**Kimberley C. Patton**

As if heeding to Simon Goldhill’s plea for real-life examples, Kimberley Patton’s contribution challenges us with a series of richly diverse arenas in which she sees our ideas reflected. They are not presented as critiques. Nonetheless, with every unanticipated application, philosophical musings like ours acquire new meaning and nuance, and a richer sense of how far they extend. Patton reflects on *The* *View From Within* by example, rather than by counter-example, even where one would expect the opposite - as with regard to God Himself, whom she takes to be paradigmatically and perpetually ambivalated!

Like different productions of the same play, each of the areas to which Patton applies our insights adds to them new dimensions. She focuses less on the problem we raise than on the remedy we propose, elaborating on the images of the trading zone and its contact pidgins, and the destabilizing potential of encountering others with whom we struggle to find words. Her brief remarks about the proven transformative potential of psychotherapy is a case in point: how the dialogical encounter between patient and therapist can literally change the former’s mind in ways no one can by talking to oneself. Psychoanalyst Andrew Gerber, whom she quotes, describes the process dramatically as a change in “psychic structure” that seems to always straddle brief periods of “a kind of intense ambivalation”, as she puts it. Insofar as normative commitments define selfhood, the psychotherapeutic encounter emerges, even from the little she tells us, as a paradigm of mind-changing dialogical exchange knowingly geared to ambivalate. Such exchanges need not be purely reasoned, and may well include “persuasive” elements, to use Wittgenstein’s phrase. However, as we remark in response to Simon Goldhill, we sincerely doubt that in such psychotherapeutic settings, tactics involving ridicule, bullying or coercive humor, though potentially ambivalating, can be at all effective. It is an area we need to study more closely, but on the face of it, it seems that to achieve its transformative goal, psychotherapy should aim at renewing and empowering their patients’ self-confidence, rather than make them fun of them.[[1]](#footnote-1)

But on one point to which Patton alludes in passing, we beg to differ. Neuroscience, has nothing to offer us in this regard. In fact, its physico-chemical reductive paradigm (of mind to brain) threatens to totally undermine our manifest self-understanding on which our book expounds.[[2]](#footnote-2) Because the only motive force recognized by the physical sciences is that of blind causal propulsion, its vocabulary is incapable, in principle, of distinguishing between being driven by blind impulse and being moved by the self-governing force of normative commitment. Neuroscience collapses the latter on the former as a matter of apriori scientific presupposition, not because it has *discovered* that normativity is an illusion or a mere stance[[3]](#footnote-3), but because its very vocabulary leaves it no choice. The fact that neuroscientists can now locate with relative precision which emotional responses light up which parts of the brain is aside the point.

The second area to which Patton turns is constitutional law. Here the focus shifts from the perspective of the ambivalat*ing* therapist/critic looking in, to the ambivalat*ed* Supreme Court Judges looking out. She raises two issues pertinent to our thesis. That of how and where the Constitution is reinterpreted and precedents are overturned, and that of the rhetoric in which such changes are couched. The US Judicial system is charged with the responsibility of interpreting and implementing the Constitution, not of amending it. But, as Patton notes, in doing so it “is notoriously unwilling to change its collective mind” – unwilling, note, not unable. Other major interpretive undertakings, comparably crucial to our wellbeing - science is a good example - are far less reluctant to admit being wrong and to changing their minds. Scientific framework transitions are not achieved easily. Like any revolution they have to be fought for. What Patton’s brief mention the US Supreme Court in this regard brings to the fore is the difference between being *unable* to change one’s mind, in the sense explored in our book, and being *reluctant* to do so. It is not always an easy line to draw, of course. Still, in science, bold innovation is encouraged and rewarded. Unaware most of the time of the frameworks that govern their work, scientists pride themselves in constantly questioning, testing and improving on the interpretive efforts of their predecessors and peers. They too are not legislators. They are powerless to change the reality they interpret.

And yet the dynamics of the two systems are so very different. As guardian of the Constitution, the Supreme Court views itself as custodian of its accepted reading, which they are liable to change from time to time, but only when dramatic new cases are brought before it by others, as Patton nicely describes; only after the event, after it is clear that injustice is proved to prevail. The Supreme Court will never propose changes on its own accord, as a result of debate and discussion. It certainly does not actively seek external critique. Patton is right in claiming that the only “trading zone” relevant to a judicial change of mind is constituted by the cases brought from the outside before the court – so very different from the active and proactive testing and questioning in other interpretive enterprises.

However, the most interesting issue Patton raises has to do with religious moments in which, as she so nicely puts it, the image of the trading zone gives way to that of beyond the pale; when a transformative effect is achieved by practitioners knowingly venturing out, not merely to liminal sites of religious exchange and borrowing, but into regions of extreme transgression. Not just any transgression, though. Not to areas of carefree inobservance or unruliness, but of those of religious crossdressing, if we be allowed the term; when lines are crossed not for the sake of heaven or self, but for that of a member of a different faith.

Two biblical (counter) examples will help better make the point – one explicit and one implicit. The first concerns the Torah’s intriguing vision and command with respect to the “stranger”, the *ger*, the gentile minorities who will dwell amongst thee when you reach land. In sharp contrast to the ethnically cleansed Jerusalem of Ezra-Nehemiah, the Torah envisages sovereign Israel as a multi-ethnic national collective that far transcends the boundaries of Jewish peoplehood established at Sinai. For although the Hebrew Bible recognizes the adoption and desertion of Gods and cults, it does not recognize conversions of peoplehood.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The *ger*’s status, the Torah commands, will be identical to your own: “you shall not wrong him. But the stranger dwelling among you shall be to you as your native-born” (Leviticus 19:33-34). (The biblical term for “native born” is *ezrach*, the word we use today for citizen: ‘A citizen just like yourself’, we would now say, ‘shall be the stranger who dwells amongst you’.) The next verse, however, going an important step beyond the formalities of freedom and equal citizenship, commands further, as if anticipating Martha Nussbaum’s recent work[[5]](#footnote-5): “*And thou shalt love [the stranger] as thyself,* for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 19:34, and Deuteronomy. 10:19).

But how can love be rendered a prescribed willful act? Nussbaum’s solution involves cultivating patriotic feelings of patriotism by means of inclusive rituals of civic religion: “Shared grief – whether on the Gettysburg battlefield or at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial … [and] songs of national pride and aspiration have a … capacity to forge or re-forge identity.”[[6]](#footnote-6) The Torah adopts a similar approach by inviting gentile Israelis into the Jewish Temple to offer personal sacrifices of gratitude or regret or to solemnly make a vow in accord with the exact same protocols as Jewish Israelis (Num. 15:13-16). Here too the term *ezrach*, citizen, is used to jointly denote Israelite Jews and gentiles.

Love of the other is thus expressed in a Torah-sanctioned transgression of a significant religious boundary. The picture of gentile Israeli idol worshippers[[7]](#footnote-7) partaking in Jewish ritual sacrifices as a supreme expression of national fraternité steers close to what Patton is getting at, but not quite. A major boundary is indeed transgressed, but with no sense at all of it constituting a religious concession. Quite the opposite!

The second, biblical boundary crossing of this kind goes in the exact opposite direction. The young King Solomon’s first act of state after “the kingdom was established in his hands” (1Kings 2:46), was to ally himself in marriage to Pharaoh King of Egypt by marrying his daughter (I Kings 3:1) - a move that paid off handsomely when Egypt went to war a few chapters later (9:15–16). His fiercely antinomian overriding of Torah law by political consideration was not to marry a gentile, which is a biblical commonplace. Diplomatic marriages are different. The Egyptian Princess is not married to be incorporated into an Israelite household, as when Zipporah married Moses or Boaz, Ruth. The union here is supposed to symbolize and clinch the pact between the two peoples. To this end, Pharaoh’s daughter was to remain Egyptian and represent Egypt in Jerusalem in custom, dress, and especially creed. Her palace and entourage were to maintain Egyptian culture and cult, to function as the Egyptian embassy in Jerusalem, as it were. Diplomatic marriages necessarily introduced small, exterritorial idolatrous institutions in the city, where protocol might well oblige the king to participate on occasion, although this is nowhere mentioned explicitly.[[8]](#footnote-8)

This, together with Solomon’s other major antinomian act of state – granting royal patronage to the mass sacrificing at “the great high place” in Gibeon, prior to building the Temple (3:2–4) - steers even closer to Patton’s examples, yet again not quite. They steer closer in being divinely approved. While still sacrificing at Gibeon, God appeared to the young king rewarding him with the gift of supreme wisdom and unmatched riches. But unlike Patton’s examples, they are not acts of self-sacrifice for the sake of others, but deemed by Solomon to be of political necessity.

Moreover, none of the three biblical boundary transgressions aim to ambivalate. All of Patton’s examples do. They all have an element of *avoda zara* in common, in the literal sense of *strange*, or *foreign* worship. And what seems to be doing the work owes more to their foreignness, than to them being sinful. But their sinfulness is a factor too. According to Patton, God seems to be moved and ambivalated by the self-sacrifice involved in going out beyond the pale of one’s own religion in support of a member of a different faith tradition, in places and ways deemed idolatrous by the eyes of one’s own. Theologically speaking, such cases reverse the logic of the *Aqedah*, as one proves willing to knowingly sin against God along the vertical in the service of horizontal compassion for a fellow human.

However, the philosophical lesson for us lies in the foreignness rather than the wrongness of such acts. To be meaningful and moving religious ritual and prayer require familiar settings. Novelty and strangeness of place and liturgy are inevitable sources of distraction. It is against complex backdrops of second-nature repetition and familiarity, the intimacy of the recognizable, the recurring formats and habitual idiom, that we are able to focus in contemplative devotion and transport and transcend ourselves in prayer.

But in the type of boundary crossing Patton describes the opposite occurs. Regardless of questions of religious inappropriateness, when praying “away from home,” especially beyond the pale, we find ourselves drastically deprived of what have become for us the necessary conditions of religious expression, radically out of place, and lost for words, forced to think about what we’re doing and saying in ways never called for when at home. Patton’s insightful portrayal of the transgressor’s awkwardness of expression and struggle to articulate as a kind of one-sided religious pidgin, capable of grabbing God’s attention *by virtue* *of* its ungainly inadequacy, has much to teach us regarding the potentially self-destabilizing, even ambivalating effect that trying to express ourselves in the company of strangers to our own world can have. Searching for the words of a strange and foreign language – pidgin or other - to best explain ourselves is liable to give rise to a form of self-reckoning we rarely encounter in the comfort zones of our home settings.

1. As if to take up Patton’s recommendation, leading relational psychoanalyst, Lewis Aron’s “Beyond Tolerance in Psychoanalytic Communities: Reflexive Skepticism and Critical Pluralism”, *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, 14 (2017), pp. 271–282 is the first serious attempt to explore from within the relevance of our work to the field. Unfortunately, his untimely death in 2019 brought our conversation to a premature end. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Our use of “manifest” knowingly echoes Wilfrid Sellar’s classic study of the fundamental incongruity between the manifest and scientific “images of man”: “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man”, in R.G. Colodny (ed.) *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962, pp. 35-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The definitive work in this regard is Daniel Dennett’s *The Intentional Stance*, Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See for example, Sarah Japhet, "The Term *Ger* and the Concept of Conversion in the Hebrew Bible," in T. Dunkelgrün and P. Maciejko (eds.), *Bastards and Believers: Jewish Converts and Conversion from the Bible to the Present*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020, pp. 26-41 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters to Justice*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. For an appraisal and critique of her approach see Menachem Fisch, “Epistemic Humility, or What Political Theory can Learn from Talmudic Judaism”, in H. Schulz, M. Fritz and R. Barth (eds.), *Stolz und Demut. Zur emotionalen Ambivalenz religiöser Positionierungen*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, (forthcoming) 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Nussbaum, *Political; Emotions*, p.388. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The insightful portrayal of gentile God-worshippers in 2Kings 17 describes them as remaining understandably faithful also to “the Gods of their ancestors”. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. And yet, the fact that the princess’s palace was to function as an Egyptian temple is strongly implied by the second part of the verse: “And Solomon became allied by marriage with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh’s daughter, and brought her into the city of David, *until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall of Jerusalem round about*” (3:1). There would have been no reason for her place of residence to be moved outside the city walls once the Temple was built and functioning, and the boundaries of the city set, unless there was something religiously objectionable about it. The verse clearly implies that Solomon was aware of this from the start. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)