



## Spiritual Necessity

I was interested to hear Rutger Bregman, in the opening words of his Reith Lectures, on the necessity of a Moral Revolution, identify himself as the son of a protestant minister. And honoured to be at a meeting with the Archbishop-Elect Sarah Mullaly – who was at New London last year.

Both are wrestling with what they perceive as a morality failure pervasive in much of contemporary society; a nihilist sense that, since the whole world is such a mess, the morally efficacious thing to do is protect one's own pot as fiercely as possible at the expense of all else and all others.

We are all, it seems, playing that game-theory thought-experiment where a ten people are sat around a button; if no-one presses the button, everyone gets £100, but if one person presses the button, they get £200 and no-one else gets anything. We all want to live in a society that is compassionate, demonstrates responsibility and values difference, but we are scared that maybe someone else will press that button before us, so, instead of placing our efforts into developing humility, curiosity and kindness, we elbow our way towards pressing the button ourselves.

I think religion is central to the task of finding ways out of this rush to the button/bottom. In fact, I don't know anything else that might work. That's not to suggest that any particular theology will bring us all to a 'happily ever after,' but rather that we must cultivate our understanding of what it means to be human as being in relationship with something that is beyond our human grasp. This essential turn towards an existential position of humility and felt-responsibility is also the very thing that has brought us to such extraordinary achievement, as a human race, to this point. This is the thing that allow us to continue to thrive. Bregman spoke of the history and necessity of "expanded circles of moral concern," where we care about and demonstrate compassion for wider ripples than our immediate self-interest. This is the very driving force of human thriving.

As Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote in a telegram to J.F. Kennedy (and a happy Thanksgiving to my American friends), "the hour calls for moral grandeur and spiritual audacity."

Shabbat Shalom

**Rabbi Jeremy**

