Journal of Textual Reasoning (Old Series) 1:1 (February 1991)
ISSN: 1939-7518

Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Bitnetwork
Old Series: Volume 1, Number 1 (February 1991)

Office of Jewish Studies, Drew University, Madison, NJ 07940
Peter Ochs, Editor
Karen Leek, System Manager
Bitnet Address: POCHS@DREW; Telephone: (201) 408-3222

Paul Mendes-Flohr, Hebrew University, Jerusalem:
Norbert Samuelson, Temple University
Ken Seeskin, Northwestern University
Edith Wyschogrod, Queens College, CUNY
Michael Wyschogrod, Baruch College, CUNY

FORWARD

Welcome to our first official edition. After preliminary correspondences, we begin, modestly, by introducing some of our members' descriptions of work they've written in the area of "postmodern Jewish philosophy." For readers who have not been part of our preliminary discussions, here is, first, a restatement of our purpose.

We are a discussion network funded in our founding year as a Collaborative Project of the American Academy of Religion. "The Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Bitnetwork" represents the first stage of a BITNET journal of Postmodern Judaism, philosophically considered: referring both to the plurality of contemporary Jewish religious expressions, philosophically considered and to the plurality of postmodern methods of Jewish philosophy and philosophical theology. In the history of Judaism, the two principle paradigms of philosophic inquiry have been the Jewish Aristotelianism and neo-Platonism of the Arabic speaking Jewish philosophers of medieval Spain, and the Jewish Kantianism of the largely German speaking Jewish philosophers of 19th-20th century Europe. For now, we are using the term "postmodern" very loosely to refer to what may be a third paradigm of Jewish philosophic inquiry, emerging from out of Kantian and Aristotelian roots. As we use it, the term may refer to any of a variety of hermeneutical, semiotic, process, feminist and deconstructive inquiries, all of which are adapted to and influenced by emergent forms of Scriptural and Talmudic text interpretation and all of which generate corresponding varieties of philosophical theology.

In its first year, the goal of the Network is to identify the variety of "postmodern" Jewish inquiries as currently practiced and to elicit generalizations about what these inquiries may share: in other words, to begin to clarify what we mean by "postmodern." We may, in fact, discover that we mean too many things by it and that we need either to delimit our conversation further or at least to rename it. Our plan is to disseminate to our limited membership a Network issue every three months (or whenever else we want to!). For the first two or three issues, we will collect brief descriptions of articles and books already written by our members and pertinent to the work of postmodern Jewish philosophy and philosophical theology. By the second issue, we will disseminate, as well, our members' initial thoughts about the approaches that seem to inform these descriptions: what the various subgroups of approaches may be and what they share and don't share. By the fourth issue, we hope to reach initial conclusions about how to define our Network so that, in the second year, we might expand our membership and invite papers that belong to a single conversation, however broadly or inclusively characterized. We plan to use the annual meetings of both the AAR and the Academy of Jewish Philosophy as occasions to gather ourselves for face-to-face discussion.

DESCRIPTIONS BY OUR MEMBERS OF WORK IN POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY:

ROBERT GIBBS:
* CORRELATIONS: ROSENZWEIG AND LEVINAS. A book that re-reads the two philosophers separately in order to display the deep connection of their thought. Rosenzweig is read as a philosopher, and not as a sectarian Jewish theologian; while Levinas is read as a Jewish thinker, as adapting Rosenzweig's central concepts. The book proposes an agenda for contemporary Jewish philosophy that centers around social ethics.

* "Present Imperative: Ethics and temporality". A paper at the 1990 AAR. I present a three-step interpretation of time: from internal consciousness,

to existentially lived, concluding with interpersonal responsibility. The sequence moves from Husserl to Heidegger to Levinas. The responsibility for the other person re-orients our interpretation of time, as my encounter of an other appears as the fundamental origin of temporality.

* "The Other Comes to Teach Me: A Review of Recent English Translations to Levinas" — For "Man and World". Self-evident. But the extras include: 1) discussions of two recent books that are appropriate introductions to his thought, 2) a discussion of Levinas' Jewish writings in relation to his philosophical ones, and 3) a brief overview of the various connections to more widely known post-modern thinkers (Lyotard, Derrida, Irigaray, etc).

YUDIT GREENBERG:
* My essay, "Rosenzweig in a Postmodern Context: Revelation, Hermeneutics, and the Midrashic Dimensions of THE STAR OF REDEMPTION, examines the notion that revelation is a privileged moment of speech in the context of contemporary debate on the hierarchical order of speech and writing. This angle of investigation presses the import of how our employment of language informs our metaphysical constructions. My claim in this essay is that there is not only an essential nexus of speech and text in Rosenzweig's writings; but, the boundaries between sacred texts and philosophy break down with Rosenzweig's retrieval of biblical speech, and also the dialectic between audible and written speech.

STEVEN KEPNES:
Here are abstracts of four articles and a book I have written in the area of Post-Modern Jewish Philosophy.

The first three articles I will describe are very early versions of parts of chapters 1-3 of my book on Buber.

* "A Hermeneutic Approach to the Buber-Scholem Controversy,"

Journal of Jewish Studies, 38 (Spring, 1987), 81-98.

I attempt to address Scholem's highly influential critique of Buber's interpretation of Hasidism from a hermeneutical perspective. By analyzing the hermeneutical assumptions of Scholem's critique, new insights into the Buber-Scholem controversy and avenues for resolving it can be found. Scholem criticizes Buber from the perspective of the Wissenschaft des Judentums. He does not believe that Buber presents an historically accurate picture of Hasidism. Implicit in Scholem's critique is a belief that texts are properly interpreted when the historical context is adequately reconstructed and the meaning which the original audience understood is discerned. Scholem does not recognize a real development in Buber's hermeneutical approach to Hasidism. And he also does not recognize and appreciate the fact that Buber sought, not the original meaning of the text, but the meaning for contemporary audiences. I argue that Buber's hermeneutical approach to Hasidism opens up Hasidism and allows it to address contemporary readers in ways that a historical critical methodology advocated by Scholem et. al. simply cannot. I do try to show, however, that there need not be a stand off between those who defend a Buberian interpretation and those who defend Scholem's interpretation of Hasidism. I use the hermeneutic theory of Paul Ricoeur to suggest that there is no reason why Buber's dialogical hermeneutic method cannot be augmented by an initial historical critical analysis. In Ricoeur's language, historical critical "explanation" can often develop dialogic "understanding" of a text. The most fruitful interpretations of Hasidic texts will result from a hermeneutical method which combines a historical critical analysis with a dialogical hermeneutical approach.

* "Buber as Hermeneut: Relations to Dilthey and Gadamer"
The Harvard Theological Review, 81:2 (Spring, 1988), 193-213.

Here I try to show a movement from Buber's early romantic hermeneutic method to what I call his "dialogical hermeneutic method." I begin with the hermeneutic influence of Buber's teacher, Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey's

"romantic" notion of interpretation as a process of empathizing with the mind of the author so that the author's experience (Erlebnis) can be "relived" and the text "recreated" most adequately describes Buber's early hermeneutic method. However, the development of the philosophy of I-Thou leads to changes in Buber's hermeneutical thinking. By carefully analyzing Buber's aesthetics in I and Thou, I show that works of art, what Buber's calls geistige Wesenheiten, are to be approached with the same attitude of "I-Thou" as persons and nature. The result is that the "I-Thou" relationship becomes the paradigm for the hermeneutical process. This means that it is no longer the re-creation of the author's experience behind the text which is the focus of interpretation, but the text itself and the dialogical relationship between the text and the interpreter. In the last section of this paper I show how Buber's dialogical hermeneutic notions anticipated some of the most significant hermeneutical principles developed by Gadamer in his Wahrheit und Methode, (Truth and Method) [1960]. Gadamer's notion of the conversation that must occur between the reader and the text, his concept of "the fusion of horizons," the horizon of the text and that of the reader, his insistence that the meaning of a text be applied to the contemporary situation, and his belief that any true understanding of a text must involve a different understanding than that of the original audience, are all principles that are implicit in Buber's dialogical hermeneutic method.

* "Buber's Biblical Hermeneutics and Narrative Biblical Theology," Proceedings of the Academy of Jewish Philosophy. N. Samuelson and D. Novack, eds. Lanham: University Press.(forthcoming)

I focus on the Buber-Rosenzweig translation and interpretive writings on the Hebrew Bible. My first aim is to show that the Bible translation and the interpretations which result from it provide the best example of the application of Buber's dialogical hermeneutics. Throughout his work on the Bible, Buber aimed to facilitate the reader's reception of the text as "Thou." In reviewing the philosophy of the Buber-Rosenzweig translation I try to show how the dialogical I-Thou paradigm is at work in Buber's

biblical hermeneutics. Secondly I try to show that Buber's experience of translating the Bible led to important developments in his hermeneutical method. To present the text as Thou, as "other," Buber employed a variety of translation techniques and historical critical methods. Although a strict application of the hermeneutics of the philosophy of I-Thou would suggest that techniques and methods destroy the immediate conversation between the interpreter and text, in his biblical writings, Buber appears to have become convinced that it is precisely techniques and methods that help to preserve a dialogical relation to the text. Here, Buber appears to have heeded the wisdom of a Scholemian critique of his Hasidic interpretations and moved closer to the model for interpretation developed by Paul Ricoeur (a model in which techniques and methods of historical explanation are combined with dialogical approaches).

* Buber's Hermeneutical Philosophy and Narrative Theology.
Indiana University Press. (in press, 1991)

The aim of the first four chapters (part 1) of the book is to present the development of Buber's hermeneutic method of interpretation from his early romantic period through his dialogical period to his biblical writings and late thoughts on language. The last chapter of part 1 represents my attempt to place Buber in "dialogue" with contemporary hermeneutic theory and construct a general Buberian hermeneutic method for all texts.

In Part 2 of the book (chs.5-8) I turn from hermeneutical issues to more strictly narrative ones. The overall argument of Part 2 is that Buber's narratives provide privileged access to his philosophy of I-Thou and to his theology. But narrative is not only a tool of expression for philosophical and theological ideas. In writing and interpreting narratives Buber's ideas are deepened and emboldened. For example it is only through Buber's work in narrative biblical theology that he is able to confront the most difficult issue of his day, the eclipse of God brought about by the Holocaust.

In retelling biblical and hasidic tales and using the tale to address the modern situation, Martin Buber, famous modern heretic, found himself employing an extremely old Jewish means of theological expression. If we look at the entirety of Buber's narrative writings what we have is a body of literature which represents a daring attempt to formulate a modern narrative Jewish theology. The promise inherent in this narrative Jewish theology is truly great, for if it is fully explored and articulated it could provide the basis for an "aggadic" or narrative Judaism. This aggadic Judaism could reverse the traditional priority given to halakhah (law) over aggadah and provide a way back to tradition for that majority of modern Jews who no longer subject all aspects of their lives to the dictates of Jewish law. If Buber's hermeneutics is seen in the context of contemporary hermeneutical studies in Judaism his work can be recognized as the beginning of what some have called the modern Jewish revival of the "midrashic imagination" (Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Buber and Post-Traditional Judaism," European Judaism, 12:2, 118).

* "A Narrative Jewish Theology,"
Judaism, 37:2 (Spring, 1988), 210-18.

This article was written after study I did in "Macon Shlomo," a Jerusalem Yeshiva for University educated Americans. I provide examples from rabbinic literature and reasons from contemporary theory for why rabbinic theology has tended to take a narrative form. I examine some of the problems of solely narrative forms of theology at the end of the article.

PETER OCHS:
* "A Rabbinic Pragmatism," in "Theology and Dialogue, ed. Bruce Marshall (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990), pp. 213-248.

I suggest that George Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" method of theology (as displayed, for example, in his The Nature of Doctrine) speaks to Jews as well as Christians. Influenced by Wittgenstein as well as Barth, Lindbeck's program for studying Biblical "intertextuality" articulates the

theological methods of a collection of "postliberal" Christian theologians (among them Hans Frei, Stanley Hauerwas, Ronald Thiemann and others). I suggest that these methods correspond, within the context of rabbinic hermeneutics, to those of a collection of what I label "aftermodern" Jewish theologians: Hermann, Cohen, Buber, Rosenzweig, and also Fackenheim, Levinas, and to some extent Heschel, Kaplan and Max Madushin. The work of this essay is, then, to show how Lindbeck's methodology illuminates the methods of these Jewish aftermoderns and vice-versa. I adopt a variant of Charles Peirce's semiotics as the most helpful language for analyzing and comparing these methods. The essay's central claim is that both postliberals and aftermoderns are responding to the facts that their respective religious communities suffer crises of moral authority and of identity AND that traditional theologies have proven ineffective in responding to these crises. "Traditional theologies" means both traditionalist AND modernist theologies (the latter are theologies informed by Cartesian- Kantian epistemologies). The aftermodern theological alternative is to claim that God's spoken-word is authoritative; that, as presented (written), that Word is incomplete and relies on its interpreter to complete its presentation; that the Word has a performative meaning which is displayed only by way of this interpretation; and that this performative meaning is also transformational: as enacted, it transforms the rules that govern interpretation at any given time.

I use the term "aftermodern" as a temporary label for a particular KIND of postmodern Jewish theology. It is one of the kinds I hope we'll entertain in this Bitnetwork.

* Understanding the rabbinic Mind: Essays on the Hermeneutic of Max Kadushin, (edited collection, Atlanta: Scholars Press for South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism, 1990). This is a collection of essays by Jewish and Christian scholars, on Max Kadushin's hermeneutic. Here are two blurbs I've written on the book:

Seven scholars of rabbinic Judaism (Jack Neusner, Theodore Steinberg, Simon Greenberg, Richard Sarason, Alan Avery-Peck, Martin Jaffee, Peter Ochs) and two Christian theologians (Gary Comstock, George Lindbeck) offer the first extensive evaluation of one of the least known but most important American Jewish thinkers: Max Kadushin (1895-1980) of the Jewish Theological Seminary. They show that, influenced by American process thinkers and pragmatists, Kadushin viewed rabbinic Judaism as an organic system of virtues, or "value concepts," embodied in the rabbis' vast corpus of homiletic writings (midrash aggadah). Through his study of these writings, Kadushin offered a descriptive theology appropriate to his contemporary rabbinic community. While at times overlooking details of concern to the historical-critical scholar, Kadushin generated a method of text interpretation of great import to post-critical and post-modern theologians in both the Jewish and Christian biblical traditions. Kadushin's books are difficult to read; their conclusions have therefore failed to receive the public attention they merit. This collection teaches Kadushin's work to a general academic audience. It shows how, from out of the methods of traditional rabbinic discourse as well as of 20th century philosophy and social science, he generated a hermeneutic which may well serve as a prototype for contemporary Jewish and Christian text interpretation. The collection redefines his hermeneutic within the terms of several contemporary disciplines: the literary, rhetorical and historical study of rabbinic literature; pragmatism and semiotics; phenomenology; Christian narrative theology and "postcritical" theology; and descriptive theologies of rabbinic Judaism and of Christianity. From the perspectives of the collection's authors, Kadushin's work has parallels among the interpretive works of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, of Solomon Schechter and G. F. Moore, of Isaac Heinemann, of Mordecai Kaplan, of Alfred Whitehead and Charles Peirce, and of Martin Luther!

In my own contribution to the collection, "Max Kadushin as Rabbinic Pragmatist," I argue that Kadushin's work cannot productively be interpreted according to the standards of historical-critical, literary and form critical or traditional rabbinic hermeneutics. It is best viewed,

instead, as a contribution to "aftermodern Jewish philosophy" (see above) or, within that philosophy, to a "rabbinic pragmatism." I describe how, searching for norms for this kind of hermeneutic, Kadushin borrowed selectively from ethnographic, social-psychological and process languages of analysis. Kadushin was influenced somewhat by Charles Peirce's semiotics. I argue that, if the influence were made more than somewhat, his hermeneutic would have more power, emerging as a method of describing the normative force of Talmudic hermeneutics FOR guiding the reformation of aftermodern (or postmodern) communities of rabbinic practice.

* Rabbinic Text Process Theology," Jewish Thought, forthcoming (spring, 1991).

More on Kadushin. This time, I respond to a question posed by process theologians David Griffin and Sandra Lubarsky: what would a Jewish process theology look like? I say that, if this means (as it usually does) a NATURALIST Jewish process theology, then the answer is some version of Mordecai Kaplan's theology. But if, more in keeping with rabbinic theologies, this means a TEXTUALLY responsive Jewish process theology, then our best example would be Kadushin's hermeneutic. I then examine Kadushin's use of Whitehead. I conclude that the categories of process theology can be used in a rabbinic text process theology IF they are redescribed as META-ONTOLOGICAL, rather than as ontological categories. I take this to be another attribute of aftermodern Jewish philosophy: it replaces the study of ontology with a study of the hermeneutical or semiotic patterns of reasoning which allow us to place any ontology in dialogue with the transforming patterns of Scriptural discourse. Here "ontologies" refer to context-specific ways of describing the most general characters of the most extensive entities we know. God's spoken-word (dibbur) addresses some given ontology, in the interest of transforming it in some manner. In what manner? God only knows, but the text-process theologian attempts to find out something about this manner by examining the ways in which ontologies tend to be

transformed through their encounters with God's spoken-words — in this case, with God's spoken-words as interpreted through classical rabbinic hermeutics.

* Rabbinic Semiotics," American Academy of Religion annual meeting, 1990:
I argue for a "compassionate postmodernism," which understands itself as modernity brought to self-consciousness rather than as a critique of modernism as an errant choice. The rational constructions of philosophic modernism are symptoms of suffering. Compassionate postmodernism reads these symptoms as symptoms and offers hope that, just as God heard and responded to the cries of the Israelites in bondage, so too may a reawakened encounter with the Scriptural word offer modernists the means to respond to the suffering of which they are witnesses. I say H. Cohen was the first to identify this reawakened encounter, and, stimulated by K. Seeskin's recent book, I trace the "rabbinic semiotics" that links Cohen's response to that of Buber and Rosenzweig.

LARRY SILBERSTEIN:
* "I am currently endeavoring to apply recent, post-structuralist theories discourse and ideology to contemporary Israeli discussions on the meaning of Judaism, Jewish history, Jewish identity, and Jewish tradition. In this project, I approach the writings of selected Israeli thinkers and writers as efforts to formulate a contemporary discourse for Judaism and Jewish life. Specifically, I want to focus on their treatment of such issues as the nature of tradition, the relationship of history to contemporary realities, the contemporary implications of the Holocaust, Arab-Jewish relations, and the relationship of Jewish values and political power.

Events such as the occupation of the territories, the Intafada, the growing influence of ultra-nationalist ideologies and the existence of a strong Jewish community in America confront the current generation of Israeli intellectuals with realities previously unknown in Jewish life. Consequently, many find the discourses of classical Zionism to be either

inadequate or simply obsolete. Israeli thinkers and intellectuals such as Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua, Boas Evron, Gershon Weiler, Yoseph Agassi, Amnon Rubenstein, Adi Opir, Yeshaya Leibovits and others critically engage and revise prevailing Zionist discussion of such issues as exile/redemption, diaspora/homeland, submission/resistance, cowardice/bravery, power/weakness, and particularism/ universalism. Informing their efforts is a recurring question: In the light of the realities of Jewish life in general, and Israeli society and culture in particular, how do we speak meaningfully about Judaism, Jewish history, and Jewish identity? In particular, I am concerned with finding in these writings the traces of a post-Zionist ideology. Diverging from conventional discussions of Jewish thought, I shall bring to the works I am discussing such questions as: What are the social and linguistic processes by means of which Zionist ideology was formulated, disseminated, and transmitted? What institutional arrangements and configurations of power are necessary to sustain Zionist ideology? What understandings of the past are implicit in them? What are the implications of the Zionist interpretation of history for current power relations both within the Jewish community and between Jews and non-Jews, particularly Arabs? What alternatives are implicit in recent Israeli writings to such inherited forms of Jewish discourse as secular and religious Zionism, traditional and liberal theology, and prevailing historical interpretations of Judaism? To what extent is it possible to speak of the emergence of a post-Zionist discourse?"

EDITH WYSCHOGROD:
At the American Academy of Religion annual meeting in New Orleans, Nov. 1990, Edith was the respondent to four papers on "Trends in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy." The session was described as follows:

"Contemporary Jewish philosophers and hermeneuts derive from the inquiries of Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig and Emmanual Levinas new methods for conducting Jewish theological and textual inquiry. These methods offer alternatives to the historical-critical text studies of the

Wissenschaft des judentums as well as to the philosophic theologies of Jewish Aristotelians and Jewish Kantians. This session offers a sampling of very recent studies in what now goes by such names as postmodern or hermeneutical Jewish philosophy."

* Robert Gibbs' and Jacob Meskin's papers are not only interesting in themselves but are markers of a shift in Jewish theological thinking in the last decade. Before turning a hunch about this change into a hypothesis, I retrieved my 1980 AAR/SBL program and examined sessions that touched on Jewish theology: Alan Berger on holocaust literature; a panel discussion on the usefulness of anthropology and philosophy for studying the history of Judaism; Steven Katz on models for analyzing religious traditions; Jacob Neusner and Bill Green on making sense of Judaism as a whole; Ellen Umansky and Buber's relation to feminist theology; and myself on Levinas on God. Some of this decade-old work attests the dominant analytic strain in Anglo-American philosophy. For the most part, reflected in these rather eclectic presentations, is a kind of Jewish theological architectonic that dates from the end of World
War II to about 1980. Central to this period is the question of the holocaust given representative expression in the theologies of Fackenheim and Rubenstein and their respondents. The articulation of this problematic is indebted to the existential philosophy of the pre-war and immediate post-war period: the simultaneous repudiation and incorporation of Heidegger as well as the influence of Jaspers, Sartre and Jewish figures such as Buber and Rosenzweig.

Neither the words postmodernism nor deconstruction appear in the program — Mark Taylor is listed as discussing his then new Kierkegaard and Hegel book. Judaism as ethics in the tradition of Hermann Cohen, except perhaps for the lonely voice of Steven Schwarzschild (a voice recently effectively appropriated by Kenneth Seeskin), was then seen as of historical interest. The thought of Levinas, Derrida, Jabes and Blanchot, hardly young at that time, as well as Jewish feminist thinking were only faintly visible. Nor was biographical writing (then represented in

Scholem's monumental life of Sabbatai Zwi) seen as theologically significant whereas now Yovel's account of Spinoza as Marrano and the influence of Moshe Idel's experiential revision of Scholem's view of Kabbalism may presage new theological developments. Gibbs and Meskin, I believe, belong to a new-wave of a Jewish revival of ethics which develops moral and social philosophy against a backdrop of postmodern critique. To name only a few, Susan Handelman and Susan Shapiro bring postmodern accounts of negation to the fore, and reinscribe the holocaust against this new backdrop while Judith Pleskow, Blu Greenberg and Susanna Heschel deal with feminist issues. Peter Ochs, I shall argue, is a most interesting anomaly.

The phenomenological past exhumed in Gibb's extremely interesting paper, assesses Husserl and Heidegger in order to determine what is living and what is dead in their accounts of time. The sheer reflexivity of internal time consciousness, Gibbs argues, first as it appears in retention, holding on to what went before and, second in the act of perception itself are intrinsic to Husserl's view. It takes time to perceive time or temporally distended objects, he says, and that remains interesting. Heidegger discovers that the past and the future are asymmetrical, the future governed by the anticipation of one's own death and the past by appropriation of who one was. Interesting, but not good enough, Gibbs insists. By contrast, Gibbs continues, Levinas argues that self-aggrandizement belongs not only to the way we expropriate things but also the way we subordinate the Other's time to our own. The Other interrupts me by placing a demand upon my time: I am not taken out of the world but become responsible for it. Gibbs identifies this mode of time with Levinas's time that can never be made present, a time that frustrates previous views of temporalization.

Despite Levinas's break with phenomenology, Gibbs demonstrates that Levinas remains enmeshed in phenomenological thought. It is only Rosenzweig who can sever ties with (to use postmodern argot) the ocularity or vision-centeredness of phenomenology by invoking language

as signification and communication. What I find particularly intriguing in Gibbs's semiotic turn is his recognition that the idealistic or phenomenological moment in Levinas cannot be scotched altogether: "Both Rosenzweig and Levinas retain a prior ego-centrism, in order to see the rupture that occurs in speaking." This accords with Gibb's superb analysis elsewhere on "speaking Greek" or the language of philosophy in Levinas. This Greek residue is indispensable if one is to manifest oneself to the other. (I think Levinas's remarks on speaking Greek might be useful to African theologians struggling with the tensions between local traditions and general communicability.)

I could not agree more with a number of key points in Jacob Meskin's paper: first, that the body represents a non- conceptualizable reality which is constitutive for thinking; second that the body is the reference point for distinguishing self from other; third that there is a shift from Totality and Infinity to Otherwise than Being so that, in the latter body becomes the ground of speech and sensate locus of vulnerability. Finally, Meskin's most compelling critical point: by making the ethical contingent upon body, the symbolic significance of culture and history are attenuated in Levinas. Levinas's account of the asymmetry and differentiation between self and other remains abstract and does not allow for the expression of Judaism's cultural specificity.

I believe the difficulty to which Meskin points can be explained by Levinas's worry about submersion in the il y a, the undifferentiated being of paganism. So deep is Levinas's fear of the il y a, a fear associated with its identification as the milieu of the Teutonic gods, that he cannot acknowledge, as Buber does, the celebratory aspects of Judaism. Levinas's analysis of the elemental however may offer a way out of this difficulty. City and landscape, for example, are unproblematic instances of the elemental so that the elemental need not be identified with the il y a which gives rise to pagan rite.

I am also drawn, deeply so, to Peter Och's wish for a compassionate postmodernism, one that treats modernism as, to borrow Heidegger's term, errant. This errancy is not the result of some evil impulse on modernism's part but reflects a suffering towards which postmodernity must be merciful. Hermann Cohen, he thinks, offers a clue to the understanding of mercy: a combining of the Kantian principle of universalization with prophetic loving kindness, rachamim, to be actualized in the lived life.

Ochs also endorses scepticism (the Cartesian sort to be sure) so that postmoderns need not passively accept received traditions. Following Buber, he wishes to replace an ethics derived from a metaphysics of substance with a relational perspective. And he believes that Peircean semiotics as an account of the triadic relation of sign, object and interpretant, can provide such a relational approach as well as a guide to compassionate action. I think Peter is right to lament the hardheartedness in postmodern sensibility. I argue elsewhere and at length for distinguishing between ethical postmoderns among whom I number Levinas, Derrida, Blanchot and Lyotard and postmodern ecstatics, who hunger for experience, Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari and others. But I do not think one can simply reinstate modernism — for example, use Kantian ethics Â la Gewirth or phenomenology Â la Scheler or Thomism Â la MacIntyre — because the postmodern critique of revisionisms goes all the way down.

Peircean semiotics does not escape Heidegger's critique either of theoreticity in general or of moral theory in particular. For Heidegger, moral theories are not unlike theories in science in which the meaning of truth is reduced to relations of inclusion, exclusion and identity and truth is understood as it is in the science of logic. But, Heidegger argues, logic is not free floating, not without metaphysical foundations. Heidegger does not deny the necessity for rule- bound reasoning but criticizes the failure of reason to display its ontological ground.

A response is also required to Derrida's critique of the sign on the grounds that the indicative power of signs is unstable from the start because signs conceal an "order" of time and space prior to phenomenologically accessible differences. One must react to the cunning of reason with new strategies or make "visible" the traces of postmodern critique in older philosophical discourse if it is invoked.

In his paper delimiting the boundaries of exegetical authority in Rabbinic Judaism, Jose Faur makes some extremely imaginative and interesting claims as well as some which raise further questions. Faur argues that normative Judaism is a religion of exegesis and is so of necessity. With the destruction of the Temple, Judaism generated interpretive resources for the expansion of Scripture that would enable Jews to adapt to altered circumstances. The result: a revolutionary new religion grounded in prayer, synagogue worship and exegesis.

So far so good.

Next, Faur proposes that for Christianity and Islam textual interpretation is grounded in ecclesiastical authority whereas in Judaism the reverse is true: authority is founded on exegetical expertise. On the face of it, this claim seems unexceptionable. But if, the question of how discourse is distributed is made a focal point (a matter to which Foucault and Kristeva among others have called attention), one must ask how — through what institutional mechanisms — a particular gloss acquires authority: who decides the question of its soundness, who rejects it and why? How is authority allocated and transmitted? For classical Judaism this is the academy in which learning takes place, the structure of the family that supports scholarly endeavor and so on. These mechanisms are less visible than the formal ecclesiastical organization of the Church but nevertheless attest social authorization.

Next, using Kristeva's distinction between Platonic and Stoic interpretation, Faur argues that Christianity leans on Plato's philosophy

of the forms, a philosophy that sublates textual authenticity by substituting itself for textual meanings. Such interpretation is viciously circular. By contrast, Rabbinic explanations are governed by Stoic hermeneutics which impose no principles extrinsic to the text itself. This distinction can, I think, yield fruitful results, but the matter is more complicated than it may appear.

Faur is largely right about the Platonic archetypalism of Christian Scriptural interpretation. Nevertheless, Stoic and Platonic knowledge claims themselves overlap and are hard to segregate. For example, Augustine thinks, following Plato, that the divine ideas are contained eternally in the mind of God but, in explicating the doctrine of creation, he appeals to a Stoic notion, the rationes seminales, the divinely created latent seeds of all things that will unfold in time. This doctrine is, in turn, rejected by Aquinas and replaced with the Aristotelian notion of immanent substantial form. Thus Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic ideas all have a place in Christian hermeneutics. The complexity of the matter increases with Acquinas's un- Platonic, even rabbinic, contention that a multiplicity of meanings may inhere in a single text: "Every truth that can fittingly be related to divine Scripture, in view of the context, is its meaning." (Pocket Aquinas, p. 317).

It should also be recalled that when Kristeva says that for the Stoics "to interpret" is "to make a connection" the context of claim is to show that the Stoics "open the field of subjectivity" by endorsing the "will of the Stoic sage." Thus, for her, the point of Stoic interpretation is different from the juridical aims Faur proposes for rabbinic hermeneutics. Because Faur's thesis nevertheless remains remarkably suggestive, I should like to mention some Stoic claims that work for his thesis. Stoicism repudiates universals — Chryssipus calls universals not-somethings — thus distinguishing itself from Platonism (Long and Sedley, sources, p. 180). In addition, Stoic logic loosens meaning from reference or, as it was called then, body (H. H. Long, HP 137-8). H. G. Gadamer makes much of this point: "The sphere of linguistic meaning becomes detached from the

sphere of things encountered in linguistic form. Stoic logic speaks of these incorporeal meanings [which are] conceived by themselves for the first time (Gadamer TM, p. 392)". More, some Stoics separate authorial intent from the reader's interpretation. These observations about language taken together form a kind of rhetorical constellation that can be applied tomany rabbinic texts.

But if interpretation is free as Faur claims it is, as he also says, bounded by the fact that it is largely devoted to law and that legal interpretation is limited by the principle that law cannot be self-nullifying. Rabbinic exegesis has ethical and ritual outcomes. But if this is true do we not return to an arche or form of the law? For Plato, the purpose of the law is to produce goodness in human beings in conformity with the ideal laws in the world of forms whereas for Rabbinic Judaism it is to produce obedience to the divine will. But for both Plato and the Rabbis the Law is governed by an arche outside itself, so that Rabbinic exegesis is in that sense at least as Platonic as it is Stoic. My reflections of Faur's Platonic/Stoic distinction are intended less as criticism than as a spur to further elaboration.

MEMBERS NEWS ITEMS:
Members are welcome to submit for this section any news, queries, or offerings that may interest the whole group.

This time Norbert Samuelson would like to bring to your attention that a position is open for a Judaic Scholar in Residence at Franklin and Marshall College. The college wishes to make a series of one-year appointments over a three-year period. They are looking for a teacher/scholar, preferably a senior one, distinguished in Judaic studies. They would like someone on leave who would like to develop some innovative teaching. If interested, please write to:
Chair, Judaic Studies Search Committee
Franklin & Marshall College
Office of the Dean of College

P.O. Box 3003
Lancaster, PA 17604

AFTERWARD:

So, what do we mean by "postmodern Jewish philosophy?" We are assuming for starters that the meaning will be displayed in the several ways we use it and that, to identify these ways, we need to collect a family resemblance class of examples. For our next issue, we invite these kinds of submissions:

- More reports on what you've written in this area. We need many more examples!
- Comments about the reports you've read in this issue. What kinds of inquiry do you think our various contributors are engaged in?
- Additional reports and comments you may have on the recent examples of postmodern Jewish philosophy.
- New items of any sort pertinent to our membership, including additional comments about your work or about what we'll be doing in the Bitnetwork. There is a wide variety of activities we could engage in; we're beginning cautiously while we gather a sense of our shared purposes.

We've begun this project at a time of war and brokenness and of terrible hardship in Israel and throughout the Middle East. Our words in this issue do not display our concerns nor, perhaps, our not knowing at such a time what our words can do. For now, we simply say to our correspondents in Israel, Paul and Almut, you and your families and neighbors are on our minds and in our prayers. We welcome you using this Network, along with our other members, so share with us thoughts and concerns that speak from and to this difficult time.