
BIBLE AND MONOTHEISM

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Abstract

Bible is considered by many westerners as a paradigm of monotheistic religion. We examine this point in some detail and argue that monotheism, as a concept, finds no support in the Bible. We show that strict monotheism is impossible to construct and polytheism, while banished through the main port, comes in via the back door again. A brief overview of the development of the concept of monotheism in the West is given. We quote a number of biblical episodes as illustration of the point and examine the logical aspect of the issue too. The prominent role serpent played in both Judeo-Christian mythology and practice has been noted as well. We offer a new interpretation of the Yahweh's explanation to Adam concerning his prohibition with regard to the tree of life.

Keywords: Bible, serpent, satan, evil, polytheism

1. Introduction

Monotheism arrived rather late on the religious scene. Why? Two answers at least may be offered to explain this apparent retardation of what is regarded by many to be the summit of the human spiritual life. One is that the concept of a single god, the God, in the diversity of actual human experience cannot fulfil the role humans needed. Another explanation defies the question: monotheism preceded polytheism, but was abandoned as inadequate. In order to consider the essence of the issue monotheism *versus* polytheism, *raison d'être* of the religious thought must be scrutinized first. The central point of all developed religious systems is the ethics which faith is supposed to provide and sustain. Ethics appears spanned between two extreme ends, the concept of *good* and *evil*. It is not difficult to define both notions in terms of thermodynamic of complex systems, but for our purpose it suffices to note that these entities are supposed to oppose each other. In terms of Physics, or even logic, good and evil are determined 'up to the sign'. They go always in pair, and one determines the other. In religious narratives to be good means to be *benevolent* and *vice versa* to be evil means *malevolent*.

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Very versatile religious construct must possess at least two components: (i) It must have means to fulfil its purpose and (ii) it must be endowed with immunity, tools of self-protection, if it wants to persist. God(s) must be inaccessible to humans, both physically and epistemologically; otherwise they will perish, as many of them did. Within polytheistic pantheon, some gods at least must be fearful, otherwise humans would not be obedient and gods would cease to be superior beings. But in the case of a single god, the God, all these necessary attributes must be attached to him (Him). A God must be at the same time benevolent and harsh, good and fearful, loving and cruel, as the case of Jewish Bible testifies. As Euhemeros would put it, humans created God in their own image.

All religious texts have to answer one fundamental question: why punishments, or to put it differently, why evils? Or, as philosophers and theologians would put it: what is the source of evil among (or against) humans? Or, in more abstract terms: is it possible to construct a logical-ethical system, which is closed, complete and internally consistent, on which human ethics can be based? We shall show that the answer to this Gödelian question is negative. Even such powerful minds like Leibniz [1] could not provide satisfactory answer to the question how it came about that in the world created by an omnipotent, benevolent God evil exists and persists. It is this outcome of the logical analysis which is the source of the plethora of inconsistencies, even contradictions, we find in religious books like Bible.

It has been repeatedly claimed by ‘people of Book’, Hebrews, Christians and Muslims, that the Jewish Bible (Old Testament in Christian parlance) provides the first and only proclamation of a single god, the God, biblical Yahweh. This claim may be contested on at least two grounds. First, history knows other attempts to construct monotheistic faith. Second, it is questionable whether the Bible really defines a unique god, the God. We shall first briefly discuss a few prominent attempts to proclaim monotheistic religion and then subject the biblical narrative to a scrutinized analysis. In the latter case we show that the biblical theology is dualistic, albeit in a disguised form.

2. Monotheism *versus* polytheism

One of the most popular example of the attempts to set up a monotheistic faith has been that of the Egyptian pharaoh Amenhotep IV (Ekhnaton, as he entitle himself after introducing the unique god Aton). His reform was considered so radical for his time that some historians consider Akhenaton (1352-1336 BC) “the first personality in history” [2]. But it is exactly his revolutionary reform which calls for caution when making any analysis of the event. Revolutionaries provoke violent reactions, benevolent or otherwise, and the historicity, or veracity of data, not to mention their interpretation must be taken with grain of salt. The case of Akhenaton is illustrative for that matter for several reasons. First, the reaction of the clerical establishment, after his death was so hostile, that it is reasonable to consider many of the ‘historical data’

linked with his personality and actions dubious, even forged. Second, in the context of 'priority contest' when the new concept of monotheism is considered, it is to be expected that those who pretend to be the first, and control the religious history, as we have the case of Judaism-Christianity in the West, to distort the 'historical picture' to the extent that the priority goes to the ruling religious paradigm.

With regard to Egyptian monotheism a few words about the general outlook of the phenomenon seems in order. Generally, one may speak of the *rise of monotheistic concept* or of the appearance of the monotheistic religion. Both approaches refer to the concept of *evolution*, endowed with different mechanism. In fact, Egyptian already reached the concept of monotheism by adopting *Amon* first as the supreme and then a unique god. In this sense their Pantheon represented at the same time polytheistic and monotheistic system. The burden is thus shifted from the diversity of divinities to the content (or meaning) of the concept of *god*. Now comparing the cases of Amon and Aton, we see two concept of evolutions: Darwinian in the former and Lamarckian in the latter. Similar situation with Amon case we encounter in the Hinduistic divinity system, which abound with gods, but among them *Brahma* arises as a unique divinity, not just as the supreme one, but with essentially different nature, a sort of an amalgam of Yahweh and Holy Spirit in Judeo-Christian tradition. The central dogma of Hinduism *Brahman equal Atman*, points towards unity of humans with the God. The difference between Akhenaton's Aton and Linguistic Brahma is the coexistence of the latter with other gods, unlike Aton's theocide, as mentioned bellow. It goes without saying that the nature of Brahma (the God) and other Hinduistic deities, like Vishnu, Krishna etc must be different, though all are denoted as gods. Parenthetically, Jewish Bible testifies the same situation regarding God and gods, which causes often confusion with some readers, who expect a compact logical structure in the Holy Scriptures.

We first discuss the immediate (possible) reaction of the Egyptian environment. Revolutionary steps are usually preceded by precedents in milder form. Akhenaton's father Amenhotep III already considered the reduction of divine pantheon to one God of Sun. Akhenaton had all images and names of the Egyptian gods, except Aton, to be erased from temples and sanctuaries. It should be noticed that graphic representation or effigies of living beings, including men and gods, implied a sort of control over those represented. In this context what Akhenaton did was a sort of theocide. Equally, when after Akhenaton death the traditional clergy, who opposed vehemently the new cult, erased all signs of Amenhotep III existence, in retaliation. After such violent actions and reactions it is doubtful that 'victorious side' has allowed a fair record of the actual history to be preserved. As for the other aspect mentioned, later monotheistic pretenders had no reason to present the story in an objective manner, if it provides evidence that the monotheistic concept had precedents among 'other peoples' (*goyim*). In this context, the story of Akhenaton resembles that of Democritus, whose atheism cost him his proper place in the philosophy and sciences. Not only Christians ignored him, but Plato never mentions him, even in bad context,

because of his atheism. Fortunately, Aristotle did discuss Democritus' ideas, if for nothing else then for his own semi-atheism, i.e. deism.

A weird twist in the Akhenaton case happened just before World War II, due to Freud, who published his testimonial essay *Moses and monotheism*. The motivation for this essay may be searched along many lines, but we mention just two of all possible. Freud could be considered to belong to the series of European thinkers who strived to emancipate Jews from their naïve biblical mythology. We quote just a few of them: Marx, Freud and Einstein. If the biblical narratives and theological claims may be defined as *Semitism*, then these prominent members of Jewish European community may be regarded as promoting *anti-Semitism*. The latter should not be confused for the misnomers *anti-Semits*, *anti-Semitism* as incorrectly used to designate what is called by Germans *Judenfeind* (hatred towards Jews). Another explanation stems from the very Freud's teachings, specifically from his thesis of an inherent human *suicidal impulse*. Freud was deeply involved in the Jewish culture and social life that his assertion that Moses was not Jew and his doctrine stemmed from the Egyptian milieu, must intimately be experienced as a high treason of *Jewishness*.

If Akhenaton's endeavour may be regarded as an abortive attempt to reduce polytheism to monotheism in Egypt, the case of Zarathustra (Zoroaster) speaks of a failure of another kind, which is even more relevant for our issue. Initially, Zarathustra conceived a single, benevolent god, the God, named *Ahura Mazda* (*Ormuzd*) who gave name to the entire religion *Mazdaism* [3]. Soon it turned out one god only would not suffice, in particular with regard to the disastrous phenomena humans experienced, including evil. To remedy such a shortcoming, high priests introduced another god, *Angra Mainya* (*Ahriman*), as an adversary to Ahura Mazda, to be treated on equal footing. (The true origin of Zoroastro's teaching appears obscure (as it is the case for all religions), and our interpretation follows logical line, rather than historical one.) Those families with Christian New Testament narrative and doctrine will immediately recognize satan in Ahriman. This doctrine was surely known to Israelites in Babylonian exile and was subsequently built into their sacred scripts, to become later Jewish Bible.

3. Adam and Eve in Eden

We shall now examine the case of biblical myth of Adam and Eve and the 'original sin' they committed while being in the Garden of Eden. This narrative shed much light on the dichotomy *monotheism versus polytheism* and we shall discuss it in some detail now.

3.1. The concept of polytheism

Polytheism appears in many cultures in various forms, sometimes so different that one may speak of *polytheisms*... Whether particular pantheon is endowed with a structure, hierarchical or otherwise, the essential attribute of

such collection is the absence or presence of free will, which designates the attribute of free will. In an extreme case of a mere collection of divinities gods possess free will and their decisions are mutually independent. On the other extreme, we have a hierarchical structure with more or less clear system of subordination. Hellenic Olympic Pantheon appears of a mixed case, with gods endowed with different powers, but are otherwise independent in making decisions. Free will appears an essential ingredient of sentient beings, and provides the ground for all dramatic effects, from the classical Greek drama to the biblical narrative of the original sin, angelic rebellion etc. For the biblical authors first man was inferior to God, his creator, in every respect, except in the possession of free will. Adam was able to disobey, thus to defy, and eligible to be punished. The latter was devised to explain the presence of disaster, the troubles mankind was doomed to suffer. Good was created by Yahweh, but evil (Evil) was thus the product of man. But the story appears much more complicated and subtle and we shall follow the biblical narrative in some detail. Before doing that, we mention the paradoxical relationship between God's power to predict and free will of the subordinated beings, like humans [4]. The issue is relevant not only to the concept of Original sin, but to the New Testament narrative of Judah's and Peter's betrayals, too. However, we shall not dwell on it here.

3.2. *The original sin*

It is of no importance whether serpent talked to Eve or not, but what he said.
(Karl Barth)

Narrative about the first sin committed at Eden is charged with strong pedagogical intentions. Four actors are involved in this primordial drama, whose plot possesses all literary elements necessary for introducing into mankind two essential ingredients of a successful religion: feelings of guilt and obligations.

Why the concept of (original) sin? From ideological viewpoint it was necessary to make mankind (feels) guilty so as to impose the dominance of the Church, whatever the latter is conceived of. Adam could not, of course, harm Lord God, but was allowed to exercise disobedience to his creator. The latter was not, according to the biblical narrative, introduced in a straightway manner, but the fable leaves much space to various interpretations, some of which we shall discuss here.

According to Genesis Yahweh creates first the 'physical framework' for the living world, then plants and animals. The latter will turn out mortal that is they are born and they die. Adam is created as a kind of supervisor to animals, immortal that is like a subordinate partner of God, semi-God. He is allowed to eat fruit from any tree in the Garden, but explicitly forbidden to eat fruit from the central tree, called tree of life. According to some exegetes the name should

be understood in a negative way [5]: if immortal Adam eats the fruit, he will be deprived of his immortality. Hence, the tree of death would have been more appropriate name, at least of mortality. In a sense, Adam will become human, in our ordinary sense. Note that this prohibition was spelled before Eve was created. She, therefore, was absent when this ‘unilateral contract’ was made.

After Eve appears on the scene, the serpent follows immediately. It is a weird creature, in many respects [6]. Anatomically apparently primitive, but mentally sophisticated, it was not by accident chosen to convey the message of the biblical authors. It possesses a number of features, which he shares with God: it is fearful, intelligent (‘cunning’, in biblical parlance), his acts are whimsical and unpredictable. The central theme of this episode is the human reliability and temptations, which were designed to check it. God appears in the biblical narrative at the very start ‘from nowhere’, but serpent enters the scene ‘from nowhere’, too. Who is that serpent? Its role in this episode is burden with perplexity and contradictions. He appears human adversary, even enemy, but at the same time one can not help seeing he is God’s partner. God tests Adam and serpent seduces Eve. (In a number of later dualistic movements, notably Gnostic ones, like Bogomils, Cathars etc, this seduction will take on a straightforward sexual meaning.) But upon a closer look at the biblical text, serpent tests Eve too, rather than persuading her to commit the sin [5]. “*And the woman said unto the serpent: 'Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the mist of the garden, God hath said: Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.'*” *And the serpent said unto the woman: 'Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil'.*”

This conversation provokes a number of questions to be posed. First, since the following narrative confirms serpent’s predictions, what implies he possessed the knowledge of God’s design and intentions? How it came about, if serpent and God were two separate entities, independent and with drastically different power? Are we here dealing with monotheistic concept or this episode inaugurates what shall in the later development become a dualistic religion, albeit in a disguised form? That this outlook won’t be easy to discern from the biblical *prima facie* ideology, is illustrated in the same episode in Eden. God spells curse upon serpent for what he has done with Eve (and Adam in consequence), what should dispel the suspicion of God-serpent partnership. But the fact remains, nevertheless: both God and serpent relied on the human free will and ability to make a free choice. Serpent may be blamed, but he was not put there to take over the whole burden of disobedience. He is at most an instigator.

The exegesis of ‘tree of life’ appears all but easy one. What we are to understand behind the assertion “*your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil*”. Notions ‘good’, ‘evil’, central constructs of any ethics, have not yet be defined. We know from the rest of Bible that Yahweh’s acts do not conform with what we understand by ethical behaviour. When Spinoza demands that Jews should conform to biblical ethos, but *goyim* should

continue to exercise 'natural ethics', he clearly distinguishes two ethical systems. What is the essence of the biblical ethos? Or, can one speak of Yahweh's moral? Obviously not. For Yahweh's acts go 'beyond human understanding' (and judgments, for that matter), what implies his (and only his) acts are to be considered *ipso facto* acceptable. In fact, what Yahweh demands is the absolute obedience of his people. To be 'right' means to be allowed to stand (up)right before God, and not to be ashamed for one's acts which do not satisfy God. With this in mind, we may reinterpret the prohibition quoted above. Explanation given to Adam was flatly discarded by serpent, rightly as will turn out immediately. Then, what is 'good' and 'evil'? Adam disobeyed God's prohibition and thus sinned. The moral was: obeying God's order was 'good' and *vice versa*. This was 'the knowledge' which the 'tree of life' was charged with.

Another inconsistency perplexes the reader concerning the Eden episode. Namely, the creature which (or who?) talked to Eve was designated initially as serpent (constrictor), while from the God's curse we see it refers to venomous snake. Both species may be considered 'cunning', in the sense they perplex other living creatures by their form and kinematics [6], what results in animals falling easily victims of these 'weird' creatures. The curse is supposed to provide an explanation of what biologists and psychologists call *reptophobia*, an innate fear from reptiles, especially snakes. According to some biologists this fear has been transmitted genetically from generation to generation, being built up into animal (including human) 'hardware', as a distinct evolutionary advantage. This 'instinctive protection' had to be built in into animals, especially those endowed with higher intelligence, like primates, since there is nothing in the appearance, both of serpents and snakes that warn against deadly danger.

But the evil exercises strong attraction on human too (*coincident of extremes*). In his hallucinational vision Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of Jesuit order, testifies: "... *a form in the air near him and this form gave him much consolation because it was exceedingly beautiful ... it somehow seemed to have the shape of a serpent and had many things that shone like eyes, but were not eyes. He received much delight and consolation from gazing upon this object ... but when the object vanished he became disconsolate.*" [7]

We know that many societies venerate snakes, including some Christian European communities [8].

It is interesting that no specification of the kind of tree forbidden to eat. The authors were cautious not to spell curse to any particular fruit, so as to avoid a permanent prohibition. The tradition of apple tree arrived much later in Europe, in 16th century [6]. (Likewise the narrative of Exodus fails to mention the name of pharaoh, wisely preventing any link with possible historical record.) The tree might well be named 'tree of knowledge', for another reading of 'good and evil' may be 'everything' [5]. One is tempted to read this passage of Genesis as an allegorical separation of faith (irrational) and knowledge (rational) aspect of human experience, with clear sympathy to the religious side.

Likewise, the insistence on the free choice might be interpreted as an allegory to the separation of human from animals, the rise of *homo sapiense*. The logical order of things would then be: instincts → irrational → rational, but the temporal series would exchange places of the latter two phases, since irrational behaviour would result in evolutionary disastrous consequences. Man may indulge in irrational, once he has secured its existence by rational behaviour.

4. Monotheism or dualism, the question is now

The buck stops here.
(Harry Truman)

Upon careful reading of the episode with God, Adam, serpent and Eve, one gets feeling that the text is overburdened with value judgments. If the latter are omitted, what remains is an entity that tempts Eve. God and serpent (the Serpent) never appear synchronously, always in the temporal sequence. One is, therefore, tempted to pose the question: is it possible that God and Serpent are the same being? Or, to put it differently, is the God taking form of serpent to try to instigate Eve to disobey his prohibition?

Divinities in the pre-Classical era were prone to disguise in various forms. One recalls Zeus in the form of bull, golden rain, eagle etc. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are full of disguised divinities, etc. [9]. Yahweh himself used to appear in various forms, like burning bush, mist, etc [5]. The case which might be the closest to our issue, is that of Zeus seducing Alexander's mother Olympia, in the form of a serpent, the story which encouraged Alexander to seek a confirmation from Egyptian priests that he was 'Son of God' [10].

Temptation appears a recurrent theme in religious circles, Occidental and Oriental alike. Buddha was tempted by evil demon Mara, Christ by satan. The concept of temptation is essential for constructing and preserving one of the principal points of any religious system of doctrines – the immunity before destructive influence, both external and internal. Formally, this immunity is exercised in the Platonic form of dialogues, or the form of the classical Greek drama. The entire issue revolves around the central concept of free will. Man is not bad, in essence, since he was created by a benevolent being, the God, but evil comes from the coincidence: *free will + temptation*. We find this combination in the famous narrative of pious Job, which deserves our attention here in some detail.

Three principal players appear in this story of trust and devotion to God: God, satan and Job. Satan appears here as a true partner of Yahweh, what was the reason the whole story to be classified by biblical scholars as 'literary supplement' (*Ketuvim* in Hebrew, [11]). Nevertheless, the stile and august intonation of the narrative and moral make this episode the true and integral part of the Jewish Bible, indeed. Satan appears her 'from nowhere', just as Yahweh does at he very beginning of the Bible. God and satan bet about Job's devotion to Yahweh, with God's proviso that Job's soul will be spared. The story thus

allows the possibility that Satan may take hold of human soul, what makes the dogma of free will empty notion. Motivation for the entire narrative is obvious: there is no way to escape responsibility for disobeying God. Two points may be made here:

- (i) Job's firm sticking to Yahweh symbolizes the effect which may be called *ethical collapse*, like the 'gravitational collapse' in modern Astrophysics [12]. Once our mental switch has been turned up to belief, there is no way to return to the rational thinking. The more the experience put human being to disaster, torture etc., the more man must stick to God. For it is just God's temptation which is operating and which one should endure. It is that point which keeps many Jews still trusting Yahweh after Auschwitz and Holocaust (Shoah). Once the switch (the Switch) has been turned on, there is no escape, just as there is no escape from the so-called black hole, in the modern theory of gravitation.
- (ii) There is no way to get empirical evidence of existence of God. We know from the Greek mythology that no mortal may be allowed to see God (Zeus), as the story of Semele and Zeus teaches us. The only way to experience the presence of God must be indirect evidence, after effects which we ascribe to deities. (Just as there is no way to detect the presence of a black hole, except by side effects, like gravitational influence on the immediate surroundings.) Holocaust does not prove there is no God, but just demonstrates another temptation for faithfuls. In this context the term *Shoah* (Disaster), appears counter effective, but we should not forget we are within a realm of irrationalities (until we adopt eventually other logic and knowledge, at least).

Poor Job was pushed to the wall. He could not ask for help anybody, since he is endowed with the faculty of making choice. He cannot 'pass the buck' further, for there is nobody behind, except the supreme god, the God, who is the judge (the Judge).

Dualistic concept appears in this narrative almost explicitly. Satan talks to Yahweh 'on equal footing', just as Mephistopheles does in Goethe's Faust. Dualism turns out to be generic 'attractor' of all seemingly monotheistic religious systems, from Judaism and derived religions thereof (Christianity and Islam), original Zoroasterism (as mentioned before), and all gnostic teachings (see, e.g. [3] for the latter). All 'unique', 'single' gods, Gods, split finally into two deities, who epitomize 'good' and 'evil', we experience on Earth. This seems to be a logical necessity, a proof that the ethical space must have at least two dimensions, as mathematicians would put it. But logic apart, could we trace back the road from polytheism to monotheism, with the latter as the paradigm of (ethical) monocentrism? The question resembles much the similar puzzle cosmologists pose to themselves: What was before Big Bang?

5. Monotheistic polytheism

*I sent my soul to the deep space to find out the Paradise.
The soul returned to me and said: both Paradise and Hell lie in you*
(Omar Khayyam)

There is no doubt that man created gods in plurality, before attempting to reduce their number, first to two, then to one and eventually to zero. It is equally clear that the charges of gods within ever smaller number increased, so as to be able to fulfil their duties, doing service to the community. Despite simple definitions of ‘unique gods’, Gods, it is obvious that their nature becomes so complex, that it is hardly possible to talk about their individualities (*in-dividuum* meaning *non-divisible*, or *atom* in the original Greek concept). They appear ‘zipped’ from the plurality of the previous pantheon, amalgams of the various gods. On the other hand, their behaviour reveals complex personalities, *personalities* in the original sense, which perplex ordinary believers. Gods are immortal and defy human manipulations, revealing themselves in the attributes and acts of ‘unique gods’ as ‘all-round players’. Yahweh is not an exception for that matter either and his seemingly unexpected acts, often deplorable by the standard of human ‘natural ethos’, testify the fact that strict monotheism is impossible to realize.

Not only Yahweh got his partner, as we showed above, but his ‘alter ego’, serpent will serve as an incarnation of many religious entities, often mutually contradictory ones. If the Bible (both Old and New Testament) is a collection (amalgam) of various records, written or oral, many parts of them become sources of new religious movements, sects, heretics, which eventually develop into new religions, as the case of Judaism and Christianity testifies. Majority of sects within Christianity, belong to the gnostic, dualistic doctrines, trying to remedy the general shortcomings of the quasi-monotheistic concept.

We may distinguish two general outcomes of diversifications of the biblical doctrines:

- (i) temporal series of gods (*diachronous aspect*);
- (ii) splitting of original deities (*synchronous aspects*).

For the first category the best example was that of Marcion of Sinope (c. 85-160 AD), [13] who rejected the Old Testament in many respects, trying to found Christianity on the concept of two gods, Yahweh from the Old Testament (Demiurg) and Christian father of Christ (the Father), benevolent god, who sacrificed his son (the Son) to bad Yahweh, for the benefit of mankind. Note that within this scenario Yahweh was not relegated to the status of satan. On the contrary, his role is primordial, both temporally and logically, since it is him who creates the World. But this world turns out bad, as one would expect from material component of the Creation. The dichotomy *good versus bad* now appears in the form *spiritual versus material*. Knowledge, as epitomized by ‘the tree of life’, appears now beneficial for humans, not as such, but rather as a special knowledge accessible to gnostics only, the knowledge of salvation.

According to Bogomils [3], these forerunners of Catharses, it was the Christian, benevolent God who sent Christ in the form of serpent to reveal to Adam and Eve the truth in Eden. Serpent as Christ will become a frequent theme among esoterics, notably alchemists (see, *e.g.* Figure 1 in [6]). Generally, splitting God into two deities aimed at overcoming the paradoxical point of New Testament, where Father sacrifices his son to himself, in order to spare humans, he created himself, too. This point was elaborated in many gnostic scriptures, notably in the so-called *The Gospel of Judas* [14].

As for the second alternative, many deities turned out to possess schizophrenic character, with benevolent and cruel features. This should not come as surprise, since, as Euhemerus already noticed, gods are designed by reminiscence of historical persons, with strong personalities, what usually means by despotic rulers. Yahweh from the Jewish bible appears a paradigm of a despot, what he himself does not hide, as exemplified by the Commandment No 2, for instance. (Some authors argue that the original meaning of the second Commandment differed from the official one and that it referred to Moses abolishing the rite of circumcision among Hebrews, which he strongly opposed.) In a formative phase of any religion it is more important gods to be fearful than benevolent. It is not by accident that biblical God always bears epithet Lord (Lord God).

6. God of Holocaust and Holocaust of God

Sin Athena, kai hira kini
(Greek proverb)

If a god (especially the God) is to be at the disposal for every service, he must be endowed with corresponding attributes. Biblical Yahweh was conceived as (i) omnipotent, (ii) cognizable and (iii) infinitely benevolent. The attributes (taken together) used to be incompatible with occasional historical experience of his chosen people (the Chosen people), and it was not a trivial task to bring the originally tribal god in concordance with the reality. This issue became particularly acute and annoying after the experience of Holocaust (Shoah) under the Hitler's Nazi regime in Europe. Many attempts were made to bring harmony between the Biblical theology and historical reality. Reaction of Jewish population spanned from outright renounce of Yahweh to the Jobean strengthening the trust into God. Between these extremes one finds a number of partial solutions, which try to make compromise between the rigid biblical dogmatics and rational resolving of the paradox. Here we discuss briefly the point adopted by the biblical scholar Hans Jonas [15], who tried to resolve the Gödelian completeness problem within the context of Shoah experience.

Formally, points (i) – (iii) as quoted above, span the entire logical space, as points in a three-dimensional Euclidian space. Historical experience shows that the 'vectorial base' appears overcomplete. If God is omnipotent and infinitely benevolent, why he did not spare his people (His People)? Jonas found that the

only reasonable solution was to renounce one of Yahweh's attributes. He chose that of omnipotence - according to him God turned out not to be omnipotent and it was of that deficiency he could not protect his people before the Nazi evil. His solution, in fact, brought back the concept of unique god (the God) to the notion of tribal god (the gods), to *henotheism*, as conceived originally in the very (Hebrew) Bible, as a direct inspection of the latter easily confirms (see, e.g. psalm No. 82, Asaph's Psalm). It brings back, albeit in an indirect way, the concept of polytheism, as present in the Bible in its formative chapters. The early history of Hebrews, according to Bible, consisted of Israelites' disputes and fighting with neighbouring tribes, generally hostile towards Hebrews. The conflicts consisted of contests between tribal gods, as many episodes in Bible testify. The more powerful gods bring the victory to their tribes.

Jonas' rationale belongs, in fact, more to the political than to theological sphere. He asserts, first, that his god, since he is benevolent and still loves his people, feels compassion with them, moreover he suffers too. The political implications are clear: Israelites should not passively suffer, but must fight for their benefits. For there is no omnipotent Yahweh who can protect Jews from the evil environment. Though not explicitly, but this approach refers to the book of Judges with silent call for messiahs, a new Judges who are to lead his people against their enemy. It is, also, an anti-Jobian ideology, not of submission but of defiance. Jonas argues for mankind (at least Israelites) as God's partners, thus returning the argument to original situation one may call Euhemerian - it was not God who made man according to his own image, but rather *vice versa*. All men appear hence, *albeit* implicitly, gods, what one may call *extreme polytheism*. By making God less divine, *i.e.* god who suffers, Jonas envisages Yahweh more human, a partner of mankind. It seems as if God has passed all phases of humanization, from the omnipotent Creator in the book of Genesis, *via* Christian semi-God on the Cross and finally (henotheistic?) Jonas' suffering God. Yahweh thus appears good, but not Good. On the other hand, such a solution of the 'primordial paradox' makes Yahweh more familiar with his people and *vice versa*. This familiarity strengthens the bonds with God, as the very name *Israel* testifies. (We recall the struggle of Jacob with God/angel in the book of Exodus.) On the other hand Paul of Tarsus had difficulties with convincing Gentiles that Israeli god was their (or universal) god, as well, the God (Romans 1), just because of this henotheistic original Jewish faith.

The point has been illustrated many times in the Jewish history (including virtual one). But history knows the opposite points too. Instead of many gods to many tribes, one may have one god (the God) to many tribes. When Joseph Flavius tries to persuade Jews in the besieged Jerusalem in 70 AD to surrender to the Roman army under Titus, he made exactly this point [16]. Yahweh had abandoned 'His People' for the Romans, who were obviously, according to Joseph, his new favourites and Jews must accept this change of Yahweh's favour. As we know, besieged Israelites did not accept the proposal and fought to the tragic end.

Hitler made use of the similar stratagem, though in a very subtle form. He never referred to a particular god, surely not to biblical one, but frequently made allusions to the providence (Providence), whom he never defined. His providence matched better Chinese *Heavens*, though such a notion was not alien to European thinkers either. He was addressing Christians, whom he was converting gradually to a new semi-secular religion. Religion where Providence played role of the God father, and Hitler himself his earthly representative, if not exactly the Son.

7. Epilogue

Bible is (better to say are) unique collection of scriptures and as such defies any unique, self-sufficient overview. It was written during the half millennium time span, by many authors. It includes many myths, literary texts and other cultural sources from Israel environment, that it is illusory to claim originality of the ideas, even narratives. It is also illusory to put the theological (and any other aspect) content under a scrutinized analysis, except for inference what the authors may have wanted to say in this context. After all, any rigorous analysis of Bible would imply an inadvertent overestimate of the latter.

We have discussed a number of biblical instances that shed light on the perennial theological issue concerning the concept of monotheism. Despite the *a posteriori* claims that Bible teaches a self-consistent concept in this respect, it is evident from straightway reading that one may claim any theological solution, by selecting biblical passages. One outcome of the careful reading, which we did not pursue here, is that despite of the general set up Good against Evil (with the final clash at Armageddon) no such clear-cut separation is to be found in the Holy Scriptures. All personalities appear both good and evil. The Bible, as a whole, goes beyond such 'zero-approximation' outlook, as mathematicians would put it. It is the sign of grander, the hallmark of great human literary works, from Homer, Euripides, Cervantes to Shakespeare. In this respect, Bible appears greater than Judeo-Christian theologians assert (recall Michelangelo's Moses with horns and the popular Middle-Age syntagm *Old Horny*) [17].

The issue of monotheism *versus* polytheism in Bible is, of course, much broader than we have encompassed here. In particular, the road from animism, *via* polytheism, henotheism to monotheism (and back to hidden polytheism) may be traced by careful reading the Holy Scriptures. It will be the subject of the following paper.

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