

The Sweetness (of the Law)

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The perennial spring of imperishable sweetness is within everyone.

Meher Baba

This essay attempts an intellectual attack upon everything in us that rises in revolt against this statement, against all that would dismiss out of hand the reality of its truth and confine its meaning to the realm of sentimental metaphysics. Likewise, it stands in defense of everything that already feels and knows this statement's correctness, not as concept, but as immanent fact: *the universal fact of essential sweetness*. I will pursue this two-fold aim by investigating the relation between sweetness and the law, because it is precisely via a stimulation and vexation of our sense of law that the statement of the universal fact of essential sweetness impresses us. The inversive and profoundly intimate link between these terms is found in the bitter waters of Marah (Exodus 15: 25), which I will interpret in light of medieval mystical ideas about

the immanence of paradise in order to argue for the universal ontological *illegality* of worry. At the still point or moment of identity that forms the crux of the law/sweetness relation, is found the highest anagogical sense of law, the impossible yet inevitable taste of eternal justice.¹

1. Upside Down Sweetness

The sense of law, which always bifurcates between the ethical and ontological poles of law's idea, between law as what ought to be and law as what is, is the intimate term of our simultaneous intuition of and resistance to this fact of sweetness, the substance of the taste of its inevitable impossibility. Consider how, in hearing of it, one is legitimately caught in conundrums of thinking that such sweetness should be, yet is not and/or that such sweetness

¹ I would like to thank the reviewers of this essay, whose comments have clarified for me both the strength and the weakness of its methodology. My interpretation of the relation between sweetness and law proceeds by categorically affirming a principle and then exploring its conceptual field in a rather spontaneous manner, rather than by crafting its idea via critical consensus and contextual justification. Overall, the argument pursued is closer to poetic exegesis than academic criticism, one that aims to produce something new out of the texts, rather than account for them as such. Such an approach is legitimated by the intuitive/counter-intuitive nature of the law-sweetness equation, which if we are to take it seriously demands leaping beyond its facile senses, going beyond metaphor. Hence the commitment to identify sweetness as absolute imperative, a pure command of law, to grasp the truth of it as something that simply compels itself and against which argument, however instructive, is essentially irrelevant. In short, my wager is that this fundamentalist stance is redeemed, saved from dogmatism, by the openness of its own play. Should the reader remain unconvinced as to the essential illegality of worry, I trust that the renewed sense of its justification thus produced will be worth the failure.

is, yet cannot be. The statement of this sweetness brings law into negative relief, shadowing law forth as the inversion or negative transposition of sweetness, a category at once depending upon and contradicting it in all respects. Because there is real sweetness, there is law—because there is law, there is no real sweetness. Like other transcendent/immanent dyads, sweetness and law appear as *joined* by an impossibility of being the same, oppositionally fastened together around an infinitesimal point – the still moment of inversion – where they are impossibly one (the gate to paradise).

This inversive relation between law and sweetness is generically intelligible in connection with the classical triad of truth, goodness, and beauty. Where law is all about regulating the distinctions between the true, the good and the beautiful – a regulation that modernity pursues to the point of aporia, consigning these principles to separate domains – sweetness occupies their indistinction, the place of affective yet absolutely real movement wherein truth, goodness and beauty are synthesised in delight.² Sweetness in this ancient sense is rooted in the intuition of the immanence of perfection, in our idea of an existent and realisable truth wherein law *is* without persuasion or restraint, that is, without law as such, an eternally free enclosure where law is escaped through itself.³ In the

² See K. N. Llewellyn, 'On the Good, the True, the Beautiful, in Law,' *Chicago Law Review* 9 (1941/2): 224–65. Llewellyn speaks of the 'sweetness of [law's] effect' (249) as a 'knitting' or synthesis of these 'three great ultimates' (247).

³ 'The sweetness of the law [*dharma*] exceeds all sweetness; the delight in the law exceeds all delights' (*Dhammapada*, ed. Max Müller [Oxford: Clarendon, 1881], XXIV.354). 'I am also the sweet [*punya*]

context of modern philosophy, such intuition is exemplified by Schopenhauer's non-dualist theory of eternal justice, according to which, owing to 'the unity and identity of will in all its phenomena,' law is meta-temporally and always already accomplished both generally and individually: 'in all that befalls [every being], indeed can ever befall it, justice is always done to it ... the world itself is the court of justice.'⁴ And in the mystical tradition that especially informs my investigation, this state is exemplified by the 'sweet country' described by Marguerite Porete as that in which 'the Soul is above the Law / Not contrary to the law.'⁵

Not seeking to discursively produce or prove this perfect sweetness *from* or *for* something other than it, the method of what follows is instead to penetrate its truth as axiomatic and proceed *inside* the position that all counter-arguments only affirm it, to stay on *this side* of sweetness as the only one. Thus I follow the *inversely* logical method whereby Pierre Sogol discovers earth's ultimate alp in René Daumal's *Mt. Analogue*: 'assuming the

fragrance in the earth; I am the brilliance in the fire, and the life in all beings' (*Bhagavad Gita, with the Commentary of Sankaracarya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991], 7.9). 'O taste and see that the lord is sweet' (Psalms 33:9, Vulgate). '[T]he ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether . . . sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb' (Psalms 19:9–10). Biblical citations, unless otherwise noted, are from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Presentation*, trans. Richard E. Aquila and David Carus, 2 vols. (New York: Pearson, 2008–11), I.409–415, §63–4.

⁵ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky (New York: Paulist, 1993), 142, 196.

problem solved and deducing from this solution all the consequences that flow logically from it.⁶ Like the ur-mountain of this perfectly unfinished novel, a mountain that analogically *must* exist and be accessible precisely through the earthly ‘ring of curvature’ whereby ‘everything takes place *as if* [it] did not exist,’⁷ the universal fact of essential sweetness represents an ultimate sweetness that is analogically evident and accessible exactly through its seeming inexistence, the essential form of which is the fact of law. That there is law is the general index, not of a deficiency, but of the invisible yet accessible supreme *excess* of sweetness in the world.⁸ Correlatively, that there is sweetness is a property of the highest and profoundest law, a paradisaical or supremely enclosing sweetness-beyond-sweetness identical with love as the ultimate rule of things, the inexorable principle which binds and attracts the law-governed finite universe to its beyond, curving like inescapable gravity all laws around the whim of the lawless Infinite.⁹

⁶ René Daumal, *Mt. Analogue: A Tale of Non-Euclidean and Symbolically Authentic Mountaineering Adventures*, trans. Carol Cosman (New York: Overlook Press, 2004), 56.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸ This excess is shadowed in the bittersweetness of sin and taboo, for example, in the legendary sweetness of human flesh (see Karl Steel, *How Delicious We Must Be*, in *How to Make a Human: Animals & Violence in the Middle Ages* [Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2011], 118–35) and the lust of Myrrha (lit. ‘bitter’) for her father: ‘he kisses her. She takes too much delight / in this’ (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum [San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1993], 340).

⁹ In a similar fashion, Hegel identifies universal *attraction* as the summit of law, that which binds together and ‘transcends law as such’ (G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie

From this perspective, as per Agamben's understanding of the inverse intimacy of the divine and the profane,¹⁰ it is precisely the felt absence of justice in the world that shadows forth the fact of eternal or infinite justice – a fact hiding nowhere save in our ignorance of the nothingness of experience, of world as we know it: 'all experience is in "nothing". There is no suffering. When I say this, you grouse. Since you do not know the law of nothingness, you think there is nothing like justice.'¹¹ Just as the proverbially 'sweet' satisfaction we feel in seeing a causer of suffering proportionally suffer is, as Schopenhauer explains, really a material distortion of eternal justice, a sensing of its immanence 'misunderstood and falsified'

[New York: Dover, 2003], 86). The overall vision I intend to evoke in this essay is of the universe as an infinitely systematical order of laws within laws grounded in the eternal spontaneous Reality: 'The mystery of the universe is hierarchic in structure ... The spiritual panorama of the universe reveals itself as a gradient with laws upon laws. Superimposition of one type of law over the other implies elasticity and resilience of lower laws for the working out of higher superseding laws' (Meher Baba, *Beams from Meher Baba on the Spiritual Panorama* [San Francisco, CA: Sufism Reoriented, 1958], 33). The identity of divinity and reality coincides, at the summit of existence, with the identity of freedom and necessity: 'Here there is no longer any way because for the just man there is no law, he is a law unto himself' (John of the Cross, *Collected Works*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez [Washington: Institute of Carmelite Publications, 1991], 111, from the top of the drawing of Mt. Carmel).

¹⁰ 'The world—insofar as it is absolutely, irreparably profane—is God ... The proposition that God is not revealed *in* the world could also be expressed by the following statement: What is properly divine is that the world does not reveal God' (Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt [Minneapolis, ME: University of Minnesota Press, 1993], 89–90).

¹¹ Meher Baba, *God to Man and Man to God*, Chapter 33.

by separative identity or consciousness 'caught up in the *principium individuationis*,'¹² so our general sense that there is no real justice, that things are not governed by the strictest and most supreme moral laws, is really a willfully unconscious twisting of the sense that they are, an identitarian or self-dramatising sophistry that perverts an overwhelming universal truth into a wieldable albeit self-mangling personal weapon. The sense of injustice, inseparably bound to its own saccharine delight, is a photographic negative of the real, incomprehensible sweetness of eternal justice. As usual, our pattern of thinking, hypnotically curved within the confined interests of its finite *cogito*, confesses the inadmissible and radically immanent fact of the matter in inverse form.

The fraudulent correlational condition proceeds thus: inwardly I sense and intuit—via law of cause and effect, awareness that 'every disorder of the soul is its own punishment,'¹³ etc.—that there is justice ... and *I am afraid, for myself*. A fear of which the only way out is instantly to install myself as arbiter, as judge of whether there is justice in the world or no. This fear, at its root, is not a calculative fear *of* anything, not a fear of any narratable, self-perpetuating implications of eternal justice. It is not a fear *for* me. Rather it is absolute auto-ontological fear, a fear that I *per se* am wrong, a direct perception of the wrongness *that* I am for which nothing, neither God nor base materiality,

¹² *World as Will and Presentation*, I.416, §64.

¹³ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), I.12.19.

nothing other than myself itself, is to blame.¹⁴ A fear identical to my fear of fear, a problem identical to my problem with problems. Analogous to the terrors of boredom and silence, wherein one faces the horror of being no one, the *putative* vacuum of not being oneself, this fear is of a piece with the direct perception that *you* – the so-and-so you ‘know’ yourself as – cannot survive (and has never properly existed within) the strict lawful order of the vast cosmos-machine. As the *Dies Irae* tradition demonstrates, the infinitely systematic universe, the self-recording book ‘in quo totum continetur’ [in which all is contained], is fundamentally terrifying to the ‘self’, which constitutively cannot face or afford the prospect of its absolute perforation by omniscience.¹⁵ Vision of the totality in which everything is always already worked out makes *personal* free will impossible. This is why, in order to be someone, one must: (i) worry, or negatively project thinking away from the present by means of concern for the inexistent past or future; and (ii) consider oneself as a mysterious *mixture* of good and bad, an obscure combination of virtue and vice, truth and falsehood. Where the first keeps oneself a special kind of thing, a person, the second keeps oneself a special kind of authority, a criminal-judge or victim-avenger virtually capable of making and breaking law. Enslaved to these two rules or strictures of selfhood, one enjoys the illusory freedom of

¹⁴ ‘Every individual discomfort leads back, ultimately, to a cosmogonic discomfort, each of our sensations expiating that crime of the primordial sensation, by which Being crept out of somewhere’ (E. M. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, trans. Richard Howard [New York: Ceaver, 1973], 16).

¹⁵ See Eugene Thacker, ‘Day of Wrath,’ *Glossator* 6 (2012): 89–120.

an entity existing in the margin of law in its double sense, orbiting within an elliptical projection that is always at once in touch with and apart from what is and what should be. Such is the weird transgression lying at the core of the cry for justice, from the slightest critical remark to the most monumental collective wailing, the pure evil – a kind of inverse auto-murder – of refusing the sweetness of being ‘neither oneself nor someone else’¹⁶ and choosing the bitterness of not permitting ‘the day’s own trouble [to] be sufficient for the day’ (Matthew 6:34). Such is the torment of a domain where nothing escapes personalisation, i.e. hell: the sheer *identity* of not seeing God and being oneself forever.

That this is at once immense good news and precisely what *you* do not want to hear on this subject is exactly the point. As Porete warns her readers at the opening of the *Mirror*, ‘I pray you by love, says Love, that you hear me through great effort of the subtle intellect within you and through great diligence, for otherwise all those who hear it will grasp it badly.’¹⁷ Accordingly, just as it is the mystic’s antinomian claim of the radical immanence of paradise that elicits her judicial execution for heresy – a murder that decides, in the name of law, the fallenness of this world – so will I directly rank all that refuses the universal fact of essential sweetness under the heading of the human *hatred of paradise*. This hatred, which by definition is hardly admissible as hatred, is what one shares with Milton’s Satan and Dante’s infernally sullen denizens. It is simply the covert privative will of narrow

¹⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, 137.

¹⁷ Marguerite Porete, *Mirror of Simple Souls*, 80.

self-love that lies within your desire *not* to exit ourselves – ‘Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell’ (*Paradise Lost* IV.75) – and to remain ‘tristi ... ne l’aere dolce che dal sol s’allegra’ (*Inferno* VII.121–2) [sad ... in the sweet air that is gladdened by the sun]. Among its main symptoms is the weird assumption that justice might be satisfied in a world that ought to be otherwise.

Loving to mask itself with nostalgia for Eden and/or hope for a better tomorrow, the hatred of paradise is marked by hypocritical fidelity to the law, a pseudo-faith which believes in and worships law as both cause and remedy of the world’s non-paradisical nature. The hatred of paradise says that law has poisoned the world and will make it sweet again (whether by law’s creation, preservation, or destruction), that the problem and the solution resides with law. Neither keeping nor abandoning the law, the hatred of paradise feeds on law as a dead power, a rotting lion-carcass out of which flows the false honey of its own bitterness, the insufficiency of its semi-sweet life. The common, naturalised force of this hatred is evident in our too-easy sympathy with the speaker of William Blake’s ‘Garden of Love’ from the *Songs of Experience*:

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
 And Thou shalt not. writ over the door;
 So I turn’d to the Garden of Love,
 That so many sweet flowers bore.¹⁸

This moment of reversion is emblematic of the operative opposition between law and sweetness in the world,

¹⁸ William Blake, *Complete Poetry & Prose*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 26.

an environment wherein the negativity of proscription is inevitably experienced as precluding the positivity of enjoyment and freedom, and vice-versa. The law-inscribed institution, rather than preserving and securing the site of originary pleasure, the garden 'where I used to play on the green,' not only occupies it, but turns the very garden into the infected space of law's *outside*:

And I saw it was filled with graves,
 And tomb-stones where flowers should be:
 And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,
 And binding with briars, my joys & desires.

Whence the deeper meaning of the final line, namely, that not only is delight restricted, externally governed by legal bindings, but that joy and desire are themselves bound, restricted in their very form. This is a world where sweetness lacks itself, is without true savour, being delimited from within by having become the intimate exterior of proscription, the *thou shalt not*, irrespective of what is negated. Sweetness in such a world is unsavoury because the good to which it is proper, in being translated into law and consequently confused via the negativity of proscription with the evil it exempts, has been made the subject of *justification*, from which goodness is essentially or naturally free and has no need of whatsoever. Only evil needs to justify and explain itself – first to itself and secondarily to everything else. Justification is in fact evil's principal preoccupation and anxiety, its chief *busyness*.¹⁹ So the last

¹⁹ Here the precise evil of worry is also revealed, namely, that worry always operates as a *justification* for not being happy, as performance of a putative *right* to misery. Saint Francis rebukes a gloomy

thing one ought to do is sympathise with the ‘innocent’ speaker of Blake’s poem in a manner that justifies his disappointment as our own, that feels *sorry* for him as fellow dissatisfied subject and voluptuous victim of the law. To do so is paradisisally *illegal*. Note how the verses rather hint against the error of falling for such a fallen identity of desire. Sweetness in this realm is only referenced as a former property of the garden, properly attracting us to understand it as synthesised *per se* by the structure of Edenic nostalgia, as if the decalogic door of the chapel is the actual ground from which the ‘sweet flowers’ inexorably grow. No, this all-too-experienced poem is not a true account of the way things really are, but a playing out of the bitter experiential self-deception inherent to all attempts to return to a garden that *was* (or will be), to find delight in what *is not*, in the place ‘Where I used to play on the green.’ The truth of the Garden of Love is one that Blake realised and knows very clearly, namely, that the source of sweetness resides within, in the sheer spiritual freedom of the one who elects *not* to bind itself to desire, ‘he who kisses a joy as it flies.’²⁰

Overcoming or renouncing the hatred of paradise demands abandoning belief in and becoming heretic to sweetness in this failed, self-lacking sense, cleansing the tongue of this too-familiar, diurnal taste of the impossibility

companion thus: ‘Why do you outwardly show your sadness and sorrow over your offenses? This sadness is a matter between you and God’ (*Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, eds. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, 3 vols. [New York: New City Press, 1999], III.342–3).

²⁰ Blake, *Complete Poetry & Prose*, ‘Eternity,’ 470.

of authentic, unitary enjoyment, the sugary aftertaste of our assumed fall into or away from law. It means openness to the horror of all that this hatred fears: the finding of a real source of imperishable sweetness immanent to everything that infinitely exceeds *me*, namely, the so-and-so who lives according to the illusory right of telling Reality what it should be like and do. The opportunity of tasting real sweetness asks that one pass through exposure to the perfect *terror of paradise* or sweetness-in-the-last-instance whose ordinary ethical form is the enactment of the absolute illegitimacy of worry, one's intellectual slavery to the pernicious pseudo-intuition that something (else) is always wrong with things. Correlatively, the current cultural form of the hatred of paradise, as Max Weber's famous analysis shows, is capitalism (*business*, from Old English *bisignes*: anxiety, concern, uneasiness, worry). Similarly, every ideological or identitarian process of law necessarily operates within, as its very condition, the obfuscation, falsification and elision of this ultimate fact of the sweetness. For this reason, erasure of the hatred of paradise is not ordered per se toward sweetness-production, though it may (or may not) release sweetness. The erasure is not to be realised in the style of founding external sources or institutions of sweetness, such as socially produced affective spectacles of sweetness-affirmation or returns to religion or philosophy or humanism as earthly gardens of spiritual law. To abandon the hatred of paradise means simply to live one's own life spontaneously in the *dolce stil nuovo* [sweet new style] of discriminating the infinite difference between true and false sweetness. Bataille is most right – 'Woe to those who, to the very end, insist on regulating the movement that exceeds

them with the narrow mind of the mechanic who changes a tire²¹ – because there are *higher* laws. And this is exactly what the common evocation of love as the highest law – ‘Quis legem det amantibus? Maior lex amor est sibi’ [Who can give law to lovers? A greater law is love to itself]²² – sentimentally forgets, that love is *law*. ‘Woe unto them that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!’ (Isaiah 5:20).

The form of law necessitated by the universal fact of essential sweetness is *ordinary* law in François Laruelle’s sense of ethics returned ‘from the heavens and the earth back towards its real base which is man’s immanence.’²³ Ordinary law is paradisaical law in the sense of law in touch with and grounded in law’s own interior beyondness or universality, law on the cosmic continuum of laws. Ordinary law is real law in the sense of the tightest possible binding together of law’s two senses (what is and what should be), a binding that paradoxically intensifies and immanentises the gap between them, opening it as the narrowest gate of paradise. Ordinary law is the sweetest law – ‘my yoke is easy [*chrestos; suave*] and my burden is light’ (Matthew 11:30) – because it is the law you think the most bitter, the one whose perennial sign is in one stroke to hit you where you live and demand from you the courage to really have, without the alienation of ascribing to it, a moral code that is truly one’s own. The law of ordi-

²¹ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, trans. Robert Hurley, 2 vols. (Brooklyn, NY: Zone, 1991), I.26.

²² Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. S. J. Tester (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), III.m12.47–8.

²³ François Laruelle, ‘The Concept of an Ordinary Ethics Founded in Man,’ trans. Taylor Adkins (www.univocalpublishing.com).

nary law is nothing less or more than rigorously personal impersonal responsibility for guarding with one's life the secret beyond-within of law itself, the sweet pure sense of infinitesimal difference according to which it has been written that 'between Nirvana and the world there is not the slightest difference,' that in Paradise – the good thief's *today* (Luke 23:43) – 'everything will be as it is now, just a little different.'²⁴ With this purposeless end in mind, the remainder of this essay attempts to extract exegetically a maximum sweetness (of the law) from one of law's more bitter founding moments.

2. The Taste of Law

The disjunctive relation between sweetness and law is evident in the general discursive separation of these categories. That this is a significant rather than accidental separation is suggested by the general concept of the 'bitterness' of the law,²⁵ which implies preclusion against thinking law as sweet. Yet that is exactly what understanding the concept of law's bitterness will demand. The trope may be traced back to the waters of Marah (lit. *bitterness*) which Moses sweetens through the addition of a tree shown to him by the Lord (Exodus 15: 25). Christian commentators on the text emphasised the law's bitterness by interpreting the waters in fulfillment of the parallel

²⁴ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 52, citing Nagarjuna and Ernst Bloch (citing Walter Benjamin citing Gershom Scholem citing a well-known Hasidic parable), respectively.

²⁵ For example: 'We have strict statutes and most biting laws' (William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 1.3.19).

distinctions governing their figural exegesis: Old Law/ New Law, letter/spirit, fear/love, judgement/grace. As Henri de Lubac observes,

the waters of Marah . . . lend themselves to signifying the ancient books of Scripture . . . Through the spiritual sense that is communicated to the books by the wood of the cross, they become the very sweetness of the Gospel: 'let the bitterness of the law be overcome by the sweetness of the cross.' From the time of Tertullian and Origen onward, this image is repeated indefinitely.²⁶

For this tradition, sweetness is a kind of essential supplement to law, a potentiality of law that yet subsists in being different from law itself. Sweetness both characterises the essence of law, its inner spiritual truth, and is a secondary property, a sweetener and more than sweetener that makes law palatable and livable, 'so that the people may drink.'²⁷ Being an addition to law that transforms it without alteration into its real substance or truth, sweetness is like the *spice* of the law,²⁸ the deep quality of its immanent life, and precisely for that reason something that must not be confusedly identified with law itself. Sweetness is not law's essential face or appearance, not its *species*, yet there is a sweetness that has to do with it and can make it like itself. Law and sweetness represent different orders of being, especially if sweetness is conceived in light of the

²⁶ Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, trans. E. M. Macierowski, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 1998), 3.256.

²⁷ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 302.

²⁸ On spice as 'generational integrity of spirit and letter,' see Nicola Masciandaro, 'Becoming Spice: Commentary as Geophilosophy,' *Collapse* 6 (2010): 20–56.

anomian aspect of charity as law beyond law.²⁹ Yet they are interdependent. Law depends upon sweetness for its fulfillment, and sweetness depends, for its intelligibility and operation, upon law. The difficulty of the sweetness/law disjunction, the necessity of connecting and separating these terms, asks that we look further into the story, behind and beyond the doctrinal gloss.

The bitter waters of Marah must be understood in the context of the events immediately preceding and following their sweetening, on which their connection to law is founded. Given the lack of drinkable – and the presence of undrinkable – water, the people became restive, an anxious condition of great moral consequence which is later equated to tempting the Lord (Exodus 17:2): ‘they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying “What shall we drink?”’ (Exodus 15:22–4).³⁰ In a creative reversal of this situation, the sweetening of the water, the making wholesome of what did not satisfy, is the pretext for the establishment of life-sweetening law:

There the Lord made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he proved them, saying, ‘If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God,

²⁹ ‘[T]he law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient’ (1 Timothy 1:9). ‘Love and do what you will [*Dilige et fac quod vis*]’ (Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, trans. John W. Retting [Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1995], 7.8).

³⁰ Cf. ‘And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life ... Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?”’ (Matthew 6:27–31).

and do that which is right in his eyes, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon you which I put upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord, your healer' (Exodus 15: 25–6).

The waters are both the place of the giving of law, which as object is paralleled in the tree or wood revealed to Moses,³¹ and, in light of the affinity between sweetness and health,³² an analog of the law itself whose keeping heals and protects from disease. On the one hand, sweetness, as the property of what ensures health, belongs to the law. The law is wholesome, a sweet source of well-being.³³ On the other hand, sweetness figures not the law itself, but the secondary effect or benefit of keeping it, a superadded law of the law or necessary quality of its realisation or fulfillment. As the bitter waters are sweetened by the addition of the tree, the life of the people will be sweetened in keeping the law. Within this analogy, the waters beautifully flow between being the problem law addresses and the sweetness of its solution. Significantly, the nature of the sweetening itself is left open, or hidden.

³¹ See Richard Bauckham, 'Paradise in Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*,' in *Paradise in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Views*, eds. Markus Bockmuehl and Guy G. Stroumsa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 52.

³² See Mary Carruthers, 'Sweetness,' *Speculum* 81 [2006]: 1100–1.

³³ Steven Wilf highlights the figural equation of law and water in the context of how the episode narrates the social fashioning of the people 'into *nomian* beings': 'According to the *Mekhilta*, the Israelites had become 'rebellious because they had been without Torah for three days. Torah is likened to water – necessary for life on a nearly constant basis' (*The Law Before the Law* [Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008], 137, 149–50).

The analogical form of the story establishes a four-fold intersection and separation of law and sweetness. On one side, law and sweetness are disjoined in the life of the unrighteous and analogously in the bitter water. On the other side, law and sweetness fuse in the life of the righteous and analogously in the sweet water. The story does not merely illustrate that there is an analogical relation between law and sweetness, but *establishes sweetness itself as the perfect form of law's governing of the real analogy between life and the living*,³⁴ as figured by the implicit vital homology between tree and human, which points back to their common origin in paradise. The governing analogy of the story, between the sweetening of the waters and the giving of law, is not merely figural or expressive, but holds the essence of the story as a statement about the nature of law itself. As follows:³⁵

Law	Truth	Living
water	<i>bitter</i>	unrighteous
<i>object</i>	LAW	<i>subject</i>
water+wood	<i>sweet</i>	righteous

³⁴ On the analogical (as opposed to univocal or equivocal) relation between life and the living, see Eugene Thacker, *After Life* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 108–13, 126–9.

³⁵ These terms of the table may be glossed as follows. The sweet subject of the law (righteous) is the one sweetened or kept wholesome by keeping the law and the one for whom the law itself is sweet, a source of delight. The bitter subject of the law (unrighteous) is the unwholesome one who does not keep the law and for whom the law itself is bitter, a source of suffering. The bitter object of the law (water) is the condition of bitterness (unwholesomeness, suffering) that law remedies. The sweet object of law (water+wood) is the condition of sweetness (wholesomeness, delight) that law provides.

The *analogy* says: law is truth. In what sense? Not as what is otherwise simply decidable as true or false, good or bad, but in the immanent sense of the living or spontaneously historical analogy between life and the living whose perfected mode of consciousness is *remembrance of the present*, i.e. that attention to things which sees them *as they are* in the context of past and future, as opposed to reducing the present – like mistaking the frame for the picture – to a mere correlate of past and/or future. The natural sweetness of truth in this sense is that which is proper to life understood as *a* life, the ‘impersonal yet singular life’ which Deleuze illustrates via Dickens’s character Riderhood at the moment when, ‘in his deepest coma, this wicked man himself senses something soft and sweet penetrating him.’³⁶ Truth is the non-difference between the life of the living and the living of life, the *necessity* according to which the ‘Infinite ... has to discover its unlimited life in and through the finite without getting limited by this process.’³⁷ The divine purpose of law is to realise and fulfil the infinity of this non-difference, to *wake life* to the endlessness of its immanent reality by consciously laying to sweet sleep all the purposes that bind it, above all to itself.³⁸ Accordingly, the practice of law must live or flow

³⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone, 2001), 28.

³⁷ Meher Baba, *Discourses*, I.120.

³⁸ As figured in Nietzsche’s ‘heaviest weight,’ the absolutely binding-liberating principle of the eternal return of the same (*The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], 194) and in Meister Eckhart’s formulation of the divine whylessness of life: ‘it lives without *Why*, because it lives for itself’ (*Complete Mystical Works*, 110). Life’s only purpose is to arrive at the purposeless Reality: ‘Purposelessness is of Reality; to have a

within the proportional analogy between law and laws, namely, in the space where law is not itself the truth, or, the taking-place of things is not reduced to a fact like others.³⁹ Ontologically, law is what is *proven* in life and in the living. Ethically, law is how life is made worth living and the living make themselves *worthy* of life. On this point it is essential that *what* laws were given at Marah is not given in the text, only *that* laws were given. For only an open idea of law, similar to the unqualified wood, can fulfill law as truth and sweeten the waters of life. Which also

purpose is to be lost in falseness ... Love alone is devoid of purpose and a spark of Divine Love sets fire to all purposes. The Goal of Life in Creation is to arrive at purposelessness, which is the state of Reality' (Meher Baba, *The Everything and the Nothing* [Beacon Hill, Australia: Meher House Publications, 1963], 62). In these terms, the purpose of law or the law of law, is to bring to end all the purposes that separate life and living. Purpose exists in the separation of ends and means, in the empty space between law's two senses. Purposelessness lives in the inescapable free binding of life to itself, wherein what is and what should be are forever reconciled beyond reconciliation, where the dialectical circle of law is paradoxically shrunk to an infinite point. This whyless gravity of law is manifest in the proverbial sweetness of sleep, an absolute law of life. As anxiety is the enemy of sleep, so is sleep a reflection of the irreconcilability of worry and justice: 'At peace with God and neighbor, thus good sleep demands. And at peace too with the neighbor's devil! Otherwise he will be at your house at night' (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian de Caro [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 18). Just as justice 'never sleeps,' the infinite weight of sleep indexes the sweet immanence of eternal justice: 'suppose you feel tired and fed up and that you go to sleep. What is it that you are trying to do? It is nothing but to try to take refuge in God—your natural and inherent state' (Meher Baba, *God Speaks: The Theme of Creation and Its Purpose* [New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1973], 101).

³⁹ 'Evil ... is the reduction of the taking-place of things to a fact like others' (Agamben, *Coming Community*, 14).

means that the fact of law equally needs *mere* law, simple unmixed, non-allegorical wood for its truth. Indeed, the story demonstrates such an idea of immanent truth in its own structure, wherein law is provided to people within the karmic or cause-and-effect logic of its own event, around the waters of Marah. This situational relation of law's event to causality raises a bitter question: would the Lord have given laws at Marah had the people not murmured? And a sweet answer: no.

Meister Eckhart says, 'In truth, unless you flee first from yourself, then wherever you flee to, you will find obstacles and restlessness no matter where it is.'⁴⁰ That the Marah episode is legitimately read as ordered towards this principle, that is, that the failure of people to flee from themselves while finding the bitter waters is the condition for the provision of law, is legible not only in light of the broad Judeo-Christian proscription of the 'bitterness of murmuring [*amartudine murmurationis*]'⁴¹ as a lapse in faith and blindness to eternal justice – 'Do all things without grumbling or questioning' (Philippians 2:14); 'Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins?' (Lamentations 3:39) – but more significantly in terms of the spiritual 'mechanics' of sweetness

⁴⁰ Meister Eckhart, *Complete Mystical Works*, 488. Correlatively, it is in the nature of sweetness to displace its savourer: 'the sweetness-in-me experience casts the enjoying subject out of the center and places it, for a few precarious yet welcome moments, on the fringe of an autocratic taste sphere' (Peter Sloterdijk, *Bubbles: Spheres I*, trans. Wieland Hoban [Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2011], 93) – with thanks to the anonymous reviewer who brought this passage to my attention.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Enarationes in Psalmos*, 99.14.2, PL 37:1280.

and bitterness, both in the story and its interpretations, which point back to their inner source. As the people's superimposition of psychic bitterness upon the waters of Marah is the pretext for their being given laws, so are the laws received a means of ordering people towards the true source of sweetness within themselves, toward realising the profound relation between wisdom and taste, *sapientia* and *sapor*, according to which truth is always a matter of discriminating for and through oneself the difference between good and bad, a process of tasting or proving its *right flavour*.⁴² This means that the laws cannot at all be means in the spiritually escapist or religiously legal (i.e. hypocritical) sense of a guarantee that supplants the paradisaical imperative of sweetness with rules for sweetness. Rather the laws are simply *another chance* to discover sweetness's inner source, another bitterness with which to find paradise, a chance that is itself *directly* produced from the preceding failure via the cosmic logics of experience. Law is the chance that the refusal of sweetness *deserves*.⁴³ It is a chance to stop worrying, not because

⁴² 'Perhaps *sapientia*, that is wisdom, is derived from *sapor*, that is taste ... For in nothing is the victory of wisdom over malice more evident than when the taste for evil – which is what malice is – is purged away, and the mind's inmost task senses that it is deeply filled with sweetness' (Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, trans. Irene Edmonds, 4 vols. [Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980], 85:8–9, IV.204–5). The deep logical connection between the gustatory and the elective is shown in the IE root *geus*: to taste, chose (origin of both *choose* and *gustus*). As knowledge proceeds via discrimination, so is pleasure or disgust also a choice. The horizon of knowledge is governed by the ethics of taste.

⁴³ This corresponds to how the laws given at Marah are also a test or proof of the people: 'and there he proved them' (Exodus 15:25).

keeping the law promises removal of the object of worry (health), so that now one need only worry about keeping the law, but because keeping the law *instructs* in the needlessness and evil of worry in the first place. The lesson of law's event is exactly *not* 'I have law so now I need not worry', but 'I worry so now I need law'. To the one who exits (the possibility of) paradise, who misses paradise by deciding that *this is not it*, who refuses disobedience of the self's bitter command to remain a servant of oneself, who demonstrates too humanly a sheer inability to *be* in paradise, to this one is given law.⁴⁴ Law is the sweet and truthful reflection of the negation of sweetness, an incapable symptom of the hatred of paradise.

To understand the Marah episode in this way, at the touch point between the 'external' binding of people to law and their 'internal' attraction of law unto themselves, requires by its own principle (the priority of self-fleeing)

⁴⁴ 'Certain it is that *work, worry, labor* and *trouble*, form the lot of almost all men their whole life long. But if all wishes were fulfilled as soon as they arose, how would men occupy their lives? ... men would either die of boredom or hang themselves; or there would be wars, massacres, and murders, so that in the end mankind would inflict more suffering on itself than it has now to accept at the hands of Nature' (Arthur Schopenhauer, *Studies in Pessimism*, trans. T. Bailey Saunders [London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891], 13). The genius of this hypothetical passage, of course, is that it only reproduces the world as it is and thus begs the question of natural vs. self-created suffering so as to ironically open the speculative possibility that this in fact is paradise. Indeed the essay heads directly into an ecstatically pessimist vision of that equally certain possibility: 'There is nothing more certain than the general truth that it is the greivous [sic] *sin of the world* which has produced the grievous *suffering of the world* (24). Cf. 'Most of man's suffering is self-created through his ungoverned desires and impossible demands. All this is unnecessary for self-fulfillment' (Meher Baba, *Discourses*, III.168).

that one *neither blame nor excuse* the Israelites for the laws at Marah. Likewise, it requires a correlative neutralisation of the concept of law, so that we see law neither as punishment nor revelation, but as the pure working out of the necessity of law itself, the *actus purus* of the law of law whose universal form is the unity of cause-and-effect or the preservation of oneness in duality. To think otherwise would be to interpretively commit the same transgression our reading would redress and embitter the text with doctrinal law. Indeed the story seems conspicuously fashioned to promote or even enforce this neutrality. There is no question that the people's desire for water is right. Nor is there any question that their murmuring is wrong.⁴⁵ The rightness of one does not legitimise or justify the wrongness of the other. Rather the opposite: the wrongness is *all the more wrong* in relation to the rightness of its pretext. The waters are bitter, but something even bitterer, a hostile *exacerbation*, has been added to them, an element of *pure evil*.⁴⁶ This evil, fulfilled in the murmuring, is what is already present in the *naming* of

⁴⁵ On the semantic parameters of murmuring (Hebrew *lûn*) and its connection to rebellion against God, see *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Volume 7*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry [Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 1995], 509–12). *Lûn* is associated with the growling of dogs, which underscores both the loss of human dignity and the failure of understanding involved in murmuring, the sense in which murmuring equals irrational misapprehension.

⁴⁶ This may be understood as a corollary to Augustine's perverse delight in stealing pears that were 'not particularly tempting either to look at or to taste [*nec forma nec sapore inlecebrosis*]' (*Confessions*, 2.4.9), a formulation that intentionally inverts, like the crime, the delicious fruit of Genesis 3:6.

the waters – ‘When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah’ (Exodus 15:23) – insofar as the name is permitted to step beyond its own truth as (mere) name and veil reality, insofar as bitterness is permitted to pass from the waters through the word to the spirit. In failing to preserve and protect paradise with the living word or flaming sword of the tongue,⁴⁷ one instead imitatively follows language outside of paradise, literally murmuring like the bitter water beyond its bounds, missing once again the garden’s narrow gate: ‘For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few’ (Matthew 7:14). This tiny, momentary gate to paradise, which St. Francis perfectly illustrates in terms of patiently enduring being locked out in the cold,⁴⁸ is the infinitesimal opening or point passed over in the transition from the rightness of needing water to the wrongness of murmuring, from the good bitterness of the waters (in their own right) to the evil bitterness of demanding that the world be otherwise (according to one’s own desire). The bitter conjunction of the unquestionably right and the unquestionably wrong marks a misprision or mis-sensing of law itself, a failure to discriminate between what is

⁴⁷ ‘[T]he problem of knowledge is a problem of possession, and every problem of possession is a problem of enjoyment, that is, of language’ (Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez [Minneapolis, ME: University of Minnesota Press, 1993], xvii).

⁴⁸ ‘Freezing, covered with mud and ice, I come to the gate ... “For the love of God, take me in tonight!” And he replies: “I will not!” ... I tell you this: If I had patience and did not become upset, true joy, as well as true virtue and the salvation of my soul, would consist in this’ (*Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, I.166–7).

and what should be that ruins the chance of translating between them.⁴⁹ What the murmuring at Marah figures is precisely the *false synthesis* of the two senses, the failure to synthesise world and will for which Nietzsche offers the unconquerably sweet antidote of *amor fati*: ‘seeing what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them – thus I will be one of those who make things beautiful.’⁵⁰ True synthesis of law’s two senses, what is and what should be, is sweetness. Marah is not the place of law because law is bitter. Instead, Marah is the bitterness showing that law is the form of sweetness, the necessary water, which man’s bitterness *warrants*.

The exegetical tradition accords with this reading insofar as it locates the ultimate source of sweetness within the divinity of the individual soul and not in the objects and events that human beings name bitter or sweet. For Philo, the bitterness of the law is only an apparent bitterness, like the Aristotelian difficulty of virtue, a correlate of the disordered love of the good that evaporates as that love is ethically perfected and the ignorance of desire is dissolved in the ‘sweet and pleasant labour’ of the good.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Such failure of discrimination is the same as that which inhabits the one who wants vengeance, who ‘demands from the phenomenon what only pertains to the thing in itself [and] does not see to what extent the injuring and the injured parties are in themselves one’ (Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Presentation*, I.426, §64). Whatever the waters of Marah are in themselves, they expose the bitterness of those who find them bitter.

⁵⁰ *Gay Science*, 157.

⁵¹ Philo, *Works*, trans. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 818–19). Wilf reprises Philo: ‘Law simply *seems* constricting. When it becomes the object of desire, it may be transformed into something beloved’ (*Law Before the Law*, 149).

Origen, commenting on *exacerbation* in Ezekiel 17:12, similarly derives bitterness from sin and underscores the human capacity to sweeten, via life's essential sweetness, even 'the most sweet words of God.'⁵² Continuing and clarifying this line of thinking, Emmanuel Swedenborg directly interprets the bitterness of *Marah* as the state and quality of temptation away from 'genuine affection for truth,' a negative distortion of reality caused by the curvature of perception around self-love.⁵³

Exegesis explaining the nature of the sweetening of the waters, even if literally projecting the origin of sweetness outward into natural or supernatural external sources, is also easily savoured as confirmation of the more mystical sense I am insisting on, a sense ideally articulated by Eckhart via the ancient metaphor of the sick man's tongue.⁵⁴

However, this interpretation both misunderstands Philo and commits the error of glossing love of the good as an eros of law. Law is good, but it is not the good. The *goodness* of law is tied precisely to its constriction, its operation of binding beings to the good, as well as, via love, binding the good itself to its own beyond, to what is beyond being. If there is something in law to be loved, it is just this binding. As a condition of responsibility, law is ordered toward freedom and for that reason can never be the space of freedom itself, which 'can be manifested only in the void of beliefs, in the absence of axioms, and only where the laws have no more authority than a hypothesis' (E. M. Cioran, *History and Utopia*, trans. Richard Howard [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987], 11).

⁵² Origen, *Homilies 1–17 on Ezekiel*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Mahwah, NJ: Newman Press, 2010), 147–8.

⁵³ Emmanuel Swedenborg, *Works, Volume 14* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1907), 201.

⁵⁴ 'As long as that which intervenes [the bitterness of the sick tongue] has not been removed in us, we will never get the proper flavor of God, and our life will often be harsh and bitter' (*Complete Mystical Works*, 350). I would highlight here the principle of intervention or interruption, the sense in which the error of bitterness takes the

The tree by which the waters of Marah are sweetened has generally been interpreted as also being bitter, so that the sweetening might carry the sense of a wondrously positive double negation of bitterness, a ‘miracle within a miracle.’⁵⁵ At the level of spiritual acts, this is to be understood as the marvelous nullification of bitterness or affective negativity that occurs when bitterness is no longer negated or embittered, the suicide-from-without of bitterness when it is entered into itself and permitted to be beyond relation in positive non-determining resignation to whatever it is.⁵⁶ See what happens to fear when the fear of fear is renounced – it kills itself. In the

form of a stoppage of the flow of life and insertion of self as a barrier *between* consciousness and the world. A real version of this analogy is the way in which a person may love their own sickness insofar as it serves as a way of keeping the world ‘about’ them. The sense of murmuring as intervention or interruption in the Marah episode is paralleled in the way it necessitates Moses’s intervening with the Lord and thence the intervention of law itself, which is now placed in covenantal fashion *between* the people and their health. The goodness of the law thus lies precisely in creatively displacing the distorted selfhood that was bringing life down.

⁵⁵ ‘He puts something injurious inside something injurious in order to produce a miracle inside a miracle’ (*Tanhuma Beshallah* 24), as cited in Eliezer Segal, *From Sermon to Commentary: Expounding the Bible in Talmudic Babylonia* [Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005], 92). God does not only turn something bitter to its opposite, but all the more miraculously does so by adding bitterness to bitterness, so that there are two miracles, one positive and one privative: (i) turning the bitter to sweet; (ii) preventing the bitter (of the wood) from embittering the bitter (of the water).

⁵⁶ Commentary on the name *Mary*, cognate with *Marah*, offered another context for articulating this principle. See *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, trans. Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson (New York: Paulist, 1991), 186. Samuel Zinner identifies the Virgin’s name as denoting ‘the world’s bitterness which her own reality of celestial sweetness cancels’ (*Christianity*

form of the Marah episode, this means putting the bitterness of the water back into water, or in Quentin Meillassoux's philosophic terms, undoing correlational identity by 'transform[ing] our perspective on unreason ... and turn[ing] it into the veridical content of the world as such.'⁵⁷ If there is indeed bitterness, let it not be *my* bitterness. 'I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse the accusers. Let *looking away* be my only negation!'⁵⁸ If there is a problem with life, that is, if *I* have a problem with it, let life itself *be* the problem. Hell is only destroyed by entering it, by staying in it. Here one must understand the identity of turning away from bitterness and embracing it (like the Turin horse), which fulfils the *imperative to be* as figured by Miguel de Unamuno in terms of enduring the passion of the mystery (rather than trying to solve it) or allowing oneself to be swallowed by the Sphinx and 'know the sweetness of the taste of suffering.'⁵⁹

Crucially, the tree was also figurally and even literally equated with the most sweet Tree of Life (Genesis 2:9).⁶⁰ Complementing the sense of a miraculously surplus auto-negation of bitterness, the sweetening of the water thus carries the sense of an overpowering of bitterness by a

and Islam: Essays on Ontology and Archetype [London: Matheson Trust, 2010], 211).

⁵⁷ Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), 82.

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 157.

⁵⁹ Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, trans. Crawford Fritch (New York: Dover, 1954), 283.

⁶⁰ Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* relocates Exodus 15.25 to the period of forty days on Sinai (Exodus 24:18) in order to make the link (Bauckham, 'Paradise,' 52). Origen connects the tree to the cross via comparison to wisdom as 'tree of life' in Proverbs 3:18 (*Homilies*, 301–2).

marvellous and original sweetness, not merely sweetness strong enough to compensate for and mask bitterness, but a sweetness that eliminates it all together within the infinitely superior quality of itself. Sweetening in this sense indicates return to the non-dual primacy of the good, its being beyond the opposition of good and evil.⁶¹ This is the truly *spicy* paradisaical sweetness that makes bitterness to be nothing, in keeping with the idea of spice as not merely a condiment or addition to substance, but that which fulfills substance itself. So Philo interprets the tree added to the waters of Marah as the perfect good by connecting it at once to spice and the Tree of Life.⁶² Ethically, such sweetening pertains to escaping the prison of the good, that is, overcoming morality as such, the *identification* with the good that binds both the good and oneself into opposition with evil.⁶³ The sweetness of this escape belongs to the fact of its being materially easier than escaping evil. For where evil is an evident and concrete prison that really must be escaped via the difficult

⁶¹ 'Evil is not a being; for if it were, it would not be totally evil. Nor is it a nonbeing; for nothing is completely a nonbeing, unless it is said to be the Good in the sense of beyond-being. For the Good is established far beyond and before simple being and nonbeing' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Complete Works*, 85).

⁶² Philo, *Works*, 256.

⁶³ 'When a person looks upon himself as being good and not bad, he is engaged in self-affirmation through identification with this conviction, which is a continuation of separative existence in a new form ... Identification with the bad is easier to deal with because, as soon as the bad is perceived as being bad, its grip on consciousness becomes less firm. The loosening of the grip of the good presents a more difficult problem, since *the good carries a semblance of self-justification through favourable contrast with the bad*' (Meher Baba, *Discourses*, I.98).

binding of ethos or virtuous habit, the good, like those force fields that typically surround the false paradises of science fiction stories, is an obscure or invisible prison which disappears soon after its existence is discerned and its mechanism seen through.⁶⁴ Theologically, such sweetening pertains to the instantaneous and seemingly impossible absolute erasure of evil in divine justice, the eternal moment of all things being made new and well in the revelation that they were never otherwise, that ‘nothing is ever written on the soul.’⁶⁵ For Julian of Norwich, this is the sweet anagogy of her intuition that *all shall be well* – a Now found within her vision of the crucifixion at the moment when Christ turns to her in good cheer from the cross.⁶⁶ In this light, the sweetening of the waters of Marah evokes the principle of a first-and-last sweetness that is intelligible as the perfective detonation of law itself, a manifest explosion of law’s subject-determining negation (*thou shalt not*) into an impossibly positive and hyper-objective *shall be* that speaks beyond hope, rendering consolation ridiculous and even its own assurance senseless. Not coincidentally, the opposed senses of the wood as sweet or bitter were synthesized and suspended in the *coincidentia oppositorum* of the Cross.⁶⁷ And by

⁶⁴ ‘The difficulty concerning the abode of evil is not so much of perceiving that it is a limitation but in actually dismantling it after arriving at such perception. The difficulty concerning the abode of the good is not so much in dismantling it as of perceiving that it is, in fact, a limitation’ (Meher Baba, *Discourses*, I.98).

⁶⁵ Meher Baba, *Discourses*, I.99.

⁶⁶ Julian of Norwich, *Writings*, 193.

⁶⁷ ‘Moses sweetened the water in Marah with a bitter wood, / and the Nation drank and satisfied their thirst. / Likewise the cross of Jesus sweetened the bitter Nations, / and gave them the sweet taste of

means of medieval wood-of-the-cross legends, the figural relation between the cross and the tree shown to Moses at Marah was also literalised, its wood derived from a paradise-planting grown in its waters.⁶⁸

The figural reading of the Marah tree as Tree of Life and/or Cross manifests a significant but otherwise vague formal aspect of the episode, namely, that the sweetening of the waters by means of the tree signifies a *paradisical inversion* of the normal flow of life into a higher and other kind of life. Where life in its regular flourishing would be imaged in the watering of a tree, the inverse ‘treering of the water’ at Marah suggests the principle of a spiritual inversion that realises the natural sweetness of life[*zoē*]⁶⁹ at a level of reality or being wherein the human is no longer simply dependent, like tree upon water, upon the seeming sweetness of external sustenance and becomes instead the very principle of an independent and world-sweetening sweetness. The arboreal reversal figures transition from recipient to source. In Porete’s self-annihilated and intoxicated terms, such a human is the one who not only gets drunk whether there is wine or no, but who can drink from the impossible itself: ‘And she is inebriated not only

the name of the Creator’ (*Narsai Homiliae et Carmina*, II.124–5, as cited in Cyril Aphrem Karim, *Symbols of the Cross in the Writings of the Early Syriac Fathers* [Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004], 70–1)

⁶⁸ See Nicole Fallon, *The Cross as Tree: The Wood-of-the-Cross Legends in Middle English and Latin Texts in Medieval England* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 2009).

⁶⁹ ‘And we all see that men cling to life even at the cost of enduring great misfortune, seeming to find in life a natural sweetness [γλυκύτητος φυσικῆς] and happiness’ (Aristotle, *Politics*, III.6, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon [New York: Random House, 1941]).

from what she has drunk, but very intoxicated and more than intoxicated from what she never drinks nor will ever drink.⁷⁰ Achieving her own nature as paradisaical tree, this soul makes even the bitter waters of Marah intoxicated. For as the human body is inversely homomorphic to the tree, an upside down tree,⁷¹ so must one spiritually invert oneself vis-à-vis life in the world, that is, turn right side up all that refuses to stand upright and be in paradise today, in order to really live: ‘his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither’ (Psalms 1:2–3). But to know this real sweetness of a life in direct and practical terms, to taste and see its reality rather than fall into theoretical imagination of it, it is necessary to sense the sweetness (of law) in the most literal terms, to find the actual point of contact between sweetness and the law.

3. The Sweetest Law

That law ought to be understood as essentially bound to the inversion of sweetness is evident from the logical relation between the terms. Where law signifies what coerces and binds, sweetness signifies what attracts and delights. The inversive relation is immediately suggested by the continuity between coercion and *persuasion* along the spectrum composed of the opposites of force and attraction. And

⁷⁰ Marguerite Porete, *Mirror of Simple Souls*, 105.

⁷¹ See Plato, *Timaeus*, 90a, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 1209.

if we recognise that delight is fundamentally linked with freedom, with the potential to do as one pleases (*quodlibet*), then a proportional oppositional continuity between delight and binding is also clear. The inverse logical relation between sweetness and law is also indicated by the fact that the pejorative sense of sweetness as cloying (via Middle English *cloyen*, to bind, hinder movement, fasten with a nail) is connected with the principle of binding. So Aquinas defines the essence of law thus: ‘Law is a rule and measure of acts, whereby man is induced to act or is restrained from acting: for *lex* (law) is derived from *ligare* (to bind), because it binds one to act.’⁷² In other words, law encodes and transposes sweetness in a negatively volitional manner, enclosing the freedom of what one wants to do within the necessity of what one must. This relation may be summarised with a simple table:

Attraction	SWEETNESS	Freedom
<i>persuasion, coercion</i>	↕	<i>delight, cloying</i>
Force	LAW	Binding

Following this logic, law is simply the actualisation of the inversion of sweetness. Law is sweetness upside down. As the negation of sweetness deserves law, the justice of law resides in its serving as an affirmation of sweetness. The distinction and conceptual inseparability of the terms is correlative to the ‘inclusive exclusion’ that obtains between *zoē* and *bios*, bare life and political life, as per

⁷² *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province [New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947–8], I-II.Q90.Art1.

Agamben's analysis.⁷³ The implication of this close correlation is that the imminent task given to the biopolitical body is that of a constitution and installation of a law that is wholly exhausted in sweetness, a law that is only its own sweetness.⁷⁴

The answer to the question of the identity of this law, this new sweet law, could not be more simple or clear. The writing is on the wall – writing that immediately numbers, weighs and divides the very person, your so-called 'self': *thou shalt not worry*. Not worrying is at once how to 'politicise' the "natural sweetness" of *zoē* and is itself the 'politics already contained in *zōē* as its most precious center.'⁷⁵ Any resistance to this law is the ineradicable sign of its truth. To require justification of this law, for instance to bother about 'what the world would be like' if it were kept, or to deny any materiality or substance to it, is already to evade its immanent task and pervert its proper good. The proscription of worry is *pure law*, sweetest law, in the strictest sense. It is fully and simultaneously a law of freedom and the freedom of the law. It lays down no precept or rule, places no categorical restriction on what one can or cannot do. At the same time, this law absolutely binds, ties one's neck in the noose of one's own logic, so that one must either reside in rebellion towards it (a rebellion that perforce only manifests its own futility: I worry in order to keep worrying) or necessarily begin

⁷³ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998) 8.

⁷⁴ See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 188.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

to escape worry's total evil, the fact that to worry is to bind oneself and others in a terrible way. Likewise, *thou shalt not worry* is simultaneously a law of attraction and an attraction of law. The authentically and purely negative work of not-worrying, a negativity free from its own *against*, does nothing but open and invite other potentiality and impotentiality, the unknown plenitude of powers otherwise eclipsed by preoccupation. At the same time, being without worrying is the bare promise of law itself, its own attraction, which not worrying simply realises directly, without binding itself to a ground or reason. 'Do everything, but don't worry. Worrying binds.'⁷⁶

The supreme legitimacy of *thou shalt not worry* is proven and intensified by the seeming impossibility of its not being kept, by the terror of following it in a topsy-turvy world that willfully mistakes pain for sincerity, anxiety for responsibility, concern for understanding and thinking for knowledge. All the more reason, then, to implement not-worrying as a protocol that one need not worry about, a perfectly unprogrammable rule whose following passes freely within and without the imprisoning walls of false power, above all the narrow circle of demands upon reality that keep one a self-hypnotised human, a someone at the expense of remaining elsewhere than in paradise. As much a law as not a law: the real principle of universal synthesis and sweetness (of the law), a sweet new style that is always invented by the few who are concerned only with what they *must* do, the 'great man ... who in

⁷⁶ Meher Baba, quoted in *The Awakener* 3:2 (1956), 12.

the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.⁷⁷

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⁷⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance and Other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1993), 23.

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