

deficient commander. Rather, they maintain every confidence that the law incorporates not only power but also wisdom.

Third, the yoke of the law is not onerous —or at least not only onerous. Rather, according to scripture, the requirements imposed on Israel are a source of joy and peace.²³ That is, of course, not an impartial viewpoint, but it receives support both from the phenomenology of obedience and from the foundational postulate that Israel's God is loving and merciful. Even if the rationale for some decree is not apparent, even if the penalties consequent on violation seem draconian, there nonetheless is overriding reason to believe that the system of law taken as a whole cannot be improved upon as a structure for human flourishing.

That is not to maintain that in every instance where *p* is commanded, there exists a balance of reasons on behalf of *p* rather than any alternative and, furthermore, that is why God commands *p*. For example, there may be no rationale whatsoever for disallowing pork chops rather than lamb chops. Perhaps, though, it is a useful discipline to have some food or other off-limits, and so the covenantal precepts include a food prohibition that is in itself arbitrary. If so, it is the prohibition that makes eating pork bad and not vice versa. The underlying theological jurisprudence of Torah does not provide a univocal answer to the Euthyphro question. Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed is not the last word on the logic of that jurisprudence, but it is a necessary word.

A representative passage is Psalms 19:7–10: "The law of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul. The LORD's instruction never fails, and makes the simple wise. The precepts of the LORD are right and rejoice the heart. The commandment of the LORD shines clear and gives light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure and abides for ever. The LORD's decrees are true and righteous every one, more to be desired than gold, pure gold in plenty, sweeter than syrup or honey from the comb." No late-night infomercial endorses its product so fulsomely.

Fourth, the covenant is not in the first instance between God and each individual taken singly but rather between God and the collectivity of Israel. Not just the nation's well-being but its very existence are a function of the Sinai undertaking. Covenant informs them what to do but also how to be. It means that Israel will thenceforth not only have a collection of biographies but a history. The covenant is a charter for communal achievement. Insofar as individuals have concern not only for their own self-serving ends but also for their kin, their neighbors, and their posterity, they possess additional bases to value that covenant.

Taken together, these constitute compelling reason to observe commands both major and minor. Provenance in covenant is itself reason-conferring. At least that is so when the covenantal partner is of uniquely sterling quality.

D. Transgenerational covenant. The covenant at Sinai was made with the living but clearly was not intended for them alone. Indeed, scripture emphasizes that the generation of those who received the law at the mountain was deficient. They are described as neglectful, rebellious, "stiffnecked." These failings count against their piety quotient. In addition, they exhibit distinctively political shortcomings. In every time and place, people need courage if they are to maintain the institutions of a free polity. The escapees from Egypt, however, are portrayed as excessively timorous. The spies who return from scouting out the land Israel is to occupy are dispiritingly negative, and their interlocutors almost swoon with fear (Numbers 13). Because they lack heart, they are disqualified