

*An Alternative Study on the Ethical Concepts of the Hebrew Bible in terms of the  
Ethical Structure of the Kanun*

Kazuhiko Yamamoto, Kyushu University, Japan

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**Abstract**

Apparently, the theological contradiction between the scribes and the Pharisees who believed in the law given by Moses and Jesus who claimed to be the son of God led Jesus to crucifixion. However, it should be the Jesus' new doctrine and value, which actually compelled him to his death, since Jesus had no reason to manifest as the son of God if it were not for the new doctrine and value. Jesus declared that his advent marked the turning point in value (John 15.22-24). The ethical and logical contradictions between Jesus and the law given by Moses seem to be the causa magna of his death on the cross. The structural analysis of the law given by Moses in terms of ethics as well as logic is needed for clarifying the contradiction. In an attempt to clarify the ethical value of the Hebrew Bible, its ethical concepts and logic were analyzed within the perspective of comparison with the ethical structure of the Kanun. It has been found that Jesus' preaching was logically contrariwise with the ethical value of the Hebrew Bible. Jesus was crucified because he could not abide by the law given by Moses.

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## Introduction

Jesus, who is believed to have appeared between around 4 B.C. and around A.D. 30, preached a new religious doctrine, saying “Love your enemies,...” (Matthew 5.44\*), which is deemed to be his most salient and original teaching (YAMAMOTO 2011:215-235).

It was said in the New Testament that the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1.17). Jesus was well aware that the law and the prophets were until John, who preached the kingdom of God, pressing every man into it (Luke 16.16). In spite of the law given by Moses being prevalent in society, Jesus had to say “from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John” (Matthew 11.12-13). Though John and Jesus commanded people to repent on account of the fact that the kingdom of God seemed at hand, the situation did not ameliorate, because “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one title of the law to fail” (Luke 16.17). Jesus declared that he was sent to this world by God in order to give a new commandment, saying “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also... Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5.38-44). In addition, Jesus made it clear that his advent marked the turning point in value, saying “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin... If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin:...” (John 15.22-24). Jesus exhorted his disciples to forgive others and ask forgiveness from God, saying: “Pray ye:... Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6.9-12), “forgive us our sins; for we forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil” (Luke 11.4). Jesus was ordained to shed his blood, which was supposed to save his people from their sins (Matthew 1.21). As Jesus’ blood was to be spilt on the cross as redemption in advance for all blood to be spilt in the future, he seemed to be endowed to advocate forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus’ preaching, which categorically commanded people to love enemies, seems to logically collide with the ethical structure of the Albanian customary code, the Kanun, which sanctions the offended party to take a retributive action against the offending party if the offended party cannot forgive them, whose offenses are associated with the concepts of “oath,” “honor,” “guest,” “blood,” and “food” (YAMAMOTO 2008: 230-259).

The fact that Jesus advocated the ethical value, which logically collides with the ethical structure of the Kanun (YAMAMOTO 2011: 215-235), suggests that the law given by Moses is related to the ethical value of a society without state power. However, the New Testament told that Jesus was not crucified on account of his advocacy of the new value, but on account of his supposed blasphemies. When the

scribes and the Pharisees heard what Jesus preached, they thought that Jesus spoke blasphemies, reasoning “Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” (Luke 5.21). The high priest declared that they had heard the blasphemy and Jesus should be condemned to death (Matthew 26.65-66, Mark 14.63-64). Jesus asked the Jews why they persecute him (John 10.32). The Jews answered, saying “For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God” (John 10.33). Thus, apparently, the theological contradiction between the scribes and the Pharisees who believed in the law given by Moses and Jesus who claimed to be the son of God led Jesus to crucifixion. However, it should be the Jesus’ new doctrine which actually compelled him to his death, since Jesus had no reason to manifest as the son of God if it were not for it. The ethical and logical contradictions between the law given by Moses and the new doctrine preached by Jesus seem to be the *causa magna* of Jesus’ death on the cross. The structural analysis of the law given by Moses in terms of ethics as well as logic is needed for clarifying the contradiction.

Since the law given by Moses was to deal with all issues in the society of the children of Israel before the advent of Jesus, its ethical value is assumed to be related to the ethical value of a society without state power. To our knowledge, there have been few studies on the ethical value of the Hebrew Bible in terms of the ethical value system of a society without state power. Though the Hebrew Bible in English version consists of 39 books, while that in the Hebrew version consists of 24 books, the stories told are considered to be the same (DEVER 2002: 1-21, SPIECKERMANN 2005: 337-352). In an attempt to clarify the ethical value of the Hebrew Bible, its ethical concepts and logic were analyzed within the perspective of comparison with the ethical structure of the Kanun. The hypotheses here are 1) the ethical value of the Hebrew Bible principally belongs to the category of that of a society without state power, 2) in the Hebrew Bible, two stories: the *story of the Almighty* and the *story of the process to the Almighty* are told in parallel from the early stage of the narratives until its end. When the *story of the process to the Almighty* finished, the eternal truth came out to light as the single God with almightiness and eternity. Then, the *story of the Almighty* started from the outset of the narratives.

## **Conclusion**

The ethical concepts of the Hebrew Bible have been extracted and compared with the ethical structure of Homeric society, as narrated in the Homeric epics such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Previously, it has been found that the ethical structure of Homeric society was similar to or the same as that of the Albanian customary code, the Kanun, which consists of the six concepts: “oath,” “honor,” “guest,” “blood,” “food,” and “revenge” (YAMAMOTO 2008: 260-289). In the present study, it has been found that the Hebrew Bible has the ethical value similar to that of the Kanun, though the narratives of the Hebrew Bible have features peculiar to it, such as: 1) that God insists that he is the only deity alive with almighty power, 2) the theme for almost all of the narrative is the endless repetition of making covenants between God and the children of Israel, and the failure of their fulfillment on the part of the children of Israel, 3) in conjunction with the children of Israel’s almost perennial failure to fulfill the covenants, the angry God punishes the children of Israel repeatedly, bringing them to

the brink of abyss, 4) God moves to rescue the children of Israel in their plight, who swear to abide by God's commandments without fail in return for his rescue and favor. In view of our previous hypothesis that the ethical structure of the Kanun developed on the basis of pagan culture with a myriad of deities (YAMAMOTO 2008: 230-259), it appears incomprehensible that the Hebrew Bible has the ethical value similar to that of the Kanun, because the fact that God in the Hebrew Bible asserts that he is the only deity with almighty power is apparently contradictory with this hypothesis or precludes it. However, when we read the narratives of the Hebrew Bible carefully, it becomes clear that God of the Hebrew Bible, whose name he reveals himself as "I AM THAT I AM" (Exodus 3:14) or JEHOVAH (YHWH or Yahweh) (Exodus 6:3), was not the only deity in this world. There are narratives, which suggest that numerous deities were existent along with the Hebrew God both in the community of the children of Israel and in the world (Genesis 35:2-4, Exodus 15:11, 18:11, Deuteronomy 6:14, 7:16, 13:2, 29:18, Joshua 24:15, Judges 5:8, 10:13-14, 11:24, Ruth 1:15), at least, in the early stage of the narrative. The Moses' praise of God, saying "the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward:..." (Deuteronomy 10:17) indicates that there were numerous deities and that God of the Hebrew Bible should be mightier than other deities. Moses explained the origin of his people before all the congregation of Israel, saying "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye...so the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him" (Deuteronomy 32:8-12), which implies four things: 1) when the Most High divided the earth according to the number of the nations, the LORD (I AM THAT I AM or YHWH) chose the children of Israel among the nations as his portion and the land of Canaan as his own, 2) each nation was to worship their own deities, 3) the children of Israel were to worship the LORD in the land of Canaan, 4) therefore, there should be no deities other than the LORD among the children of Israel. The fact that God repeatedly uttered the commandment that the children of Israel should not worship deities other than himself (Exodus 20:3, 34:14, Deuteronomy 4:19, 5:7, 6:14, 7:16, 8:19, 11:28, 12:30, 13:6-8, 29:18) seems to corroborate the assumption that there were numerous deities in this world. The "monolatry" was ordained for the children of Israel at the beginning of the narratives, while monotheism was not the case in this world (Sociology 18\*, 19). In view of this, the findings in the present study that the Hebrew Bible has the ethical value similar to that of the Kanun, does not contradict the fact that the ethical structure of the Kanun developed on the basis of pagan culture, i.e., the "unrestricted polytheism" (Origins 256\*\*).

The issues such as monolatry, aniconism, monotheism, the sublime abstraction, words and spirit appear to be the cornerstones which would enable us to unveil the "secret aims" (Origins 283) of the Hebrew Bible. Our findings indicate that 1) the monolatry was ordained for the children of Israel, while monotheism was not the case in this world at the beginning of the narratives, 2) the god of the Hebrew Bible, whose name he revealed himself as "I AM THAT I AM," was not the only god in this world, and

numerous deities were existent along with God both among the community of the children of Israel and among the nations, at least, in early stage of the narrative, 3) the monotheistic step of God's achieving the status of the single deity with almightiness and eternity proceeded in parallel with the course of his becoming infinite in time and space, and when strict monotheism gained a strong foothold, he rose to the heights of the sublime abstraction, 4) God and all his agents ceased to appear in concurrence with God's becoming the sublime abstraction, 5) before he achieved the status of the sublime abstraction, he uttered many words and commandments to the children of Israel, 6) when God became the sublime abstraction, he had two means to exercise his divine jurisdiction: words and spirit, 7) God's words, as the equivalents to his spirit, comprised the spirit, endowing the words with the divine might, which would fulfill his will in this world. The narratives of the Hebrew Bible suggest that the religious revelation and events which lead us to the discourse just described above had been in progress in conjunction with the narrative *history* of the children of Israel. When the fixing process of the text of the Hebrew Bible started under Ezra and Nehemiah after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile (Ezra 7:10, Nehemiah 9:38, 10:29), God was supposed not to utter new words or new commandments any more, and would not show signs or marvels or wonders explicitly any more. Only the words which God uttered in the past would be in the hands of the children of Israel in the form of the Scriptures. God's words and laws became critically important and indispensable for the faith and life of the children of Israel in later stage of the narratives. Freud warned us not to commit error when we try to understand the Hebrew Bible, saying "Anyone who sought to construct the Mosaic religion on the lines of the religion we meet with, according to the chronicles, in the life of the people during their first five hundred years in Canaan, would be committing the gravest methodological error" (Origins 293). What did the gravest methodological error really mean? It means that the readers of the Hebrew Bible so far failed to notice that two stories had proceeded side by side from the beginning of the narratives: the story of the Almighty God, as the sublime abstraction, who had words and spirit to fulfill his will in this world (the story of the Almighty), and the story of the deity who had to proceed a long way in order to achieve the glory of becoming the single, almighty God in the end (the story of the process to the Almighty). It appeared to Freud as if "care was taken to shift back commands and institutions of the present day into early times – to base them, as a rule, on the Mosaic law-giving – so as to derive from this their claim to being holy and binding" (Origins 287). No, care was not needed when "commands and institutions of the present day" were shifted back "into early times."

The narratives of the Hebrew Bible began with the story of the Almighty, which announced that the single, almighty God created this world. When God made this world, the Spirit of God did it through words (Genesis 1:1-3, 1:6, 1:9, 1:11, 1:14, 1:20, 1:24, 1:26, 1:28-29). In the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, only humans are given the following privileges as compared with other creatures: 1) God created man in his own image (Genesis 1:26-27), 2) humans were to have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moved upon the earth (Genesis 1:28), 3) humans were given every herb bearing seed, which upon the face of all the earth, and every tree (Genesis 1:29), 4) God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life himself, thus, man became a

living soul (Genesis 2:7). Why was God entitled to create this world and give only humans all living things that moved on the earth, as well as herbs and trees? It was because God was the only divinity in the universe, which was almighty and eternal. Why was God seen to be almighty and eternal? Freud asked the question himself: “it is less easy to understand why there may only be a single god, why precisely the advance from henotheism to monotheism acquires an overwhelming significance” (Origins 376-377). Of course, the children of Israel needed evidence that clarified that their God was almighty and eternal, i.e., “reference to the truth” (Origins 378). What revealed the truth of God’s almightiness and eternity? According to Freud, it was the *history* narrated in the Hebrew Bible that revealed the truth of God, though the “*historical truth*” may not be in perfect agreement with the “*material truth*” (Origins 378). The *historical truth* was referred to in the story of the process to the Almighty, that is, the story of God’s “path to monotheism” (Sociology 20). The story of the process to the Almighty in the Hebrew Bible narrated the *historical truth* concerning how God achieved the eventual, undisputable victory over all other formidable powers and deities, which had antagonized the children of Israel (WEBER 1993:20-31). Upon this *historical truth*, God declared his testament to wield his vengeful force against the children of Israel who might forsake him and the nations who might be opposed to his scheme and will on the day of his vengeance (Isaiah 63:3-6, 66:15-18, Ezekiel 38:19-22). If there might be a gap between the truth of God’s almightiness and eternity, and the *historical truth*, it is solved by the faith and the piety to God, since “the pious solution contains the truth – but the *historical truth* and not the *material truth*” (Origins 378).

When the eternal truth came out to light as being that of the single God in the last stage, the narrative in this line was resumed from its beginning. In the course of the two stories being told, the story of the process to the Almighty might have “had its form changed back into conformity, or even perhaps into identity” (Origins 287), with the story of the Almighty. Then, the former might have been revised according to the “secret aims” among “a small circle of the people” (Origins 292), who might be said to “have falsified it in the sense of their secret aims, have mutilated and amplified it and have even changed it into its reverse” (Origins 283). Who was the small circle of the people? What were their secret aims? Here, we will not dwell on the issue of the “secret aims” among “a small circle of the people.” Since it would require an abundance of assumptions and surmises, a discussion based on them would not shed light on this issue. It will be discussed briefly. The narratives in the Hebrew Bible suggest that “a small circle of the people” consisted of people such as prophets and the priests (2 Kings 17:13, 22:8-9, Ezra 5:1, 6:14, 7:10-11, Nehemiah 8:1-3, 8:8-9, Jeremiah 36:1-3, 36:32, 45:1). It is not farfetched to assume that “a small circle of the people” was expected to mirror the passionate, jealous disposition of God, since God’s resentments toward the blasphemous apostasy among the children of Israel and the nations which destroyed Samaria and Jerusalem, and God’s urge to avenge the children of Israel and himself, seem to be the driving force, which impelled the small circle of the people to stick to God’s words and commandments. It is safely surmised that since “a small circle of the people” experienced the un-describable hardships themselves in the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem, they harbored resentments towards the other nations and formidable outside powers which performed the actions,

and wanted to avenge them (Psalm 9:12, 18:47, 59:5, 69:27-28, 79:10, 92:7-9, 94:1-2, 94:23, Isaiah 59:17-18, Jeremiah 20:12). Prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel exploded the pent-up emotions in prophecy, while the “religion of the Psalms is full of the need for vengeance, and the same motif occurs in the priestly reworkings of ancient Israelite traditions” (Sociology 111). The children of Israel’s political misfortune forced God and the small circle of the people to have “an experience which must be regarded as traumatic” (Origins 293). Thus, “resentment,” “a conscious or unconscious desire for vengeance,” and “great hopes of future compensation” (Sociology 110-111) became the fountain of the emotions, which manifested as God’s wrath, curses and the prophecy of doomsday, inspiring the small circle of the people to stick to God’s covenants with the children of Israel at all costs.

Why did God and the small circle of the people stick to the covenants at all cost? It is related to the issue of the “secret aims.” What were the secret aims? The clue to solve this question may be found in what Moses said: “man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live” (Deuteronomy 8:3), indicating that the aims should reside in God’s words. God revealed why he liberated the enslaved children of Israel in Egypt from bondage, saying “I wrought for my name’s sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt” (Ezekiel 20:9). Then, God confessed his “secret aims” of all things that he had done to the children of Israel, saying: “I will be sanctified in you before the heathen” (Ezekiel 20:41), “I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them” (Ezekiel 39:21). The Hebrew God did everything for the sake of his honor and glory, which were to be manifest everywhere in the world including in heathens (Isaiah 42:6-8), through the absolute humbleness and total submission on the part of the children of Israel (Ezekiel 36:22-23, 39:7, 39:23-25). It was God’s ultimate aim. The fact that God’s aim was revealed through Ezekiel was of great significance because God’s spirit took possession of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 11:5). As the Oracle of God (2 Samuel 16:23), Ezekiel in trance delivered a divine message to the children of Israel, like the *Pythia* in Delphi did it in ancient Greek world (ANDRONICOS 1996). Did the small circle of the people share the aims? If they did, why did they share it? According to Freud, they shared it on account of: “an enchantment of their self-esteem owing to their consciousness of having been chosen,” the feeling of exaltation owing to “the conception of a grander God,” the belief of having “some kind of share in his greatness” (Origins 359). It became not only “necessary to do something to glorify him” (Origins 284), but crucial to do so for the children of Israel’s honor and pride (Psalm 106:4-5). Since the honor, pride, and glory in this world were vital to God and the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 26:19, Isaiah 45:25, 48:11, 66:18, 66:23), “the next world or a life after death” (Origins 264) mattered little in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, “the possibility of existence continuing after death is nowhere and never mentioned,” and immortality was entirely renounced in the Hebrew Bible (Origins 257). It should be emphasized that in the Hebrew Bible, two stories - the story of the Almighty and the story of the process to the Almighty - were told in parallel from the early stage of the narratives until its end. When the story of the process to the Almighty finished, the eternal truth came out to light as a single

God with almightiness and eternity. Then, the story of the Almighty starts from the outset of the narratives. While God, in the process to the Almighty, uttered words himself or through mediators such as angels and the prophets, God ceased doing so when he achieved the status of the single deity with almightiness and eternity, leaving the words, which were written down in the books. Then, God's commandments and laws in the Scriptures became the everlasting righteousness and the eternal truth.

It has been found that the Hebrew Bible had the ethical value, which is structurally similar to or the same as the ethical structure of the Kanun, though the narratives of the Hebrew Bible had features peculiar to it. Our assumption that the ethical structure of the Kanun developed on the basis of paganism seems applicable to the Hebrew Bible on account of the fact that God was not the only deity when this world was opened to humans, but there were numerous deities. In spite of the fact that the monolatry was ordained for the children of Israel at the beginning of the narratives, monotheism was not the case in this world. In this sense, it can be said that the ethical value of the Hebrew Bible represents the tradition or culture, which is far older than the *history* narrated in it (FALK 2001: 1-22, PATRICK 1985: 63-96). It is safely assumed that before any state power appeared in human society, humans lived with a value system which regards "revenge" as the act of justice. This value system is defined by the social condition where there is no judicial power to punish the offender except for the revenge prosecuted by the offended party. When a state power with proper authority, which is able to impose judicial decisions and punish offenders, is firmly founded, people are willing to delegate the rights of revenge to the state power. It has been assumed that modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) originated in Africa between 150,000 and 200,000 years ago, and dispersed to Eurasia sometime after 65,000 years ago. The ethical value system of a society without state power, as represented by the ethical structure of the Kanun, seems to be the first form of ethics that humans have ever had (YAMAMOTO 2008: 230-259, YAMAMOTO 2008: 383-394). Humans who had been living in a small region in Africa came across a cultural apparatus, such as "guest" and "food," through their primordial, crucial experiences, which enabled them to establish a friendly relationship between people of different backgrounds (YAMAMOTO 2008: 383-394, YAMAMOTO 2008: 408-416, YAMAMOTO 2012: 319-339) tens of thousands of years ago, before their dispersal to a wide area. This is the starting point from which humans fully developed the ethical value system of a society without state power. People who founded the system prospered, multiplied, and spread all over the world, being accompanied by this cultural apparatus (YAMAMOTO 2013: 79-116). When, how and in which conditions did humans begin to change the ethical value? It was the new doctrine preached by Gotama in the fifth century B.C., the philosophy forged by Socrates and Plato in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., and the new doctrine preached by Jesus in the first century A.D. that precipitated the cataclysmic change in the ethical value among humans. The ethical value of the Hebrew Bible, which belongs to the ethical value system of a society without state power, is older than these doctrines or philosophy. When Jesus preached a new religious doctrine, saying "whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also....Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5.39-44), his preaching was



logically contrariwise with the ethical value of the Hebrew Bible. The Pharisees and chief priests cried for persecuting Jesus, saying “Crucify him, crucify him... We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God” (John 19.6-7). Jesus was crucified because he could not abide by the law given by Moses.

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- Contact email: [yamamoto@design.kyushu-u.ac.jp](mailto:yamamoto@design.kyushu-u.ac.jp)