UNITY AND FRAGMENTATION OF THE SELF IN LEIBOWITZ'S IDEA OF FAITH AND THEIR REPERCUSSIONS: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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1. Introduction

This article deals with the issue of the self in relation to Yeshayahu Leibowitz's idea of faith and the characterization of the believer it drives. This issue does not appear in his writings as a distinct theme, although the very being of the self is not denied there explicitly. Elucidating and extricating this issue from the depths of Leibowitz's discussion of religious faith, which will be the focus of discussion in this article, can also serve as an essential basis for understanding some fundamental components of his thought, including: the origin of religious faith, the engatement in religious life, the status of God, and the significance and status of the individual personality in the religious way of life. My central argument is that Leibowitz's thought contains two concepts of self, which can be related, generally speaking, to the modernist ethos and the postmodernist ethos.

The modernist self appears as a symbolic project whose center is the search for identity, interpretation, reflection about the self and the surroundings, and, in general, an ongoing effort to obtain meaning in existence. One of the central challenges this perception of self faces is in clarifying the relation between the internal world, perceived as a unity, and the external reality, distributed into a multiplicity of contexts and relations. The dialectic weaving of the external and internal dimensions together reveals the human experience as a unity enfolding multiplicity

within itself. In this context, the self's unity does not just denote the existence of a mutual reference between the self's various experiences, but also the affirmation of the self's recurrence in its various experiences. In fact, the repeated presence of the self is what connects these experiences with each other, thus affirming the identity of the self participating in them. The term "presence" therefore describes not only the embodiments of the modernist self, but also the recognition that the self is a real entity not identical to any of its particular experiences, but denoting the entirety of these experiences and, in some cases, transcending it. Some important aspects of the modernist perception of self[1] are outlined by Charles Taylor:

> We are selves only in that certain issues matter for us. What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me…. These things have significance for me, and the issue of my identity is worked out, only through a language of interpretation which I have come to accept as a valid articulation of these issues. To ask what a person is, in abstraction from his or her self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn't in principle be an answer.
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> So one crucial fact about a self or person that emerges from all this is that it is not like an object in the usually understood sense. We are not selves in the way that we are organisms… We are living beings with these organs quite independently of our self-understandings or -interpretations, or the meanings things have for us. But we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions….[2]

In contrast, the concept of self typical of the postmodernist ethos appears as an object, one of several composing the human sphere, which does not possess the establishing status or

authority determining the meaning of the individual's action in the various experiential contexts. These determine the personality each time according to the individual's performance within the boundaries of the single experience. One of the most notable features characteristic of the postmodernist discourse regarding the self is that it marginalizes the category of identity in favor of the category of self.[3] The approaches assuming this perception of self repeatedly argue the argument that the self cannot be expressed beyond its practices.[4] A recurring emphasis in this approach is the inability to grant rational or other meaning to the components of the multiplicity, as they do not combine into one organic body. Unlike the modernist perception of the self, the one anchored in the postmodernist ethos also rejects the possibility of achieving unity, including dialectical unity, from this multiplicity. As a result, the self appears as a "flexible, fractured, fragmented, decentered and brittle" entity.[5]

Indeed, the element of multiplicity also appears in the modernist idea of self, but the postmodern understanding of self denies the existence of the self-referential mechanisms that could enable individuals to examine the relations between the various experiences in which they participate. In any case, it rejects the possibility of forming a unity from them. Instead, the multiplicity is enhanced, creating a split that delimits each single experience within its own boundaries and even denying the self's very existence beyond its appearances in the different experiences. Many of the fundamental elements described here appear in the approach of Erving Goffman, considered one of the precursors of the postmodernist theory of self.[6] In his words:

> [The Self] does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action, being generated by that attribute of local events which renders them interpretable by witnesses. A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to

> the performed character, but this imputation—this self—is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited.[7]

The two perceptions of self presented here are based on the assumption that people act within the possible multiplicity of contexts of experience and life. However, these are anchored in different ontological understandings of human experience and of the reality in which human beings live and act. The assumption of the modernist ethos perceives people as sovereign entities with the power to influence the contexts of their activities and to design the relations between them. Furthermore, the self is perceived as an arena in which the various experiences are assimilated, and where they crystallize into one unity constituting the individual's identity. In contrast, the perception of self related to the postmodernist ethos, particularly in its more extreme forms, usually does not acknowledge the existence of a relation between different contexts of activity. Accordingly, the various contexts of human activity are split, appearing as separate realms that cannot be identified with a particular self.

The traces of both ethoses of self, modernist as well as postmodernist, are apparent in Leibowitz's idea of faith, but their status within it is not equivalent. On the immediate level, the modernist self plays a role in the act of choosing to believe, at the basis of which lies an experience of self that bears an identity and strives for personal expression. However, once the choice has been made, within the experience of religious practice, the modernist self gives way to a fragmentary self, divided between different life contexts. The connection of the self that

fulfils the religious experience to the postmodernist ethos is apparent in its fragmentation. It refers to the distributed human experience within the multiplicity of contexts and relations, and its expressions are explicitly particular. However, on the deeper level, even within the field that is distributed and split into different contexts, of which religious experience is only one, the traces of the modernist idea of self are still apparent in the effort to realize control that would reinforce the separation between them and give the split itself a religious significance. The aim of this paper will thus be to expose Leibowitz's complex dialog with these two ideas of self that are present in his thought, and to discover the implications for the formation of the character of the believer within his thought.

2. The Spheres of Human Activity

Three different spheres of human activity can be inferred from Leibowitz's thinking, each with its own characteristics. First, there is the individual world of the believer as a person, to which access is blocked off from any kind of reflection or rationality. Second, there is the world of religious experience, which is ruled by Divine commandments that cover all the religious praxis as well as the instructions for its fulfillment. Finally, there is the natural world that can be accessed by every means developed by human civilization. True, the sphere in which religious life takes place is that of the natural world, "in the world as it is." Moreover, Jewish commandments appear to be a program that governs daily life,[8] which suggests rules and norms that dictate one's eating, mourning, celebrating, and so on. Nonetheless, the split between the three spheres is not violated by this fact, for these rules are considered God-given. Furtheremore, as will become clear later on, Leibowitz saw the commandments as conflicting with human nature. In any event, Leibowitz's thinking is directed exclusively to the sphere of religious

experience. He used to say that he never discussed "religion" or "religiosity," but rather Judaism, which is a particular way of obedience to the Divine commandments.[9]

The understanding of the arena of human activity as composed of multiplicity can be reconciled with both the modernist conception of self and the postmodernist conception of self. Only understanding the contents filling each of these conceptions and the relations between them reveals the connection to each ethos. To a large extent, the issue of the self and its complex connection to these ethoses is only treated in regards to the first sphere, while the other two do not receive special reference. Leibowitz does not propose a new idea of the actual reality in which human beings, believers and non-believers, regularly participate. Nor does he usually discuss the specific religious rituals related to the believer's daily life. Instead, he assumed the context of religious law as formulated by the halachic authorities.[10] However, the duality typical of the first sphere, fed simultaneously by the modernist and the postmodernist ethoses of self, trickles into the other two spheres in the form of a radical split, which Leibowitz perceives as having religious value.

One of the surprising things about Leibowitz's thought is that even regarding the sphere of individuality, at the focus of the current discussion, Leibowitz says little. The main information concerning the believer in Leibowitz's writings depicts a person who out of free will has decided to accept the whole framework of God's commandments—a decision that can be taken by a secular person or, in the case of one who was educated religiously, by an adult. Leibowitz describes the decision to believe as unrelated to any factual state of affairs, and as such it cannot be imposed by any facts or rational reasoning. In any event, the decision to believe is an indispensable condition for the very constitution of the religious way of life in which God's commandments will be realized. Allegedly, Leibowitz's argument that the decision to believe

stems from one's individuality may enable using the study of that act as a key to the understanding of the believer's individual personality.

Yet this stance requires justification, for it is quite obvious that not every act of will can be considered as a means to access one's personality. Therefore, what is demanded in the first place is a clear distinction between the will to believe, which is a free will for it represents "an obligation that one imposes upon oneself,"[11] to other wills. For the present, Harry Frankfurt's distinction between two kinds of wills—"First-order desires" and "Second-order desires"—can be of value for understanding how people's free will can testify about their personality. Whereas the former relate to human beings' motives, which are common also to "members of certain other species" and are basically designed to satisfy biological needs, the latter are "particularly characteristic of humans."[12]"Someone has a desire of second order when he wants simply to have a certain desire or when he wants a certain desire to be his will." In other words, desires of the second order take place whenever one wants a certain desire "to be effective—that is to provide the motive in what he actually does."[13] Logically, the fact that human beings may experience desires of the second order shows that "they are capable of wanting to be different ... from what they are."[14] To conclude, people's ability to identify themselves with a certain will, and the fact that such a will may generate changes in their personality and life, which underlies Frankfurt's idea of desire of the second order, provides substance for elucidating the subjectivity of religious people out of their will to believe.[15] The introduction of the split between the two types of self and the believer's sphere of individuality starts with Leibowitz's argument, whereby a severance between the will to believe and the realization of God's commandments will void the will to believe of any meaning. According to him "Faith in Judaism, is the religion of Mitzvoth [commandments], and apart from this religion Jewish faith does not exist."[16]

One of the tangible expressions of this split is apparent in the statement that not only is it impossible to trace back the roots of the decision to believe, but it is also impossible to influence the believer's decision. Leibowitz states that "Even if one could be absolutely certain that the world was created by the will of God, and that He liberated our forefathers from Egypt, and that He reveals Himself to them on Mount Sinai … one may still refuse to serve God."[17] That is to say that even when the proof of religious faith seems certain, an individual can still reject it or at least overlook the practical norms that come out of it—two options that for Leibowitz mean one and the same thing. It transpires, then, that since the decision to believe is not an outcome of external circumstances, but is embedded in the depths of the individual's internality, it is not predictable and not predicable. George Herbert Mead's distinction between two concepts of self, "me" and "I," may help emphasize the radical nature of the idea of self at the basis of Leibowitz's approach. The first constitutes the product of socialization processes, while the latter denotes a dimension not assimilated into the social framework enabling diversity among individuals. As Mead put it:

> To have self-consciousness one must have the attitude of the other in one's own organism as controlling the thing he is going to do. What appears in the immediate experience of one's self in taking that attitude is what we term the "me." […] Over against the "me" is the "I." The individual … is not only a citizen, a member of the community, but he is one who reacts to this community and in his reaction to it […] changes it.[18]; […] The attitudes involved are gathered from the group, but the individual in whom they are organized has the opportunity of giving them an expression which perhaps has never taken place before.[19]

In Mead's terms, we can say that in the context of faith, Leibowitz stresses the "I," and creates a radical contrast between it and whatever can be contained within the boundaries of the "me." However, unlike Mead, Leibowitz does not recognize the power of social and collective processes to influence the self, and eventually his idea of self significantly pushes aside any social dimension in the way the believer is understood. Moreover, while for Mead the "I" is a dimension in the phenomenon of self, for Leibowitz it has acquired separate reality, not related to the "me" in any way. Anthony Elliott rightly notes:

> […] this conceptual move also allows Mead to avoid the charge that his theory of the self is deterministic—that is, that the self is a mere reflection of the attitudes of general society, or an internalization of social structure…. Mead's distinction between "me" and "I" thus introduces a level of contingency and ambivalence to each social encounter: the "I" reacts to the "me" in a social context, but we cannot be sure exactly how that 'I' will react.[20]

It appears that the dimension of the "I," which in Mead is intended to protect from a severe idea of self limited to the symbolic meanings formed within a social context, operates almost the opposite way for Leibowitz, who refuses to grant the religious action a symbolic meaning that would connect it to the world of human concepts. Instead, he seeks to understand religious life as aimed at a transcendent entity, even at the cost of losing the meaning of the religious actions. This choice undoubtedly contributes significantly to the severity typical of Leibowitz's idea of faith, which, without the ability to contain it, forms a deep divide within the

being of the self. Thus, while the act of deciding to believe shows the modernist ethos of the self as a unity, and as a presence that forms it, these dissipate immediately after the decision stage thus separated from the sphere of religious law in which the self, at least the self as a crystallizing element, is absent. Eventually, the duality of the concepts of self permeates the believer's sphere of individuality, where the features of the fragmented and split postmodern self are apparent. More accurately, the split is not only within the sphere of individuality, but also between it and the other two spheres of human activity: that of religious practice and that of the secular life.[21]

The far-reaching implications of this idea of self apparent in Leibowitz's approach to the believer will serve to broaden the discussion later on. First, to the extent that belief is based on the individual's decision to believe, the decision itself does not say anything about this believer as an individual, and its implications for shaping the believer's life do not bear the person's individual stamp, but are rather pre-determined by religious laws. Moreover, it is impossible to come to terms with the connection between the actuality by which the believer is surrounded and the believer's decision to believe. Actually, the possibility that such a connection does not exist at all was not explicitly dismissed by Leibowitz, who constantly employs restricted language about faith:

> I know no ways to faith other than faith itself…. I do not regard religious faith as a conclusion. It is rather an *evaluative decision* that one makes, and, like all evaluations, it does not result from any information one has acquired, but is *a commitment to which one binds himself*.…

> No method can guide him in this. Nothing he could experience would lead him to faith if faith did not spring from his own decision and resolve.... It is not nature or history that give origin to religious faith. In that case, faith could have no meaningful value. It would impose itself on man even as the findings of science impose themselves on any mind that understands them, leaving no room for choice, deliberation, and decision.[22]

The argument that the individual background is shut from any observation remains valid also in the case of people who can express the considerations they took into account before deciding to accept God's commandments, for these can be meaningful only for their owner. Those same considerations will have a different meaning for another believer, or even at a different period in the lifetime of the same believer. This is the inescapable nature of a decision that does not stem from objective data and hence cannot be explicated.

In Leibowitz's writings one can find two kinds of reasoning for his extreme understanding of the individuality. The first refers to biblical history, claiming that even though the Bible is full of miraculous proofs of the existence of God, as well as attempts to persuade people to believe, those attempts failed completely.

> Scriptural historiography teaches us that events in which "the finger of God" is incontestably manifest do not inevitably lead to faith and service of God. The generations that witnessed wonders and miracles in Egypt … did not believe. Forty days after the revelation at Sinai they made the golden calf. The prophets who rose in Israel and delivered the word of God did not succeed in influencing even one person to repent.

> On the other hand, during many periods in Jewish history multitudes of men and women adhered to God and His Torah, and sacrificed their lives even though God was never revealed to them, no prophets rose among them, and miracles were never performed for them … still they believed. There is no correlation between what occurs in nature or in history … and man's faith in God and his willingness to serve him.[23]

Leibowitz does not intend to deny either the occurrence of what he terms "religious facts" (such as the creation of the world, the revelation at Mount Sinai, etc.), or the important role they played in the collective consciousness of the Jewish people throughout history. Though Leibowitz refers especially to historical facts, this is also true for other facts of any kind (natural, psychological, etc.). Like Spinoza in *Tractatus,* Leibowitz rejects the theological interpretation of such facts, claiming that it inescapably rests upon human understanding and hence cannot argue for religious validity. In his words: "Historical facts … per se, are religiously indifferent. No historical event assumes religious meaning unless it is an expression of religious consciousness … of the participants in the event."[24] Religious meaning can be conferred upon a historical fact solely when there is a commandment that attributes such meaning to it. To be more precise, only a commandment can indicate that a religious meaning was bestowed upon a certain fact. Hence facts as such cannot speak by themselves of religious meaning.[25]

The pronounced distrust of the possible contribution of facts to faith clearly represents Leibowitz's effort to protect the independence of religious faith from external reality—namely the secular sphere.

Yet, it seems that more profound support for Leibowitz's concept of faith can be elicited from his strong dualistic worldview, which he proclaims in another context. According to Leibowitz:

> […] there is no logical correlation […] between our concepts which refer to things or events of the psychic reality and those which relate to the same in the physical reality … nothing can be changed in the physical world because of the psychic reality. On the other hand, my psychic reality, which I know by a direct acquaintance, is totally independent of any physical reality, in any event of logical necessity;… we do not discover any functional association between these two worlds.[26]

In the same context, Leibowitz states that one's wills are composed of "the intimate realm of one's consciousness." In contrast to what can be observed and recognized by everyone, one's wills and the like (wishes, thinking, feelings, etc.) cannot be estimated or evaluated. These are known only to their owner, who is familiar with them and does not need any method or guidance in order to know them.[27] That is to say that people's consciousness concerns their intimate realm, and as such it cannot be communicated with other individuals.

The connection to the postmodernist ethos of self largely explains Leibowitz's argument whereby the will to believe cannot be subjected to any objectification or reasoning.[28] Furthermore, it seems that the case of the will to believe in particular uncovers the dualism characteristic to the human being as a psycho-physical entity that participates at the same time in two different worlds: internal and external. The religious belief belongs to the first world and is blocked from the second.[29] What distinguishes between believers of the same religion is not the

religious praxis that is regulated by the religious authority and leaders and is applied equally to each member, but rather their concealed individuality, out of which their initiated will to believe stems. Believers differ, then, from each other on the basis of their internal world, i.e., the same basis that separates between human beings as such—be they believers or non-believers. While the modernist ethos is apparent in Leibowitz in the understanding whereby one's individuality is the indispensable origin of religious belief, the postmodernist ethos of self is expressed in his argument that believers cannot be defined by their beliefs. However, whatever the individual differences between believers, these cannot have any religious validity.

The blocking of the will to believe to any external observation is supported, then, by an ontological theory that differentiates and separates between the two realms of being in which human beings participate. For Leibowitz considers human beings' individuality as incapable of communicating itself understandably to other people, and since the will to believe appears in his thinking as stemming exactly from this realm, it transpires that it is impossible to come to terms with the origin of faith.[30] In other words, though the entire individuality is involved in one's decision to believe, that decision cannot bear witness to the individual's personality. Hence, the individuality that is responsible for choosing a life ruled by religious commandments does not become transparent because of that choice. At most, one can speak of it in a negative way, i.e., as not observable, not communicative, etc. Thus, in Leibowitz's mind, even a religion like Judaism, whose commandments demand so much involvement and co-operation with other practitioners, cannot get in touch with the believer's personality, which finally remains unaffected and separated from the religious experience.

The double explanation of the blocking of the will to believe to rational discourse is evidence of the feebleness of rationality and objectivity when they are faced with the

phenomenon of religious faith. Indeed, these features are very much responsible for the link between Leibowitz's idea of faith and the postmodernist ethos of self. Such feebleness cannot be repaired or overcome by new findings about faith or with the help of newly discovered methods. Yet the elimination of the individual being from the explication of faith does not make the will to believe irrational or capricious. Harry Frankfurt rightly contends that one is not allowed to deduce from the equation of the personality with the will that the individual personality is deprived of reason and rationality. For him, "it is having second-order volitions, and not having second-order desires generally, that … [is] essential to being a person."[31] Therefore the very structure of personality presupposes the person's rationality.

Furthermore, it is exactly the absence of any correlation between two of the contexts of human activity denoted in Leibowitz's approach, i.e., the internal one of individuality and the external one of the secular sphere, and the blocking of the first from the second, that left him no choice but to identify religious belief with the praxis of God's commandments. So, he states, "Faith and worship are born of the resolve and decision of man to serve God, which is the whole of Judaism."[32] Finally, the will to believe that led to the acceptance of God's commandments as a whole reveals the decision that the believer has taken as sharp and clear-cut in its very nature. The meaning of this is twofold: firstly, that decision creates a dramatic change in the believer's life from the normative aspect. From that point on, religious experience is entirely ruled by Divine commandments. In addition, it blurs or even casts aside the individual's background which preceded it. Therefore, though the decision to believe is anchored in the believer's individuality, this individuality does not endure in active religious experience. Hence, the reason there is no use in discussing ways to religious belief stems not only from the fact that once he has taken that decision, no remnant of the original individuality is left, but also from the specific

nature of the individuality of the believer. This sphere transpires as an arena where a struggle takes place between the two ethoses of self—the modernist one aiming at unity, and the postmodernist one that denies the very possibility of unity. Even if we assume that Leibowitz was not completely aware of the internal split within the concept of self on which his idea of faith was based, several penetrating questions arise: what were the considerations that supported this extreme conception of the believer in Leibowitz's thinking that created such a sharp separation between individuals' subjectivity and their faith? Is it accurate to say that once the decision has been taken, the believer as an individual personality no longer has any impact on his or her religious experience? Can it be really possible that within the religious praxis no remnant will be left to the being and personality that preceded the decision to believe? Which kind of philosophical problems arise from such a conception? The following section will be dedicated to uncovering the reasoning for the stance of the believer within the religious praxis in Leibowitz's thinking.

C. The Strategy of the Split

The understanding of religious faith as identical with the praxis of God's commandments was designated by Leibowitz both to promote a specific idea of the Jewish religion, which is free of subjectivization and naturalization that would turn it into a human matter, and to defend believers' right to remain individuals despite their total commitment to an authority external to themselves.

The first goal is based on the modernist ethos of self, aiming to maintain the general character of its objects and to prevent the assimilation of private criteria into their evaluation. In contrast, the second goal is anchored in the postmodernist ethos of self, aiming to protect it from

fixation and to thwart any attempt to understand it using external criteria—objective, cultural, and social. In regard to these goals, this strategy, which will be exposed as follows, seems to find its preliminary justification. Logically, if one does not want religion to be subjective and subjectivity to be religious, one must separate between the religious faith and the individuality of the believer. Religion and subjectivity speak different languages, express themselves in dissimilar behavior, and demand unalike capabilities. Therefore, mixing up religiosity with one's subjectivity confuses things that cannot get along.[33] The *first function* of the split is the definition of the limits of the realms of discourse according to the spheres of human experience. Concerning the goals toward which the strategy of the split is aiming, guarding the boundaries of each sphere of being appears to be an indispensable condition. This is no more than a formal or necessary condition, but not a sufficient one, for it does little directly to promote the specific meaning of religion and subjectivity to which Leibowitz's thinking was aiming.

The *second function* of the splitting strategy is narrowing and limiting the scope of religious life solely to what is defined by the religious commandments. It is true that in the case of Judaism these cover a vast amount of details. Nevertheless, Leibowitz stresses that outside these borders, believers are free to conduct themselves just like everybody else, namely, like non-believers. Accordingly, the figure of the believer is disclosed as bearing a resemblance to that of the non-believer, except for the part of the believer's life that is ruled by defined commandments. That is to say that the phenomenology of the believer in Leibowitz's thinking is not identical with his general conception of anthropology. As a matter of fact, according to Leibowitz, aspects in the individual's personality that appear in the phenomenon of religious belief do not come into view in a person's religious experience as a believer. Leibowitz exemplifies the differences between the believer and the non-believer in regard to their attitude

towards seeing themselves as natural beings; whereas a non-believer can live in peace with the very fact of being a natural and finite being, believers struggle with the same fact and strive to get in touch with infinity. In Leibowitz's words:

> The religious person is different from the one who did not accept the authority of heaven or freed himself from that authority, in that he [the religious person] did reconcile himself with the fact that he is part of the natural reality which he cannot transcend. His belief … is not in accord with the objective reality in which he already finds himself and with which he will never be in accord.[34]

The present function relates more directly to the content that fills the religious sphere, guarding it from spreading to spheres that might distort the essence of the religious existence as referring to the transcendent entity. Without doubt, to achieve this goal, the modernist idea of self may suffice, as it realizes control of the spheres of life, and in any case may prevent leakage from one sphere of human activity to another. But this does not exhaust the purpose of the second function of Leibowitz's strategy of split, relating more radically to the sphere of individuality where his idea of faith is anchored. In this context, Leibowitz appears to be wishing to fortify the understanding whereby a religious person is nonetheless a natural being, and hence is doomed to carry out an unending struggle in order to realize a religious faith. By narrowing and limiting the scope of religion in one's life, Leibowitz not only takes into account the fact that believers unavoidably remain natural beings. An approach that strives to separate between people's individuality and their faith may also decrease the conflict between the two by making room also for non-religious aspects and activities that concern the natural existence.[35]

Consequently, a religion that covers a delimited sphere appears to be a single dimension among others, none of which claim superiority, let alone exclusivity. The limited concept of religion appears as respecting the individuality of the believer and defending it from the possible invasion of elements that belong to the religious sphere.

On the face of it, one can argue that Leibowitz thus leaves open the possibility of accepting the modernist ethos or the postmodernist ethos. On the one hand, his approach nurtures the split between the realms of human activity, expressing a modernist understanding of human existence. On the other hand, the significance of the split is not contained within the religious sphere but in the realm of the individual, and this, as we have seen, appears for him to be a dark area that cannot be objectified. At this point, the dominance of the postmodernist ethos in Leibowitz's idea of faith becomes clearly apparent, and is more suitable than the modernist ethos. From a modernist perspective, we seem to have a paradox, since what may enable religion, which is based on accepting authority, is the individual's control in acting to fortify the boundaries surrounding it. But from the viewpoint of the postmodernist ethos, this paradox disappears, since religion appears as one more of the contexts in which the person participates, and it does not have a special status among them. Moreover, concerning the split mind suggested by postmodernity, one can tell that only a narrowed version of religion can have any chance at all of communicating with people who are not willing anymore to commit themselves to any total authority. Therefore, Leibowitz's concept of religious faith can justly be considered as supportive of religion and not as enfeebling it.

The third function of the splitting strategy is compartmentalization of the aforementioned three spheres, which appear, then, as not only distinguished but also as detached from each other by an unbridgeable gap.[36] The idea of compartmentalization in this context is that though the

decision to believe originated in one's individuality, the commandments themselves were not designed to fulfill any individual need. This is exactly the meaning of religious belief as a transcendental act—it directs believers to what lies beyond themselves and not towards their internal personalities or concrete needs. Consequently, the believer in Leibowitz's thinking is one who functions in two different spheres: natural and religious. The natural sphere contains everything that is connected to the existence and the culture of the believer as a human being. The religious sphere includes everything ruled by the religious imperatives. Leibowitz considers the religious sphere to be not only external to the natural one, but also inaccessible to it. True, the acknowledgment of the opposition between the religious sphere and the natural one is not an innovation in the religious discourse; what is unique about Leibowitz in this context is that he did not look for bridges or connecting points between the two spheres, but made great efforts to strengthen the split between them in order to defend religious belief from the invasion of any natural or human elements.[37]

Nonetheless, the compartmentalization is not evidence that there are no interrelations between the different spheres that were separated. On the contrary, the compartmentalization is actually defining the framework in which the relations between the different spheres can be elucidated; namely these are crystallized around the principles of the heteronomy of God's commandments and the idea of absolute transcendence. According to Leibowitz, only complete detachment of the Divine from the human can ensure the total devotion of the believer to the work of God. In order to illustrate his approach, he suggests distinguishing between two types of religions: granting and demanding. The "granting religion" appears to be a means of fulfilling believers' needs, whereas the "demanding religion" imposes upon them obligations without promising them anything in return.[38] For Leibowitz, as long as one's faith is based on what

religion grants to human beings it should be seen as idolatry.[39] Therefore, only the "demanding religion" is a genuine religion, and vice versa: only when belief is detached from worldly experience and reality and has no function in one's life is it really belief.

At the present point, the distinction between religions is further developed by Leibowitz, in regard to two principles taken from the Jewish classics, which he employs in order to support his concept of Judaism: "belief for its own sake" and "belief not for its own sake."[40] What distinguishes between these two is the motivation behind them and not the praxis of religious commandments. ''Belief not for its own sake" is actually an instrument for fulfilling one's needs, or it appears as a conclusion that one reaches out of his worldly experience. It is clear that this kind of belief is dependent on believers achieving their goals. "Belief for its own sake" that lacks any external purpose and does not actually give the believer any kind of benefit or satisfaction is different. According to Leibowitz, only this kind of belief is genuine, precisely because a believer is not expected to feel "happiness," "perfection," or "morality."[41] For all these, Leibowitz determines, one does not need religious belief; one can get them from even better agents. The only satisfaction that "belief for its own sake" can wish to have is the contentment from fulfilling the divine obligation.[42] However, a genuine belief must be independent even of this satisfaction. Finally, as long as one's belief bears witness to the believer's needs or motivation, this can be considered as evidence of its falseness.

The link to the two ethoses that have accompanied the discussion so far—the modernist and the postmodernist—may explain Leibowitz's choice of the "demanding religion" and of "belief for its own sake" over a "giving religion" and "belief not for its own sake." What the "giving religion" and "belief not for its own sake" have in common is their being directed at the believer. The "giving religion" gives the believer something—a giving that makes the believer's

faith become "not for its own sake." Furthermore, the "giving religion" affirms the self's desires and needs, and this reveals the self to be the center of the faith. The solid and crystallized sense of self that the believer acquires in this approach clearly links it to the modernist ethos of self. But, as noted, Leibowitz rejects this approach in favor of the one he characterizes using the concepts "demanding religion" and "faith for its own sake." Beyond all the meanings these concepts may be granted, one thing is utterly clear about them—the denial of the believer's self as the center point and anchor of the experience of faith. The demand from the believer is aimed from the person outwards, but it does not encounter any inside or any center. Quite the opposite, the self is scattered among the multiplicity of experiences, of which faith is just one. This believer's faith is "for its own sake," since among other things it has no center to absorb the benefit that the religion could have granted the believer. The believer is distributed among the range of experiences, and presumably what is beneficial in one place does not necessarily have the same influence elsewhere. The clear link between Leibowitz's idea of faith and the postmodernist ethos of the self thus receives further support from his choice of the concepts of the "demanding religion" and the "faith for its own sake."

D. Disharmony, Conflict, and Gap

Having said all that, it should not be surprising that not harmony but rather an experience of crisis and conflict appears as a permanent component in the daily routine of the believer. The frustration that accompanies this experience has many reasons whose examination may elucidate and establish the link between Leibowitz's idea of faith and the postmodernist ethos of self.

First, it is due to the existence of an extremely large gap between the autonomy that is granted to believers at the constitutive stage of their decision to believe and the unreserved

heteronomy to which they must commit themselves within the religious experience. In a way, the concept of compartmentalization mentioned above can be regarded as a supreme expression of the understanding of this gap as unbridgeable. Furthermore, the understanding of the religious experience as governed by compartmentalization regulates the moments of crisis. As a result of that, these do not appear as stemming from one's caprice or emotional condition but as a substantial component of the religious belief without an anchor or center point, but constituting one experience out of a range of experiences that do not join together.

Secondly, the experience of crisis is a result of the demand to severely split between the religious faith and the believer's personal life, so much so that what is demanded from believers is relinquishing some of the values that they hold as natural beings. Leibowitz regards the biblical story of Abraham, who was commanded by God to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac and to reject the supreme value of fatherhood of defending one's child, as a paradigm of the conflict between the human and the divine.[43] Out of the study of this biblical story, Leibowitz concludes the following:

> Sacrifice is a very religious crisis … in the sacrifice God demanded of Abraham all he had … relinquishing human and collective values … all the elements of human consciousness—those concerning the individual and those relating to all human problems—everything was rejected. There is no crisis as big as the one between the reality of the human being, including his material and emotional reality, and the status of man when he stands in front of God.[44]

Against this background one can accurately understand the meaning of Leibowitz's objection to the idea of "Jewish morality," where he contended that a person who acts as a moral agent cannot be acting as a religious agent. In other words, a religious action cannot be simultaneously a moral action. Whereas the morality of an action is determined by one's intentions and desires—which in the modernist approach are identified with the center of the person's being and selfhood as an individual—the religious appropriateness of an act is determined by one's commitment to follow God's commandments. This match, like the postmodernist ethos of self, does not refer to the self, which does not constitute an anchor or a center, but rather is directed outwards, outside everything within the realm of the individual's constitution and control. In Leibowitz's words:

> Being moral, from the standpoint of a secular ethic, can have only either of two meanings; directing man's will in accordance with man's knowledge of reality … or directing man's will in accordance with man's recognition of his duty…. The Torah does not recognize moral imperatives stemming from knowledge of natural reality or from awareness of man's duty to his fellow man. All it recognizes are Mitzvoth, divine imperatives. The Torah and the prophets never appeal to the human conscience, which harbors idolatrous tendencies. No equivalent of term "conscience" appears in the scripture.[45]
>
> [Therefore] Morality can be neither Jewish nor non-Jewish, neither religious nor irreligious…. [It] is an atheistic category which differs radically from religious consciousness or religious feeling. From the standpoint of Judaism man as such has no intrinsic value. He is an "image of god," and only as such does he possess special significance. That is why Judaism did not produce an ethical theory of its own, was

> never embodied in a moral system, and made no pretenses of representing a specific moral point of view.[46]

In Leibowitz's idea of faith two opposed aspects meet: the negative one eliminates the "utilitarian Justification, whether it be for the good of individuals, of society, or of the nation,"[47] which usually plays an important role in ethics. The positive aspect refers to the emphasis on the performance of the religious imperatives. That is to say that as a result of the principle of compartmentalization the believer does not appear in the religious experience as a complete being but solely as a non-personal performer of the commandments of God.[48]

Yet, the reduction of the believer's being in Leibowitz's thinking, which actually amounts to a reduction of any human aspect of faith, does not imply that the believer is not crucial for the actualization of the compartmentalization itself. Whereas the two above-discussed reasons for the believer's experience of crisis—the gap between the believer's initiative autonomy and the demand to commit oneself to Divine commandments; and the demand to severely separate between religious faith and the believer's personal life—actually originated in Leibowitz's specific understanding of the Jewish faith, a supplementary one refers to the disposition of the believer himself. Leibowitz depicts the believer as, "One who cannot live in peace with natural reality, even though he himself is part of this reality which he cannot transcend, no matter whether he is a believer or a non-believer, whether he accepts divine authority or not."[49] The reduction is then all about the specific position, which the believer is required to shape, that conditions genuine faith as such.

However, the difference between the ontological split in human beings as such, and not necessarily as believers, and the split suggested by Leibowitz must be marked in order to achieve

an accurate understanding of the function of the compartmentalization in his thinking. Actually, the split that concerns religious experience, which is suggested by Leibowitz, adds a further and unnecessary section to the more basic one that concerns one's psychophysical being. Choosing this way, Leibowitz not only strengthens the individual's coping with it but also radicalizes the initial split. It is important to note that since the psychophysical split is part of one's given factuality, it does not necessarily have any religious value. It is only the carrying out of an unnecessary split that can be of value, for it transcends one's given factuality. The religious value is granted to faith precisely because it involves carrying out a voluntary compartmentalization and facing the challenges that accompany it. In other words, though the believer is acquainted with the feeling of split, to the believer such a feeling cannot be helpful, and hence the compartmentalization remains a religious mission to fulfill.

It is exactly Leibowitz's respectful attitude toward the human condition that removes him from the attempt to suggest any solution or relief either to the human wish to transcend natural reality or to the situation of the split. Instead, he speaks for an adoption of the split itself and for a routine of constant contact with the difficulties and frustrations that come out of this very choice. Actually, what is suffering in the disposition of the believer is not only the very fact that it can change nothing in the human condition, but that the religious praxis does not shape the individual's personality from inside and hence cannot really become a habit. The believer will always remain a natural being, whereas religious imperatives are divine. Therefore, no comfort but endless crisis and battles appear as the daily portion of the believer. Even though the believer becomes acquainted with these, it is impossible to develop better tools to deal with them, for they stem from the very fact of the individual's natural being. Believers are doomed to find themselves

daily at the beginning of the path with no sense of achievement from the previous day's battle. Every day they start at the very same point.

> Performance of the Divine Mitzvoth [commandments] is man's path to God, an infinite path, the end of which is never attained and is, in effect, unattainable. A man is bound to know that this path never terminates. One follows it without advancing beyond the point of departure. Recognition that the religious function imposed upon man is finite and never ending is the faith, which finds expression in the regularity, constancy and perseverance in the performance of the Divine Mitzvoth [commandments]. The circle of the religious praxis rotates constantly about its center. "Every day they will appear to you as new," for after each act the position of man remains as it was before. The aim of proximity to god is unattainable. It is infinitely distant, "for God is in heaven and you on the earth" (Ecclesiastes 5:1). What then is the substance and import of performance of the Divine Mitzvoth [commandments]? It is the man's striving to attain the religious goal.[50]

Clearly, Leibowitz strives to maintain the dichotomy between the human and the divine; in his thinking, the demand to overcome one's own human nature becomes the core of the religious praxis, without promising believers any payment or compensation for their struggling and suffering. In fact, the clear link to the postmodernist ethos thwarts this possibility, since compensation assumes a uniform and integrated being to assimilate the compensation within it. As noted, in Leibowitz's approach, the believer is not such a being. This is why the initial decision of the believer, the one from which everything started, is never safe and stable. It needs

constant care and maintenance. The experience of the believer transpires to be a Sisyphean one—all the efforts that believers put into obeying the religious imperatives cannot prevent them from conceding to their natural beings. Living this way demands the ability to withstand daily frustrations, which appear as a constant component in one's religious experience.

E. The Paradox of the Believer's Subjectivity

The three functions of the splitting strategy discussed above—defining the spheres of human experience, narrowing the scope of religious life, and compartmentalization—point clearly to an increasing process of pressing the believer's individuality outside the religious experience. Though by the founding decision the believer attributes an indispensable transcendental condition to the realization of the religious belief, the splitting strategy has finally set the believer aside from the religious experience or even outside of it. As we have seen, in the decision stage that preceded the implementation of the splitting, the believer enjoyed the status of an establisher of the religious experience, so that without him or her, such experience could not come into being. This was the crucial infrastructure of religious life. In fact, this is the main part where the traces of the modernist ethos are apparent in Leibowitz's idea of self, and accordingly the believer appears there as a coherent personality and as a source of its own action. However, later the uniform fabric of selfhood seems to disintegrate. This disintegration is expressed in two ways: first, the believer does not serve as a resource to the self becoming more intelligible. Second, believers do not become more comprehensible in light of their decision. It transpires, then, that we are dealing here with a double cut. The believer as an individual does not bear witness to the religious belief, and the belief itself cannot provide evidence about the believer. Yet, the dismissal of the believer from religious experience was an unavoidable

consequence of the splitting strategy. This dismissal is actually uncovered as a necessary condition for the bestowal of a transcendental and divine meaning to religious life. Therefore, the individuality of the believer—whether permeated by the modernist ethos that forms it into a unity, or split into a multiplicity of experiences, of which the religious is just one—has become irrelevant to such a meaning of religious life. The self of the believer does not blend into the religious experience, but remains outside of it.

One can regard the selfhood of the believer also as transcendental, but this is a different kind of transcendentalism from the one that can be attributed to God. Whereas the transcendentalism of the believer is immanent, that of God is transcendent. Nonetheless, God's transcendentalism is accessible by his commandments, which in the religious experience are perceived as the core of his reality, but that of the believer remains closed, and any attempt to approach it encounters its disintegration into a multiplicity of experiences.

Finally, the figure of the believer is elucidated neither in the immanent sphere—for the very decision to become a believer transcends the borders of immanence—nor in the transcendent sphere—for the individuality of the believer finds no expression in the religious praxis. As a result of that, the believer in Leibowitz's thinking remains an enigma as long as one tries to access it from the viewpoint of the sphere of religious experience. Surely, the believer can still be open to rational reflection—that is to say, the believer is not deprived of the possibility of achieving self-understanding—but Leibowitz says that such an understanding has no religious meaning or value and hence cannot have any impact on religious experience. That means that the split is not only between the natural sphere and the religious one, but also in the very being of the believer who functions in two different and unbridgeable contexts. The radicalism that characterizes Leibowitz's thinking is that even the believer, who is the establisher

of the religious experience, cannot bridge the gap between the natural experience and the religious one, for the believer is eliminated from it together with every natural component of the human life.

Believers as practitioners can be depicted, then, as atomistic beings, detached from any realistic context, closed off from themselves as well as from the external world. They function in the religious praxis, devoid of any particularity and individuality. Being purified of any essential components, believers cannot become an object for investigation. In other words, believers must appear in the religious experience in order to bring it to reality; they are the subjects who establish the religious experience. Yet once the decision to believe has been made, the self of the believer seems to disintegrate and scatter into experience in general, which is divided into a multiplicity of contexts, with religion occupying only one of them. In the absence of a core of self in which a typical attitude of the believer towards the various religious commandments can formulate, the commandments appear to the believer to be equivalent in their importance and value. In other words, there is no basis to talk about a particular closeness or connection of the believer to any particular commandment. All are equally foreign to the believer, and thus require a uniform attitude.

In fact, there is no reason why believers should not treat the different commandments of religion equally, since according to Leibowitz the different religious imperatives are contrasted in equal measure to their natural and individual being precisely because they are God-given. This contrast and the elimination of all individual elements from the sphere of faith are exactly what guarantees the unity of the religious experience and defends it from subjectivitisation and particularization. Therefore, one should be reserved about describing believers unilaterally, for they are supposed to appear just the same along their praxis; their ideal being is exactly the

reason why it is possible to reach an adequate understanding of them. The separation between the praxis and the believers' individuality transpires then to be extremely crucial for Leibowitz's thinking, for it maintains the deep contrast between the religious experience and the natural one. Of course, believers do not cease to be immanent beings, but they function, or better, are expected to function, as ideal beings detached from any individuality. Only as such can they not damage the transcendental character of the religious experience.

Only at the present point may we understand Leibowitz's contention, according to which the essence of the religious belief is not one of cognition but one of endeavor. In other words, the religious belief is not linked with the attempt to achieve certain knowledge about religion or faith, but rather with the effort to execute the practical implementations of it.[51] While the demand to understand the commandments would have maintained the believer as the center of their treatment, the removal of understanding from the religious experience in Leibowitz's approach, in favor of performing the commandments in practice, places the commandments themselves at the center—although they do not occupy the whole of the experience, but only one segment of it. This does not mean necessarily that believers do not understand what they practice, but only that their faith is independent of such understanding. Finally, believers' disposition locates them at a middle point—they functions as non-empiric and ideal beings in the religious experience, but at the same time they are separated from the idealistic frame of consciousness, for they are not required or expected to achieve understanding concerning religious faith, but to practice the religious imperatives. This is the way they are about to take, or better, they are obliged to face religious commandments: cleared of their own individuality, no matter what its meaning might be, but, thanks to the early establishing decision, not ceasing to be individuals. In other words, religious experience does not destroy believers' individuality, but rather eliminates it.

However, the proposed understanding of the location of the believer may only regulate the gap between the two ideas of the self in which Leibowitz's thinking is imbued, ideas arranged in two stages of the religious experience. The modernist idea of the self is located in the empirical and constituting stage where the decision to believe takes place, while the postmodernist one occupies the arena of practical religious experience guided by the commandments, whose origin is abstract and transcendent. However, spreading the religious experience over two stages—the volitional decision stage and the practical stage of following the commandments—does not solve the fundamental paradox of subjectivity in Leibowitz's thinking.[52] This paradox has two dimensions: first, the believer, as the one who takes that decision, is transcendent to any rational explanation and reasoning, though as we have seen, the traces of the modernist ethos of the self, granting the believer's being a formed and uniform nature, are apparent. At least historically, this stage is linked to an attempt at self-understanding. Yet, once believers put themselves into the religious experience, they are expected to transcend their empiric being and to function as ideal beings, meaning people equally devoted to the various religious commandments as a whole. In any case, what transpires is that behind this devotion there was not one self, as a formed pole of reference to the commandments, as giving them meaning, or as achieving self-understanding through them. Quite the opposite: even if we assume according to the influence of the link to the modernist ethos that the decision to believe is taken by one cohesive self, it disintegrates within the religious experience into a multiplicity of experiences behind which there is no unifying self. Therefore we can expect that one's original individuality leaves no impact on the believer's religious experience. Believers in Leibowitz's thinking are deflected from their initial status of "establishers of faith" by their volitional act and

transferred to the status of compliance, so much so that their individuality is eliminated from the religious experience.

Clearly, Leibowitz by no means understood the above-depicted changes, which occur to the believer as reflecting loss of freedom. On contrary, for him, "None but he who busies himself with the Scripture (Torah) is free—he is free from the bondage of nature because he lives a life which is contrary to nature."[53] In other words, as long as we are natural beings, we cannot claim the status of establishers, for we are subjected to forces over which we have no control. Only when we make a decision that we are not compelled to make—and the decision to believe is of this kind—can we justly enjoy the status of establishers, and hence be really free beings. Leibowitz reverses, then, in a Spinozistic way, the ordinary thinking according to which freedom means not being subordinated to external factors. According to him, as natural beings we are subordinated anyway, but we can have a touch of freedom once we subordinate ourselves to something that we can avoid: the religious praxis. However, only in the sphere into which we entered by our decision to believe are we free beings; outside that sphere we helplessly remain subordinate beings due to our human nature. Freedom is, therefore, accepting limitations that one can avoid.

Finally, believers appear to be those who have their own personal way of being, so one can never really know what is happening in their hearts. It is impossible to understand them, or to be more precise, to understand the specific will to accept God's commandments, and hence to become believers. Actually, the stage of the decision is the only moment in which one can find accordance between the individual and his or her activity—an accordance which ceases to appear in the sphere of practical deeds or in the cognitive sphere where individuals can separate themselves from what they do or think. In other words, only where unity may appear should one

search for the accord between parts, or at least a system of relations between them. In contrast, they have no place in an arena ruled by multiplicity and dispersion, such as the one where the postmodernist self dwells.

F. The Ongoing Need for a Modernist Self

Leibowitz's defense of religion from subjectivitization and particularization, as we have seen previously, rests upon an extreme individualistic idea of subjectivity, which transpires to be marked with traces of the postmodernist ethos of self. In light of the two main goals of Leibowitz's thinking, i.e., guarding religion from being subjective and guarding subjectivity from becoming religious, the implemented splitting strategy is undoubtedly revealed as a useful means. However, this choice transpires to have a price in terms of the believer, and could also have wider implications for the religious experience. In the present section I shall contend that the dominant postmodernist characteristics of Leibowitz's idea of self, which largely led to the removal of the subject from religious experience, are seriously problematic from the viewpoint of Leibowitz's idea of faith itself. My central argument here is that the presence of the believer within the religious experience, including the practical experience, is indispensable, and therefore the believer should not be eliminated from it. Moreover, it is the subject, as a being striving for meaning and significance in trying to connect the various experiences in which the subject participates, including the religious experience, that is essential for realizing the idea of faith as Leibowitz himself perceived it, without which it lacks meaning. In other words, I argue that it is the modernist self, perceived in terms of unity and even substantivism, that is essential for realizing religious experience the way Leibowitz understood it, as directed towards a transcendent reality.

In order to come to terms with the suggested criticism, one must go back to the very basic assumptions of Leibowitz, not necessarily in order to refute them, but in order to illuminate their problematic nature. The *first assumption* to be scrutinized is the one that regards **the status of the believer in religious praxis.** As we have seen before, Leibowitz treated the involvement of the believer's life and personality as a threat to the sacredness of the religious experience. The wish to defend religious experience from subjectivization and naturalization led Leibowitz to eliminate the believer from it. As a result of the implementation of the splitting strategy, not only the empirical factors that concern the believer's life, but also his or her personal consciousness, are doomed to be excluded from the religious experience. It is precisely the exclusion of one's consciousness that finally led to the identification of the religious experience with its praxis. It seems, then, that in the context of his discussion of faith, Leibowitz treats human beings' consciousness essentially as an expression of their individuality or even as identified with it, but not as having also general aspects. Certainly, lacking the factor of consciousness, one cannot even regard the religious praxis as experience. In a deep sense, the removal of consciousness from the realm of religious experience is even more radical than pushing aside the dimension of identity from the believer's understanding. While the category of identity denotes a wide integration of the individual and a formation of a complex of the person's expressions and experiences into one unity, the removal of consciousness can in principle also refer to the individual context or to an individual act within this context. Leibowitz not only pushes aside the category of identity from religious praxis, but further, in the absence of a dimension of consciousness, the practitioner is denied the possibility of saying: "**I** follow God's commandments."

The following questions now emerge: Cannot personal consciousness be influential in other ways than subjectivizing and naturalizing? Do people's intentions not come from their consciousness and therefore represent at least a mode of their presence at the same time? Why assume that every meaning inevitably makes the intended object subjective, i.e., charges it with an individualistic significance? Leibowitz's writings provide no answers to these questions. Undoubtedly, consciousness is essential to the practical realization of the religious experience, which is based on an abstract intention; only thanks to this intention is a link created between the human action and God. Thus, the "I" is crucial not only as the performer of the divine commandments, but also as a person of consciousness who can bestow upon praxis a religious meaning.[54]

Moreover, especially regarding Leibowitz's idea of unconditioned religious praxis, the elimination of the individuality of believers and the reduction of their being to that of practitioners is problematic. The meaning of these things is that the link between religious praxis and the postmodernist ethos of the self is problematic, and that the category of identity in religious experience, originating in the modernist ethos of self, is not only possible but worthwhile. Believers as whole, uniform beings are needed not only for taking the initial decision to believe and hence as constitutive subjects for faith, they are also necessary precisely for Leibowitz's idea of unconditioned religious praxis. As said above, what differentiates between "belief for its own sake" and "belief not for its own sake" is the intention behind them and not the mere praxis of religious imperatives, which are in any case carried out according to identical criteria not subject to the believer's own opinion.

But it is not just the link between the perception of the practical religious experience and the postmodernist ethos of self that is problematic. The relation between practical religious

experience and the modernist ethos of self, i.e., the stage of the decision to believe, is also not without difficulties. This becomes apparent when studying the *second assumption* regarding **the link between freedom and individuality**, in which Leibowitz's idea of freedom is anchored. Here we reveal a contrast, and even a paradox, in what Leibowitz considers expressions of freedom. On the one hand, he sees the decision originating in believers' individual being as an expression of their free will, which cannot be reduced to aspects related to the facts or circumstances surrounding them. The constituting status of the volitional decision to believe in Leibowitz's thought seems to be the last stronghold of the individual being in Leibowitz's idea of faith. On the other hand, Leibowitz argues that religious experience is free precisely due to its being liberated from subjectivization and neutralization. In other words, what makes religious experience free is that it is full of limitations conducted by practitioners who can avoid them, limitations that are not necessitated by the practitioners' nature as subjects and natural entities. While the first expression of freedom places the individual at its center, the second expression distances this individual in favor of the decisive dominance of the practical activities entailed in it. We are once more seeing the split typical of Leibowitz's thought between the stage of deciding to believe and the practical religious experience, or between the arena dominated by the modernist ethos of self and the one where the postmodernist ethos leaves its mark.

Leibowitz's approach to the issue of freedom, which also restored and revealed the presence of these two modes of self, raises the following serious question: does Leibowitz provide sufficient protection for individuality when he states the independence of individuality, of which he considers the volitional decision to believe to be the highest expression, in the circumstances and context in which it is contained? Contemporary critiques, such as those of Foucault, Lacan, Bordieu, and others in the spectrum between Freudianism and Feminism to

post-structuralism and Post-modernism, reject this possibility. These critiques argue that the total being of the individual, and even the individual's self-perception, are subject to the dramatic influence of historical and social forces. The understanding at the basis of these approaches is important here, since it considers a sharp separation, like the one arising from Leibowitz's approach, between the internal and the external in the being of the self to be impossible. Moreover, such a separation undermines the believer's ability to form an identity within the religious experience, and thus it is unlikely to hurt the individuality that is vital to realizing Leibowitz's idea of faith. It is no coincidence that in a period when the self shattered and fragmented into the splinters of its experiences, awareness of the power of total ideologies to enslave individuals increased. Without doubt, such ideologies can play this destructive role, particularly for a broken and fragmented self. In contrast, people's chance of defending themselves from the power of these approaches starts in recognizing that they have an internality, an identity, and even a unique substantive dimension that distinguishes them from other individuals, and at the same time enables them to encounter them and to experience similarity with them.

The *third assumption* refers to **God's mode of presence in the religious experience**, which was perceived by Leibowitz as absolutely transcendent. Leibowitz states that not only does God's being leave no traces in the world, but in fact the path the believers are about to take, or better, the religious imperatives they are obliged to face, must be independent of the immanent reality in which the religious praxis takes place. In his words: "the position in front of god is not mirrored in the objective reality; it is above that reality and beyond it."[55] This aspect may either indirectly explain the logic behind depriving consciousness of any role in the religious praxis itself or complete it. Simply put, God is transcendent—to human consciousness and to the world.

Therefore, the attempt to understand him or the way he relates to the world is in vain. However, it seems to me that the more profound idea that supported these two theses— concerning God and concerning the believer—is Leibowitz's wish to support independent relationships between immanence and transcendence; in other words, between the worldly reality, including that of human beings, and God's entity. God's independence of his believers and of the immanent reality rests on the very fact of his absolute transcendence: "God's divinity is entirely intrinsic to Him and does not consist in his relation to the world, whose contingent existence adds nothing to God's divinity…. Clearly, his kingship is essential to Him. God is a king even in the absence of a world in which He reigns."[56] In God's transcendence is embodied, then, not only God's entity but also the meaning of it to the religious praxis.

Yet, what are problematic in the above exposed argumentation are not necessarily Leibowitz's assumptions but the conclusions he deduces from them. In the first place, an independent relationship does not rule out, at least not by definition, the very possibility of having an affinity—both from God's side and from that of the believer. One can have contact with something and remain independent of it. Presumably, Leibowitz's radical way of thinking did not enable him to discern the possibility of gradation. Therefore, for him any kind of touch or contact ends up, sooner or later, in total absorption. Moreover, in my opinion this logical deficiency is not the main problem in Leibowitz's present concept; rather, the fact that the ideal of total transcendence unavoidably excludes God from the religious experience as a whole is. Consequently, God "appears" in the religious praxis in an analogical mode, by following his commandments, but his very entity, i.e., exactly the core of his meaning according to Leibowitz, is absent there. Leibowitz himself admitted this, saying that "in reflecting and speaking about man's standing before God, the believer tries to refer minimally to God, who has no image at all,

and makes effort to direct his religious consciousness to himself as recognizing his duty to his God."[57]

The question is, then, if God's vanishing presence within the religious praxis and metaphysics is not acknowledged as a legitimate means to give expression to God's entity or to the way he relates to his believers, what meaning can one bestow upon God? Does Leibowitz's unreserved emphasis on God's transcendence, as a being as well as an object of consciousness, not finally leave unanswered the question of why at all one should believe? Leibowitz would have replied, "Because I want to." Yet, in his thinking, Leibowitz supplies no means to maintain that will or to defend it from opposition. In other words, my contention is that an extreme conception of absolute transcendence damages the very possibility of constituting a real relationship to God as the subject of religion. Mere acknowledgment of God's transcendent being, which does not receive constant confirmation in the believer's consciousness and within his praxis, cannot support the religious praxis as directed to God. The vanishing of God and that of the believer add up to a meaningless religious praxis, for it has neither subject nor object.

A possible explanation for the double elimination that occurs in Leibowitz's idea of faith can be that he preferred expressing His being to its meaning for the believer, or else that he preferred ontology to epistemology. Yet one wonders why he assumes the need to choose between the two? Moreover, what sense can ontology have when it is not accompanied by an epistemology or at least by a rational account of the being to which that ontology refers? In other words, an ontology that does not include within itself the means to validate the being it strives to represent remains denuded and may end up as a groundless idea. Therefore, in order to give support to his ontology, i.e., his concept of God as absolutely transcendent, Leibowitz should have suggested the means to understand it. Clearly, there must be "someone" seeking such an

understanding. This is in fact the self-understanding that is part of the human experience in the world, of which religious praxis is a part. Just as the possibility of obtaining such understanding does not detract from the transcendence of God, it also does not provide complete understanding of the self, though such an understanding does not have to be complete or rooted in coherent epistemology. Elliott described this well in the following words: “To stress that self-interpretation and practical understanding is crucial to the formation and maintenance of the self is not, however, to argue that we can have complete access to our inner worlds and sense of identity."[58]

> Furthermore, perhaps the individual’s experience of the inexhaustibility of self-understanding can serve as a basis for experiencing God’s transcendence. This means that the obvious human need to refer to the contexts in which we participate and to understand ourselves can serve as a basis for the religious experience, despite it being directed at a heteronymous and transcendent object. Whatever the nature of self-understanding, such understanding not only cannot damage the specific idea of Leibowitz’s faith, but may support the very possibility of it. In other words, not only does religious experience as directed at a transcendent being not benefit from pushing the believer out of it, but moreover the believer is essential to confirm the directedness of this experience to God or transcendence.

G. Summary

Leibowitz's attempt to establish religious faith solely on praxis rejected the widespread traditional approaches that usually regard metaphysics as theoretical justification or as a mental infrastructure to the religious praxis. Instead, he contends that there is no such difference between belief and religion, for "belief is but the religion of divine commandments, outside of which the religious belief does not exist at all."[59] This means, then, that all we know about believers is a depiction of the religious imperatives that rule their lives; we know nothing about their individuality and the subjectivity from which their initial decision to believe stemmed. Consequently, their decision to believe and their entire individual world are excluded from the realm of the religious experience, and the differences between them and non-believers are narrowed to the sphere of praxis.

Yet the suggested commentary to Leibowitz's idea of faith strove to point also to its deficiencies. I argue that Leibowitz's endeavor to free the religious experience of subjective elements, personal as well as mental, was dependent precisely on the subjectivity of the believer—not only for the performance of the religious praxis, but also in order to have the right intention within the act. As a matter of a fact, without the presence of the believer as an agent of thinking and truth, an approach largely responding to the modernist ethos of self, God himself would be dismissed from the religious praxis. Needless to say, the idea of a religious faith devoid of believers and of God is meaningless.

Seeking the total independence of religious praxis, Leibowitz failed to differentiate between different kinds of conditionality. Whereas the conditionality that refers to factual reality is contingent by its very nature, the conditionality that relates to the believer is crucial to faith

itself, to the extent that without the believer no faith or praxis can exist at all. Hence it is exactly the demand to achieve the total independence of transcendence from immanence which was addressed to the believers as conscious beings that made Leibowitz's idea of faith impossible to implement. However, anchoring religious conception in immanence entails more than necessarily relinquishing the idea of transcendence or the experience in God's presence. On the contrary, a conception that assumes that God is absolutely transcendent of the religious experience should facilitate and even demand the involvement of immanent consciousness that will speak for the being of God, and by that confirm its presence in the religious experience. Admitting the essentiality of the believer's subjectivity to the praxis by no means implies that faith turned out to be a subjective matter. Yet the fact that religious faith cannot but be realized as human experience indicates that subjective beings are incessantly involved in it. Therefore, in my opinion the presence in religious experience of believers as united beings that strive to achieve meaning for their experience and to connect its different parts should be defended.

[1] For a detailed discussion of the modernist dimensions embodied in Leibowitz's thought, showing the connections I revealed with Husserl, see Ronny Miron, "Phenomenology of the Believer's Self: The Case of Yeshayahu Leibowitz's Thinking," in *On Faith*: *Studies on the Idea of Faith*, ed. Moshe Halbertal, David Kurzweil, and Avi Sagi (Jerusalem: Keter, 2005), 124–189. 597–604 (Hebrew). For an analysis of the centrality of personal autonomy in modern religion, see Peter Berger, *The Homeless Mind* (New York: Random House, 1974), 196; David Berger, *The Heretical Imperative* (New York: Anchor Press, 1979), 1–31; and Moshe Sokol, "Religious and Personal Autonomy," in *Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy*, ed. Moshe Sokol (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1992), 169–216.

[2] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 34. On the history of the perception of the subject in modern times, see Anthony J. Cascardi, *The Subject of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 56–71.

[3] On the early philosophical roots of this process, see Sydney Shoemaker, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1963). See also Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Cornwall University Press, 1992).

[4] In this context, see Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of the Self* (Malden, MA: Polity and Blackwell, 2001), 12–16.

[5] Ibid., 2.

[6] Ibid., 36.

[7] Erving Goffman, *The Goffman Reader*, ed. C. Lemert and A. Branaman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 23–24.

[8] Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, trans. E. Goldman, Y. Navon, et al (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 5.

[9] Ibid., 64.

[10] Leibowitz's famous references are to the mitzvah of Tefilin and the Shema prayer, but even here he did not refer to their practical aspects but used them as an example of his abstract principles. Leibowitz, *Faith, History, and Values* (Jerusalem: Akademon,, 1982), 11–19 (Hebrew).

[11] Ibid., 11.

[12] Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *The Journal of Philosophy* 68:1 (1971): 6.

[13] Ibid., 10.

[14] Ibid., 7.

[15] Nonetheless, Frankfurt's analysis of the free will cannot be adopted completely for the present discussion, for it does not include the demand to realize the practical implementations that emerge from a desire of the second order. Frankfurt terms such a case as "wanton," and clarifies that by such a position one does not turn out to be an animal that has only "First-order desires." Ibid., 11.

[16] Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 38.Though Leibowitz shared with Frankfurt the idea of free will which cannot be imposed by any facts or rational reasoning, for Leibowitz freedom does not refer to the practical implementations of that will, but ends exactly once the decision has been made. However, this reservation

does abolish the relevance of Frankfurt's understanding of desires of the second order as characterizing persons to the analysis of Leibowitz's idea of faith. For an analysis of the centrality of personal autonomy in modern religion, see Berger, *The Homeless Mind*, 196; Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, 1–31; and Sokol, "Religious and Personal Autonomy."

[17] Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 75.

[18] George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 196.

[19] Ibid., 198. My emphases.

[20] Elliott, *Concepts of the Self*, 28.

[21] Here we can also note a surprising link between Leibowitz's idea of self and that of the early Jean-Paul Sartre. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. R. Kirkpatrick and F. Williams (New York: Noonday, 1957); Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956). Sartre, too, rejected the possibility of identifying the presence of one's self in the range of experiences of consciousness, and characterized it as transcendent in relation to the realm of consciousness. Like Leibowitz, Sartre worked ceaselessly to fortify the separateness of the self from consciousness, and in fact from all other contexts of human activity. He saw this as defending the individual's freedom. For a comprehensive discussion of Sartre's concepts of self, see Hugh Silverman, "Sartre's Words on the Self," in *Existentialist Ontology and Human Consciousness*, ed. William L. McBride (New York: Garland, 1997), 181–200. The surprise in this comparison is because Leibowitz's move was intended to enable religious faith as he understood it and to fortify the transcendent reality (of God), while Sartre's was part of a quite radically atheist approach that relied on an anti-substantive perception of self. On this issue, see James Collins, *The Existentialists: A Critical Study* (Chicago: Henry Regency, 1952), 40–87.

[22] Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 37–38.

[23] Ibid., 75.

[24] Leibowitz, *Judaism, the Jewish People, and Israel* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1976), 92 (Hebrew).

[25] For a detailed discussion of the meaning of "facts" in Leibowitz's thinking, with a comparison to Wittgenstein's concept of language, see: Avi Sagi, "Yeshayahu Leibowitz: A Breakthrough in Jewish Philosophy: Religion without Metaphysics," *Religious Studies* 33 (1997): 207. The understanding of meaning as a human product, and the struggle to maintain the separation of it from any divine matter, appears in Leibowitz's thinking as the supreme principle in

the Jewish fight against idolatry. Leibowitz emphasized this issue in his interpretation of Maimonides. See Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 95 ff.

[26] Leibowitz, *Between Science and Philosophy* (Jerusalem: Akademon, 2002), 211(Hebrew).

[27] Ibid., 210–212.

[28] Leibowitz, *Faith, History, and Values*, 62–63.

[29] In this context, Leibowitz's idea of self can be compared to Sartre's "womb of the in-itself." See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 3–7; Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 83–84; Collins, *The Existentialists: A Critical Study*, 62; James M. Edie "The Question of the Transcendental Ego: Sartre's Critique of Husserl," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 24:2 (1993): 112.

[30] Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 74.

[31] Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 67:1 (1971): 10. Frankfurt's approach to free will presupposes the important distinction between rationalism and rationality. For a fine discussion of the differences between the two concepts, see Avi Sagi, *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002), 59–65.

[32] Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 75.

[33] Leibowitz did not point in the present context to an abstract problem of violation of imagined borders, but to the inescapable influence of one of the main characteristics of modernity, i.e. the split within the human being, on the religious experience. For a general view of the split within modernity, see Karl Jaspers's analysis of the "impossibility of steadfast life-order," Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1931), 46–48. For a discussion of this feature in regard to religion, see Berger, *The Homeless Mind*, 36 ff.

[34] Leibowitz, *Faith, History, and Values*, 57. Other differences between the two are discussed also in Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 142.

[35] The understanding of Judaism as a religion that does not close its believers from the non-religious aspect of life is emphasized in David Hartman's studies of Maimonides and in Soloveitchik. See David Hartman, *Israelis and the Jewish Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), x-xii; Hartman, *Love and Terror in the God Encounter* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2001).

[36] The theory of compartmentalization became common in the current interpretations of the phenomenon of Orthodoxy. See Charles Liebman, *Deceptive Images* (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1988), 54–59. It should be

noted that Leibowitz's original position did not adopt a narrowed version of Judaism but spoke for a model that was more akin to Catholicism. See "Jewish Education in a Modern Society" (article from 1954), in Leibowitz, *Judaism, the Jewish People, and Israel*, 37–45. Leibowitz himself did not fully admit a change in his thinking, but presented it more as a shift of emphasis (he referred to it in a note, see Leibowitz, *Judaism, the Jewish People, and Israel*, 45). Nevertheless, the understanding that a real change occurred in Leibowitz's thinking is common among his commentators.

[37]For a sketch of typical Jewish responses to modernity, see Eliezer Goldman, "Responses to Modernity in Jewish Thought," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 2 (1956): 52–73; Liebman, *Deceptive Images*, 43–59.

[38] Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 13–14.

[39] Ibid., 64.

[40] This classical distinction has appeared in many contexts. For instance, see TB Ta'anith 7a. Leibowitz wrote a series of articles on the topic of "Lishmah and Not-Lishmah" ("for its own sake and not for its own sake"). The one that was translated into English appears in Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 61–78.

[41] Ibid., 63.

[42] Ibid., 37–42.

[43] The understanding of the Binding of Isaac (Akedah) as a paradigm of religious experience, in which the believer is required to abandon his humanity, has appeared in both Jewish and Christian sources. See Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* III:24, 497 ff; and *Neues Testament*, Römer, chap. 4 ("Das Beispiel Abrahams"). Yet among the Jewish thinkers a different approach appears, according to which Judaism and humanity can meet each other. See Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 34–55. Fromm also suggested a comparative view of the understanding of God in Judaism and Christianity. Erich Fromm, *Das jüdische Gesetz, zur Soziologie des Diaspora-Judentums* (dissertation from 1922, Heidelberg, Basel and Weinheim: Beltz Verlag, 1989), 57–65. David Hartman, who was acquainted with Fromm's thinking, criticized Leibowitz's understanding of the binding of Isaac and suggested an alternative model of "Covenant" to the relations between God and his believers. Hartman, *A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 42–59; and Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 1999), 11 ff. Hartman also referred to Leibowitz's concept of Judaism, see ibid., 267–296. These two polar models of Judaism appeared in Joseph Soloveitchik's thinking and were explored as two indispensable components of the religious experience. For

a comparison between Leibowitz's view of God's commandments and that of Soloveitchik, see Avi Sagi, "Contending with Modernity: Scripture in the Thought of Yeshayahu Leibowitz and Joseph Soloveitchik." *The Journal of Religion* 77 (1997): 421–441. See also Sokol, "How do Modern Jewish Thinkers Interpret Religious Texts?," *Modern Judaism* 13:1 (1993): 25–48.

[44] Leibowitz, *Faith, History, and Values*, 58. For a comprehensive commentary of the biblical story of the Binding of Isaac (in Hebrew, *Akedah*), see Avi Sagi "The Meaning of the *Akedah* in Israeli Culture and Jewish Tradition," *Israel Studies* 3:1 (1998): 45–60. See also Louis Jacobs, "The Problem of Akedah in Jewish Thought," in *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 1–9.

[45] Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 18.

[46] Ibid., 6–7. The words "is an atheistic category which" were mistakenly dropped from the English translation, and were added above according to the Hebrew original.

[47] Ibid., 19.

[48] For a general discussion of the relationships between religion and morality, see Avi Sagi and Daniel Statman, *Religion and Morality* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995); and Michael J. Harris, *Divine, Command, Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2003). for a more specific critique of Leibowitz's position, see Sagi and Statman, *Religion and Morality*, 155–164. For a further perspective into this topic in Judaism, see Sagi, "Punishment of Amalek in Jewish Tradition—Coping with the Moral Problem," *Harvard Theological Review* 87:3 (1996): 323–346; Sagi, "'He slew the Egyptian and he hid him in the sand': Jewish Tradition and the Moral Element," *HUCA* 67 (1994): 55–76.

[49] Leibowitz, *Faith, History, and Values*, 57.

[50] Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 15–16.

[51] Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 15.

[52] For a phenomenological perspective, that underlies my discussion, see: Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 112–129; David Carr, *The Paradox of Subjectivity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 67–97.

[53] Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 22.

[54] For further discussion in this context, see my review article about similar flaws in Arendt's idea of self, with similar central characteristics of the postmodernist ethos: Ronny Miron, "The Self in the Realms of Ontology: A

Critical View of Hannah Arendt's Conception of the Human Condition," *The International Journal of the Humanities* 6:11 (2009): 41–52.

[55] Leibowitz, *Faith, History, and Values*, 59.

[56] Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 74.

[57] Ibid., 76.

[58] Elliott, *Concepts of the Self*, 5.

[59] Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 38.