

## **SOURCE FOR BILL GALSTON, "WHAT OUR TRADITION SAYS ABOUT ECONOMICS"**

In Deuteronomy 6:17 God says, "You shall diligently keep the mitzvot of the Eternal your God, and God's rules, and God's ordinances, that have been commanded you." The next verse, "And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Eternal," goes beyond specific rules. It speaks of compromise and actions that are beyond the obligations of the law. God first tells you to obey the law; then God reminds you to do what is "right and good" when it is beyond the law.

This is a great matter. It is impossible to mention in the Torah all of a person's actions toward his neighbors and friends, all of his commercial activity, and all social and political institutions. So after God has mentioned many of them...God continues to say that even if it is not specifically mentioned, one should still do "what is right and good" through compromises and other actions that are not specifically mentioned in the Torah.

(Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Deuteronomy 6:18)

Some porters working for Raba bar bar Chanan broke a jug of wine. He seized their clothes. They came before Rav, and Rav said to Raba bar bar Chanan, "Give them their clothes." Raba bar bar Chanan said to him, "Is this the law?" Rav said to him, "Yes, because of the principle, 'You should walk in the ways of the good.'" (Proverbs 2:20). He gave them back their clothes. They said to him, "We are poor, and we troubled ourselves to work all day, and we are needy. Do we receive nothing?" Immediately Rav said to Raba bar bar Chanan, "Go, give them their wages." He said to Rav, "Is this the law?" Rav said, "Yes, [because of the principle], 'You should keep to the ways of the righteous'" (Proverbs 2:20).

(b. B. Mets 83a)

You shall not render an unfair decision: do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your kinsman fairly." (Leviticus 19:15)

Poverty is worse than all the other sufferings in the world. . . If all the other troubles were placed on one side and poverty on the other, poverty would outweigh all of them.

(Sh. Rab. 31:12, 14)

If a rich man says to a poor man, “Why do you not go and work and get food? Look at those hips! Look at those legs! Look at that fat body! Look at those lumps of flesh!”, then I, the Blessed Holy One say to him, “Is it not enough that you have not given him anything of yours, but you must set the evil eye upon what I have given him!

(Vay. Rab. 34:4)

The reason that the poor person is poor [is because] the rich person is rich; when your star ascends, his star descends. You [the rich person] are the reason why he is poor.

(Isaac Caro, medieval commentator)

The highest degree of charity, exceeded by none, is that of a person who assists a poor Jew by providing him with a gift or a loan or by accepting him into a business partnership or by helping him to find employment—in a word, by putting him [in a position] where he can dispense with other people’s aid.

(Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 10: 7-14)

Tzedakah belongs to the notion of justice rather than benevolence . . . and reflects the idea that since all property ultimately belongs to God, it is a sense of equity rather than generosity that commands giving it to others. The giving of charity could therefore be coerced by communal sanction and was formally organized on a community basis.

(R. Jonathan Sacks)

There has not been, and could not be conceived, an identification of Judaism with any particular political stance. [In the same vein,] it would be quite wrong to identify a great religious tradition with any particular set of economic institutions. . . Judaism has no specific answers to the economic and social problems of our times.

(R. Jonathan Sacks)