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2019

Exile as “Place” for Empathy

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Historically, exile has been a political act that has various philosophical and psychological ramifications. In the Roman world, exile was a substitute for physical death.¹ Adorno argues that exile is a “life in suspension” as a result of being placed in the diasporic conditions of estrangement. For Adorno, “it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home,”² since being in exile makes one a perpetual stranger and sharpens one’s ethical stance. The idea of being a stranger leads to the significance of the issue of empathy. In this chapter, I discuss Shinran and Maimonides as I maintain that the focus in some of their writings demonstrates the effects of exile as “place” for empathy. I further propose a link between empathy and ethics by viewing empathy as a measure of genuine ethical concern.

The choice of focus on Shinran and Maimonides is not predicated merely on their being contemporaries, though divided by vast geographic distance, but is informed by their respective statuses within their communities. In addition, by choosing these thinkers, I aim to problematize a tendency to view Eastern and Western thought as existing in the unrelated milieus that continue drawing the boundaries between the familiar and the unfamiliar as impenetrable. This comparison attempts to decrease this perception.

While philosophy and consequently philosophers are often treated in terms of “a continuation of Plato’s enterprise,” which is the life of a withdrawal from everyday social life, viewing any thinkers and their thought outside of their respective environments means overlooking that some of their views are directly affected by these environments. Any thinker’s thought cannot be fully understood if it is abstracted from the history of his or her life as a whole. Rather than viewing Shinran and Maimonides as Plato’s “cave philosophers,” we can note that their thought demonstrates direct applicability to human lives. In the cases of Shinran and Maimonides, their thought cannot be fully comprehended if their respective exiles are not taken into account. In both cases, their life conditions resulted in the creation of either “hybrid” or new identities that allowed them to view certain issues from the position of empathic insiders/outsideers.

As a result of their displacement from their familiar environments, both thinkers had to reinvent their own identities. The “hybrid identity” of Maimonides was a result of his belonging to multiple communities: his own Jewish community and the Islamic community in which he became embedded. Shinran’s identity was reinvented as well when, following expulsion from the monastic community, he entered the community of the common people and broke the monastic tradition by starting his own family. For him, exile meant being defrocked and expelled from Japan’s capital, the nation’s intellectual and religious center, and returning to secular life. In this process of being stripped of his ordination, Shinran’s exilic identity underwent a change as he lost his religious name and was given a new name as a layman, a name he refused to own.

For Maimonides, his new life conditions stimulated an increased emphasis on Jewish communal life and the endorsement of the commandments (religious law) as a means to his continual existence fully embedded and involved in the culture of his host land. For Shinran, they meant a complete and unconditional embrace of the teachings of the Pure Land and particularly of the practice of the Buddha Amida.

Since Jews in Maimonides’ time never wrote their autobiographies, Maimonides did not address his own experience. Thus, everything that is known about him comes from his other writings and letters. Likewise, Shinran did not leave any notes or a personal account of his experience of exile. The influence of their displacements from their respective communities becomes apparent through their writings. Their writings demonstrate that this displacement—from the Andalusian Jewish community of his childhood and youth for Maimonides and from the monastic community of Kyoto for Shinran—produced an empathic and tolerant approach to other human beings, enhanced by their experience of the embodied knowledge of their new surroundings and new community members. The goal is to demonstrate that their biographical experiences, which have informed their thinking, resonate with conditions of exile and diasporic living in pluralistic societies that define the lives of many individuals, communities, and societies in the twenty-first century. Let us briefly turn to their respective environments before we attempt to tackle the elusiveness of the idea of empathy.

Japanese Environment

Shinran’s life and writing fall within the Kamakura period (1185–1333), which directly followed the Heian period (794–1185). The Kamakura period was a time of much devastation and suffering. During this period the scholarly communities of Buddhist monks suffered a decline because their focus on the educated elite failed to address social concerns. The first shogunate (military) government

was established in 1192, and the Japanese warriors, rather than the court nobles, took control of the government. In addition to many social and cultural changes, this period was characterized by an unusual number of natural disasters, such as typhoons, epidemics, fires, and earthquakes. The Kamakura period represented the crisis of the age, the so-called degenerate age (*mappō*), characterized by increased distance from the teachings and practices of the Buddha.

The Pure Land tradition was a direct response to these hardships and human uncertainties. Already enjoying some popular support among the nonelite in the earlier Heian period, in the Kamakura period the Pure Land tradition took a critical stance toward the decline of the preceding Buddhist traditions into monastic formalism, sectarianism, and a focus on individual liberation. Remaining connected to the larger Mahāyāna principles the Pure Land tradition did not negate its principle of the nondichotomous relation between self and other. In effect, the Pure Land tradition became an admixture of a Mahāyāna conception of enlightened wisdom and the karmic nature of human existence. While the traditional Buddhist view of karmic existence builds on the principle that performing good deeds counters the negative influence of evil deeds and hence improves conditions for rebirth, the Mahāyāna tradition, while accepting the principle of karmic causation, maintains that bodhisattvas perform good actions and practices and accumulate merits that become transferred to human beings. In other words, bodhisattvic practices are undertaken with the goal of liberation of all beings.

All the teachings of the Pure Land tradition pivot around the Buddha Amida (Skt. Amitabha), a bodhisattva Hōzō (Skt. Dharmakara) who attained the state of Buddhahood. Making forty-eight vows, Amida Buddha established a Pure Land as the land of happiness (Jōdo). His most important is the Eighteenth Vow, or Primal Vow (*hongan*)—the vow of birth through the recitation of the name of Amida Buddha (*shōmyō nenbutsu*). This vow expresses the desire to free all beings from the weight of karmic evil. In the Pure Land tradition, the recitation of the name of the Buddha Amida nullifies one’s karmic evil and revokes karmic causation. Hence, any human attains the potentiality of enlightenment. Shinran was particularly attracted to the nondiscriminative nature of this tradition.

Shinran

Shinran became a Tendai monk at the age of nine and studied on Mount Hiei. During his studies Shinran was an ordinary temple monk (*dōsō*), exposed to the Tendai system’s major doctrines as well as Pure Land thoughts of such Tendai masters as Ennin, Ryogen, and Genshin. In addition, he was influenced by a prevalent religious consciousness in society known as the “veneration of

Prince Shotoku.” Traditionally credited with the formal adoption of Buddhism in Japan, Shotoku (574–622) was seen as a manifestation of the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara (J. Kannon). At the age of twenty-nine, Shinran left Mount Hiei and, after a period of spiritual turmoil, joined Hōnen and his Pure Land movement.

Hōnen—the founder of the Jōdo, or Pure Land, school of Buddhism—established the popular independent movement of Pure Land teaching, advocating belief in the power of Amida Buddha’s Eighteenth Vow and the recitation of Amida’s name as the sole means for birth in the Pure Land. Hōnen’s teachings challenged the prevailing Tendai view of Pure Land thought by articulating the *nenbutsu* practice as “exclusive *nenbutsu*” (*senju nenbutsu*), as an independent and self-sufficient path of Buddhist practice. Hōnen’s teaching questioned the Tendai school’s focus on the significance of merit transfer and self-power (*jiriki*). However, as his teaching of the exclusive *nenbutsu* spread throughout the country, old temples at Mount Hiei and in Nara tried to prevent the further dissemination of this practice. In his teaching practices Hōnen never differentiated between monks and laypeople, men and women, or aristocrats and common folks. This lack of differentiation was perceived as a challenge to the traditional Buddhist institution because it ultimately ensured everyone’s access to the sacred. Hōnen’s approach was seen as a “religious democratization.”³ Already in 1204 the priests of Mount Hiei appealed to the chief abbot to abolish the exclusive *nenbutsu* practice.⁴ As a result, Hōnen and his main disciples, including Shinran, were exiled from Kyoto to different remote parts of Japan. Shinran’s tenure with Hōnen was short, for he never saw Hōnen again after being exiled.

Shinran’s period of exile fell between 1207 and 1235, during which he lived in the harsh environment of Kokufu in the Echigo District and broke the monastic tradition by marrying and raising a family, calling himself “neither monk nor layman.” After Shinran’s exilic ban was lifted in 1211, he chose not to return to Kyoto and the monkhood but stayed in Echigo for two more years. He then moved with his family to Kantō, still a somewhat rural area, perhaps benefiting from its proximity to the libraries where he began writing his *Kyōgyōshinshō* (Teaching, practice, faith, and realization).

The exilic period was the most significant time in Shinran’s life in relation to the crystallization of his thought. During this period, as he became further disillusioned with both Buddhist institutional power and institutionalized societal power, Shinran continued self-consciously exploring human nature, with all its passions and instincts. In his postscript to *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran wrote:

The emperor and his ministers, acting against the dharma and violating human rectitude, became enraged and embittered. As a result, Master Genku [Hōnen]—the eminent founder [in Japan]—and a number of his followers, without receiving

any deliberation of their [alleged] crimes, were summarily sentenced to death or were disposed of their monkhood, given [secular] names, and consigned to distant banishment. I was among the latter. Hence, I am now *neither a monk nor one in worldly life*. For this reason, I have taken the term “Toku” [stubble-haired] as my name.⁵ (Italics mine)

By saying he was not a monk, he divorced himself from the temporal power of the Buddhist tradition in Japan, and by saying he was not a layperson (“nor one in worldly life”), he distanced himself from the nobility and warriors as well. These words clearly articulated his political views as well as his displeasure with the lack of ethical treatment of Hōnen’s followers.

The exposure to farmers, hunters, fishermen, and other working people made Shinran more appreciative of a nondualistic principle that did not view the religious life and lay life as two separate realms. Shinran further reconceptualized the doctrine of merit transference. In his interpretation, merit transference not only entailed individuals to send out their merits but could also be a manifestation of the compassion sent to others by the already enlightened Amida Buddha. He further reinforced the idea of “other power” (*tariki*) by negating the value of self-power (*jiṛiki*). This reconceptualization grew out of his own inability to attain enlightenment by the traditional Tendai principle of accumulating merits through one’s own efforts. Becoming sensitized to the inadequacy of one’s own efforts, he viewed self-power in terms of rational calculation (*hakarai*) as merely egotistic self-focus devoid of compassion for other beings.

One of Shinran’s most important concepts is *shinjin*, a concept that defies a precise translation. Its approximate translation is “entrusting faith,” and it implies a “true, real, and sincere heart and mind.”⁶ For Shinran, the practice of *shōmyō nenbutsu* was much less significant than attaining the sincere mind (*shinjin*). It is sincerity and spontaneity that Shinran emphasized, not any form of rational calculation.

Cognizant of life’s challenges and his attention to those afflicted by negative karmic effects,⁷ Shinran did not use the terms “good” and “evil” to describe people’s actions but viewed karmic “evil” as “suffering and the awareness of suffering.”⁸ Shinran’s early works, although lacking sophistication of *Kyōgyōshinshō*, already demonstrated a humanistic focus driven by his compassion for all beings. For instance, in *Kangyo-amidakyo-shuchū* (Annotated Amitayur-dhyana sutra), composed in 1217, he cited a passage from *Le-pang-wen-lei*, written by Tsung-hsiao in 1200, in which Tsung-hsiao discussed the rebirth of the animal slaughterer. In medieval China, by the standards of that time, the animal slaughterer was considered unable to die a peaceful death. Shinran reflected on this story by arguing that it is entirely *possible* for a butcher to be saved through Pure Land faith. Here we can see a significant element of Shinran’s Pure Land theory, which he would call *akunin-shōki* (literally, the wicked person as the true opportunity).

The notion of *akunin-shōki* matured during Shinran's period of exile, when he became most intimately familiar with the hardships of daily labor that he shared with his neighbors. This cognizance of human weakness and wickedness (one's own and that of others) led him to realize the absolute or eternal truth of the Buddha Amida's Eighteenth Vow, which was explicitly directed toward those whose karmic situation made it impossible for them to reach the place of enlightenment by their own efforts. For Shinran, that karmic situation was in fact shared by everyone living in the degenerate age of *mappō*.

In a *Kyōgyōshinshō* chapter on faith (admittedly one of the most important chapters in *Kyōgyōshinshō*), Shinran reflects and acknowledges the difficulty of overcoming human inclinations, including a propensity for violence and greed. Shinran refers to the Buddha's compassion in this passage:

When there is sickness among the seven children, although the father and the mother are concerned equally with all of them, nevertheless their hearts lean wholly toward the sick child. Great King, it is like this with the Tathāgata. It is not that there is no equality among all sentient beings, but his heart leans wholly toward the person who has committed evil.⁹

Shinran's work demonstrates carefully argued religious logic largely informed by his views on human nature, including human imperfections. Human nature, prone to weakness and wickedness, exhibits an inability to know Buddhist reality (to be reborn and hence to attain enlightenment) through one's own efforts. In Shinran's thought, this inability became an equalizer among all human beings, regardless of their wealth, social status, education, or heredity.

It would be incorrect to argue that Shinran's reform of Buddhist practice started only during his exile. Exile, however, helped him crystallize certain of his contentions that resulted in some radical changes. Shinran's own experience of exclusion from a monastic community and his refusal to be merely a layman either resulted in the need to reinvent his identity and increased his sensitivity to the issues of inclusion. His firsthand familiarity of exile enlarged his awareness of the arbitrariness of judgments about good and evil and contributed to his amplified compassion for all sentient beings. While he remained committed and devoted to his ideals, this experience further informed his thought and his commitment to ordinary men and women. The ordinary people who followed Shinran's teaching were spared anxiety over salvation and continual rebirth. This angst was alleviated with the relocation of the center of agency to the Buddha Amida.

Jewish Environment

In Jewish tradition, God's intentions encompass the expectation of human righteousness and ethical behavior. The question of fulfilling God's expectation is

directly linked to one's religious and ethnic identity. The preservation of religious and ethnic identity arose in biblical times. The Babylonian exile demonstrated the hardships of survival in the conditions of displacement but also demonstrated a number of factors that influenced the successful resistance to the pressures of assimilation and preservation of one's religious and cultural identity.

Preservation of the Jewish tradition was affected by its history of persecution. The history of Jewish displacement influenced the need for counteracting these adverse conditions by further strengthening ethnic and religious identity. From the time of the loss of their native land and their separation from the central institution of the temple, Jewish survival depended on the caprice of local rulers. Subjected to discrimination, expulsion, and massacre, the Jewish people developed a keen sensitivity to danger. As Jews became scattered, the commandments assumed a central role in preserving Jewish existence by giving the Jewish people norms and obligations to follow.

In medieval Muslim Spain, Jews enjoyed a period of relative peacefulness under the rule of the Almoravids (1054–1147), a confederation of Berber tribes. In 1125 the Almohads, rival Berber tribes who advocated the "Unity of Allah," rebelled against the Almoravids in the Atlas Mountains. The fighting between these tribes lasted until 1147 and ended with the victory of the Almohads. By the early 1150s the Almohads had conquered a wide area of North Africa as well as the western portion of Muslim Spain, including Córdoba. By 1160 the Almohads had expanded their control, covering vast territories that included Tunisia and Tripoli. Ten years later the Almohads had completed their conquest of Muslim Spain. By that time the Almohads had forced conversion on all non-Muslims, and previous protection of minority religions (*dhimma* status) was lifted.

Maimonides

Moses Maimonides was born in 1138 in Córdoba, Andalusia, which was then a major Arabic metropolis. When the Almohads conquered Córdoba, the relatively safe Andalusian environment fell apart and Jewish lives dramatically changed. Some information on the treatment of the Jews during this time can be gleaned from a letter written by Maymun b. Yusuf, the father of Maimonides, in 1160: "Overwhelmed with humiliation, blamed and despised, the seeds of captivity surround us and we are submerged in its depth."¹⁰ Unable to live under these conditions, Maimonides' family left Córdoba in 1148. As his family wandered from place to place in Andalusia, Maimonides became an exile and a refugee at an early age. In 1160, Maimonides and his family settled in Fez, Morocco, where they stayed for about five years. In 1166, Maimonides and his family finally came to Fustat (Old Cairo) after a brief stay in Alexandria.

These wanderings from place to place influenced Maimonides' ability to integrate various influences and later were manifested in his intellectual versatility and testified to his "cosmopolitan" nature. Perhaps this ability was enhanced by the fact that, even before his exile, Maimonides' life was embedded in the Islamic culture of Muslim Spain (Andalusia), characterized at that time by a peaceful coexistence of Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Although his ability to adapt to a new environment was developed prior to his final exile in Egypt, his life under Islamic dominance made him well aware of a certain inherent duplicity.

While still wandering from Andalusia and not settled in any permanent place, Maimonides started writing his *Commentary on the Mishnah*. In his conclusion to the *Commentary*, he wrote, "My heart is often burdened by the troubles of the time and what God has decreed for us with regard to exile and wandering the world from one end to another."¹¹ *Commentary on the Mishnah* was Maimonides' preparatory work for his *Mishneh Torah* (Repetition of the Torah), his major compilation of comprehensive law code.

Maimonides' life significantly improved when he moved to Egypt in 1166. The Fatimid dynasty that ruled Egypt at that time was spared the Almohads' fanaticism. In Fustat, Maimonides became integrated into Egyptian society and involved with the day-to-day life of the Egyptian Jewish community. There the boundary between the Jewish community and the other communities was largely demarcated by the commandments and the requirement to adhere to them. Maimonides did not necessarily translate this legal separation into strict relational boundaries and did not erect any impenetrable boundaries between his existence as a Jewish leader and an Islamic thinker.

Maimonides' participation in public affairs demonstrated his concern with the lives of the Jewish community. For instance, in 1169 he became actively involved in obtaining funds for the Jewish prisoners from Bilbays who had been captured in the Crusades. He sent letters to Jews throughout Egypt asking for contributions to pay out ransom fees demanded by the crusaders for these prisoners. Maimonides' commitment to his community was not limited to writing letters and listing his name as a signatory; he also served as the campaign's treasurer, overseeing the distribution of the obtained funds.

In 1171, Egypt was conquered by the Ayyubids, a Muslim dynasty of Kurdish origin. Shortly after Saladin became sultan over Egypt, Maimonides was elected the head of Egyptian Jewry—*ra'is al-yahud*. Navigating between Jewish and Islamic communities, Maimonides exercised the highest judicial authority by appointing chief judges and having broad communal responsibilities. In addition, he functioned as a respondent to legal inquiries from Jewish communities in Egypt and elsewhere.

Given the political and institutional standing of his position, Maimonides was thrown into a struggle with the dominant and well-established local power.

Here we note a certain resonance with Shinran’s situation. While Shinran voiced his objections in terms of embracing a different approach to religious practices, Maimonides also did not always go along with the rules of the prevailing establishment. A case in point is his refusal to collect funds for the support of halakhic scholars.¹² Perhaps this explains why, despite Maimonides’ integration into the society and his role as *ra’is al-yahud*, he held that position for only two years, from 1171 to 1172. He did not regain the position until later in his life, serving from 1196 to 1204.¹³

In Egypt, Maimonides’ commitment to the Andalusian halakhic tradition remained firm. This commitment was tested between 1189 and 1191 when Maimonides argued against some of the prevailing views held by the Babylonian geonim—presidents of the Babylonian Talmudic Academies. A head of the yeshiva in Baghdad, Samuel ben Eli, did all in his power to discredit Maimonides’ rulings by ruling himself that it was permissible to sail on the Sabbath in the Euphrates and the Tigris. A parallel can be seen in Maimonides’ commitment to those whom he considered his Andalusian “teachers” and Shinran’s loyalty to Hōnen. In both cases, an approach chosen by these two thinkers respectively was not in line with the prevailing view of those in power.

While Shinran directly acknowledges his debt to “seven patriarchs,” Maimonides’ debt to his predecessors appears to be less straightforward and depends on whether the debt is related to his halakhic works or to his philosophical writings. He acknowledges that his thought was influenced by Aristotle, though read through the eyes of Alexander, Themistius, and Ibn Rushd (1126–1198). He articulates his reverence for these thinkers in *Eight Chapters*, his introduction to *Commentary on Tractate Avot*.¹⁴

Naming Aristotle (or those who explicated his writings) would have been dangerously unprecedented, but even the reference to the “ancient and modern philosophers” as a guide for his explanation of the commandments was already revolutionary. Maimonides further challenges authority by adding, “Hear the truth from whoever says it.”¹⁵ It is truth that matters, not whether it comes from the mouth of a given sage. Holding his “teachers” in high esteem does not translate into Maimonides’ complete agreement with their views. In analogy, but also in contrast, with Shinran—who interpreted (or in some cases translated) the words of his “seven patriarchs” in a slightly different vein than intended by them—Maimonides offered his own objections to some of the views of the sages as well as the views of those whom he called his teachers, highlighting his ability to think beyond what was already accepted.

Similarly to the writings of Shinran, in which he further democratized and radicalized Hōnen’s teachings, Maimonides’ writings exhibit certain “heretical” features. Nonetheless, even those writings, which were infused with a highly provocative perspective, never strove to undermine but, rather, empathically focused on ensuring the preservation of Judaism and the Jewish people.

Like Shinran, Maimonides espoused certain opinions that contradicted established norms. He explicitly and implicitly challenged the conventional understanding of Judaism. Similarly to Shinran, Maimonides did not have any institutional support that could have helped legitimize the transformations he envisioned. Neither did Maimonides claim any divine inspiration, nor, contrary to Shinran, did he back up his claim by referring to the thinkers before him. In his introduction to the third part of his philosophical magnum opus entitled *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides writes: “I followed conjecture and supposition; no divine revelation has come to me to teach me that the intention in the matter in question was such and such, nor did I receive what I believe in these matters from a teacher.”¹⁶

Maimonides’ possession of a heretical streak should not be mistaken for an intention to undermine the centrality and the significance of the commandments. While he recognized that complete adherence at times might not be feasible, he considered following the commandments as being imperative to preserving Jewish heritage. The possible inability for a complete devotion to the commandments necessitated certain creative reinterpretations. Maimonides was acutely aware of the contradictions and stipulations that originated from the conditions of exilic life. His *Mishneh Torah* was, in effect, an instrument of sustainability of one’s existence in exile. By contextualizing specificity of the conditions and putting *Mishneh Torah* into language accessible to everyone, he converted it into a mechanism central to the construction of a viable diaspora. Maimonides transformed the Talmudic elliptic style, with its variety of overlapping arguments, into comprehensible material and a functional tool for continual survival.

Maimonides’ approach to intolerable conditions and imposed conversion can be gleaned from some of his direct thoughts in his “Letter on Forced Conversions” (Iggeret ha-Shemad).¹⁷ In this letter he privileges human life and states that the only clear case in which the Jew should die rather than transgress is when he or she is under condition of being forced to violate the commandments that prohibit idolatry, adultery, and murder. Maimonides asserts that, in other cases, the Jew must take into account the purpose for which the transgression is being forced upon him or her and whether the transgression will occur in private or in public. Maimonides makes a clear distinction between the matters of the heart (inner feelings) and outer exhibitions (any actions that one is required to perform in order to survive). He exhibits a high sense of tolerance when he advises Jews to confess the Islamic creed rather than die. Yet when Jews are forced to transgress, they should do it to the smallest extent possible and aim to leave that place as soon as it becomes possible.

In this letter Maimonides combines an allowance for compromise (to ensure survival) with an argument against complacency. Despite his empathic approach, Maimonides transcends the immediacy of suffering and provides a nuanced

perspective. Typical of his style, Maimonides does not aim to offer clear guidelines for acting under duress; on the one hand, he shows leniency; on the other, he encourages Jews not to stay in the environment that is conducive to coercion. He combines his love for the Jewish people and anxiety for their personal safety with his concern for the Jewish community's continual existence.

Maimonides' *Epistle to Yemen*, written in 1172, is a further testimony to his commitment to the Jewish community. He concludes this epistle by noting that despite having concerns about his own safety after making his views public, he is convinced that "the public welfare takes precedence over one's personal safety."¹⁸ Maimonides' diasporic personality is that of a person who shared the fate of those to whom he addressed his writings, which provides him with language that speaks directly to his audience.

Throughout his life in Egypt, Maimonides always considered himself an Andalusian, despite being displaced from Andalusia. His life in exile, as his writings demonstrate, was dedicated to preserving Judaism, to "save the Jewish world from the halakhic and spiritual ruin he had experienced."¹⁹ His goal, however, was never to claim the impossibility of coexistence with other traditions; rather, he believed in that coexistence with the distinct particularities remaining intact.

Empathy

Recalling that I suggested that exile is conducive to the increased ability for empathy, I turn now to empathy as an important concept in relation to our capacity to gain a grasp of the content of other people's minds. It also has been seen as important in relation to our faculty to identify with others and to respond to them in an ethically appropriate way. I focus here on empathy as understood by Edith Stein (1891–1942), a student of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). In her 1916 doctorate on empathy, Stein addressed not only what empathy means but also its problematic character. While she follows Husserl that empathy is "the basis of intersubjective experience" and "the condition of possible knowledge of the existing outer world," she emphasizes the embodiment of empathy by pointing out "the expressive dimensions of bodily movement and of speech."²⁰ Stein argues that empathy is "the experience of foreign consciousness in general, irrespective of the kind of the experiencing subject or of the subject whose consciousness is experienced."²¹ In her view, empathy is a shift of intentional focus to the recipient's viewpoint without loss of self-awareness. Emphasizing the intersubjective and relational dimensions of empathy allows one to understand others but also to increase one's self-understanding.

In some cases, empathy becomes affected by emotional contagion or emotional infection. Precisely because there is the danger of confusing empathy

with emotional contagion or emotional infection, it is important to keep in mind the significance of the differentiation between self and other. Emotional contagion is a process that is relatively unreflective, unintentional, and hence largely inaccessible to one's awareness. It is usually driven by a self-oriented perspective and results in one's assessing the other according to one's own perceptions. A self-oriented perspective errs on the side of misrecognizing that in actuality one's own response to a set of circumstances is rarely an indication of another's reaction. In actuality, self-oriented perspective leads to personal distress when, by seeing everything as related to self, one loses track of the fact that the experience is actually someone else's, not one's own. Empathic distress in effect nullifies empathy to the other because all attention becomes focused on the self, and the focus is now placed on the means to alleviate one's own pain and discomfort.

Because of its self-oriented perspective, empathy is more likely to extend to kin group members than to strangers from another land or tribe. Being in exile limits this self-oriented perspective because, as Adorno expressed, exilic conditions are characterized as "an incomprehensible" and one might be less tempted to project one's own experience as universally applicable to everyone.

In her discussion of empathy, Stein differentiates between our experience of our own pain as a primordial, or firsthand, experience and our experience of another's pain as nonprimordial, or secondhand, experience. However, she argues that the *awareness* of the pain of others is primordial for us. For Stein, empathy is an "embodied experience" rather than merely abstract or theoretical. I suggest that exile provides the embodied experience conducive to an enhanced sense of empathy.

In her later works, Stein posits that individual consciousness can be understood only as a result of external impacts and influences, and she places much more emphasis on the importance and impacts of one's community.²² She develops an account of social acts as "a third form of social relation" in which social acts are intermediary between empathy and collective intentionality. Mutual communication among human beings is the means of establishing communities that are characterized by the integration of the individuals on the basis of the cognitive, the intentional, the normative, and the phenomenological dimensions. These dimensions cannot be considered in isolation from each other but, rather, must be considered in relation to one another. According to Stein, humanity is "one great individual,"²³ and community its best representation.

I suggest that exile further sensitizes one's sense of empathy to extend beyond the familiar without reducing the identification with the members of one's own group. From a Buddhist viewpoint, however, empathy might be a natural state of being with others. If we take into account the Buddhist concept of interrelatedness, we recognize that each self is embedded in a sharing

meaning with others. In this case, exile reinforces the sense of empathy by bringing an increased awareness of life's travails.

What is the relation between empathy and ethics? According to Hume, our empathic feelings toward someone affect our judgment of one's actions and provoke our desire for justice. Empathy is instrumental for the development of our capacity to make moral judgments by increasing our sensitivity to moral rules and the ideals of justice. Exile can be a means of familiarizing oneself with diverse and distant cultural and religious groups and developing "a broader and more consistent capacity to empathize."²⁴ Invoking Adorno again, I recall his words that "it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home,"²⁵ and exile certainly increases the likelihood of not being "at home in one's home." Empathy is a measure of genuine ethical concern. However, empathy is not a condition for ethical response but a *possibility* for it. In other words, empathy increases potentiality for an ethical involvement. This ethical involvement in the case of Shinran and Maimonides may be observed through some of the themes addressed in their writings.

Michael Slote argues that empathy provides the "cement of the moral universe" and foregrounds moral approval.²⁶ Reflecting on the notion that empathy can be a means of moral approval, we should not go so far as to suggest that the writings of Shinran and Maimonides exhibit moral approval; rather, they exhibit the absence of moral *disapproval*. Their respective exilic conditions enabled them to distinguish between self and other without assessing this distinction in any moralistic terms. For Shinran this is observed in his conceptualization of *akunin-shōki*, whereas for Maimonides it is exemplified in his articulation of the approach to conversion. In addition, their need to reinvent their own identities resulted in an empathic understanding of the complexity of the identities and ethical needs of others.

With this in mind, I suggest that Shinran's and Maimonides' writings demonstrate that exile heightened their sense of empathy and as a result further sensitized their respective approaches to ethics. Their writings implicitly exhibit the key components of empathy, and their approach intertwines affect and cognition rather than building only on either one of these components of empathy. As Lawrence Hatab has observed, empathy is "a mode of disclosure that generates ethical import."²⁷ For Shinran and Maimonides, this mode of disclosure is in their writings.

Empathy is one of the significant concepts that served both Shinran and Maimonides as a means for their empathic identification with their newly acquired communities. Some of Maimonides' writings demonstrate that a sense of empathy is his ability, in Stein's terms, to "enter the foreign consciousness" affected by his own experience of displacement. That ability, while enhanced by his sense of duty to his own community, is intensified also by his appreciation

and respect for the other. Like Maimonides' writings, Shinran's teachings are testimony to his own empathy.

Exile as "Place" for Empathy

Despite their differences, Shinran's and Maimonides' tolerance and empathy arose, not only from their intellectual musings, but also from their need to contend with these issues personally. It is their respective exiles that provided them with a "place" for empathy but also allowed them to show resolve rather than capitulation of their values and to challenge a perception of powerlessness and fearfulness often associated with those who are placed in adverse or unfamiliar conditions. In some instances, their capacity for empathy enhanced their ability to compromise without sacrificing their values. Their respective conditions of exile allowed them to develop empathic feelings, not only toward the people who shared their immediate experiences or to the members of their own community, but also toward the people who shared the experiences of life's hardships. To say that their experience of exile attuned their sense of empathy only for those who were like them is to limit empathy to empathy contagion and to see them as exercising a self-oriented perspective. The idea of emotional identification cannot be reduced to the narrowly conceived similarity in one's experience. Emotional identification in their case reflects their nuanced approach to what can be considered morally acceptable.

However, we should not reduce their approaches to mere similarities, and we should be careful not to overlook differences that inform their views. Their focus on empathy for human beings carries differing undertones. Shinran, driven by a sense of compassion that became heightened by his exilic conditions, advanced teachings that included acceptance of the disenfranchised and the disadvantaged. He emphasized overcoming life's problems from within oneself, viewing the world of *mappō* as fundamentally "unsaveable." This approach remains within the parameters of traditional Buddhism.

Shinran's focus on the individual rather than on social transformation contrasts with Maimonides' approach. Maimonides stressed the communal, social, and political commitments related to the covenantal (obligatory and promissory) relationships that typify Judaism. To claim, however, that Maimonides was concerned with the survival of the community at the expense of the individual would be incorrect. His emphasis on the commandments as the underlying ethical system testifies to his commitment to Judaism but also to his concern for the community's preservation. Yet, out of his sense of empathy, he is capable of taking into account any extenuating circumstances that might require an adjusted approach.

Exile heightened Maimonides' sense of empathy, coupled with his concern for justice and ethics. As a leader of the Jewish community and a liaison between that community and the Muslim rulers, Maimonides was acutely aware of the intricacies involved in this setting. Despite his ability to learn from and appreciate an unfamiliar environment, his own experience of exile made him intensely mindful of the dangers of being swallowed by a surrounding alien culture, and it strengthened his aspirations for the preservation of the community and its traditions. In some cases his ideas involved disagreement with other members of the Jewish community, but more often than not those ideas encompassed critical awareness of the dangers of outside forces.

While Shinran was not embedded in a similarly complex and conflictual environment that required balancing between different cultural and religious systems of thought, his firsthand experience of being exposed to the corruption of the ruling powers (shogunate) and also to the complacency of the monastic community similarly augmented his sense of ethical compassion. His exposure to his own culture's inadequacies heightened his empathy for ordinary folks whose lives were directly affected by these failings. Although he was not faced with the loss of Buddhism per se (contrary to Maimonides' concern that Judaism might become absorbed into Islam), he was critical of the prevailing Tendai system of thought and was convinced that the True Pure Land tradition was more inclusive and accepting of all beings. At the core of the thought of these two men was a similar concern with the well-being of humans.

Shinran's exile, unlike that of Maimonides, did not result in aspirations and concerns of retaining a distinct theological community but pointed to his hope of transforming and democratizing the prevailing Tendai tradition. If viewed superficially, his take on adherence to a tradition can seem diametrically opposed to that of Maimonides. Yet this is not completely accurate, because Shinran aimed not to get rid of the Tendai tradition, which in itself incorporated some ideas of Pure Land thoughts, but to further strengthen this thought within the existing tradition by challenging its status quo. His implicit desire to transform the tradition does resemble Maimonides' service to his coreligionists when he is similarly willing to challenge the existing state of affairs. However, it would be misleading to claim that his concerns for his fellow human beings included a direct call for any reformation of the political structure, which is absent in Maimonides' thought as well. Like Maimonides, Shinran was personally aware of the political repercussions of challenging the prevailing religious system. An expectation for ethical treatment was inherently linked to concern for inclusion but also to concerns for safety and the provision of unthreatening and humane conditions.

The thought of Shinran and Maimonides, two exceptional men who, even in conditions of adversity, were capable of focusing on larger concerns for others,

reminds us that empathy and tolerance are notions that will never become obsolete. The cultivation of these qualities will always be imperative to humanity's well-being. Exile teaches us to look empathically beyond our own group by warning us that "within an embrace of particularity lies the danger of tribalism, where a myopic fixation on one's own group can obscure or cancel out the dignity and humanity of other groups."²⁸ This is not to say that one's cultural and religious heritage is to be forsaken and replaced but to say that one's culture has a finite presence capable of accepting other cultures. Shinran and Maimonides in their exile were directly exposed to the other, which taught them empathy and acceptance of difference.

NOTES

1. See Jo-Marie Claassen, *Displaced Persons: The Literature of Exile from Cicero to Boethius* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).
2. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2006), 87.
3. James W. Heisig, Thomas P. Kasulis, and John C. Maraldo, eds., *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 238.
4. Hōnen founded Jōdo Shinshū in 1175. Shinran became his disciple in 1201.
5. Shinran, *The Collected Works of Shinran* (hereafter cited as CWS) (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-Ha, 1997), 1:289.
6. CWS, 2:206.
7. See Ronald W. Neufeldt, ed., *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986).
8. Heisig et al., *Japanese Philosophy*, 239.
9. CWS, 1:133.
10. Norman Roth, *Jews, Visigoths and Muslims in Medieval Spain: Cooperation and Conflict* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 119.
11. Moshe Halbertal notes that these words were written in Maimonides' *Commentary on the Mishnah*, conclusion to *Seder Taharot* [Laws of purity]. See Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides: Life and Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).
12. Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 43–47.
13. See Martin Gilbert, *In Ishmael's House: A History of Jews in Muslim Lands* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
14. Moses Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, in *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, ed. Raymond L. Weiss with Charles Butterworth (New York: Dover, 1975), 60.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 2:416.
17. Moses Maimonides, "The Epistle on Martyrdom," in *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*, texts translated and notes by Abraham S. Halkin, discussions by David Hartman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985), 24–25.
18. Moses Maimonides, "The Epistle to Yemen," in *Crisis and Leadership*, 131.
19. Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 23.
20. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue, 1913–1922* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 84.

21. Edith Stein, "On the Problem of Empathy," in *The Collected Works of Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of Cross, Discalced Carmelite* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1989), 3:11.
22. See Edith Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and Humanities*, trans. Mary Catherine Baseheart and Marianne Sawicki (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2000).
23. Edith Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being*, trans. Kurt F. Reinhardt (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2002), 507.
24. Lawrence J. Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian Contributions to Moral Philosophy* (Boston: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 263.
25. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 87.
26. Michael Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 13.
27. Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude*, 150.
28. *Ibid.*, 203.