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ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE RELIGIOUS STUDENT: BETWEEN LOVE AND RESPECT

"The love of [God's] creatures requires considerable effort if it is to be widened to its proper scope. This is against the shallow conclusion which can be reached at first glance, by means of insufficient preparation in the realm of Torah or that of practical morality, which makes it appear as if there is some opposition, or at least equanimity [in Judaism] regarding the attainment of this love, which should always fill all of the chambers of the soul.

The most elevated state of love for the created beings needs to take the love of humans, and to extend it to include all of humanity entirely. Despite variation of opinions, religions, and faiths, and despite all the differentiations of race and climate, it is necessary to reach a deep understanding of all the different peoples and human collectivities, and as far as possible to learn their characteristics and traits, in order to determine how this human love may be established on foundations which will lead to action."

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook
*Midot ha-Ra'ayah*¹

In the spirit of the above quotation from the writings of Rav Kook, this article considers some of the promises and challenges which the study of anthropology can offer students today in their attempt to define an integrated religious response to human diversity.

The love of God's creatures, *ahavat ha-briot*, is identified by Rav Kook as a central religious and moral obligation.² He reacts strongly against those who, because of "insufficient preparation," find in Judaism a level of resistance to this vision, or who treat the love of God's creatures (especially human beings) as less than central to their lives as religious Jews. But for Rav Kook this is not just a lyrical vision; it is also a practical halakhic directive, which requires considerable effort. It requires deep and detailed knowledge of the different peoples and their societies, and should be oriented towards concrete action. My hope in this short essay is to analyze this demand in light of contemporary anthropology, which has been defined in part as the study of "different peoples

and human collectivities." In this essay, we will consider some of the promises and challenges which the study of anthropology can offer students today in their attempt to define an integrated religious response to human diversity. We will not deal with problems of belief or with issues of practical Halakhah, but with the conflict of divergent emotional and moral orientations which anthropology and the teachings of Rav Kook respectively seem to presume. Simply put, the tension is between an attitude characterized by love, through which we may be led to make certain kinds of demands on our interlocutors, and one characterized by respect, in which we attempt primarily to understand and accept them on their own terms. I began this essay by quoting from Rav Kook's writings on the love of humanity, and that is where our analysis ought to begin.

I

One of the most striking things about the passage cited above from Rav Kook's *Midot ha-Ra'ayah* is the close relationship between love, knowledge, and concrete action which it describes. This is reminiscent of Maimonides' treatment of the love of God at the end of *Sefer ha-Mada*: "One does not love God except according to the knowledge with which one knows him. The love is according to the knowledge: if limited, limited, and if extensive, extensive."³

The context of this statement is a passage in which Rambam discusses what it means to enter the service of God "for its own sake." This means performing the commandments and studying the Torah "not from fear, nor in order to receive a reward, but for the love of the Master of the whole world, who has commanded it."⁴ The commandments help to organize society in a way which facilitates people's attainment of the knowledge of God,⁵ but they are also to be understood as ends in themselves. Succinctly stated, one "does the truth because it is the truth."⁶

Knowledge, love, and action are thus inseparably linked. Love of God is a result of knowledge, and leads in turn to the performance of the commandments for their own sake. An even stronger statement of this relationship can be found in the last section of the *Guide for the Perplexed*:

It is clear that the perfection of man that may truly be gloried in is the one acquired by him who has achieved...apprehension of Him, may he be exalted, and who knows His providence extending over His creatures as manifested in the act of bringing them into being and in their governance as it is. The way of life of such an individual, after he has achieved this apprehension, will always have in view *loving-kindness, righteousness,*

and *judgment*, though assimilation to His actions, may He be exalted, just as we have explained several times in this Treatise.⁷

In this passage, Maimonides adds the important point that true knowledge of God always seeks concrete expression in moral activity directed towards other people.

Like Rambam, Rav Kook too seeks to link the love of God with a practical desire for justice and morality, although he seems to go further in specifying that this principle should extend to love for all individual living things:

It is impossible not to love God, and it is impossible that the force of this sweet and compelling love should not bear practical fruit: to love to bring about, in action and in practice, all that tends toward the good in connection with the attainment of God's light. It is impossible not to love the Torah and the commandments, which are so closely tied to God's beneficence. It is impossible not to love uprightness and justice.... And it is impossible not to be filled with love for every creature, because the overflowing light of God is illuminated in all of them, and all are the revelation of God's sweetness: "God's mercy fills the earth" (Psalms 33:5).

The love of God, in Rav Kook's teaching, is logically prior to all other forms of love, which can be described as its offshoots. The love of the commandments, of morality, and of the created beings are each derived from the love of God, which is compellingly self-evident, as he says: "it is impossible not to love God." The love of the creatures, on the other hand, *ahavat ha-briot*, is both derivative and oriented by a practical sensibility which the love of God necessarily lacks:

The love of all creation is prior to everything; afterwards comes the love of humankind, and after that the love of Israel which includes everything, since Israel in the future will rectify all of creation. Each of these loves are *practical loves*: to love [the created beings], to do them good, and to cause their advancement. Exalted above all of these is the love of God, which is *love in action*, and which does not, of itself, bring about any practical result, except that the heart becomes filled with it, which is the loftiest happiness.⁸

The distinction between *practical love* (אהבה מעשית) and *love in action* (אהבה שבפועל), for Rav Kook, is not a distinction between the world of activity and that of emotion.⁹ Both kinds of love, in fact, are deeply felt *and* oriented towards concrete expression. What distinguishes them is that "practical love" must be expressed through activities which are meant to benefit the created beings, whereas "love in action" is expressed by fulfilling God's will through

performance of the commandments, which does not “benefit” God in any normal sense of the word. Whereas practical love seeks “to do [people] good and to cause their advancement,” love in action finds its authentication in service “for its own sake,” which means service which is both disinterested and non-utilitarian. Some activities may actually express both kinds of love. The pursuit of justice, for instance, may be considered an expression both of our love for God’s will, and of the love for His creatures which overwhelms us with desire to help them.

Once the distinction between “practical love” and “love in action” has been made, however, we can see that knowledge plays a somewhat different role in the attainment of each. We have seen that for Rambam the love of God is dependent on the knowledge of God, and that true love is authenticated by its “uselessness”: “He does the truth [simply] because it is the truth.” This is similar to Rav Kook’s “love in action.” The *love of the created beings* as defined by Rav Kook however, emphasizes that a person must go beyond such purity of heart. She or he must also act to produce effective change in the world. Knowledge is vital to this kind of love because it holds out the promise of helping the created beings *practically*, and of causing their advancement. This is the context in which Rav Kook makes the far-reaching statement with which we began: “...it is necessary to reach a deep understanding of all the different peoples and human collectivities, and as far as possible to learn their characteristics and traits, in order to determine how this human love may be established on foundations which will lead to action.”

What we have said up until now may be summarized as follows:

The Love of God and the Love of Human Beings

The Love of God	The Love of Human Beings
1. Generative and originary. “It is impossible not to love God.” 2. Expressed through action that has no practical consequence. אהבה שבפועל	1. Derivative. Every person is an embodiment of God’s light. 2. Expressed through action whose practical consequence is to do good for other people; spiritually, materially, and culturally. אהבה מעשית
3. The knowledge of God is necessary for <i>attaining</i> the love of God. ¹⁰	3. The knowledge of people and their societies is necessary for <i>implementing</i> the love of human beings.

This is the only statement I know of in rabbinic literature which explicitly relates to the broad study of human beings in society as an activity fraught with religious and moral value.¹¹ On the face of it, one can scarcely imagine a more rousing acclamation for the study of anthropology than the one Rav Kook seems to offer. In the remainder of this essay, I will argue that anthropology is in fact a discipline uniquely situated to enable the development of practical love which Rav Kook teaches us to pursue. As an anthropologist, however, I also remain troubled by areas of tension between his thought and that of contemporary anthropology. Can a practice-oriented, activist conception of love be reconciled with anthropology's relativist paradigms?

II

To what extent is modern anthropology an appropriate vessel for the fulfillment of Rav Kook's vision? Before attempting an answer to that question, it may be helpful to juxtapose Rav Kook (1865-1935) with his slightly older contemporary Franz Boas (1858-1942), who was one of the founders of modern cultural anthropology. A brief introduction to Boas and his work may help to throw him and Rav Kook alike into sharper relief.

Franz Boas was born in Germany to a family that has been described as "actively liberal" and "inactively Jewish."¹² He received his doctorate from the University of Kiel in 1881 with a thesis entitled "Contributions to the Understanding of the Color of Water." His academic background was in physics and geography, although he became interested at an early stage in the relationship between human observers and phenomena they observed. He noted, for instance, that the ability of people to distinguish between different shades of color in a spectrum was related to "situational factors," by which he meant the mental state of the subject. In later work, this would lead Boas to consider the influence of language and cultural factors on seemingly objective scientific observations.¹³

In 1883 Boas undertook a year-long voyage to the Arctic which would later be seen by many as a turning point in his intellectual career. His motives remain controversial. In a 1943 obituary, Boas' student Ruth Benedict (herself an influential American anthropologist) wrote that he had undertaken the trip in order to continue his studies on the color of sea water. According to Benedict, Boas was convinced of "the necessity of gathering firsthand material in conditions as they actually exist in human experience,"¹⁴ and decided therefore to study how the color of sea water was perceived by local Eskimo. It was his experience among the Eskimo, she claims, which converted him forever from physicist to anthropologist. This account assumes that something happened in

the Arctic which drastically changed Boas' personal and professional outlook, putting human beings forever thereafter at the center of his intellectual concern.¹⁵

On the basis of Boas' own letters and diaries, however, George Stocking Jr. has argued that Boas really traveled to the Arctic in order to study the relationship between peoples' geographical knowledge and the history of their migrations. The development of a "law of the migrations of peoples" was an important goal of 19th-century scholars (such as Boas' teacher, the geographer Karl Ritter) who thought that this would enable them to trace the "origin and diffusion of nations."¹⁶ If Stocking's proposal is correct, it would mean that Boas' encounter with the Eskimo only pushed him further along a well-established 19th-century scientific trajectory, in which no firm boundary between the so-called physical and social, or human sciences had yet emerged.¹⁷

Be that as it may, Boas' 19th-century geography already bore the signs of what would later come to be recognized as social and cultural anthropology. For one thing, it cannot be denied that Boas wanted to *live* among the Eskimo, and to collect research material in the context of sharing their everyday existence. His diaries contain accounts of seal hunting (which bored him) and of long-distance sled journeys in the company of his Eskimo hosts. It is this attitude which would crystallize among later anthropologists into the well-known methodological apparatus of "participant-observation."

Previous researchers had been willing to rely on material artifacts removed from the contexts of their everyday use; a good example would be the pottery or tools which were often "collected" in the field by travelers or missionaries, and then sent for analysis to the anthropologist back home. Anthropology in the wake of Boas, by contrast, has stubbornly maintained that only extended association with people in their own societies allows us to gain any real insight into their lives, customs, or even material culture. This kind of extended association would later come to be known as "ethnographic fieldwork," a methodological feature of anthropology which distinguishes it even today from related disciplines such as sociology, psychology, or social history. An old joke says that sociologists like to hand out questionnaires, whereas anthropologists invariably stay for dinner.

Understood in this way, anthropological fieldwork is ultimately about the *contextualization of data*, and it is significant that one of Boas' primary intellectual battles would later be fought over the organization of museum collections. Whereas museums, influenced by the idea of social evolution, had tended to display artifacts collected in different settings in common displays (i.e., a display on "the evolution of musical instruments"), Boas insisted that museums illustrate the *use* of artifacts in the lives of particular peoples. Similar

artifacts, he argued, could play different roles in the lives of different societies, and could have dissimilar origins.¹⁸

The demand for contextualization was related to Boas' rejection of the rigid evolutionary hierarchy current in European thought during this period, which usually (and not surprisingly) placed white European and American males at the height of physical, technological, and ethical development. Boas' rejection of this attitude can already be detected in his notes from the Arctic trip. In mid-December of 1883, after 26 hours on a dark trail at -45° C., Boas wrote the following about his Eskimo hosts:

...I often ask myself what advantages our "good society" possesses over that of the "savages." The more I see of their customs, the more I realize that we have no right to look down on them. Where amongst our people would you find such true hospitality? Here, without the least complaint people are willing to perform *every* task demanded of them. We have no right to blame them for their forms and superstitions which may seem ridiculous to us. We "highly educated" people are much worse, relatively speaking. The fear of tradition and old customs is deeply implanted in mankind, and in the same way as it regulates life here, it halts all progress for us. I believe it is a difficult struggle for every individual and every people to give up tradition and follow the path to truth. The Eskimo are sitting around me, their mouths filled with raw seal liver (the spot of blood on the back of the paper shows you how I joined in). As a thinking person, for me the most important result of this trip lies in the strengthening of my point of view that the idea of a "cultured" individual is merely relative and that a person's worth should be judged by his *Herzenbildung* [character of the heart]....¹⁹

Boas portrayed these reflections as "reaffirming" beliefs he already held, and they show points of contact as well as distance from his later anthropological thought. There are a few basic themes, however, which need to be emphasized here: 1) the notion of human *progress* which Boas began to question; 2) the *relativity of culture* which he began to develop as an important concept; and 3) the emotional ambiance of *respect* which characterizes his depiction of the Eskimo. Each of these themes will provide us with a way of talking about anthropology as it relates to the religious vision of Rav Kook.

III

The notion of progress in all spheres of human life was a guiding faith of the 19th century, and neither Boas nor Rav Kook were alien to their generation in this

regard. Of course, progress did not necessarily mean the same thing to each of them. For Boas, as revealed in the passage cited above, progress meant throwing off the shackles of tradition and superstition in order to engage freely in the pursuit of truth.

Progress toward liberation in the intellectual realm, however, was inseparably associated for Boas with progress in the political realm, including the attainment of "equal rights for all, equal possibilities to learn and work for poor and rich alike." Boas wrote that "all that man can do for humanity is to further the *truth*," but was simultaneously able to complain that "scientific activity alone is not enough; I must be able to *livingly create*."²⁰ These two inclinations, which may seem opposed, were actually linked by the widespread faith in human progress, and in the responsibility of learned men to bring it about in practice.²¹

Difficulties in Germany at the time, including the rigidity of the academic system and expressions of antisemitism (Boas himself bore facial scars from duels he had fought over antisemitic remarks) persuaded Boas to emigrate to the United States. It is important to understand though, that his scientific and political-moral posture had been formulated in a liberal German intellectual milieu. As George Stocking Jr. has written of Boas:

...equality of opportunity, education, political and intellectual liberty, the rejection of dogma and the search for scientific truth, and identification with humanity and devotion to its progress are all part of a single outlook — a single left-liberal posture which, as in the case of Rudolf Virchow, is at once scientific and political.²²

Despite its strong secular, if not to say rationalistic orientation, Boas' "identification with humanity and devotion to its progress" is nevertheless reminiscent of Rav Kook. Rav Kook did not believe that the rejection of tradition was a path to true progress but, like Boas, he believed that humanity was progressing steadily towards an objective good which included moral, cultural, and technical improvement, and to which the intellectual elite were obliged to contribute.²³ The irony is that Boas called this conception of cultural and historical progress increasingly into doubt as time went on.

What initially seems to have impelled Boas was his opposition, on scientific as well as political grounds, to the social evolutionism which had gripped 19th and early 20th-century anthropology. Social evolutionists were teaching that human societies could be strictly ranked with regards to technical and cultural progress, and that progress in these areas was linked together. In the hands of Lewis Henry Morgan or a Frederick Engels, social evolutionism could provide a theoretical background for liberal or even revolutionary politics, politi

which envisioned *future* human development in terms that included the liberation of women and the reorganization of wealth, for instance.²⁴ When combined with a willingness to justify current imbalances of power, however, theories of social (and later physical) evolution became methods for focusing moral energy entirely on an imagined *past* and on the supposed dangers represented by mixture between highly evolved and primitive races.²⁵

Members of technologically undeveloped societies (in Africa, Asia, and North America) were portrayed as less highly evolved, biologically as well as culturally, than were white, northern Europeans. Jews and southern Europeans stood somewhere in the middle. A whole science of head measurements and racial types — anthropometry — was actually developed among scholars in the United States and Europe. This kind of racial thinking absolutely dominated the scientific study of human beings during this period.²⁶

It is against this backdrop that Boas' lonely crusade against the evolutionary anthropology of his time needs to be considered. Boas spent a good deal of his career fighting these ideas in different ways, and in so doing he helped to set his stamp on the new field of cultural anthropology. His attack was multiple, but in each case rested on the demand for contextualization of the facts and inductive reasoning. At the biological level, he tried to show that the concept of "race" was a misleading abstraction; this is because physical types popularly associated with one "race" were invariably found among others as well, and it was impossible, even for confirmed evolutionists, to identify individuals who presented all the physical characteristics of the race to which they supposedly belonged. Moreover, each "race" could be shown to be associated with people at varying levels of technological and cultural development, calling into question the whole notion that certain races were inherently more advanced. In a famous study involving immigrants to the United States, Boas showed that even physical traits like head size could change in the course of a single generation, presumably in response to environmental factors.²⁷ What all this comes down to, Boas argued, is that there are no grounds for the claim that discrete races of human beings can be scientifically distinguished. "Race" is a social category rather than a biological one.

Perhaps even more far-reaching, however, was Boas' attack on social evolutionism. He labored to show that cultural progress cannot be ordered in a comprehensive evolutionary hierarchy. This is because similar inventions can have disparate origins, and can serve different purposes in the lives of the people who utilize them. He argued, for instance, that the widespread use of geometrical designs on pottery had a different historical origin among different peoples. Geometrical designs could result from the technical needs of pottery makers, from the conventionalization of natural forms, or by derivation from

symbols. But if identical art forms could have different origins, they could not therefore serve as reliable indicators of evolutionary progress.²⁸

The only way to really understand a custom or an artifact, argued Boas in 1896, was through immersion in the study of a particular people:

We have another method, which is in many respects much safer. A detailed study of the customs in their bearings to the total culture of the tribe practicing them, and in connection with an investigation of their geographical distribution among neighboring tribes, affords us almost always a means of determining with considerable accuracy the historical causes that led to the formation of the customs in question and to the psychological processes that were at work in their development.²⁹

Boas' method was thus a historical one, concerned not so much with customs or artifacts themselves, as with social and historical *process*. Boas method demanded that the full context of social facts be taken into account, and undermined the search for a uniform pattern of human development around the world.

The reader will recall that in his 1883 letter from the Arctic, Boas wrote that his travels reinforced him in thinking that "the idea of the 'cultured' individual is merely relative." He meant that the idea of "culture," in the sense of a universally agreed upon standard of refinement or virtue, was insufficient. Despite their crude technology and lack of external sophistication, Boas wrote, the Eskimo manifested great qualities of heart, and this is the true measure by which all people should be judged. That there *is* a universal standard of measurement by which people *can* be judged, however, Boas did not yet seriously question.

By 1896, however, Boas was no longer speaking of "the cultured individual," but of different "cultures," each associated with a different tribe. The anthropological idea of "culture" which Boas' students went on in later years to elaborate, did not imply a single standard of evaluation, but actually its opposite. "Culture" came to indicate an appreciation of the diverse ways in which human life is organized and evaluated in different societies. Boas' student, Ruth Benedict, in one of the most popular books ever composed by an anthropologist (*Patterns of Culture*), extended this insight into an argument for wide-ranging cultural relativism.

Benedict argued, for instance, that in some cultures aggression is a valued moral quality while in others this is true of pacifism. In some cultures, women are expected to be dominant forces in the community, while in others they are socialized to be dependent on men and largely passive in the political sphere.³⁰ Each of these "cultures" represents an independent and unique whole, and can only be studied as such. There is no obvious outside standard of evaluation by

which they can all be ranked or judged, and the study of culture is important for reminding us that our own culture is neither universal nor self-evidently "natural."

This holistic approach has been critiqued from a variety of perspectives, but has left its mark on subsequent anthropology. Clifford Geertz, a contemporary anthropologist who has been identified with the cultural school, describes anthropology as the "interpretation of cultures" along a textual model. Culture, for Geertz, is the largely unquestioned body of "local knowledge"³¹ through which a people orient themselves towards the world; the "webs of significance" which they (we) spin and within which they (we) cannot help but live.³²

The growth of the "culture concept" was gradual, and Boas himself wavers to some extent between the old and new uses of the word in his writings. Anthropological usage of "culture" tends to be plural, relativistic, and historically contingent. It has also been associated with an attempt to combat the worst forms of ethnocentrism within anthropologists' own societies. Anthropologists have tended to argue that, viewed in its proper context, most human behavior can be appreciated as meaningful and appropriate. While this is undoubtedly an oversimplification, it will serve well enough to bring us back to the comparison with Rav Kook which is the subject of this essay.

IV

On the related issues of progress, culture, and relativism, Rav Kook stands in uneasy juxtaposition to the anthropological tradition represented by people such as Boas and his students. On the one hand, Rav Kook never fell prey to the deep ethnocentric bias of the worst evolutionists, who viewed their own "race" as the sole repository of evolutionary progress in the world: "The Holy One Blessed be He," wrote Rav Kook, "was gracious with His world, in that He did not grant all good capacities to a single place, not to a single person, and not to a single nation; not to a single country, nor to a single generation and not to a single world, but scattered them."³³ He did, however, believe in universal movement toward a predetermined goal — just the kind of thinking that Boas opposed. Rav Kook did not represent his own people as the end of world progress but as its center — as the secret means by which all nations would gradually be perfected.³⁴

Given his belief in progress, it is also not surprising that Rav Kook's use of the word "culture" (*tarbut*) conforms to its earlier, pre-anthropological meaning. For Rav Kook, "culture" refers to elite refinement, or to "civilization" in the classical sense, but not to plural, unranked systems of meaning.³⁵ This is implicit in Rav Kook's whole conception of "practical love," where "doing good" for the

created beings is understood as helping them to spiritual enlightenment and other forms of objective improvement. Helping the created beings means helping them along a complicated path, but one whose end is known from the beginning. Rav Kook, did not, however, set out a practical directive for how this program was to be accomplished.³⁶

Whereas Rav Kook wrote about *love* for the created beings, anthropology in the wake of Boas has been fairly constant in orienting itself towards an attitude of *respect* for different societies and their cultures, and this distinction is far from trivial. It goes a long way towards setting the tone of anthropological research, and indirectly raises some of the more difficult challenges of emotional and ethical orientation likely to be faced by the religious student who chooses anthropology. Is respect for difference in its deepest sense compatible with "practical love" as taught by Rav Kook?

For one thing, it needs to be recognized that anthropologists themselves are not of one mind when it comes to issues such as cultural relativism. In a series of celebrated essays, the late British anthropologist, Ernst Gellner, attacked Clifford Geertz and American anthropology more generally for what he considered its excessive relativism (in particular intellectual, rather than moral, relativism), which failed in his opinion to privilege Western intellectual culture as the one culture in which anthropology itself had become possible.³⁷ Geertz's most direct response was an essay called "Anti Anti-Relativism" in which he accuses his opponents of constructing a parody of the relativist position.³⁸

Geertz makes the important claim that anthropological relativism is not the all-encompassing ideology of nihilism which Gellner and others have at times painted, but rather a considered methodological stance. The point of relativism so conceived is not that moral or intellectual judgments are impossible, but that they are generally problematic and sometimes unhelpful. Moreover, the attainment of anthropological knowledge may require putting the judgment of others by one's own standards into suspension as we try to understand what the world might look like in their context and through their eyes. This is not the same as saying that moral and intellectual evaluation of any kind is impossible, which is a position Geertz denies. It is just that there is no easy way to go about it, and it certainly cannot be the *first* step in any anthropological study. Just as the discovery of the New World unsettled the moral and natural philosophy of 15th-century Europe, so it is the anthropological documentation of sheer human diversity — anthropologists as "merchants of astonishment"³⁹ — rather than any dogmatic or doctrinaire "relativism," which has served to unsettle parochial and positivist accounts of what it means to be human in our own time.

What is more, increasing numbers of anthropologists have been coming around to the opinion that encounters between different people or groups

always include a moral component, and that anthropology cannot afford to ignore this fact, *even from a scientific point of view*.⁴⁰ This holds for our attempts to understand what may appear to us as exotic or morally objectionable customs, such as infanticide of twins in parts of Africa,⁴¹ or female circumcision,⁴² as well as it does for patterns of abuse and systematic exploitation in our own society.⁴³ The moral dimension, as locally understood, and as seen in dialogue between societies (which always include the anthropologist's own) is an important social fact. Ignoring the moral dimension may lead us to spend our time asking irrelevant questions or to unwittingly participate in the sources of other people's misery. A favorite example of mine is the great British anthropologist Evans-Pritchard's analysis of songs about cattle written by young herders among the Nuer of East Africa. Evans-Pritchard uses these songs to illustrate the Nuer's great love for their cattle, which is an important theme in his book, but neglects to dwell on the fact that the song he chose to document was actually a lament for the cattle (and way of life) being systematically destroyed at that time by British colonial forces.⁴⁴ Dealing with that fact in his research may have yielded a different understanding of what cattle meant to the Nuer symbolically, and to a deeper human understanding of their whole way of life. It might even have led him to different personal politics.⁴⁵

The moral dimension of anthropological research, therefore, does not lie simply in casting judgments on other peoples' ways of life, or even on our own, but in analyzing the complicated realities in which people live in ways which are more contextual, more resonant with their own self-understanding, and hopefully more humane.⁴⁶ Sometimes this will have very practical ramifications, as students of medical anthropology or developmental anthropology are well aware.⁴⁷ By taking culture into account, they may find ways to help set policy or to aid people directly that are better contextualized and more successful than similar projects without anthropological guidance.⁴⁸ They will certainly be oriented towards respect for different cultures and peoples, but will also use their knowledge to help those people to set goals and attain them.

Boas imprinted nascent anthropology with a healthy skepticism concerning our ability to make sweeping generalizations about human societies, their courses of development, or the relationships between them. He imprinted an even deeper skepticism regarding ethnocentrism and self-interested moral comparisons. Again, for Boas and others, this is both a scientific and an ethical consideration. By imposing alien categories of judgment on our subject matter — who are people, after all — we risk being unable to hear what they have to say.

This does not mean, however, that Boas considered anthropology a purely descriptive study without practical ramifications. His attempts to fight racism in its various scientific and popular manifestations have already been discussed. In terms of anthropology's potential to help people chart a course for the future of human betterment, he had the following modest statement to make:

A final question must be answered. Can anthropology help to control the future development of human culture and well-being or must we be satisfied to record the progress of events and let them take their course? I believe that we have seen that a knowledge of anthropology may guide us in many of our policies. This does not mean that we can predict the ultimate result of our actions....

Here, as in other social phenomena, accident cannot be eliminated, accident that may depend on the presence or absence of eminent individuals, upon the favors bestowed by nature, upon chance discoveries or contacts, and therefore prediction is precarious if not impossible. Laws of development, except in most generalized forms, cannot be established and a detailed course of growth cannot be predicted.

All we can do is watch and judge day by day what we are doing, to understand what is happening in the light of what we have learned and to shape our steps accordingly.⁴⁹

Despite uncertainty and contingency, this is a statement of profound faith in the idea that deeper understanding can make a difference in the way we live our lives, and that the intellectual elite has a responsibility to participate in its own modest way in the search for human betterment. Boas might never use the word "love" to describe his relationship with the world as mediated through anthropology, but his ongoing ethical concern certainly complicates any simplistic understanding of cultural relativism, for him as for us.

In turning finally to Rav Kook, it is not surprising to find that Rav Kook identifies *ahavat ha-briot*, the love of the created beings, with *practical* love — with the attempt to improve the condition of human life. This is not just the natural desire to help those whom we love, but a directive rooted deeply in halakhic thinking. In the Torah, the commandment of love is inseparable from the commandment of rebuke, and is related to our responsibility for seeking one another's betterment and moral growth: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but shall surely rebuke your fellow, and do not bear sin because of him. You shall not bear a grudge and you shall not take revenge on the children of your people; you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord" (19:17-18). Rebuke makes love possible by clearing away resentment,⁵⁰ but can also be a powerful expression of love in its own right; rebuke embodies the

desire to see the other live up to his or her own potential, and the refusal to make peace with moral mediocrity.⁵¹ The possibility of rebuke implies love with an activist orientation.

It is true, of course, that the *mitzvot* of rebuke and of love apply in a technical sense only to Jews,⁵² and, according to some opinions, only to observant Jews.⁵³ For Rav Kook, however, the technical requirements of these *mitzvot* are understood as necessary but insufficient infrastructures of the moral life. The *Halakhah*, he writes, is like the external frame of a building under construction: the open space is as important as the steel girders in allowing it to become a fit habitation. God desires us to be people who autonomously desire and embody qualities like love, and this means that those qualities must be left partly unlegislated; the law needs to point beyond itself. Rav Kook can acknowledge, therefore, that the commandment of love applies technically only to Jews, and yet insist that it must ultimately be applied to all human beings.⁵⁴ Rebuke, which comes from the consciousness of imperfection, is a necessary basis for the idea of practical love.

It is important for us, therefore, to see how the category of rebuke is actually limited for Rav Kook by means of an implicitly relativistic principle⁵⁵:

One must investigate the ways of human beings when one wishes to rebuke a certain person, and to turn him from his way. Perhaps this path, in his context, is a good one, even though there are inadequacies. These inadequacies may protect him from even deeper inadequacies. Blessed God must guide us in the ways of righteousness since our inclination is sometimes seduced to preoccupation with rebuke of everyone. This is nothing other than badness of heart. The Merciful One will atone [for such a one] in mercy.⁵⁶

Like love, to which it is related, rebuke too is a commandment which requires detailed understanding of "the ways of human beings," by which one may presume that Rav Kook intends spiritual, psychological, and cultural understanding. But the requirement of knowledge also places a limiting factor on the desire to enact human betterment or to turn people from their way. One must presume, in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, that the paths taken by human beings are basically correct for their spiritual context. Rebuke can come only after real hesitation and careful study. This does not lead us exactly to the anthropological methodology of relativism, but it does lead to an acknowledgment of the same problematics with which Boas and his successors have struggled, the problematic relationship of love and respect. In order to help the world one must understand, and in order to understand, one must give up one's harsh peremptory judgment.

The religious student of anthropology will thus find himself or herself challenged to move between love and respect, formulating a shifting response to an imperfect world. The tension is not only between Jewish and anthropological thought, but *within* both Jewish and anthropological thought. Rav Kook may emphasize activist, practical love whereas Boas emphasizes respect and relativism, but both men respond to a perceived need to reconcile sometimes conflicting moral and emotional demands.

This essay has been merely an introduction to one area of special concern for the religious student who may undertake a study of anthropology. It does not represent a final word on the subject, and many other issues could be raised for consideration as well. But for those who wish to understand their own and other societies better, and to do so as religious Jews, love and respect will constantly need to balance and inform one another as basic orientations. The working out of this dilemma in practical terms is not a matter for simple formulas, but for the ongoing energies of students who are committed to the notion of *ahavat ha-briot*, as well as to the careful and respectful study of the human world we inhabit. This essay may be read as an invitation.

NOTES

- * I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Cyril Domb for encouraging me to write this essay, and to Rabbi Mordechai Gafni for enabling me practically to do so. I would also like to acknowledge the continuing support of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Bar-Ilan University, especially Professor Menahem Friedman and Dr. Shimon Copper.
 - 1 R. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Midot Ha-Ra'ayah* (Jerusalem, 1971), p. 96. An English translation may be found in the Classics of Western Spirituality series, *Abraham Isaac Kook*, trans. Ben Zion Bokser (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), pp. 133-139.
 - 2 For more on "*ahavat ha-briot*," see the section titled "*briot*" in R. Yeshayahu Horowitz's *Shne Lulhot Ha-Brit*, 44b-45b. Also see below, note 52.
 - 3 *Yad Ha-Hazakah, Hilkhoh Teshuvah* 10:6.
 - 4 *Ibid.*, 10:5.
 - 5 See *Yad. Hilkhoh Yesodei Ha-Torah* 4:13; *Hilkhoh Teshuvah* 9:1.
 - 6 *Yad. Hilkhoh Teshuvah* 10:2.
 - 7 *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), Volume II, p. 638. Part III, chapter 54. On the importance of the practical commandments to the attainment of the knowledge of God, see especially Part III, chapter 27 and *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Yesodei ha-Torah* 4:13.
 - 8 *Midot Ha-Ra'ayah*, p. 96.
 - 9 "Practical love" is a literal translation of *אהבה מעשית*, which expresses the teaching that love of human beings *must* lead to concrete action for their betterment. Rav Kook is careful, however, not to mislead the reader into thinking that there is another kind of love which is *not* expressed through concrete action. Instead, he uses the term "love in action," *אהבה שבפועל*, to show that even the nonpractical love of God requires concrete expression.
- See Nahmanides' commentary to Genesis 22:1, where he explains that God's "test" of

Abraham at the *Akedah* cannot be considered a test in the normal sense of the word, since God already knew what its outcome would be. Rather, the point was to activate Abraham's good qualities from potential to actual by means of concrete activity; להוציא הדבר מן הכוח אל הפועל, ולא שכר לב טוב בלבד. This seems to be the sense (and may be the source) of Rav Kook's term *אהבה שבפועל*, which is also concerned with the moral and spiritual development of the doer, but assumes that the deed itself (as in the incomplete sacrifice of Isaac) bears no practical significance. This may in fact be considered a model for the performance of the ritual *mitzvot* in general, and can help to explain the troubling difference between Abraham's response to the *Akedah* and his response to the destruction of the city of Sodom. The former may be conceived as an enactment of Abraham's *אהבה שבפועל*, which would not be questioned on the basis of its likely practical effect. The latter, however, was an enactment of *אהבה מעשית*, so that Abraham was expected to intercede on behalf of God's creatures and to seek their welfare. It is significant for this interpretation, as will become clear later in this essay, that the binding of Isaac was framed as a *mitzvah* while the defense of Sodom was left to Abraham's free-willed gesture.

For more on Rav Kook's understanding of Abraham as a model for practical love, see R. Yehuda Amital, "The Meaning of Rav Kook's Teaching for Our Generation" (Heb.). In *Yovel Orot* ed. Benyamin Ish Shalom & Shalom Rosenberg (Jerusalem: Histadrut, 1985), pp. 333-341.

- 10 The relationship between knowledge and love is actually somewhat more complicated for Rav Kook. He writes that there are two kinds of love: one that comes about through contemplation of the good that God does in the world (which requires knowledge), and another that is hidden within every human soul. The second kind of love is more essential, and does not depend on knowledge of God, although knowledge may be necessary for its arousal. See R. Abraham Yitzhak ha-Cohen Kook, *Olat ha-Ra'ayah* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook 1972), vol. 2, pp. 3-4; also *Eder ha-Yakar* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1977), p. 124. Compare *Likutei Amarim Tanya* of R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, chaps. 43-44.
- 11 *Midot Ha-Ra'ayah* is a book of moral education for the emotions, partly identified with the kabbalistic *sephirot*. It is similar in genre to books such as R. Moshe Cordovero's *Tomer Devorah*. For more on the sources and implications of Rav Kook's attitude toward non-Jewish humanity, see R. Yehuda Amital, "The Meaning of Rav Kook's Teaching;" also see R. Yoel Bin-Nun, "Nationalism, Humanity and the Community of Israel" (Heb.), in *Yovel Orot*. *Ibid.*, pp. 169-208; and finally, Zvi Yaron, *The Philosophy of Rabbi Kook* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1993), pp. 285-322.
- 12 Paul Bohannan & Mark Glazer (eds.), *High Points in Anthropology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 81. Also see Leonard Glick, "Types Distinct From Our Own: Franz Boas on Jewish Identity and Assimilation," *American Anthropologist*. 84:3 (1982): 545-565.
- 13 George W. Stocking Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), pp. 133-160.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- 15 This is actually the one assumption which is common to several versions of the story which have been popularized by Boas' various students. *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 156.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 149.

- 21 This same sensibility was a powerful motivation for the generation of British social anthropologists who coincided with Boas. The crisis of World War I did much, however, to call the progressive faith into question. See Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 1-26.
- 22 Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, p. 149.
- 23 For more on Rav Kook's understanding of progress, or social evolution, see Yosef Ben Shlomo, *Shirat ha-Hayyim* (Heb.) (Tel-Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1989). Also see the discussion on these themes in Rav Kook's thought by his student, R. David Cohen (the Nazir), printed as an introduction to *Orot ha-Kodesh*.
- 24 See Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society* (Glouster, MA: Peter Smith Press, 1974), pp. 3, 351, 399-400; Frederick Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), pp. 129, 138-39, 236.
- 25 See Jean Comaroff, "The Diseased Heart of Africa: Medicine, Colonialism, and the Black Body." In *Knowledge, Power and Practice: The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life*, eds. Shirley Lindenbaum & Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 305-329.
- 26 See Stocking, *Race, Culture and Evolution*, pp. 110-132. For a parallel movement among British anthropologists see Kuklick, *The Savage Within*.
- 27 Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, pp. 161-194.
- 28 Franz Boas, "The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology," in *Science* 4, no. 103 (December 18, 1896), reprinted in Bohanan & Glazer, *High Points in Anthropology*, pp. 84-92.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 30 Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York; Houghton-Misslin 1934).
- 31 Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
- 32 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5.
- 33 R. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1963), p. 152.
- 34 In R. Kook's own words, "Nothing concerning Israel and its nature is bounded within the narrow, individual sphere. It is rather centered within a particular sphere, and from that center it influences the entire surroundings. Israel among the nations; the Land of Israel among all lands; the Torah of Israel among all the *Torot* and faiths: these are three centers in which are hidden treasure-houses of life and eternal lights which sustain the entire world, raising and sanctifying it" (*Orot*, p. 151). What emerges from this passage is a holistic cosmos in which Israel can only be understood by virtue of its embeddedness in, and relatedness to, that whole. This makes Israel's specialness, according to Rav Kook, a function of being at the center of the universe rather than at the top, and this formulation precludes a purely self-absorbed and triumphal nationalism.
- 35 See for instance *Orot*, pp. 17, 166. While culture is not an especially well-developed concept in Rav Kook's writings, it may be noted that the concept of "generation," *dor*, in some ways takes its place (see Yaron, *The Philosophy of Rabbi Kook*, pp. 30-56). The construct "generation" is, among other things, a way of talking about the shared patterns of meaning and consciousness which link the people of given historical periods. "Generation" thereby becomes an important tool for grappling with at least some elements of what we would tend to include under the rubric of culture. Because "generation" is a diachronic concept, however, it leaves open the possibility for evolutionary movement or change over time in a way that

- "culture," as commonly understood, does not. See the contributions to "Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference," a special theme issue of *Cultural Anthropology*, 7, No. 1 (1992).
- 36 To be sure, Rav Kook saw the Jewish national project as contributing to the good of all peoples, and wrote that the desire for "practical love" was inseparable from the longing for Jewish nationhood. See Y. Amital, "The Meaning of Rav Kook's Teaching."
- 37 Ernst Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992); *idem*, "The Stakes in Anthropology," *American Scholar* 57 (1, 1988); *idem*, "Relativism and Universals," in *Rationality and Relativism*, eds. M. Hollis & S. Lukes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), pp. 181-200.
- 38 Clifford Geertz, "Distinguished Lecture: Anti Anti-Relativism," *American Anthropologist* 86:2 (1984): 263-278. Also see Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), pp. 218-224; Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 205-210.
- 39 Geertz, "Anti Anti-Relativism," p. 274.
- 40 In this context it is worthwhile to consider Clifford Geertz, "Thinking as a Moral Act: Dimensions of Anthropological Fieldwork in the New States," *Antioch Review* 28:2 (1968): 139-158 and the critique of this essay by Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth*, pp. 168-195.
- 41 See Wendy James, *The Listening Ebony: Moral Knowledge, Religion and Power Among the Uduk of Sudan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). James' suggestion, following her teacher Evans-Pritchard, is that when dealing with practices such as infanticide, the anthropologist acts primarily as *translator* between the terms in which two different societies understand the world. Once the translation is complete, moral judgment may be called into play, although it may turn out that an alien practice is more familiar to us than we had thought before translation. This approach seems to me problematic, although this is not the place to engage in a thorough analysis.
- 42 See Daniel Gordon, "Female Circumcision and Genital Operations in Egypt and the Sudan: A Dilemma for Medical Anthropology," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 5(1, 1991). Also, pay special attention to the problematic relationship between respect and moral critique in anthropologist Janice Boddy's response to Gordon in that same issue.
- 43 See for instance Paul Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
- 44 E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 41.
- 45 See Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, ed. T. Asad, (London: Ithaca University Press, 1975).
- 46 See Don Seeman, "The Silence of Rayna Batya: Torah, Suffering, and Rabbi Barukh Epstein's 'Wisdom of Women'." *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 6 (1966): 91-128.
- 47 For just a few of many examples, see Yoram Bilu, Eliczer Witztum & Otto Van Der Hart, "Paradise Regained: 'Miraculous Healing' in an Israeli Psychiatric Clinic," in *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 14 (1990): 105-127; Arthur Kleinman, *Social Origins of Distress and Disease: Depression, Neurasthenia and Pain in Modern China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Mark Hobart (ed.), *An Anthropological Critique of Development: The Growth of Ignorance* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Helen Pankhurst, *Gender, Development and Identity: An Ethiopian Study* (London: Zed Publishers, 1992).
- 48 See Haim Rosen, "Working as a Government Anthropologist Among Ethiopian Jews in Israel." *Israel Social Science Research* 10 (2, 1995): 55-68; Don Seeman, "Ethnographers,

- Rabbis and Jewish Epistemology: The Case of the Ethiopian Jews." *Tradition* 25 (4, 1991): 13-29; Michael E. Gorman, "The AIDS Epidemic in San Francisco: Epidemiological and Anthropological Perspectives," in *Anthropology and Epidemiology*, ed. Craig R. Janes et al. (Dordrecht: Dordel, 1986), pp. 157-172.
- 49 Franz Boas, "Modern Life and Primitive Culture," in *Anthropology and Modern Life* (New York: Dover, 1986 [1928]), pp. 245-246.
- 50 *Yad. Hilkhoh De'ot* 6:6.
- 51 Ibid. 6:7.
- 52 Ibid. 6:3.
- 53 See R. Yisrael Meir ha-Cohen, *Bi'ur Halakhah, Orah Hayyim* 608:2 s.v. 6; R. Yosef of Tranipol, *Minhat Hinnukh* 242:1; R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Likutei Amarim Tanya*, chap. 32.
- 54 "It is our intention to fulfill the commandment 'thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself' not only with regards to individuals but with regards to peoples as well, so that not even the nations of the world will have any claim or complaint against us," *Ma'amarei Ha-Ra'ayah*, p. 252; also see *Igrot Ha-Kodesh*, volume 1:97; *Orot Ha-Kodesh* III: 318; Y. Amital, "The Meaning of Rav Kook's Teaching," pp. 335-339.
- 55 Subsequent to the completion of this essay, a sensitive and in-depth treatment of Rav Kook's attitude towards tolerance and philosophical pluralism was published by Tamar Ross ["Between Metaphysics and Liberal Pluralism: A Reappraisal of Rabbi A. I. Kook's Espousal of Tradition," *AJS Review* 21 (1, 1996): 61-110]. The relevance of her arguments to this context, which actually go beyond those offered here, should be clear.
- 56 *Midot Ha-Ra'ayah*, p. 150.