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# TRANSITION TO THE CRITICISM OF HISTORICAL JEWRY

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*The Ten Commandments as the value system of human life*

by Béla TÁBOR

(Excerpt from *The Two Paths of Jewry*)<sup>1</sup>

## 1. About action

Action is undoubtedly one of the essential momentums of that often sought after “*differentia specifica*” distinguishing humans from animals. Only man can take action, and no man is excluded from the potential to act. But action must be discriminated from the blind life functions whose various forms are characteristic of everything that lives. What distinguishes action from this lower functioning? Its direct connection to the unity of reality. This connection comes forward in the prerequisite of all action: in the process of evaluation. Every action aspires to convey a state of lower value into one of a higher value. The resistance of the lower value is inseparable from the concept of action. It is impossible to speak of any action where there is no resistance to be overcome, where “roast birds come flying into our mouths.” The meaning and purpose of action is, therefore: overcoming the resistance of the lower value and transforming it into a higher value. In short: creating matter into spirit. That is precisely the definition we gave to sacrifice too. The meaning and purpose of action is: sacrifice.

Every action is uncertain. It aspires to realize a higher value but it does not possess the measure by which to gauge which value is higher and which is lower. The One would be this measure; but action seeks precisely this One. Action is the nostalgia of the Many for the One. This nostalgia can only occur where the One appears concealed in the Many, and thus disrupts the deathlike tranquility of the fall from coherence; i.e. only in man. The hidden presence of the One irritates man, the only one of the living world that lives on the plane of collision between the One and the Many. That is what spurs him to action, but that is also what makes all action uncertain. Unlike the pure spirit which is the word that

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<sup>1</sup> Since the original text contains a few footnotes, we use a numbering system for the translator’s notes in order to separate them from those of the author, marked by asterisks. The one note marked by double asterisks, although written by the author, is cited from his epilogue to the present excerpt in order to clarify his choice of words.

creates, action is an attempt<sup>2</sup> – the analogy of which relationship is known to all forms of experimental science.

Thus action is inseparable from the big question: is this action right or wrong? The question is impossible to answer within the action; this impossibility too is itself a constituent element of action. It is right if indeed it defeats a lower value and realizes a higher one. But action, as a form of existence of the Many, is always directed at a segment of reality. Whether it really does realize a higher value at this point cannot be decided until the whole value system of reality stands before the one who acts. If it does, however, stand before him, action ceases. That stage is that of the One, and the One stands above all action. Whether an action is right or wrong can only be judged from a point that has risen above action.

What is above action? Identity is. From the human perspective, identity is action-no-more, and action is not-yet-identity. The fact that the path of man is the path of action, and as such, the path of contradiction, determines the essence of human existence as well: man himself is the contradiction man must resolve himself. Man is a transition unto himself in which he cannot stall. He must get from action to identity, which is action-no-more. But the only way to get there is through action. Stumbling through actions and contradictions must he make it to the “ultimate action” that would resolve the contradiction: to human sacrifice. Beyond that point, contradiction is no more, transition is no more, and man is no more. Beyond that point, man becomes identity, becomes One, becomes pure spirit.

But the ultimate action cannot be hastened or brought forward. Whoever brings it forward and leaves the path of action, cultivates a hollow rite. All “pure doctrines” stand as examples for that, as do the numerous ascetic sects of the Orient. Man, being a contradiction himself, can only reach the One via the path of active contradiction. Action is his relation to the whole. His “relation” to the whole – for that is all man has. He himself is not whole, but he is in contact with the whole and thus comes into its sphere of attraction. But he is not a part either: a part is already fallen out of the whole’s sphere of attraction. Man is a fractured whole. Unlike the unbroken whole, i.e. the spirit, he is spirit, soul and body. This trifoldness is no longer the diversity of the spirit. The trinity of the One remains an unbroken unity, the three members three directions each pointing at the other. But the human trinity of spirit, soul and body is characterized by the break for independence by each. The fact itself that man is spirit *and* soul-body is already an expression of this fragmentation, or – since that is the same – of this intent to disintegrate. The spirit itself is *the* whole; whatever appears as more can really only be less. That is why Augustine says that to know (as in the self-search of the spirit) is to pull down and not to build. The independence for which the soul and body strive is independence from the spirit. But even for this scission the blame can only fall on the human spirit – because there is no responsibility but the responsibility of the spirit. It is indeed characteristic of the human spirit that it can tear away from its own wholeness, it can break away from its own essence so as to work as an autonomous intelligence. This autonomous intelligence – whose most peculiar organs are mathematics and logic – can produce

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<sup>2</sup> *Attempt* and *experiment* are not distinguished in Hungarian; “*attempt*” is used here to encompass the broader (not necessarily scientific) meaning.

a mental activity in a particular way which leaves man completely untouched. It isolates itself from man with a void.

That is how *action* becomes man's relation to the whole, i.e. nostalgia. Action involves the whole person: nostalgia strings together all parts of the fractured whole. Beyond the final action, the One awaits man. But that is precisely the place of which he is locked out if his action does not take part in understanding the One. This understanding requires the whole person. Not only his spirit, not even only his spirit and soul, but his skin, flesh and bones must even understand the One. Action provides the system of channels flowing through which understanding permeates the entirety of man's reality.

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Only here can the question of the rightness of an action be formulated. Desires too can go out on their own – that is what happens in a pathological desire. The difference between actions that are right or wrong is the same as that between desires that are healthy or pathological. A healthy desire strives to be fulfilled; a pathological one goes to any length in order not to reach its object. The meaning of wrongful actions is just this pathology. As a pathological desire serves something other than satisfaction, so a wrong action serves something other than becoming whole.

But is there even any way to act right – seeing that the one prerequisite for this is a point above all action, that is, no less than reaching the final goal of action? Action indeed always remains a contradiction, and uncertainty is an indissoluble constituent in its essence. But the deeper a contradiction contradicts, the more certainly it shall break through. Action as contradiction is nothing but man as contradiction; i.e. man as pure transition: man is less than himself and man is more than himself – in no way is he identical to himself. Such a self-contained entity as “man” does not exist; he is the flow of the river, the currents in the air, the passing of time. And without metaphors: he is the rise of the spirit and the fall of matter. If he were but a hair more than this no-more and not-yet, if the angle of the contradiction were to alleviate by as little as a degree, the contradiction of action would be impossible to break through. If man could be defined by any of his constituent momentums, if man could be defined as a social being, an economic being, a creature of instinct – if such disciplines as sociology, economic theory, anthropology or psychology could actually exist, acting right would be impossible on principle. But since contradiction hones human existence to the point of this pure transition, the contradiction of action can be broken too.

But how?

The point above all action from which the value of actions could be gauged is identity, that is, the spirit. But man is spirit too. His existence is contradictory precisely because he is spirit and yet not spirit. The spirit is identical to itself, man is not. The spirit is whole, man is a fractured whole. What is the meaning of this fractured whole? The road to being whole is not stopped from man. From time to time he might get a start and reach the spirit – only he cannot *remain* in with it. For moments, man can weld together, become whole – only he cannot *remain* whole. To use a physical term, he has no cohesion. Cohesion is (even in physics) the ability to remain whole – the ability of the spirit. It is the lack of cohesion that distinguishes man from the spirit.

Since man lacks cohesion, he is constrained to the path of action. But since this is the only thing separating him from the spirit, the possibility of breaking through the contradictory prerequisite of the right action is open to man. Transmitting this possibility to him is a surrogate to cohesion, as it were, known as *memory*.

Memory is a bridge between existence and non-existence. A sort of intermediary between yes and no, identity and non-identity, whole and not-whole. Whatever lives in memory is not present, but is also not far – it exists in a sort of unquantifiable medial existence between the two. The memory of something is not identical with what is remembered, but it is also not different: it partakes in its identity. It binds to something, just like cohesion – but not quite. It is an image, but an image in the sense of Plotinus: an image that is also a force. This force stems from the existence which memory mediates. For this force to be present, two preconditions must exist: it must be preceded by a direct contact with what it stems from (whose memory it is); and this direct contact must be broken. Both requirements are met in the relationship of man and spirit. So can man have his actions be governed by the memory of the spirit. Not by the spirit itself, because the spirit is no instrument to any action and religion is not the same as ethics. As long as word is an action, the Name is unspeakable. But he can have himself governed by the memory of the spirit – for that is the only thing man can do for the spirit on his own volition: remember the spirit. As the Scripture says, “...with all your might.”

## 2. The Ten Commandments

The “Hear, Israel” speaks about the spirit. The Ten Commandments are about action.

They do not tell us what action to take. They tell us how to take action. The nine commands and prohibitions therein are but a form to express this “how.” The Bible’s specific, existential mode of expression; the characteristic which separates the Bible from all theory. The vocabulary of the Bible is the concrete, clearly formed reality; its language is that of gestures, of pointing. If it wants to say “mountain,” it points at Mount Lebanon; if it wants to say “people” it points at the people of Israel. And in doing so, it operates not via examples or illustrations. Every gesture fills concepts with a personal content – so do Biblical gestures. What makes gestures so expressive? Throwing in the paradox of personality. Personality is the junction point of individuality and identity. Gestures afford this polarity: the more particularly individual the gesture, the more perfect the understanding it can provide because the more perfectly it references identity as well. The gestures of the Bible are perfect. Each individual image they point at, gains a full individual significance, while being a sign at the same time which points beyond itself.

So do the commands and prohibitions of the two stone tablets point beyond themselves. What they contain on an individual basis can be found in various scattered chapters of the Scripture. Here they each appear as the sign of a potential sphere of action. The referent is the value system of reality which stands as the measure of the right human action. In other words, it marks the path of actions leading from action to the identity of the Name. Thus, the Ten Commandments are in fact one single commandment: the hierarchy of values. What makes it ten is its internal structure, the ten grades of values.

The emphasis, accordingly, is on *the order* of the ten pronouncements. This order is the scale of values, or *the sacrificial order*, which are one and the same.

The ten grades proceed from top to bottom. The highest one is not a command but the declaration itself which says: “I am the Name.” The sacrificial order of values proceeds downwards from this point above all action all the way to the prohibition on the desire for possession, and covers the full course of sacrificing matter into spirit. As a divine word, it resounds downwards from the top. We who want to understand this word, must follow the path of the smoke of our sacrifice: upwards from the bottom. Therefore we must begin with the last pronouncement and proceed, through the ascending series of sacrifices (of value-subordinations), towards the first one.

### THE TENTH WORD<sup>3</sup>

*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.*

The command to sacrifice the desire for possession – or more precisely: for gaining possession.

What it concerns is the lowest degree of values; because in the relationship of man and matter, possession as conduct is the polar opposite of sacrifice. Sacrifice brings matter into a continually ascending motion such that matter be in a continuous transition into something that is less-matter. But gaining possession is acquiring matter *as matter*, and possession is keeping matter *as matter*. Matter stands up to man at this point in its most massive and man accepts this form as *impermeable*. Sacrifice is the creation of matter into spirit; in possession, matter has the final word. In as much as we can speak of motion here (and later on we will see that we can indeed speak of it), this is the path of matter from itself, through itself, into itself; and man follows it in this trajectory (not only in gaining possessions but also in the act of possession itself): man chases after matter. Creating matter into spirit is out of the question here; because only the spirit can create anything into spirit (creation is always creation in the image of the creator), and there is no spirit within the fact of possession. Man chases after matter, so even man is only present here as a downward tendency – as matter. Possession and possessor alike are but *parts* of matter (since as the spirit is without parts, so matter consists *only* of parts), and possession is the relationship of two parts to each other.

Even so, the content of this relationship points beyond pure materialness, and it is in this pointing beyond, that possession appears as a specifically human behavior. First of all, ownership is the relationship of a stronger part and a weaker one; the possessor is stronger than the possession. But what makes him stronger is precisely his connection to the spirit, or in other words (since this connection is outside the moment of possessing) it is the fact that he has an existence outside of ownership. The

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<sup>3</sup> The translation of the designations to the ten segments in the Ten Commandments is a subject of frequent discussions. The expression in Biblical Hebrew is עשרת הדברים which translates to “the ten words”, “the ten matters” or, in general, “the ten things said”. The expression used in the Koine Greek of the Septuagint, δέκα λόγους (deka logous) relates this translation to *logos*, i.e. the phrase commonly used for the Word of God. It is the Hungarian equivalent of the latter, *ige* (lit. “verb”) that Béla Tábor chooses to use in his analysis, perhaps in order to highlight the active, or even imperative content.

possessor is always a human, the possession is not human (because even when it would be, ownership only regards him as non-human). And second, the content of this being stronger: possession is a distorted attempt at uniting into a whole. It is a distorted attempt because in it, parts seek to become one *as parts*. The stronger part wants to engulf the weaker one, thus to put an end to being outside of each other. But that is a part's mode of existence. The attempt carries the source of its own failure. Parts can never make up the whole; the prerequisite to the cessation of being outside each other is the cessation of parts; but possession wishes to keep matter as matter, upholding the independent existence of both parts. Therefore possession is not a state of rest at all, but rather a *vicious motion*: an unending rush after the possession. Wedged into the experience of possession as an irritating foreign element is always the experience of disappointment: the more surely something is "mine", the louder the signals of the emptiness of this "mine," of the unapproachable strangeness of the possession.

"I want to receive" what I desire to possess. This synonymous expression to possession sheds new light on the opposition between sacrifice and possession. In sacrifice, I *give*; in the act of possession, I *want to receive*. To give and to receive: the pair corresponds exactly to the two opposing directions of spirit and matter. Giving is a creative, active motion; the spirit itself does nothing but give continuously. The role of one who receives, in contrast, is passive: he is not the one who acts, he is acted upon by what he receives. Whoever only receives turns toward matter, indeed he subjects himself to matter and becomes the matter of matter, as it were. This contradiction, this perversion of reality's fundamental order of values does actually occur within the fact of possession. The possessor is stronger than the possession because he has an existence outside of ownership; but to the extent that this existence shrivels, to the extent that the significance of ownership grows within the proportional structure of his life, this his superiority too will lessen, until he eventually reaches a point at which the balance of forces tips over: the possession will rule over the possessor. We know this to happen every time the significance of material possessions surpasses a certain level in the life of a person (or a community). The history of Europe's past century and a half<sup>4</sup> stands as a particularly lurid example for that, and later on we shall advert to the role this phenomenon has played in the history of the Jews.

Possession is the fate of man. As is the body (the most massive form of matter within the human trinity) that strives to assert its independence; the body, to which possession, as attitude towards reality, corresponds. As long as man is a fractured whole, that is, as long as man is, there will always be ownership too. Placing a prohibition on possession itself within human life would thus be the realization of the "ultimate action" without the realization of its prerequisites: a hollow rite, an empty abstraction – as is amply illustrated by all corresponding historical experiments and the pungent, doctrinaire taste of those experiments. Accordingly, the tenth word does not prohibit possession, only marks its place in the scale of values, and thus demands the sacrifice of the desire for possession, its *subordination* to all the higher values. It says "do not covet anything that is your *neighbor's*." But by doing so it touches on exactly that infectious plexus of the desire for possession, that principle which makes possession a denial of sacrifice. That principle is self-interest. *Self-interest is a sundering principle, as opposed to the uniting principle of love*. Love as a uniting principle is the principle of the spirit; opposing it is the sundering

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<sup>4</sup> The nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth.

principle of matter: indifference. Having surrendered to matter in ownership, man has in fact surrendered to the sundering principle of matter. Self-interest is indifference appearing in the act of possession as the most material human relation; in other words, it is the utmost degree of indifference that is humanly attainable. One can only speak of pure indifference in pure matter; that is the indifference of objects, which are indifferent even to themselves. But even in possession, man does not become pure matter; he merely chases after matter. Just so in the attitude of self-interest, man does not turn completely indifferent, but merely chases after indifference – human indifference is a nostalgia for the object’s existence. When surrendering to the principle of self-interest, man thus presumes that he would be indifferent to others, but not indifferent to himself; but since self-interest is a motion the same way as matter is, in reality he will become more and more indifferent even to himself: he will detach more and more elements from himself, toward all of which he will become indifferent. Thus the sundering principle prevails: he severs more and more relations of his existence so to approach complete relationlessness, i.e. the ideal part.

So self-interest is the conduct of possession without bounds: the denial of sacrifice on principle; just as sacrifice is, conversely, the subordination of self-interest. Limitless desire for possession knows no respect for anything. The relationship meant by “neighbor” cannot exist for its relationless existence. Therefore when the tenth word lays down the restraint “do not covet anything that is your neighbor’s,” it demands precisely to break through the one thing that stands as the principle of possession itself. The breakthrough is all the more powerfully emphasized by throwing in this word: “your neighbor.” Each time this word occurs in the laws of the Scripture, it always connects to one form or another of the following command: “love thy neighbor as thyself.” Wherever this word appears, it drags along with itself that whole sentence as latent content. “Love” – and “like thyself”: this is nothing but breaking through the sundering principle, indeed emphatically the human sundering principle: self-interest.

The next two words still remain within the sphere of ownership. Out of these two:

## THE NINTH WORD

*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.*

Is the prohibition against treating the word as possession, the first prohibition of lying.

The realm of existence this word concerns – although it remains in the sphere of possession – represents a higher degree of values than the previous one. Consequently, whoever transgresses this command commits a graver sin than the one who transgresses the tenth word. The scale of values is also the order of responsibility: the scale of sin.

This grade of existence is made higher by the entrance of the *word*. What enters here is not the word of the spirit yet – the spirit is still far away from here. And yet it is close enough to force a word out of the man who dwells within this grade of existence. At this point the word is still an action of the *possessor*. It shall remain an action even through the higher grades until man himself becomes Word; but here, it is the action of the possessor, and this makes it the most inferior of words. The word here is captive to matter, nay, enslaved to matter. *A word serving self-interests*. What we have come up against here is the

same perversion of reality's order of values that is so characteristic of ownership. Matter enjoys primacy; matter governs the word. The word surrenders to matter. *But this negates the reality of the word.* Indeed: whoever "bears false witness," eradicates all reality from the word. One might say, he treats the word as a possession that he is at his free disposal.

## THE EIGHTH WORD

*Thou shalt not steal.*

Possession's sphere of existence comes to a close with this prohibition. The continuity is not broken: as the previous one, this too is the prohibition of lying.

By this point the lie erodes the very root of the man of ownership. The thief still dwells in the realm of ownership; he knows no other existence but that of possession – but denies the basis of even this. If it was at all possible to speak of faith at this grade, we might have to say: he does not believe in the only thing that he believes in. But while we can indeed not speak of faith here, we surely can speak of axioms: the thief is not obliged by even his own axiom. This radical lack of obligation – the enactment of the principle of lying to the extreme – is the real meaning of the *canaille* or the "underworld", of the world of the Nihil. The thief, that principal representative of everything criminal, oozes with the sickening atmosphere of this decay. Within possession's sphere of existence, no corruption can go lower than his.

Having played out all possibilities which the attitude of seceding matter (of the seceding body) can provide, possession has run the full course of its sphere with this third grade. It attempted to remain matter within matter, it attempted to fabricate spirit (a pseudo-theory or ideology) out of matter and waited until this spirit opposing its own spirit could have its full corruptive effect. The next sphere of existence is no longer that of seceding matter but that of *instinct*; as such, it is not the sphere of the body but that of the soul aimed at the body; a soul which, however, isolates itself from the spirit above. This sphere of existence is addressed in the following three words of the Ten Commandments.

## THE SEVENTH WORD

*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

The man who stands at this level may not have defeated the sphere of self-interest, but he also has not stalled in it: he is in the process of breaking free. The moment of instinctual life has not been able to shake off the adhering moment of possession – but it is grappling with it. And yet: this grapple is victory itself, the death of that emptiness of ownership. The helpless confusion of the moment of possession, in which that emptiness found its expression, is giving way to the wild flare of instincts. That was the moment in which possession came up against its limits and the clang resounded the question: "it is mine – but what am I to do with this 'mine'?" The answer is now given by blind action: it tears away the boundary.



The sphere belongs to the moment of action – but that of *blind* action which has not yet submitted itself to the guidance of the spirit (or rather of remembering the spirit). But exactly as a *blind* action is it the purest moment of action – an action independent of all other momentums. The moment of action is therefore the moment of nostalgia, of desire.\* In this sense – in this negative sense – it is perhaps the most characteristically human sphere of existence. The moment of instinct, of blind action is what realizes the man *as one who is not*, it realizes man’s *nonexistent independent existence*. Man is a transition from matter to spirit and from spirit to matter; becoming spirit is as much a human possibility as becoming an object. The moment of instinct hypostasizes, stabilizes, or freezes into a tangible form something which is intangible, which is a transition, a direction. By doing so, it shows off its own coincidence with this transient. Indeed, this sphere is itself a transition, a boundary. Below it is the existence of matter, above: that of the spirit.

So the answer to the question of possession is the blind action of instinct. It does not defeat the isolation of possessor and possession but it tears through the boundary that separates them; this is the act of union between man and woman. The fact itself that it no longer seeks union into a whole *within matter*, but rather in a human relationship, signifies that the sphere of possession breaks through. The expression the Bible gives to sexual union is: “man knows his woman.” This knowledge<sup>5</sup> is not that of the spirit yet; this is the knowledge of action – the primal meaning of experiment, of inductive knowledge, and of experience (*empeiria*). At this stage, the wish is still of those that are not whole to *unite* into a whole; when indeed the whole cannot be the result of any sort of union, it must be whole originally: born whole – thus for man: rebirth in the spirit. Therefore this is not the level of the spirit yet, although desire may glimmer with the promise of the spirit. The seventh word is not a prohibition on instinctual life, it rather marks the place of instinctual life within the scale of values and demands a sacrifice; it demands the subordination of instinctual life as well. It renders it as “do not commit adultery” – and thus prohibits stagnation in the sphere of existence that belongs to instincts.

While possession was dead matter’s grade of existence, instinct is that of *live* matter, although it may still be that of matter. Live matter – that is a contradiction. Only the spirit can be alive. It is the same contradiction as action and man are: a transition. Once again, we are up against the coincidence of the instinctual life of man (a soul that is not spirit) with man as a transition. One can say about the soul as well as we did about man: it *is* in such a way that it *is not*. Exactly in the moment of satisfaction does instinct appear most completely as the hypostasis of that human fractured whole: man “knows” his woman, but there is no cohesion to this knowledge. The fleeting moment of knowledge, of the “union into a whole” falls back into the void.

As all grades of existence signified in the Ten Commandments, so the sphere of instincts too stands as an emblem of a conduct that is a possibility in *all* walks of human life. In *this* sense did we speak of it as the primal meaning of experiment, of inductive knowledge and of experience. We might amend that with what we said about the relationship of instinct and matter: it is the grade of existence of live matter.

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\*Every desire is nostalgia, homesickness. That is the connection between desire and the whole.

<sup>5</sup> Knowledge as an act as opposed to a *thing acquired* as a consequence thereof (cf. Ger. ‘Erkenntnis’).

Carnal contact is the primal sense of experience, as the word itself suggests;<sup>6</sup> touch is the most material of senses. But contact with matter can only yield knowledge if that matter is alive, if it gives itself to the one who knows, if it exerts the same passivity-cloaked activity as does the woman in the act of union. Only live matter exudes knowledge. And here, still far away from the spirit, the only kind of knowledge is the one that matter exudes. The man of instincts awaits the gift of matter. That is step one.

## THE SIXTH WORD

*Thou shalt not kill.*

That is step two.

The gift is too little; but of course it *cannot* be enough: that would be contrary to the whole concept of a gift. To give – that can be the fullness of a moment; to receive – that is always an imperfect moment. To create – that is the fullness of the moment; to be created – that is deficiency. This only-received gift can indeed come from no other than matter. The “gift” of the spirit is precisely the triumph over the gift: what it gives is that man can give and gives. The spirit grants readiness for sacrifice, the ability to create matter into spirit. Matter in turn, gifts parts; like the spirit, it can pass nothing except its essence. Thus the gift of matter is forever in need of complement and is forever impossible to complete. That is the fate of Don Juan in love and the fate of knowledge in empiricism. The fate of action.

The thirst of instincts remains unquenched. The man of instincts, of blind action cannot be satisfied with the gift of matter because as long as this gift is possible they are still two: there is he, and there is matter. But the goal of his entire existence is becoming *one*. Within possession, the attempted union was a contradiction set on the very edge: a union upholding the independence of both parts. But instinct breaks through this contradiction: it wants to tear down the boundary between the two parts. In sexual union – or in broader terms – in the contact with live matter, this attempt failed: androgyny, the dream of the “Symposion” is unattainable; matter remained impermeable. That is why experimental physics too could give no other final resolve but the impermeability of matter. Action comes to a cross-roads: it can either transcend itself or take to the most abstract of actions – the “ultimate action”. The sixth word is a prohibition on the latter choice.

Murder is the most abstract action, or perhaps abstraction hypostasized: it wishes to disengage from existence itself. Cain is the ancestor of abstract people. It is worth noting that the Scripture relates Cain’s murder with the notion of a gift. God accepts Abel’s gift, but not Cain’s. What does that mean? Abel is able to give, Cain is not; Abel is able to sacrifice, Cain is not. Receiving only the gift of matter and being unable to give to God (and whoever gives anything, gives to God, whoever gives anything, gives to spirit) he comes to the precipice gaping at the edge of action and throws himself in it: he kills.

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<sup>6</sup> According to Merriam-Webster: “the process of doing and seeing things and of having things happen to you”; the Hungarian equivalent goes further at this point as the word *tapasztal* “to experience” shares its root with Hun. *tapint* “to touch”. In fact, the same connection is known historically in English as well since the word “taste,” deriving from Old French *tast* “sense of touch(!),” was once used in the general sense of “to know something by experience” (attested from at least 1520s).

He becomes a fugitive – as the only possible consequence of murder: he is left alone, because he could not have wanted to stay within the realm of the two and was unable to become one. Murder, as abstraction, delivers one not to union but solitude. Solitude is the abstracted one: an atom.

Action committed suicide. In one blaze, instinct has consumed its own *raison d'être*. Its existence consisted of nothing but being directed at “the other”; the other is no more. The prerequisite of all action is live and resisting matter; matter is no more. The one who acts did not overcome this resistance (which would have been the creation of matter into spirit), but annihilated it. Matter has been replaced by the atom, but by the dematerialized atom even at that: by mathematical relation. Modern science and epistemology do indeed resolve the object of knowledge in “man”; not in the spirit, but in the non-existent “man” – but they do resolve it at any rate. The knower too is left alone, without the one to know.<sup>7</sup>

### THE FIFTH WORD

*Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the earth which  
the Name thy God giveth thee.*

The murderer is alone.

The one who acts is alone, the knower is alone. He could not realize cohesion – so he realized “bad cohesion,” i.e. solitude. Now there is nothing left beside him, but there is nothing left inside him either. He is the atom itself. He is surrounded by the void, isolating him from all other atoms. Or he *is* the void, surrounded by the same void. All becomes equal in existence. This, however, is the democracy of Nothing: indifference to hierarchy.

The fifth word is the command of respect for authority, the prohibition of indifference to hierarchy. It demands subordination of the “self,” of action and of word. This is the first *express* command of subordination. Express: with that, we are right there with the spirit. Indeed the fifth word is a boundary. This is where the non-spirit turns into spirit. It is the commandment closing the realm of instincts, of the spiritless soul: the prohibition on the final word of instinct, on the autonomous “self” (on Pascal’s “moi!”). At the same time it is a transition into the supreme grade of human existence: into the spirit. In the order leading from the bottom up, this is the first affirmative command; up until this point each grade was a prohibition, a “not”. Only with this turn can man step over into the sphere of the spirit. The word of matter, the word of resistance is “no”; the word of the spirit, the word of theodicy is “yes”. “No” belongs to denial, “yes” to faith. These two words correspond to the opposing methods of believing and unbelieving science too. Unbelieving science answers the question “assuming it is not possible, why is it not possible?” while believing science answers this: “if it is possible, how is it possible?” (Neither can go beyond what is “possible”; beyond that is not science but faith itself, the word of the spirit, which sees what *is*.)

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<sup>7</sup> Without what or whom to come to know.

As a prohibition, the fifth word is against *blind* action, against irresponsibility. A child is responsible for his actions to his parents, the one lower in the hierarchy to the one who is higher; the measure of every creation is a more valuable creation. (The Hebrew etymology of the word for “honor” directly relates it to the expression “to carry weight”.) As a command, it demands of action its scale of values. If it is the first express command of subordination, then it is also the first express command of sacrifice. The only possible first step toward sacrifice, as an upward directed continuity, is acknowledging the order of values. Honor – that is merely the first step, the acknowledgment; but it is the sine qua non to all further steps. To all who managed to move on, to all who have stepped over to the living spirit (the fourth word!), respect for authority or the acknowledgment of the hierarchy is like breathing – it is such an indispensable element that one hardly ever notices it. But on those who have not reached that point, it is a minimum requirement, the key to all further progress.

“... that your days may be long upon the earth *which* the Name your God gives you.” “That your days may be long upon the earth” – that is not the fifth word yet, that is the gift of matter. But: “upon the earth *which* the Name gives you” – that is the gift of the spirit. The gift of the spirit is that it leads into the spirit. The fifth word leads into the fourth.

#### THE FOURTH WORD

*Remember the Sabbath day to make it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Name thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy servant, nor thy maid, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Name made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Wherefore the Name blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.*

Remember the Sabbath – remember the spirit.

The six days are still action. The seventh day is action-no-more – Sabbath. In Hebrew, it is “shabath”, to which the translation “action-no-more,” or the “cessation of action” stays true. It is not the cessation of *creation*, since the Sabbath is quite the contrary: the moment of creation. Creation cannot cease and cannot let up because creation is not a thing that happens in time but a one-and-only, supertemporal and indivisible act: a moment. God did not create the world “in six days” but in the one undivided moment: “in the beginning”. But he *made* it “in six days”; the Hebrew text of the Scripture makes a sharp distinction between the two. The work of making unfolds the one act of creation in time, it makes the eternally hidden moment of creation visible, it is the manifestation of creation into time. There is only one beginning, and this same beginning is the end as well, of which there is also only one. The end is the beginning from the perspective of man – the return into the Word, identity as action-no-more. The “seventh day” is the return to the beginning that is “before” the first day.

The seventh day is the spirit. Just as there were three commands about the grade of existence that belongs to the body, and three about that of the soul, so there are three about that of the spirit too. And the first one is this: *remember* the spirit. Now the prohibition of work on Sabbath demands the sacrifice of *all* action: the subordination of the entire human existence to the spirit. The tranquility of

the Sabbath is the tranquility of the spirit: Laozi's empty space, which is the prerequisite of all action. But here the boundary between action and inaction, which is the very essence of the laozean emphasis, the moment of exiting and entering action, is only the first step of the spirit: remembering.

### THE THIRD WORD

*Thou shalt not take the name of the Name thy God in vain; for the Name will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*

We had to translate it as “the name of the Name”. The latter, the Name, is the unspeakable, one and only pure word, *designated* by four letters. The former, the “name”, is the most highly valued *sign* of the human language that is meant to approach the inexpressible. The second one is living identity: the Name is the only sign that is identical to the referent; a sign whose referent is itself and a referent whose sign is itself – “I am that I am.” The expression of the Name is the very existence of the Name – it is the only *living* word; all other words can only metaphorically be said to be alive; and there is no other meaning to this metaphor but that these “live words” forge ahead toward the only live word.

All we can say about this word we have already said in our chapter about Jewish religion. It is in the third word that the specific emphasis of the Jewish religion expressly enters the Ten Commandments – in the first word addressed to the man who lives in the *spirit*. The fourth word only demanded *remembering* the spirit, only getting through and beyond the sphere of action. That was the first step of the spirit: man enters the spirit. But the third word is the first one speaking to the man who is already within the spirit. That is where religion begins – at a towering height above all ethics.

### THE SECOND WORD

*Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor serve them: for I the Name thy God am a zealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*

That is the last command. You shall have no other god: no command can stand above that.

“Other god” – is the singular-plural, speakable theonym: “Elohim”, the word which expresses to man the highest value that be. This final command is the prohibition against truncating or adulterating the scale of values, against arbitrariness in evaluation. What it says is that in the subordination of values, you must not stop anywhere lower than the Name. You must not recognize anything as the highest value if it is lesser than the absolute value: the Name. The measure of all your actions, of all motions of your spirit cannot be anything but the Name. This measure cannot be replaced by any “carved image”. Carved image – what is that? Naturally, it is an idol; but it is a special definition of an idol, one which reaches far beyond the form of a cult. Carved image – this is the essence of the idol, and thus the content of *all* forms of idolatry be it explicit or unvoiced. Creation itself is the creation of an image;

the creation is always an image. God created man in his own image: that is the relationship – *and that is the value-relation* – between God the creator and man who is created. The act of creation is thus the act of creation of the value system. The creator and the creation are the higher and lower poles of the value system. The idol, being a “carved image” turns this order upside down. The creation makes a creator above himself, the child gives birth to his father.

We arrived at the pleroma of contradiction from which all other contradictions can be derived. The idol as a carved image is nothing but a lied creation, or the creation of lies. Divine creation as the creation of the world, and so as the creation of the restless unity of creating spirit and resisting matter (or in other words, the creation of continuous creation) is an act that moves downward from the top. Man’s participation in the continuity of creation is the creation of matter into spirit, that is, a path that leads upwards from the bottom. We just said: man’s “participation” in creation; and that this participation is a *path*. Man does not create because he does not exist; but the creative spirit passes through him, and therefore the way he can participate in creation is by clearing this path which he is himself – i.e. by Augustine’s work of demolition. But the man who carves an idol (be it in religion, science, or anything else) blocks just this path with a barrier of condensed lies. This is what we summarized above in the words: the creation makes a creator above himself.

Lying is creation in the negative.

1. God *creates* an image. The idolater *carves* an image. God creates a *creature* in his own image. The idolater carves a *creator* in his own image. In his own image – for in whatever image he intends to carve it, he can only carve it in his own image. Who is this “own”? It is man who lied an independent existence to himself. So here the Name is not the measure: “man is the measure of all things” regardless of whether the Sophists make the thesis explicit or not. Because this Protagorean axiom lives on and governs human history in a hundred variations; and just now in the modern age has it triumphantly entered science, upon first expanding to become economy and society, pan-economism and pan-sociologism. But in reality man is contradiction itself. So then what the triumphant Protagorean axiom means is this: “contradiction is the measure of all things”. Divine creation means that the measure is identical to itself. Negative creation means that the measure is not identical to itself.

2. The measure is not identical to itself: and sure enough, the man who carves an idol cannot avow to himself as measure. “Man is the measure of all things” – which means: the measure of things is not man after all but something which man carved in his own image. The measure of things is the carved image, something that is a “likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” Perhaps it is the weight-deprived spirit that thus flutters high in the sky: the antipode of life; perhaps it is blinded life that fell into the primordial ocean of the unconscious: the antipode of the spirit; perhaps it is the earth-bound self-interest for which neither up nor down exist – but in any case it is a creation of human arbitrariness, an axiom in the deepest and worst sense of the word: a carved image. It is the creation of human arbitrariness: a creation whose creator is human arbitrariness. But this “creator” creates him as his own creator. The creator becomes creation and the creation a creator. That is the second momentum of creation in the negative – divine

creation means that the creator is identical to itself (because *only* he is identical to himself); negative creation means that the creator is not identical to himself.

3. There is no difference between creator and creation: pantheism is the first and final word of the man who carves an idol. But the difference between creator and creation is the difference between the higher value and the lower one. The action of carving an idol is that of leveling values, or of denying values – which is the same. Divine creation is the creation of the value system. Negative creation is the annihilation of the value system.

The man who carves an idol quits creation. His “creation” is no path: he creates an obstacle to block the path, he cuts off the upward flow of reality. Cutting off this flow is what it means to lie. Every lie starts out with the claim that reality is incoherent and thus there is no unity to it that could reveal the lie. One might say that its claim is that there is no reality beyond itself.\* But all this sundering of reality, the obstacle meant to block the path of creation into spirit is *matter* itself. The negative creation of image carving abases the spirit into matter. Man submits to matter – makes himself the possession of matter.

Thus the list of human conducts comes to a full circle. The highest command of the second word joins back into the lowest command of the tenth – that is the order of responsibility. The highest grade of human spirit is responsible for all the lower grades. The sin of ownership is merely an emanation of the sin of idolatry. Making a carved image means lying a spirit. Lying a spirit means swapping the sign in front of the Ten Commandments: negative creation. If action remembers this *lied and lying* spirit, any and all action can only carry a negative value. Not a single one of the ten commands can be broken without breaking all ten of them.

## THE FIRST WORD

*I am the Name thy God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves.*

High above all commands stands the first word: the declaration of the Name.

The first word commands nothing and prohibits nothing: it is aimed at no action. It is the existing identity. From the point of man’s existence, it is action-no-more. If previously we said that man already left action behind in the fourth word, we said that wrong. We were wrong in the same way as we express ourselves wrong each time we speak of human spirit. The two mistakes are one and the same; if we say that man cannot leave action behind, we will have said that the spirit cannot be human. This double mistake is the inevitable stutter of contradiction. Since man himself is a contradiction, his language too is the language of contradictions, and the deeper we dig toward its root the keener the contradictions to which expression must resort; paradox is the expression of the root of human existence. Only a paradox can express the simultaneous reality of the two branches of contradiction, only

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\*The latter kind of lies is represented by all attitudes that are based on various hidden axioms and which express their ultimate value judgment in the categories they call “real” and “unreal”. A highly relevant example is the attitude we attacked in the introduction to the present writing, i.e. denying the existence of the Jewish question.

the iron hoop of paradox can encompass the two divergent directions of a contradiction. There is no human spirit – but if that is all we say, we fail to express the relationship between man and spirit. The only way to express that relationship is this: man is spirit yet not spirit. And likewise: man cannot leave action behind, but he can break through action. Only now after evoking all that can we cast the veil of rational expression over contradiction (a *veil* under which a glimmer of the unrationalizable contradiction will show through): since man is a direction, his words too are merely words of direction. As a concept of directions then, we may speak of the “human spirit”: as man turning towards the spirit; and it was the expression of such a direction what we said about the fourth word: it is in the fourth word that man turns away from action and toward the spirit. But as long as man remains man, his spirit, the “human spirit” will not be free from action either. Human spirit remains an action: a struggle for the word that’s true. A struggle for the Name.

In the first word, the Name appears – that is its sole content. The word contains the Spirit which the still active man, the still active human spirit must remember. The declaration itself takes on the form of a reminder: “I am the Name, thy God, *who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves.*” “I am the one who...” – that is the proper form of a reminder. The word “who” divides the first word into two. The first part is the superhistorical word of revelation: I am the Name, thy God. The second one is a reminder to a historical momentum, and as such, to a momentum in the life of the man who acts. As per its place in the sequence of the ten words, this reminder is the ultimate intermediary between man and the spirit. On our path ascending from the bottom, we must first address this second part.

The ultimate intermediary between man and the spirit – we have come across this definition before. That is what we found to be the essence of racial existence\*\*. Indeed, these words allude to the ethnic existence of the Old Testament addressee just like the word “Israel” in the “Hear, Israel.” The exodus from Egypt was the founding act of the Jews as a people. In the existential indicative language of the Ten Commandments, this historic act is the only adequate expression to the independent racial existence of Jewry. If this were to top off the ten words, Jewry would only be a race, not a racial religion – because each and every ethnic existence is a divine mission. That is how the ten words are mutilated by all who surmise that the Jewish question could be solved simply by rekindling Jewish nationalism. For although Jewish national consciousness does become a divine command through this historical allusion, and though the high rank of this reminder in the sequence of the ten words does indeed correspond to the value assigned to racial existence, but the superordinate leading phrase of the first

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\*\* In the discussions of the period, the question was commonly phrased “is Jewry a religion or a *race*?” The essay anthology *The Jewish Question, Assimilation and Anti-Semitism* [Zsidókérdés, asszimiláció, antiszemitizmus], which has been quite popular in the Hungarian literature of the subject, mentions that “in the parlance of the age the notion of a ‘race’ was not yet tainted with the hateful interpretation of racism. Before 1918, the word was mostly used to mean ‘nationality’ or ‘ethnicity’.” (p. 16.) The fact of the matter is that this was the word used even after 1918 – without any racist overtones – in the discussions *within* Jewry about the nature of Jewishness; perhaps because the phrase “the Jewish people,” as one reaching back to the Bible, was considered a part of the religious tradition of Jews, and a bilaterally accepted designation of Jewry, and it was thus inadequate for highlighting the opposition between the supporters and opponents of assimilation. In rejecting the interpretation of a race as a consanguineal community, *The Two Paths of Jewry* contests more than just the anti-Semites.



word immediately demands subordination of the highest historical grade of values too. “You shall not have other gods before me” – not even your own ethnic existence; because you are not a self-made people but “I am the Name, thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” History is not autonomous. The belief in the autonomy of history is what feeds all atheism, and so the first word would be the prohibition of atheism – if such a prohibition were possible at all. But such a prohibition cannot exist; *this* precipice is one that man must cross on his own, without any guiding commands or prohibitions – that is his ultimate test. The only help God provides at this point is that he is there; and that he declares this existence: “I am the Name, thy God.”

High above all commands and prohibitions stands the declaration.

It is the same declaration as the one made in the commandment of the “Hear, Israel.” And yet, there is something that makes the significance of the declaration of the first word unrivaled even by that other one. Here, in the Ten Commandments, the declaration appears at the top of the ten, above all commands; in the “Hear, Israel” it is enclosed in the command to “understand.” That command is aimed at the highest action of the spirit – but at an action nevertheless. At that point, God is not standing face to face with man yet. The divine word is mediated by the acting spirit: by Moses, the chiefest of prophets. Here the Name does not appear; the command can only speak of him in “third person”, i.e. in the linguistic form representing the lack of presence: “The Name is our God – the Name is One.” The first word, in contrast, is the personal Word. “I am the Name, *thy* God” – this is personality per se, the rhythm of reality as *present*: I and Thou. The personal God appears. To whom does he appear? He does not appear to “mankind” or even to Israel – by now the historic event of founding a nation is a vanquished grade of existence – but to the one who can, by himself, stand face to face with the Name. The personal God appears to the man who has now become a person.

*Translated by István Cziegler*