DIVINE NARCISSISM AND YAHWEH'S PARENTING STYLE

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I

While the concept of narcissism has been understood and used in a bewildering variety of ways,[1] it is consistently associated with some type of mirroring.[2] Ovid's Narcissus looking admiringly at his reflection in a pool of water may be the best known example (*Met.* iii. 339-510), but we should also include parents looking adoringly at their אישון, "the little man in the eye" (Deut. 32:10), the mirror supplied by their child.[3] Admittedly, several rabbinic

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[1] Alice Miller believes that the word "narcissism" has "become part of every-day speech to such an extent ... that it is difficult today to rescue it for scientific use" (1981: vi; cf. Benjamin, 1988: 136; Lasch 1991: 31-33). Miller points out that the noun form "can be used ... to project a variety of meanings: a condition, a stage of development, a character trait, an illness" (1981: vi; cf. Cooper 1986 : 112-31). On the many meanings of the term within the body of Freud's work, see Baranger 1991: 109-11. For a detailed discussion of the different senses of narcissism in relation to biblical, ancient Near Eastern, and Greek texts, see Lasine 2001, chs. 1, 10 and 11.

[2] Lichtenstein (1964: 51) goes so far as to assert that "it is impossible to rid narcissism of the mirror hidden in the concept." As one might expect, psychologists employ the metaphor of "mirroring" in a number of different ways (see Stern 1985: 144-45). The most influential studies are those of Lacan (1977), Kohut (1971), and Winnicott (1971: 111-18). On the psychoanalyst functioning as a "mirror" for the patient, see Freud 1912: 118 and Sandler 1976: 43. Most theorists would agree that even young babies can tell the difference between true mirroring—seeing their budding selves in the mother's face looking at them—and seeing their mother's face which is really looking inward to *her*self, thereby depriving the baby of being able to use the mother as a necessary mirror in which to "grow" his/her own Self.

[3] In Deut. 32:10, Yahweh is the parent who is protecting his child Israel "as the little man of his eye." The little man (or woman; see Lam. 2:18; Ps. 17:8) is the image of oneself visible in another person's pupil when viewed from up close. Plato's Socrates refers to the self-image in the pupil (κόρη; girl, doll) in an attempt to describe the role played by others in the dialectical process of knowing oneself (*Alc. 1*, 132c-133c; cf. *Phdr.* 255d). Ironically, Ovid's mirror-gazing Narcissus is told by Tiresias that he can live long only if he does *not* know himself (*Met.* iii, 348). Here too the "little man in the eye" may play a role. According to Vigne (1967: 13), when Ovid's narrator declares that Narcissus perceives in the water only "the shadow of a reflected image" (*repercussae imaginis umbra*; 434), he is

passages claim that when Yahweh spoke face-to-face and mouth-to-mouth with the adult Moses, it was מַרְאָה "[as] in a mirror" (Num. 12:8).[4] Nevertheless, the predominant mode of divine narcissism in the Hebrew Bible involves Yahweh the parent using his *children* as a mirror. According to Freud (1914:91), affectionate parents act toward their son ("His Majesty the Baby") as though he isn't subject to the necessities which dominate life, like illness, death, and restrictions on his will. He's the center and heart of creation, in other words, a miniature version of the king's body politic in English tradition.[5] For Freud (1911: 219-20 n. 4) and Ferenczi (1950: 218-19), the foetus in the womb enjoys self-sufficiency, omnipotence and "blissful isolation," like a chick in the egg. All that ends at birth. Parents try to keep their children's pre-natal feeling of inviolability on "life-support" by serving as their adoring courtiers; for selfish reasons, to revive and restore their own lost feelings of narcissism in the mirror of their special pocket-sized prince or princess.

Narcissistic "specialness" is a mixed blessing. Lowen (1997: 105)

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perhaps indicating that "the eyes which see the reflection also see how it throws back the reflection in the pupil." In the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh's human children are rarely allowed to get close enough to their divine parent for them to be able to see themselves in his eyes. And if they *were* allowed to do so, we must ask whether they could rely upon Yahweh to return their gaze with the smiling face of an adoring parent (on the importance of parental reliability for the infant, see Winnicott 1965: 97-98).

[4] And not מִרְאָה, "clearly." See *Lev.* R. 1:14 and *Yev.* 49b, Milgrom 1990: 6, 310, and Allison 1993: 227. Divine mirror-narcissism is also displayed in the Hermetic tract *Poimandres*. Here, God creates *anthropos* as an equal and adequate mirror-image (§12–15). In this case, *theos* is a lover of his own perfection, a self-lover (§12; 14)—in other words, what, in everyday parlance, most people mean when they refer to someone as a "narcissist." He can only be self-sufficient when his human mirror is his equal (ἴσον; §12). Referring to the God of the book of Revelation, Stephen Moore remarks that this God resembles a Roman emperor who "has become his own love object" (1996: 138). He "craves" the "vast audience of idolizers" that "eternally throngs the heavenly temple." Moore attempts to uncover "the extent to which the biblical God in all his incarnations—Yahweh, the Father of Jesus Christ, Jesus himself—is a projection of male narcissism" (1996: 139). On God as the "Ultimate and Original Narcissus" in Dante's *Commedia*, see McMahon 1991: 79-82.

[5] Like Freud's baby-monarch, the king's body politic cannot die, be touched by illness, or have defects and frailties. Nor is the king, in his capacity as body politic, subject to restrictions of *his* will caused by folly—not only is he unable to *do* wrong, he cannot even *think* wrong. Moreover, laws of nature are also abrogated in *his* favor. There is one big difference: the king's Body politic is "devoid of infancy," while Freud's *is* an infant—or, at least, an infantile adult. On the king's body politic, see Kantorowicz 1957: 4-5, 7, 378.

calls the promise of specialness a "seductive lure" used by parents
to "mold the child" into their image of what the child should be.
To survive in such a manipulative environment, children may hide
their "true self" and develop a "false self" which complies with the
parents' expectations (see Winnicott 1965: 140-52). They might
grow up feeling singled out and entitled to special recognition,
but on a deeper level they imagine the world as being dangerous
and "devoid of food and love" (Kernberg 1985: 257, 289; cf. Kohut
and Wolf 1986: 187).

II

Readers of the Hebrew Bible are introduced to a royal God,[6]
and, to that extent, are also invited to relate to him in the way
that a king's subjects relate to their sovereign. The metaphors of
king and father work together to identify us as members of "the
royal family,"[7] descendants of Yahweh's special patriarchs and his
special kings. And *that* means that we might be treated with all
the ambivalence, suspicion, rivalry and strings-attached love which
characterize the attitude of a king when he views members of the
royal family as competing to succeed—or overthrow—him. De-
pending on the nature of the king and the "family dynamic," it
may also mean that the father will *simultaneously* want his privi-
leged children to be better than he and need them to fail at reach-
ing that goal. He may support *and* undermine them, even if, in
some cases, the double attitude manifests itself in what psychiatrists
call "splitting," in this case, splitting between supported son-kings

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[6] Mettinger believes that "the designation of YHWH as king expresses one of
the central Israelite notions of God" (1986: 148). In fact, it may even be "the
center of the Old Testament understanding of God" (1988: 92).

[7] Bottero (1992: 27-29) applies the metaphor of family to our relationship
with our Mesopotamian cultural ancestors. However, in the Hebrew Bible the
metaphor is, in part, a rhetorical strategy which functions to define how readers
should relate to (and judge) their ancient family members in the text (see Lasine
1989). Attempts to describe the dynamics within actual ancient Near Eastern fami-
lies (Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Palestinian, and Greek) suggest that there is too
little direct, unequivocal evidence for any definite conclusions to be drawn about
children's actual experiences with their parents. See, e.g., Glassner 1996: 117-19;
Forgeau 1996: 152-54; Postman 1994: 5-6. Hagedorn's recent sketch of the ancient
Israelite model of "parenting styles" (2000: 112) is based on generalizations about
honor, shame and loyalty in "Mediterranean culture," supplemented by quotations
from Greek literary sources, biblical and Egyptian instructional literature, and
biblical and Platonic law (111-16, 120).

like David, who function as his narcissistic mirrors, and under-mined ones like Saul, the flawed mirrors whom he eventually humiliates or smashes.

According to Rabbinic sage Abba Saul (*Tôrat Kohanîm* 86c; Schechter 1961: 200), "Israel is the *familia* (suite or bodyguard) of the King (God), whence it is incumbent upon them to imitate the King." Does that include imitating abusiveness? David Blumenthal (1993b: 79) contends that "God, as described in the Bible, acts like an abusing male: husband, father and lord."[8] Blumenthal assumes that the way we envision God is necessarily shaped by the way we have viewed our own parents and experienced childhood (1993a: 13). Once one accepts the premise that the Bible's target audience is to view themselves as children of a parental God, readers must face—or evade—the possibility that their royal biblical father can be an abusive narcissist, who may seek the loyalty and submission he needs from his children by breaking their spirit, by burdening them with feelings of guilt and inadequacy, or by keeping them cravenly dependent upon him.

If any of this is true, should we then "tame" this biblical God, whom even scholars like Brueggemann (2000: 28) describe as having a "wild dimension"? Perhaps not, if one wants to argue that the biblical Yahweh *does* truly reflect the spectrum of *human* behavior in the world. From this perspective, an all-good and merciful God is a child's fantasy of an ideal perfect parent, like the parental god imagined by abused children as a coping device. Paradoxically, even though Dad or Mom is abusive, the children may view their parental abuser as a god. This is how one psychiatrist describes the double perspective of the victim:[9]

> The repeated experience of terror and reprieve ... may result in a feeling of intense, *almost worshipful dependence upon an all-powerful, godlike authority.* The victim may live in terror of his wrath, but she may also view him as *the source of strength, guidance, and life itself.* The relationship may take on an extraordinary quality of *specialness*. Some ... voluntarily [suppress] their own doubts as a proof of *loyalty and submission* (Herman 1997: 92; emphasis added).

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[8] Blumenthal's focus is on the God of the Hebrew Bible. However, Christian feminist theologians have also pointed to parental abuse in the New Testament. As Brown and Parker put it (1989: 26), "the predominant image or theology of the culture is of 'divine child abuse'—God the Father demanding and carrying out the suffering and death of his own son ..."

[9] Herman is speaking here about battered women's perceptions of their batterer.

This description sounds suspiciously similar to Yahweh's relation-
ship with the children whom he repeatedly tests in the wilderness,
the very children whom he had earlier singled out specifically to
be his "special possession" (Exod. 19:4-5; Deut. 7:6-8; Mal. 3:17).
Yahweh's efforts to "discipline" Israel "the way a man disciplines
his son" (Deut. 8:5) are perfectly suited to make his children view
him in this manner: as the source of strength and life to whom
they must submit and remain loyal, and whom they must worship.

In spite of many blatant examples[10] of Yahweh's abusiveness
which have been discussed by scholars,[11] this aspect of his behav-
ior has gone unnoticed by many readers, as though it were hid-
den in plain sight like Poe's purloined letter. How is this possible?
Jennifer Freyd not only thinks it's possible; she thinks it is often
necessary and inevitable, especially for abused children. Freyd
views such abuse in terms of dependence, trust and betrayal. Be-
cause children need to trust their parents and caregivers, they
"must block awareness of the betrayal, forget it, in order to en-
sure that [they] behave in ways that maintain the relationship on
which [they] are dependent" (1996: 74). In short, "to know is to
put oneself in danger. To not know is to align with the caregiver
and ensure survival" (Freyd, 165).

The ways in which parents, and the communities in which they
live, "cover up" abuse through a conspiracy of silence, dissemi-
nating disinformation, or blaming the victim, have been carefully
studied. Judith Herman notes that it is very tempting to take the
side of the perpetrator. "All the perpetrator asks is that the by-
stander do nothing[12]... The victim ... asks the bystander to share

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[10] On Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22), see Delaney 1998 and Miller
1990. In Deut. 32, when the baby who had been the little man in mother
Yahweh's eye forgets the God who suffered labor pains with him (חולל, *pollel*; v.
18), Yahweh's response is to heap disasters on her flawed son (v. 23). For the
biblical voices who charge that Yahweh has knocked down or breached their pro-
tective walls, or walled up their paths to hinder them, see, e.g. Job 16:14, 19:8;
Hos. 2:7; Lam. 3:5, 7-9. In Isa. 54:7-8, Yahweh concedes that he abandoned his
child for a brief moment. On Yahweh's parental behavior in Ezek. 16, Hos. 2:5-
6 (H), and Deut. 8–9, see Lasine 2001, chapter 10.

[11] In addition to Blumenthal and Brueggemann, see Miller (1990: 137-45;
1991a: 114-26), Delaney 1998, Lasine 2001, chapters 9-11, and the discussion of
Chastain 1997 below.

[12] King David's silence and inaction after Amnon rapes Tamar becomes even
more significant when viewed in this light (2 Sam. 13:21). The very brevity and
terseness of this verse underscore the fact that Tamar is further victimized and
betrayed by her silent "bystander" father. The LXX breaks the silence by adding:

the burden of pain. The victim demands action ..." Thus, there is a "conflict of interest between victim and bystander ... the community wants to forget ... and move on" (1997: 8).[13] Herman could easily be describing the conflict between Job and *his* community, as Kimberly Chastain has pointed out (1997: 170-73). Herman (1997: 101) emphasizes that the victim herself may attempt to absolve the parent of responsibility, like a Girardian scapegoat accepting the identity given unanimously by the accusing community. In this instance, what Freyd calls "knowledge isolation" is achieved by the victim accepting the guilt pinned on her by her victimizers. In the book of Job, this often daunting task of denial is performed by Job's friends; Job himself refuses to participate.[14]

Even the youthful perpetrators of the Columbine slaughter went out of their way to exonerate their parents (*Denver Post* online). In a video tape made prior to the shooting, one of them quotes Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "good wombs give birth to bad seed" (I ii 119).[15] Alice Miller asserts that killers and other criminals who

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"and he did not grieve (ελυπησε) the spirit of Amnon his son, for he loved him, since he was his first-born." The addition seems to be based on the later mention of David's pampering of (and/or lack of concern for) Adonijah: "and his father never at any time rebuked (LXX-L: επετιμησεν; for MT עצבו, 'grieved/pained') him" (1 Kgs 1:6; LXX-B has απεκωλυσεν, apparently representing Hebrew עצר ["restrain"] rather than עצב). On the pampering and abandonment of royal sons by their fathers, see Lasine 2001, chs. 6 and 10.

[13] Recent mass killings at American schools, including Columbine High School in Colorado, Westside Middle School in Arkansas, and Santana High School in California, provide further examples. Parents of the victims who have continued to speak out about these traumatic events, or used them as a reason to argue for tighter gun control, have been criticized harshly and even threatened for their failure to "move on" (Callahan 1999: 1). On the "second injury" to victims which results from the perceived lack of concern or assistance on the part of the community, see Chastain 1997: 162.

[14] As Laub points out, really listening to the testimony given by survivors of trauma, such as Holocaust survivors, is "hazardous." Therefore, the listener may experience "a range of defensive feelings" designed to protect them "from the intensity of the flood of affect" directed toward them (Felman and Laub 1992: 72-73). According to Laub, "as one comes to know the survivor, one really comes to know oneself ... The survival experience ... is a very condensed version of most of what life is all about: it contains a great many existential questions, that we manage to avoid in our daily living, often through preoccupation with trivia ... The listener can no longer ignore the question of facing death ... of the limits of one's omnipotence ... the great question of our ultimate aloneness; our otherness from any other" (72). If Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud delivered "three severe blows (*Kränkungen*)" to human narcissism (Freud, 1917: 6-11; *SE* 17: 139), one could say that the Holocaust delivered the *final* blow.

[15] Plato's Socrates agrees that parents cannot pass along their virtues to their son—not even famous parents like Pericles (*Meno* 93a-b; *Prot.* 319d-320a; *Alc. I*

were once abused typically insist that their mothers were loving and if their fathers had beaten them it was because they "had been bad and deserved it" (1991b: 25). Miller would take it for granted that the Columbine killers had been somehow abused. She insists that "*all destructive behavior has its roots in the repressed traumas of childhood*" and that "a full one hundred percent" of inmates in American prisons had been abused as children (1991b: 25, 138).[16] Shakespeare's reference to "bad seed" might also put one in mind of father Yahweh's reference to his people as "a seed of evil-doers" (זרע מרעים) in Isa. 1: 4.[17] Who first planted this biblical seed? Yahweh didn't create his world or people by spilling his seed[18] or his tears like the Egyptian Re or Atum, but he *did* go through labor pains in delivering both her son Israel and the world as a whole (Deut. 32:18; Ps. 90:1-2). Can bad seed issue from Yahweh's womb? How good a parental role model and teacher *is* Yahweh?

It's difficult being the son of a powerful, famous father like Yahweh. Call it the "Frank Sinatra, Jr Complex." As one entertainment critic puts it, "the very name [of Frank Sinatra, Jr] is enough to strike terror into the hearts of men and boys with famous fathers" (Selgin 1995: 1-2). No father in the Hebrew Bible is as famous (or as concerned with his fame) as is Yahweh. Yahweh's special kids, whom he picks to take over the family business of domination and kingship (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8), are like all such children who are expected to step into their father's shoes. They have to listen over and over—when they get up and when they go to bed, when they go out, when they come in (Deut. 6:8)—to the tale of how dad built up the business with his own two hands, alone, from scratch, from *tohu*s and *bohu*s. Or, in the heroic war story versions, by winning it through combat with primordial monsters (e.g., Ps. 74:12-17). And to make it worse, these kids "look like" dad; they represent him. That is, they are created "in his image." Whatever else that might mean, in family terms this

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118d-119a)—no matter how diligently they seek to teach them (cf. *Meno* 95e-96a; *Prot.* 319d-e). For Socrates's *own* sons, see Xenophon, *Mem.* II. ii.

[16] For a balanced assessment of Miller's controversial views, see Haaken 1998: 78-79. Miller's ideas are applied to the religious abuse of children by Capps 1995: 3-20, 78-95 and *passim*.

[17] On the phrase, see Gray 1912: 15.

[18] E.g., "I [Re] was the one who copulated with my fist, I masturbated with my hand" ("Repulsing of the Dragon and the Creation"; *ANET* 6); "Amun-Re, King of the Gods ... who formed the land with his semen" ("Khonsu Cosmogony"; Lesko 1991: 105).

kind of mirroring means that if dad is narcissistic, he will view their bad behavior as reflecting on himself.

There are two basic metaphoric clusters surrounding the figure of the child who follows in Yahweh's royal footsteps, one positive and one very negative. The first is the king as judge, battle-leader and trampler of rival gods. That's Yahweh's "legitimate" business which the son is to take over. The second is the king as arbitrary tyrant and insatiable narcissist. When the sons start showing this flip side of the king's position, it reflects badly on their royal father. In fact, it might suggest that maybe the kid also got *this* side from dad, maybe he's mirroring something in the family gene pool.

Perhaps most unsettling for a child is the abusive parent's disturbing doubleness. In Chastain's words, "the father who terrorizes the night is the playful, affectionate father of the morning ... The mother who comforts the terrified child is also the one who responds, 'Oh honey, you must have been dreaming,' causing the child to doubt her perception of reality" (1997: 164). Freyd speaks of abused people who describe themselves as having been split between a normal "day child" and an abused "night child" (1996: 160; cf. 76). The biblical Job would find this form of doubleness to be very familiar. His indictment of Yahweh highlights the fact that God has created night-walking criminals to break his laws, while his good, compliant children obey these laws during the daylight business hours. Yahweh's response to this accusation does not deny this basic split in the temporal fabric of his realm (see Job 24:13-17; 38:12-15 and Lasine 1988: 34-35). Moses also experienced the night-and-day difference between a diurnal deity who singles out and nurtures a special emissary[19] and the nocturnal divine attacker who seeks to kill this same special child (Exod. 4:24-26; cf. v.19). As for the hypothetical mother's "You must have been dreaming," Job would hear in this a clear echo of Zophar's appeal to the unreality of dreams as a way of dismissing Job's victimization by God (Job 20:8; cf. Ps. 73:20). While abused children often view their parent with adoring eyes, through the adult eyes of the biblical narrator Yahweh appears as *both* the heroic king *and* the unreliable parent whom Jeremiah calls a "deceitful brook" (Jer. 15:18).

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[19] Even here, the nurturing father's message to Moses concerns his intention to slaughter *other* children if his demands are not met by his royal rival Pharaoh.

III

According to Blumenthal (1993a: 19), one of Yahweh's "personalist attributes" is that he is "partisan." If "God has personality, of course God has preferences." Blumenthal adds that "there is no real reason for one's preferences."[20] Like the readers who dismiss David's crimes with "he's only human," as though all humans murder and commit the other crimes of which David is guilty, Blumenthal's argument has the effect of "naturalizing" and thereby excusing Yahweh's preferential treatment with a simple, "he's only human—at least, as he's depicted in the Bible."

In Mal. 1:2-3, Yahweh declares "I loved Jacob, and Esau I hated." He says "hate" (שנא) and he *means* hate.[21] Although Yahweh had earlier told his children, "Do not hate your brother in your heart" (Lev. 19:17), his parental hatred toward one of his children is apparently another matter. Blumenthal does not cite this example of divine partiality. However, he does quote a survivor of abuse who contends that "any [family therapist] would recognize immediately the pattern of pathology that God established in His family ... He showed extreme, irrational preferences and provoked the child-Cain to a rage ..." (Blumenthal 1993a: 199). Although the survivor's other examples are also taken from Genesis, she might have noted that Yahweh shows preference for the Levites precisely because of their willingness *not* to "acknowledge" their human fathers, mothers and children in order to follow their divine father's dictates (Deut. 33:9; cf. Luke 14:26), even when this meant slaughtering their sons and brothers (Exod. 32:25, 29; see Lasine 1994: 212-14). Such an extreme demand on the part of a

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[20] In another context, Machinist asserts that the Bible gives no real reason for Yahweh's initial preference for Israel: "the special relationship is, in short, a mystery" (1991: 206). As we shall see, the mystery disappears when Yahweh's own narcissistic nature is taken into account.

[21] See Redditt 2000 for a review of commentators' attempts to soften the meaning of "hate" in this context, and reasons for taking the word literally. Redditt (175) believes that שנא primarily designates revulsion. Marshall (1978: 592) contends that שנא "has the sense 'to leave aside, abandon'" and that this sense may also be present in Luke 14:26: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and his mother ... he cannot be a disciple of mine." More typically, Nolland (1993: 762) believes that Jesus's use of "hate" in Luke 14:26 is simply a case of "typical Semitic hyperbole." However, even he admits that "the language of hate is intended with all seriousness in such Old Testament verses as Ps. 139:21-22." On Yahweh hating Job, see n. 26 below. On Yahweh hating Israel in Deut. 1:27; 9:28 and Jer. 12:7-8; 22:5, see Lasine 2001, chapter 11.

human being would be taken as evidence of a severe personality disorder. If theologians like Blumenthal are going to be so accepting of Yahweh as a "personality,"[22] with all that may imply, they have to consider that this personality can also be "disordered" or "pathological." Blumenthal's ultimate diagnosis is that "God is abusive, but not always", merely "from time to time" (1993a: 247). Is Yahweh then capricious as well as abusive?

Abusers *do* cultivate capriciousness as a tool to impose domination. As Herman puts it, "in the abusive family environment, the exercise of parental power is arbitrary, capricious, and absolute" (1997: 98; cf. 77-78, 100). Brueggemann and others have come right out and said that Yahweh is "capricious" (2000: 21, 26, 30).[23] At the same time, Brueggemann continues to offer hope that Yahweh might act with less "brutality" (40) in the future, precisely because his character is not only "unsettling" (27, 30, 35) but "unsettled" (28). By this he means that Yahweh's darker traits "are live and present in the past of this God" (40). Although Brueggemann does not mention Jean-Paul Sartre, his reconciliation with Yahweh seems based on a distinction similar to Sartre's description of human existence in terms of "facticity" and "transcendence" (1943: 91-106). We cannot evade the facts of our past, but we can never be identical to the sum of our past actions. As long as we are still alive, we also reach out into the future, in terms of our plans and intentions. When we play off one aspect of our temporal identity against another, we are committing *mauvaise foi* or bad faith. Is Yahweh saying, "I'm not really an abusive God; the real me is what's coming in the future"? Or, are *we* trying to make him say that, practicing *mauvaise foi* on his behalf, like Job's friends?

As long as the child views her parent's "daytime" self as perfect and all-powerful, she will be unable to "hate" the bad faith parent properly. Benjamin (1988: 214) argues that the notion of the all-giving and perfect mother "expresses the mentality of omnipotence, the inability to experience the mother as an independently existing subject."[24] This idealization "testifies to the failure of de-

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[22] Cf. Muffs: "Yahweh is ... probably the most articulated personality of all Near Eastern deities" (1992: 63).

[23] Cf. Noll 1999: 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 49, 50 and contrast Balentine: "It is not a question of divine caprice but rather of human disobedience" (1983: 147). The adjective "capricious" is usually applied by scholars to the behavior of Mesopotamian and other so-called "pagan" gods (see, e.g., Finkelstein 1958: 439).

[24] Benjamin highlights the role of omnipotence in narcissism. When the child

struction; hate has not been able to come forth and make the experience of love less idealized and more authentic." Confusion is inevitable: "since the child has not been able to engage in successful destruction, he is less able to distinguish the real person from the fantasy." Benjamin's understanding of the productive purpose of hate builds on Winnicott's work. Winnicott once declared that "the mother hates her infant from the word go." And the human child "needs this hate to hate" (1958: 201, 202).[25]

From this perspective, Yahweh's demand for total love (Deut. 6:5) is an example of enforced idealization which precludes his children from experiencing the kind of hate needed to make love authentic. Although Yahweh promises swift destruction to those who hate him (Deut. 7:10)—and who therefore "destroy" him in Winnicott's sense—biblical narrators *also* show him acting hatefully toward his children.[26] Yahweh is a father who describes *himself* not only as compassionate and merciful, but as jealous and wrathful. No wonder he might seem to be confusingly ambivalent to his children,[27] including the readers of the biblical family album who are belated witnesses to his behavior as a single parent.

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becomes aware of her helplessness in relation to parents' power (which Benjamin dubs "the great fall from grace") it is a shocking "blow to the child's narcissism," which the child seeks to repair through identification with the person who embodies the power (Benjamin 1988: 101). Such identification is a circuitous way for the child to prolong the experience of omnipotence in relation to the father, even after the mother has ceased providing the fiction of omnipotence. While a human mother can (and should) fail at providing unbroken womb-like protection and presence (and thereby surrender omnipotence), Yahweh refuses to give up *his* omnipotence. Given his commitment to his idealized perfect image, he must blame his children for his lapses in protection and attention, by charging them with having rejected him.

[25] The child who has been allowed to hate and destroy his parents makes a crucial discovery: "that he has destroyed everyone and everything, and yet the people around him remain calm and unhurt" (Winnicott, quoted in Benjamin 1988: 212).

[26] Job, for one, believes that God actively hates and persecutes him (16:9; for the meaning of שׂטם here, see, e.g., Driver and Gray 1921 II:105). It is rarely pointed out that Yahweh is never said to *love* Job. In fact, the root for "love" (אהב) appears only once in the entire book, when Job himself laments that those whom he had loved have turned on him (19:19).

[27] Job illustrates the plight of such children when he imagines God hiding him in Sheol until his rage turns back, at which point God would remember and yearn [כסף] for him. God would then call and Job would answer (14:13-15). While Clines is correct in assuming that the adult Job knows this to be a "hopeless ... impossible dream" (1989: 330-31), children might need to hope that their abusive parent could be caring *even while* raging against them. Job's wish for the angry Yahweh to shelter him from his own anger recalls Yahweh's reluctance to go up

IV

One thing which King Yahweh's children never learn about their father is *his* family history. Genesis 1 and Second Isaiah are insistent about Yahweh being alone at the start of things. The God of Israel is "self-originate," "without mother, [and] without father," as the Apocalypse of Abraham (first-second centuries CE) puts it.[28] Nor does the God of Israel have a wife, as does the Babylonian Anu[29] (unless we believe the tabloids from Kuntillet ʿAjrud[30]). Like the depictions of Yahweh as a lone father who uses his children as mirrors, and as a king who commissions portraits of himself as a glorious lone warrior (Isa. 63:1-6; Judg. 5:4-5),[31] this aspect of Yahweh's aloneness suggests the narcissistic desire to make the self absolute and omnipotent. Jessica Benjamin gives this desire a voice: "I want to affect you, but I want nothing you do to affect me; I am who I am" (1995: 36; 1988: 32). According to Benjamin, narcissistic omnipotence is exhibited by the insistence on being one ("everyone is identical to me") and all alone ("there's nothing outside of me that I don't control"; 1995: 36). The claim that "there is nothing outside beyond my control" is typical of Egyptian royal ideology (e.g. Liverani 1990: 59-65). But it is also typical of

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among the children of Israel after the golden calf incident: "if I go up among you for one moment, I shall consume you" (Exod. 33:5; cf. v. 3). Yahweh has to steer clear of his children because they "push his buttons"; they might make him lose his temper and destroy them even though he doesn't want to do so. The same logic can be found in 1 Sam. 18:10-15, if one is willing to assess Saul's motivation generously. Under the influence of an evil spirit from God, Saul attempts to kill David. He is afraid of David because Yahweh is with him and has "departed" (סור, qal) from Saul. Does Saul attempt to kill David again? On the contrary, he makes David "depart" (סור, hiph.) from him, thereby protecting David from his fits of rage, and also increasing David's opportunity for success and independent action by making him commander over a thousand.

[28] Around three hundred years later, Epiphanius assumes that "this is agreed to by everyone." Epiphanius is refuting the heretical view that the priest Melchizedek is described in Heb. 7:3 in terms which fit the "Father of All." According to this verse, Melchizedek is "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." See Horton 1976: 105-13 and Attridge 1989: 190-95.

[29] Anu's wife is named Antu[m]; see, e.g., *Gilgamesh* VI, 82 and the ritual text translated in *ANET* 338-39. Saggs (1968: 329) refers to Anu as "often a rather shadowy figure," and to Antum as his "even more shadowy consort."

[30] On the controversy concerning the meaning and significance of the inscription "to the Yahweh of Samaria and his asherah," and its relationship to the drawings which accompany it, see, e.g., McCarter 1987 and Dever 1990: 144-49.

[31] On Yahweh, Ramesses II, and Homer's Achilles as potentially narcissistic lone warriors, see Lasine (2001), chapter 11.

Yahweh. In fact, Benjamin's entire description sounds like a para-
phrase of Exodus, Deuteronomy and Second Isaiah: "I am who I
am" (Exod. 3:14); "Yahweh our God is one Yahweh" (Deut. 6:4);[32]
"there is none else, beside me (זולתי) there is no God" (Isa. 45:5;
cf. Deut. 4:35, 39);[33] "I, I, (אנכי אנכי) am Yahweh and besides me
(מבלעדי) there is no savior" (Isa. 43:11); "Yahweh, the king of
Israel ... I am the first, and I am the last" (Isa. 44:6); "I make peace
and evil, I, Yahweh do all these things" (Isa. 45:7).

Yahweh is not the only deity in the ancient Near East who lacks
parents. The Leiden Hymn[34] includes this description of the Egyp-
tian god Amun: "He had no mother ... he had no father who had
begotten him, and who might have said: 'This is I!' Building his
own egg ... the divine god ... came into being by himself" (Stanza
100; *ANET* 368). Amun and Yahweh weren't forced to become mir-
rors for narcissistic fathers who looked at them and declared, "This
is I!"[35] Unlike Amun, however, Yahweh offers no alternate expla-
nation of his origin, not even to Moses, the human mirror with
whom he is on the most intimate terms. Nothing about building
his own egg. Nothing, in fact, about his coming into being in *any*
fashion. All we get is "I am that I am" (Exod. 3:14). And while
Amun-Re is called "King of the Gods" (e.g., *ANET* 25, 376), King
Yahweh's brand of divine royalty and self-sufficiency denies even
the existence of gods over whom he might rule.

At the same time, narcissists are *never* self-sufficient, no matter
how much they might claim to be. Viewing Yahweh as a narcissist
highlights his need for others, even when He trumpets that he
alone is God and there is no other. And it is precisely in his be-
havior as father that Yahweh most clearly displays this neediness.[36]

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[32] Scholars like Driver (1902: 90) and Weinfeld (1991: 337) believe that when
Moses declares "Yahweh our God is one Yahweh" in Deut. 6:4, "one" (אחד) im-
plies not only unity but aloneness and uniqueness.

[33] Also Isa. 45:6, 18, 21, 22; 46:9.

[34] The Leiden papyrus I 350 dates from the reign of Ramesses II; see *ANET* 8.
On the growth of Amun-Re into a powerful universal deity and "King of the Gods"
during the 18th and 19th Dynasty, see e.g., Lesko 1991: 104-106. On Amun/
Amun-Re as the "vizier of the poor" and champion of the distressed, see Lichtheim
1976: 111 and *ANET* 380.

[35] Assmann believes that this declaration means that "the father recognizes
himself in his child and knows the child as his child" (1998: 263 n. 88).

[36] Although this is hardly what Heschel had in mind when he spoke of "God's
need of man"; Heschel (1951: 241) believes that "God is in need of man for the
attainment of His ends ... because [God] freely made him a partner in His enter-
prise." He quotes R. Simeon ben Lakish's view (*Gen R.* 30) that God needs our

Narcissists cannot declare "I am that I am" in good faith. Yahweh, who possesses "personality," cannot evade his "being for others"— or *mauvaise foi*—any more than Sartre's incomplete humans can. In fact, for Sartre human reality is expressed in the opposite formula: "I am *not* what I am" (1943: 92; emphasis added).[37]

The quintessential narcissistic fantasy does not feature the uniqueness or aloneness of a king, not even a king who "rules over the gods," as one Ugaritic text puts it (Weinfeld 1991: 338; cf. Psalm 82)—unless that king is also a father. Kings inevitably become enmeshed in a net of interdependence. Only in the closed world of the patriarchal *family* is this fantasy potentially realizable. This kind of family is a reduced world where the ultimate authority of one person is imaginable. The world of the Hebrew Bible is such a family world, totally controlled by one father-king. At the same time, the text undermines this fantasy from start to finish. Genesis is particularly adept at exposing the folly of the "father is in control"/"father knows best" fantasy. It's as though the family history is not being told solely from Dad's point of view, but from Mom's, the kids', the servants', and the ethnic neighbors who live on the wrong side of the tracks or on father's favorite fishing spot.

Nevertheless, biblical monotheism could still be considered the supreme expression of divine narcissism in the sense that the divine head of the family has no family background himself. Yahweh remains self-sufficient in the sense that he owes nothing to incorporated images of his parents, no genetic debt to his forbears, no siblings in comparison with whom he might look bad. (And he's impervious to psychoanalytical probing into his past, because we're given no information about his childhood—*if* he had one. There's no "Infancy Gospel of Thomas" for Yahweh.)

Yet, even though he claims to be the only God who exists or ever existed, Yahweh is *also* contrasted with a divine Other, the *Elohim* who are shown stripped of power and humiliated. And even when their existence is denied, the gods of the nations and their idols remain Yahweh's rivals. In spite of all the gifts which Yahweh gives to his special human children, they still run away from home in order to cling to these foster parent/false gods—these pieces

honor (243). If we understand God's "enterprise" as involving his use of us to mirror his "honor," Heschel's account is compatible with that given here.

[37] Humans can never be self-identical because human being has the "double property ... of being a *facticity* and a *transcendence*" (Sartre 1943: 91).

of wood and stone whom they call "my father" (Jer. 2:27)—even though these unreal parental mirrors[38] are powerless to nurture and protect them. For that reason alone, Yahweh can never rest supremely secure, indifferent to his children and his unreal rivals.

In terms of narcissistic divine parenting, it would seem that monotheism and polytheism have entirely contrasting "family values." According to Jan Assmann, in ancient polytheisms "nobody contested the reality of foreign gods and the legitimacy of foreign forms of worship" (1998: 2-3; cf. 44-47), an attitude which is diametrically opposed to that found in Mosaic "counter-religion."[39] Not even the "oneness/singleness/uniqueness" of Amun-Re excludes the existence of other gods (1998: 193-94). Whatever one thinks of Assmann's wide-sweeping formulations, the fact remains that only Yahweh is a parent to his human children in the sense that he needs them as his narcissistic mirrors. One might object that it's better to be created in the image of a single royal divine father than to be created in order to bear the burdens of a royal court[40] comprised of many gods, as in Mesopotamian tradition.[41] Perhaps, but polytheism also *removes* a burden—the burden of being used as human mirrors for the one and only biblical God, the jealous and demanding father and king. And since we can't choose our parents, we who are Yahweh's children must bear this burden—or catch the first boat bound for Tarshish.[42]

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[38] If humans are made in Yahweh's image, when they worship idols they start to mirror the detestable objects of their affection (Hos. 9:10; Ps. 115:8; cf. Jer. 2:5; 2 Kgs 17:15).

[39] Assmann contends that "we are still far from a full understanding of polytheism" (1998: 217), because Judaism and Christianity have replaced any authentic traditions of polytheism with "a polemical counter-construction" of paganism and abomination (216-17; cf. 2-4). He believes that ancient polytheisms "functioned as a means of intercultural translatability," producing "a coherent ecumene of interconnected nations." Mosaic religion, on the other hand, repudiated everything outside itself as paganism, and in so doing, "functioned as a means of intercultural estrangement" (3).

[40] As Bottero (1992: 224) puts it, here "human life has no other sense, raison d'être, or goal than service to the gods—just as the subjects in a state have no other goal than service to the ruler and his household."

[41] E.g., *Atrahasis* I 189-243 OB; *Enuma Elish* VI 1-36. See Foster 1993: 165-66, 384-85.

[42] In his essay, "In Praise of Polytheism," philosopher Odo Marquard offers a very different contrast between monotheism and polytheism, expressed through political, but not familial, metaphors. He contends that monotheism dominates individuals by negating other gods and "liquidating" their "many stories/histories" (*Geschichten*), in favor of the only story that is needful: the *Heilsgeschichte* (1979: 48; cf. 46). In contrast to this "monopolistic myth" (47), "the great humane prin-

ABSTRACT

Theologians like Blumenthal, Brueggemann, and Chastain have recently stressed the abusive and sometimes capricious nature of Yahweh's actions toward his people, at times using studies of present-day child abuse to bolster their case. Predictably, such indictments of Yahweh have met with considerable resistance. This paper assesses the proposed analogy between Yahweh's behavior and that of abusive parents, by making more extensive use of the psychological literature on child abuse and trauma. The discussion also moves in a new direction, by employing recent research on narcissistic parenting to analyze Yahweh's behavior as father (and mother) to his "special" child Israel and his unique son Job. Passages in which Yahweh is said to love or hate his human children are examined in terms of psychological studies of parental ambivalence, narcissism and emotional "splitting." The final section of the paper examines the relationship between Yahweh's own lack of a family history and his narcissism, in part by comparing the unique and parentless divine king Yahweh with the Egyptian god Amun. The paper concludes by contrasting the single parent Yahweh with Assmann's characterization of ancient polytheisms, and asking whether monotheism itself is the most dramatic example of divine royal narcissism.[43]

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ciple of polytheism" effects a "separation of powers in the absolute," and offers a plurality of *Geschichten*" (50; cf. 46, 53-54). As long as many gods were powerful, the individual had "room to maneuver" [*Speilraum*]), because he could always be excused in relation to each god through the service he owed another, and thus be moderately inaccessible (54-55). Monotheism, on the other hand, demands total service and obedience to the sole God. Here one can only establish individuality through inwardness, countering omnipotence with "ineffability" (55). Marquard's contrast between biblical monotheism and polytheism is weakened by the fact that it does not take into account the biblical God's individual personality and his complex familial ties with his human children/courtiers/servants.

[43] Presentation given in the "Family Relations" session of the Bible and Cultural Studies Section at the 2000 annual meeting of SBL. The presentation is a revised and much-abridged version of the discussion contained in chapters 10 and 11 of my book, *Knowing Kings: Knowledge, Power, and Narcissism in the Hebrew Bible* (Lasine 2001).

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