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Oscillation and Other Approaches to Inconsistencies in Talking about God

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Abstract : Any description of God leads to paradoxes. For instance, God is both transcendent and immanent, non-corporeal and described in bodily terms. For some, the tension in such conflicting descriptions is supposed to open a path to deeper insight into the divine. A rational handling of such contradictions is attempted by theologians. Jewish approaches can be based on emphasizing the limits of language; its inevitably metaphoric use; limiting discourse to negative theology; stressing the primacy of orthopraxy; or treating descriptions of the divine as necessarily partial, or rather complementary. The last point indicates parallels with modern science. A picture of oscillation between incompatible approaches seems to offer a promising, and rather unexplored, way of engaging with these theological tensions. This oscillation seems to be present in other areas and can be modeled formally through sequential paraclassical logic.

Keywords: Theological contradiction, Apophatic theology, Complementarity, Oscillation, Paraclassical logic

Paradoxes seem unavoidable in theology, and certainly in Jewish theology. Talking about God can result in statements that lead in different and apparently incompatible directions. The tension can often be expressed as an inconsistency, as suggested—within a general philosophical setting—by Nicholas Rescher (2001, 7): "Paradoxes thus arise when we have a plurality of theses, each individually plausible in the circumstances, but nevertheless in the aggregate constituting an inconsistent group." While any definition of paradox may be problematic, as suggested by Christopher Cowie (2023), the fundamental idea seems clear enough to be used in application to theology. Inconsistency can often be expressed as an apparent contradiction, at least at some level of discourse. Thus, for example, God is described as transcendent and also immanent, which constitutes a contradiction

if the basic definitions of those terms are invoked. At the same time, much work in theology has been devoted to showing that this, as well as other apparent contradictions, are not genuine contradictions.
Some examples of inconsistencies are indicated in Sections 1 and 2. The present paper reviews major ways of dealing with them in the Jewish tradition (Section 3), mentions seemingly parallel problems in science (Section 4), and presents a much less common way of looking at contradictions, namely the picture of oscillation between incompatible approaches; in addition, a formal model of oscillation is mentioned (Section 5). Oscillation seems to appear in many contexts (as indicated in Section 6).

1. Conflicting Attributes

Any talk of God's attributes leads to paradoxes due to an apparent lack of consistency. This seems to be an insight shared by many theologians and is certainly strongly present in Jewish theology, particularly in its modern variety. For instance, God is both transcendent and immanent, as mentioned above. Furthermore, God is non-corporeal and yet described in bodily terms.

To address the issue of transcendence, God is beyond space and time, a familiar theme in theology. For some radical modern thinkers continuing the insight of God as wholly other, even the category of "being" does not apply to God. One book by Emanuel Levinas is entitled *Otherwise than Being* (see Levinas 1991). This approach can go as far as denying the value of affirming God's existence without adopting an atheistic position. When expressed within theological language, it means that neither the rejection of God's existence nor its affirmation is required, because we need to go beyond the question of the existence of God as the alleged main question of theology. Let us ignore this question, proposes Howard Wettstein (2014): "existence" is not applicable to God, because there is no common denominator—not even existence—that applies to tables, stars, me, you, and God. This is based on a radical understanding of the uniqueness of God expressed in the traditional Jewish prayer book (Artscroll siddur 1984, 13): "there is none to compare with Him" (*eyn sheni lehahbira*) and "there is no oneness as His oneness" (*eyn yahid keyihudo*). These statements were developed in medieval Jewish theology which, however, to make it clear, did assume the existence of God as obvious. The radical consequences of the vision of absolute transcendence belong to the present era. In addition, it must be admitted that the Biblical language is much less radical. The immanence of God is strongly present in Scripture: He is involved in human matters, is accessible to the forefathers, and speaks with the prophets, etc. Furthermore, the perception of the

familiarity of God has not been abandoned by later Jewish theological sensibility, up to the present time. God is "close to all who call upon Him—to all who call upon Him sincerely" (Psalm 145:18). The paradox remains: in the Jewish tradition it has always been maintained that God is our king (*malkeinu*) and our father (*avinu*), that is, someone distant and close at the same time. In ancient times most people could never see the face of a king, so calling Him king indicates a great distance, and at the same time He is our father, that is, someone not truly distant but very close, a person whose face we can see every day.

A particularly clear expression of the familiarity of God and His closeness to us is seen in the anthropomorphic language common in the Bible and consequently in liturgy. With a "mighty hand" God brought Israel from Egypt (e.g., Exodus 13:9), "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth" (Zechariah 4:10), and God showed Moses His back, explaining that His "face" could not be seen (Exodus 33:23). Many more Scriptural descriptions of this kind enable anti-religious critics to ridicule the more philosophical idea of a transcendent God as incompatible with Biblical imagery. Theologians are hardly bothered. What is more, in the Bible and the subsequent tradition, anthropopathic language is also used: God exhibits feelings similar to those of humans; for instance, His "anger" burned against Moses (Exodus 4:14), and on many occasions it burned against Israel (e.g., Numbers 11:33). Descriptions of this kind, especially those in the Prophetic books, can be seen as supporting some modern conceptions, such as that of Abraham Joshua Heschel, who spoke about divine pathos—that is, God's emotional link to humanity, or His human-like experience of our pain or grief (Heschel 1962). On the other hand, despite all that legacy, theological developments since Antiquity have led to the idea of an immaterial God who has neither limbs nor other human, nor even superhuman, characteristics. This can already be perceived in the Torah, for example when the Revelation is recalled: "ye saw no manner of form on the day that the Lord spoke unto you in Horeb" (Deut. 4:15). While this statement can be interpreted as the absence of the perception of form and not the absence of form itself, commentators—for example Nachmanides (or Ramban; see his commentary to loc. cit., e.g., at sefaria.org)—referring also to the next verses, say that no form can be ascribed to God, or at least this is how the commentary is understood even by the most traditional Orthodox readers (cf. Artscroll Chumash, 962). The rejection of anthropomorphism was absolute in the writings of the foremost medieval Jewish theologian Moses Maimonides (aka Rambam). It is his twelfth-century principle that is preserved in modern Jewish prayerbooks: the Creator "is not physical and is not affected by physical phenomena" (Artscroll siddur 1984, 179). Still, the paradox is not eliminated: modern believers continue to speak about the non-corporeal God

using terms such as "face," "mighty hand," etc. Even if they are careful enough to avoid such expressions, they encounter the traditional phrases when engaged in liturgy.

2. Merging Opposing Attitude

There exist far more inconsistencies in theological statements, even when we limit the analysis to properties of God. Yet sometimes they can be successfully united. For example, it is common in Jewish theology to affirm that God is perfectly just and at the same time supremely merciful. As we know, a just person is one who abides by principles concerning laws and opts for punishment for their violation—a just punishment, but still retribution for wrongdoing. On the other hand, merciful treatment of a guilty person means forgiving the offence or, at the very least, dispensing with the full measure of punishment proportional to the guilt. Justice requires overcoming mercy, and mercy requires overcoming strict justice. So how is it possible to say that God is both? In Judaism, and in some other traditions, there is no attempt to speak of many gods—one just and another merciful (as is the case in various pagan religions)—nor to divide the figure of God into different persons, for example, into a strict God and another completely merciful person. How can the divergent attributes be perceived in one subject? While a judge is, at a given moment, either strictly just or merciful and lenient, it is within our human experience to unite these attitudes. To put it simply, it can be compared to a parent's attitude toward a child. This is particularly relevant since the basic term denoting mercy, namely *rachamim*, derives from the root *rechem*, which means "womb." To be merciful is thus to behave like a mother toward the child she carried in her womb. And it is easy to see that loving parents are toward their children both merciful and just. Punishment, that is, the administration of justice, is not incompatible with love—provided, of course, that the reprimand is at the same time merciful. But can it be otherwise if the parent truly loves?

Moreover, there are several Hebrew terms for "justice." In addition to *mishpat* and *din*, which indicate strict legal justice, another term often occurs, usually rendered as "justice." Perhaps this word, *tzedek*, leads most directly into the heart of Judaism. It signifies something more than justice. According to Jonathan Sacks (2009), among the shades of meaning of the word *tzedek* are justice, charity, righteousness, integrity, equity, fairness, and innocence. It means going beyond the letter of the law, or, to expound the above terms in other words, to be sensitive to human vulnerability and to exhibit conduct that includes no trace of abuse or even of taking advantage of one's position. This can be illustrated by a biblical verse (Deuteronomy 24:13). When

someone lends money and takes a cloak as collateral, and the borrower is poor, it is said: "You shall surely return the pledge to him before the sun sets, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you; and it shall be accounted to you as righteousness before the Lord your God." Here "righteousness" is used as the translation of *tzedek*. Others write "right standing," "righteous act," or "mercy shown by you." In some translations the terms signifying "good deed" or "merit" are used here. It is clear that what is meant is to go beyond the requirements of the law. Doing the right thing in the described situation—giving the poor man back his cloak so that he may cover himself at night—is precisely such a step beyond legal obligation, for the pledge belongs to the lender, and according to the letter of the law the lender is not required to return it. Similarly, a related word, *tzedakah*, usually translated as "charity," reflects this idea as well: giving to the poor is not seen as optional generosity but as an act of justice, restoring moral balance in the world. Thus, to use Sacks's words again, *tzedek* is justice tempered by compassion or mercy. That is, *tzedek* is justice and mercy combined into one—the overcoming of the opposition between justice and mercy.

3. Ways of Dealing with Paradoxes in Judaism

The solution reached with respect to the opposition between justice and mercy suggests that inconsistencies are not necessarily lethal. At the same time, there is no reason to believe that a general solution is provided by this example. What is more, paradoxical statements occur not only in attempts to characterize God, but also on other occasions, for example in the dictum: "Everything is foreseen, yet freedom of choice is granted" (Mishna, Avot 3:15, translation after sefaria.org). The problem of free will, as topical today as ever, is not considered in the present paper. Suffice it to say that the rabbinic tradition often preserves inconsistencies, thereby indicating that paradox is an acceptable, or even indispensable, mode of theological discourse.

There are several ways of dealing with such inconsistencies in the Jewish theological tradition. The mystical tradition, in Judaism and elsewhere, embraces contradictions as a way of pointing to realities that transcend logic. One can say that "God is all and God is nothing," or that "God is known and God is unknown, unknowable," in order to indicate the strangeness of the divine realm, or *credo quia absurdum*. This is not the position adopted in the present study. Rational and more logically sensitive approaches have also been deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition and are worth reviewing.

The first method of neutralizing the destructive influence of theological inconsistencies in Scripture is very general: biblical formulations are seen as

metaphors. For example, Saadia Gaon in the 9th century maintained that at least some anthropomorphic attributes of God should not be understood literally (see Saadia 1948). The certainty that they are employed in a figurative way became common among Jewish theologians later than among Christian ones, and it must be noted that average Jews, together with average Christians, for many centuries retained a rather direct belief in some manner of corporeality of God (cf. Friedman 2007). For the philosophically minded, it was a wrong understanding of the divine, resulting from the fact that, using a Talmudic dictum, the Torah "speaks the language of man." Therefore, contradictions are ultimately a problem of our language. At the same time, this inadequate language remains unavoidable in theological commentary and even more so in prayer.

The second method of overcoming contradictions was used by Maimonides. He went even further than Saadia and developed an apophatic (negative) theology. According to Friedländer, he "seems to have refrained from explaining anthropomorphisms as figurative expressions, lest by such interpretation he might implicitly admit the existence of a certain relation and comparison between the Creator and His creatures" (Friedländer, 1910, xli). In *Guide for the Perplexed* (see Maimonides 1910), he argues that no positive predicates can be applied to God; we can only speak about God in negative terms, describing what God is not rather than what God is. Another part of Maimonides' proposal is the insistence that whatever we say positively about God is a description of His actions, His influence upon the world ("God created"), and in particular upon humanity ("God redeems"). In this vein, a modern development led to a rather existentialist interpretation: to state what was, and remains, truly essential from the Jewish theology perspective, we can say that God's attributes are expressed in the imperative mode. To know God means nothing more and nothing less than to know what one should do. This is consistent with the traditional Jewish stress on orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy. We may sum up these attempts in a statement that is as relevant today as it was in the Middle Ages: all we can say about God is not really characterizing God but rather describing our world seen from a perspective that can be called divine, and especially pointing to our duties. A modern development of this approach can be seen in the philosophical-theological system presented by Franz Rosenzweig in 1921 (see Rosenzweig 2005). In the famous essay by Martin Buber, developed at the same time, the presence of God is experienced only through relationship with another person (see Buber 1937).

The third general method of dealing with paradoxes explains away inconsistencies as a problem of epistemology rather than ontology. Namely, contradictions do not describe God's essence; rather, they are caused by divergent

approaches to the inscrutable divine reality. This methodology will be expounded in Section 5 below. Here, let us consider rabbinic illustrations of this method through excerpts referring to the justice versus mercy problem. While above, in Section 2, it is resolved by keeping both as they coexist in the mind of a parent relating to her child, we can encounter another way, that of changing attitude.

One way of coping with the unknowability of the Creator and with the coexistence of His different faces, which seem not to fit together, is precisely to acknowledge the existence of those many faces. Within Judaism, this is usually expressed as the existence of many names of God. The best known are the following two: the unpronounceable four-letter name (YHVH), also known as the Tetragrammaton, and the general name "Elohim." Obviously, ancient rabbis did not try to move in the direction of the theory of multiple sources or documents. According to them, the two names are connected precisely with the issue that concerns us here. The name Elohim is associated with God's justice, with His aspect as a judge who judges creatures and the entire world. The Tetragrammaton, by contrast, is the name of the God of mercy. Therefore, the famous verse "Hear, O Israel…" (Deuteronomy 6:4)—sometimes, not without reason, referred to as the confession of faith of Judaism—can be understood precisely as a statement that, contrary to appearances, there is no difference between the God of justice and the God of mercy: "Hear, O Israel, YHVH (the God of mercy) is our Elohim (the God of justice), YHVH is one."

There exist also other visions that explain the presence of seemingly contradictory attributes. In the Talmud (Berakhot 7a) we read (translation after sefaria.org):

> Rabbi Yoḥanan said in the name of Rabbi Yosei: From where is it derived that the Holy One, Blessed be He, prays? As it is stated: "I will bring them to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in the house of My prayer" (Isaiah 56:7). The verse does not say the house of their prayer, but rather, "the house of My prayer"; from here we see that the Holy One, Blessed be He, prays. The Gemara asks: What does God pray? Rav Zutra bar Tovia said that Rav said: God says: May it be My will that My mercy will overcome My anger towards Israel for their transgressions, and may My mercy prevail over My other attributes through which Israel is punished, and may I conduct myself toward My children, Israel, with the attribute of mercy, and may I enter before them beyond the letter of the law.

Here we see that God possesses both attributes, yet desires that His mercy prevail. According to another rabbinic account of the situation, it indeed does prevail. For if it did not, we would not endure. Mercy is especially indispensable. It is particularly needed on Yom Kippur ("Day of Atonement"). How this happens is illustrated by

another rabbinic parable. In one tractate of the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 3b), a description of the Creator's day is given (translation after sefaria.org):

> But doesn't Rav Yehuda say that Rav says: There are twelve hours in the day. During the first three, the Holy One, Blessed be He, sits and engages in Torah study. During the second three hours, He sits and judges the entire world. Once He sees that the world has rendered itself liable to destruction, He arises from the throne of judgment [*kise ha-din*] and sits on the throne of mercy [*kise rachamim*], and the world is not destroyed. During the third set of three hours, the Holy One, Blessed be He, sits and sustains the entire world, from the horns of wild oxen to the eggs of lice. During the fourth three hours, He sits and makes sport with the leviathan, as it is stated: "There is leviathan, whom You have formed to sport with." (Psalms 104:26)

It is clear—and testifies to the rabbis' sense of humor—that the evening amusements must be taken as a metaphor. The metaphor more relevant to our subject is given by the image of moving from one throne to another. This picture is easy to imagine and fully justifies the possibility of the coexistence of different attributes. Different thrones represent diverging attitudes toward the world; obviously, both are assumed by the same subject, though not simultaneously.

4. Scientific Parallels

It is highly interesting that paradoxes, possibly of a similar kind to those in theology, appear in science, and especially in physics. Before referring to modern physics, let us mention a mathematical illustration that makes some theological contradictions look less paradoxical. For example, ubiquity or miraculous appearance can be explained by invoking another dimension, introduced in the 19th century. By the end of that century, it was used by theologians. In *Flatland* (Abbott 1952) we read a tale about geometric creatures inhabiting a flat world. A three-dimensional being has divine properties from the flatlanders' perspective: it can perceive the whole flat world, and when it interferes with the plane at one point and simultaneously at another, this is perceived by the flat figures as a miraculous happening. (Many mathematical examples are discussed in Krajewski 2024 and in the collection Koetsier and Bergmans 2005).

The idea of relations, and especially interhuman relations, as the only way to encounter God is present among the philosophers of dialogue (see Bergman 1991 for an account and Dvorkin 2020 for its relevance to Jewish tradition). This is continued in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, for whom, in addition, the term "God" not only never refers to an existing object, but the "face" of God is treated as the trace of

an event that has never happened (see Levinas 1990, 1991, and 1998). We may say that paradoxes arise when God is treated as an object and become less problematic when objecthood is rejected. And it is well known that in 20th-century physics the traditional concept of an object became problematic. The principle of uncertainty, introduced by Heisenberg, states that it is impossible to determine precisely the position and the velocity of a particle, which contradicts our usual ways of describing objects. What is more, according to prevailing physical theories, objects of the microworld are both particles and waves at the same time. Or rather, to be more specific, when the photoelectric effect is explained, the corpuscular nature of light is invoked, as did Einstein, and when the interference of light is described, the wave description is applied. This wave–particle dualism is virtually incomprehensible to us because it contradicts our everyday experience, that is, our perception of the world around us. In our experience, particles are very different from waves, and nothing could be both. It seems that the conceptual apparatus built on normal human experience is insufficient. It leads to inconsistencies, the attribution of contradictory characteristics, when applied to the microworld. One can note that it is therefore hardly surprising that this is all the more the case when we try to speak about God.

As is generally known, the new perception of matter led Niels Bohr to formulate a new paradigm, called complementarity. Thus, "the apparently incompatible sorts of information about the behavior of the object under examination which we get by different experimental arrangements can clearly not be brought into connection with each other in the usual way, but may, as equally essential for an exhaustive account of all experience, be regarded as 'complementary' to each other" (Bohr 1937, 291; quoted after Scheibe 1973, 31). There exists an unresolved debate whether complementarity is a feature of physical reality or, rather, of our attempts to describe the reality that in itself is beyond our direct grasp. The dispute can be traced to discussions between Einstein and Bohr. Some physicists would claim that quantum mechanics is about our observations of the quantum world, and that it is always a matter of a specific perspective, never an account of the "objective" mysteries of the world. To others, the need to have an "objective picture" of the whole world leads to attempts to go beyond observers' perspectives and explain them by an all-encompassing theory. No generally satisfying theory has been created, but the need is clearly reminiscent of the need to assume a "God's perspective." If we admit that the divine perspective is unavailable to humans, the seemingly conflicting features of the world or of God become rather unsurprising. This more modest position is better suited to dealing with theological paradoxes.

The realization of the impossibility of a super-approach, beyond all humanly possible approaches, suggests a logical system that may be related to the attempts proposed in order to take into account complementarity: it involves the vision of shifting approaches.

5 Logic of Oscillation

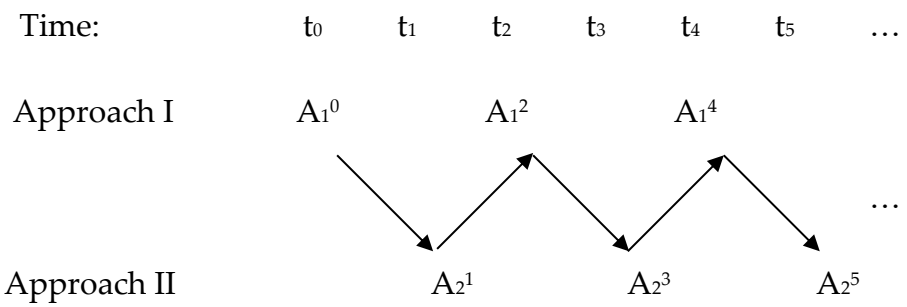
Maintaining contradictory claims, as happens in at least some theological discourses, is logically problematic. From the standpoint of classical logic, it is lethal, as, according to the principle known as *ex contradictione quodlibet*, from a contradiction any statement can be deduced. This catastrophic explosion does not occur, however, in real-life daily reasoning nor in scientific discourse, even though in each domain seemingly contradictory statements easily appear. What is more, a collection of sentences can imply a contradiction in a way difficult to perceive. Such examples abound in mathematics. In everyday experience, this can easily happen to anyone, as stated in the "jumble paradox" (cf. Sorensen 2003): the last 1000 statements made by anyone are together inconsistent with high probability. In mathematics, contradictory theses arise within well-defined theories only by mistake, but they do appear when generalizations are made to broader and not clearly defined areas of applicability, and on such occasions they can serve a constructive role, forcing the development of theories (Byers 2007). Of course, there are several methods to overcome contradictions: we can consider shades of meaning; we can redefine basic concepts; we can, while dealing with a specific statement, indicate different aspects of the matter to which the statement refers, different moments when the statement was made, or distinct agents who have different goals in expressing the statement. General logical strategies to deal with (some) contradictions are developed within paraconsistent logic (see, e.g., Carnielli and Coniglio 2016, Priest et al. 2022).

The above issues are mentioned to demonstrate that theology is by no means unique. Theology seems, however, especially appropriate as a field where methods of overcoming paradoxes can be used to help understand the arguments. One idea that has not been widely discussed so far is to use the concept of oscillation. Namely, even though in the realm of religion sometimes contradictions are accepted, in particular among mystics, on many other occasions the believer does not assume contradictory approaches at the same moment but rather oscillates from one to the other and back. This is akin to the above-mentioned Talmudic picture of God changing His throne of strict justice to that of mercy, and back.

One attempt has been proposed, the logic of oscillation (Krajewski 2023), which seems to respond to the need to describe situations encountered in theology. The initial motivation for the logic of oscillation came from the experience of interfaith dialogue (cf. Krajewski 2012). Such dialogue involves an inescapable incompatibility: one oscillates between, first, considering the other religion from an objective standpoint and, secondly, perceiving it from the perspective of one's own religion. More generally, one can model situations where one naturally alternates between incompatible stances without collapsing into incoherence. In such cases, contradiction is not eliminated or accepted as a brute fact, but dynamically inhabited: each pole illuminates the other, and their alternation is integral to the discourse. This approach fits theological discourse, which oscillates between attributing qualities to God and denying them, between affirming divine transcendence and stressing His immanence, between realizing God's justice and perceiving His mercy, and between affirming God's omniscience and experiencing genuine freedom. In each such case, and one can find more, we encounter an intentional alternation between two truths that cannot be (directly) harmonized yet cannot be abandoned. Each pole is necessary, and the oscillation between them is not a defect of reasoning but a constitutive feature of the situation, or perhaps of faith.

The logic of oscillation, or the sequential paraclassical logic of Krajewski 2023, has as a starting point the papers by da Costa and Krause (2006, 2008, 2014), in which they proposed an idea of the logic of complementarity that was supposed to illuminate the complementarity encountered in physics. Their simple paraclassical logic is defined as follows: a sentence α follows paraclassically from a set of sentences A if and only if the sentence α follows classically from a consistent subset of A. It should be noted that the paraclassical consequences of A always form a non-trivial set. For example, direct contradictions are not derivable. (Initial formal elaboration is given in Krajewski 2023.)

Now, the paraclassical logic must be expanded to incorporate the fact that oscillation is a process occurring in time. To obtain the sequential paraclassical logic, let us assume that time is measured as a sequence of moments and that we have two growing sequences of classically consistent theories: $A_1^{2n} \subset A_1^{2n+2}$ and $A_2^{2n+1} \subset A_2^{2n+3}$ for n = 0, 1, 2, …, expressing our set of (say, theological) beliefs at the moment n. We can adopt two incompatible approaches, I and II, and we oscillate between them indefinitely:



[*Figure 1*]

At each moment our set of beliefs is consistent. Yet, taken together, the sets in two moments, say A_1^n and A_2^m, in particular two consecutive ones ($m = n + 1$), involve a contradiction.

This model (from Krajewski 2023) introduces change in time, something rarely considered in standard logic, and it can be expanded to include three or more approaches. It must be stressed, however, that it greatly simplifies matters. This implies problems, for example the following three. First, our knowledge may not only grow in time but also shrink (if we abandon a belief) or be modified in other ways. Yet to say that A_i^n can be any set would be wrong, as some stability must be preserved and the approach (I or II) must be assumed at each stage. It is unclear, however, and this is the second problem, how to ensure that each of those approaches introduces more than a particular item of belief, because it means the adoption of a perspective shaping a whole set of beliefs, acting as if on a metalevel. In the theological examples mentioned above, transcendence and immanence, as well as incorporeality and corporeality, and also omniscience and freedom of will, are of this kind: they indicate our overarching theological or philosophical perspectives. The opposition of God's strict justice and mercy can be seen as our conflicting visions or approaches to the divine, but it is possible, as in the rabbinic parables, to see those qualities as attributes of God.

A third problem, perhaps the deepest, results from the fact that the formal model does not express an important aspect of the oscillation process. While the move from one approach to another is taken into account, the source of the move is not indicated. There can be many reasons for a change of approach—new experience, new evidence—but the most telling one would be the realization that sticking to one approach is not enough because within it something emerges as insufficient, limiting, and requiring the other approach. This is the case with interfaith dialogue and its two approaches: objective, supra-religious, and subjective, religion-specific. During an interfaith encounter, I can begin with a universal common ground, but in

order to better understand the dialogue partner I would connect her testimony with my own religious experience. However, I would soon feel that this subjective approach should not be maintained indefinitely because we have so much in common as human beings, participants in the same civilization, in the nation or academia, etc. Inevitably, a step toward the objectivizing approach is made, but this is not the end of the process. Soon, to better understand the dialogue partner, I would again adopt my own subjective approach. And so on. Each of the two approaches engenders the other.

Conclusion

Many paradoxical statements occur in theology, not only in its Jewish variety. Some were mentioned above: God's transcendence and immanence, non-corporeality and description in bodily terms, justice and mercy. It is not unjustified to claim that paradoxes of a similar character occur in science, especially in quantum physics. In Jewish thought, paradox is not merely tolerated; it seems indispensable. To treat theological contradictions in a rational way, rather than simply accept them as pointing outside the realm of logic, one can stress the metaphorical nature of our language, limit theology to its apophatic variety, emphasize—this is a method particularly important in Judaism—the predominance of orthopraxy, and emphasize the importance of perspectivism, that is, the realization that in approaching the divine we cannot but refer to only one "face" at a given moment. Theology, and Jewish theology in particular, seems to use some logic(s) of complementarity to harmonize inconsistent approaches. Oscillation is one way of expressing this insight.

The necessity of oscillation between approaches can be formalized by a schema that can be called sequential paraclassical logic. Rather than collapsing opposites into a synthesis or rejecting them as incoherent, theology may sustain the alternation between poles. God is thus both transcendent and immanent, merciful and just, hidden and related to us—not because the tradition is careless with logic, but because oscillation itself is the mode through which divine reality is approached. The oscillation model is not a standard rendering of Jewish theology, but it seems to express well a traditional approach to the matter. In fact, this model is little more than a contemporary formulation of a generalized version of the Talmudic vision of God moving from one throne to another.

Whatever the merit of this rather preliminarily sketched model, or of similar, possibly more sophisticated ones, no rigorous analysis can eliminate the necessity of paradox in descriptions of God within Jewish theology and, likely, within any

theology. The inevitable inconsistencies are not failures to be resolved, but mysteries to be both honored and overcome or neutralized. (Assuming the two attitudes—honoring and neutralizing—introduces a tension that offers another example of oscillation.) This challenge is independent of the specifically Christian theological issue—the explanation of the mystery of the Trinity. In all religious traditions, paradoxes do not weaken faith; rather, they deepen it, reasserting that God is beyond straightforward description. For some scholars, the paradoxes invite the construction of logical models that could illustrate rigorous ways of dealing with contradictions. It is doubtful that a definitive model has been found or can be found.

Oscillation seems to be quite common: some examples are given by Krajewski (2023), but it would be of interest to gather further examples of the process of shifting one's orientation from one position to another and then back again, repeating the moves as many times as needed. Adequate logical modelling of the process of oscillation remains a challenge.

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