Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Bitnetwork
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FORWARD

Welcome to the first post-preparatory issue of the Bitnetwork. Post-preparatory, because, after a year of collecting a sense of who we are, we find our collection too vast and varied to identify, in too prepared a way, and, willy nilly, we find ourselves speaking rather than collecting. Acting, you might say, without preparation. If there is a postmodern philosophic self, it appears so much larger and messier than a pineal gland that we might rather call it a society than a self (close enough to William James' sense of personal identity, a bit more social perhaps than Julia Kristeva's). It remains to be seen what sort of discourse corresponds to this self-understanding and to what extent, as some of our members claim, its pedigree is rabbinic.

This issue features the following sections:

BUSINESS: with your indulgence, we have little housekeeping to do.

DIALOGUES IN POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY: our main focus this issue. Here is a species of speaking-thinking: a redaction of five months of electronic dialogues among a small group of NETWORK members, initiated and managed by NORBERT SAMUELSON, redacted by the NETWORK editor.

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OUT OF ISRAEL: the first of three excerpts from the recent work of ADI OPHIR. Offered as a topic for readers' responses.

DESCRIPTIONS: in the manner of the first year's issues, we introduce a few new members by providing their abstracts of recent work.

MEMBERS' NEWS ITEMS

AFTERWORD

BUSINESS:

The BITNETWORK was generously supported in its infant year by a Collaborative Grant from the American Academy of Religion and by facilities support from Drew University. With warm thanks to the AAR, we venture off on our own now. Issues of the BITNETWORK will be sent free of charge to anyone with a Bitnet address. We now request a $10

annual contribution from anyone wishing to receive hardcopies of Volume 2 of the BITNETWORK. Of course, contributions are welcome from softcopy folks, too, to help defray clerical and distribution costs. Backcopies of VOLUME 1: free to BITNET addresses; $10 contrib. for hardcopy mailings. Please send contributions to: JEWISH STUDIES PROGRAM/BIT c/o Peter Ochs, Drew University, Madison, NJ 07940.

DIALOGUES IN POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

From November '91-March '92, a subgroup of BITNETWORK members participated in an electronic dialogue, managed by Norbert Samuelson. Here are edited selections from the dialogue, which began with Norbert's responses to Steven Kepnes' statement of postmodern concerns, published in the last issue of BITNETWORK Vol. 1. The dialogic form may prove to be typical of postmodern philosophic discourse - this remains to be seen. While the discussion cannot be classified according to theme any more than a Talmudic sugya, we find it convenient to divide the responses into several dominant subjects: On the Starting Point of Jewish Philosophic Reflection, On Judaism in the University, On The Holocaust in Jewish Studies, On Heschel's Epistemology With a Pragmatic Twist. Future issues of the BITNETWORK will include dialogues of this kind. Readers interested in participating in such dialogues should register their BITNET addreses with Norbert Samuelson. Detailed responses to this issue are of course welcome c/o "POCHS@Drew."

ON THE STARTING POINT OF JEWISH PHILOSOPHIC REFLECTION

Excerpt from STEVEN KEPNES' Newsletter Remarks, Nov '91:
Post-Modern Jewish Philosophy is a philosophy in search of itself, Jewish thinking after the failure of modern varieties of Judaism. Never before have Jews had so much material wealth. Yet in the face of the accumulation of this material wealth we have seen an astounding slippage in the quality of Jewish spiritual life.

Given this situation of deficit where do we begin in our search for post-modern philosophy? Beginning with those whom we can affect, let us begin with ourselves, with post-modern ground rules. The greatest sin of modern Jewish philosophy is its acceptance of the starting point of modern philosophy, the autonomous thinking subject. [Post-modern Jews must begin, instead, together,] speaking to one another honestly, vigorously, seriously. Our speaking together must be seen as our most important work., retrieving [from Buber and Rosenzweig] the central principle of Sprachdenken, "speech-thinking," and retrieving the Talmudic spirit of conversation. In the Talmud we see the back and forth of argument, mutual respect between speakers, and a suggestion that we begin with a Jewish text. As the Talmud begins with the Mishnah and allows it to generate its conversation, we post-modern Jewish thinkers also need to begin with a common text. We will be lead astray if we take David Blumenthal's suggestion to put "God at Center." What we need to do is to put a text at center. With the text at center our center moves out from Jewish philosophy, narrowly conceived, to the concerns that a far larger array of scholars in Jewish Studies hold dear.

NORBERT SAMUELSON:

Steve, you make two assumptions in this piece that strike me as highly questionable: (1) you look to a group of Jews who are grouped on the principle of their academic talent to construct solutions to Jewish survival; (2) you regard the survival of the Jewish people as a people as something of inherent value. Concerning the first, if what I want is a spiritual community, then I look to a group of spiritual people; if I want to effect political change, then I look to a group with political talents. Whether or not academics have such talents is purely accidental. Concerning the second, I believe that the Jewish people ought to survive because I believe that God wants it to in order to serve Him. Hence, in agreement with David Blumenthal, I would take God as a starting point. Without God, however, I see no more inherent value in the survival of the Jewish people than I do in the survival of any other ethnic group. Now, there are many ways to argue for the inherent value of an ethnic group (for example,

principles of nationalism a la Kaplan in the 1930s; or perhaps there is some validity to considering a social construct like a nation as relevantly analogous to a natural species and arguing for any endangered nation's survival with the same logic that we apply to endangered species.) However, all of these arguments presuppose principles that are hardly "post-modern."

PETER OCHS:
Norbert, the problem is not God but God as a starting for philosophic reflection. To start with "God" per se is to start either with some as yet unsituated claim about experience or with a textual reference or interpretation. I take the strength of Steven's point to be (implicitly) that the former kind of claim is either foundational (for example, about a self-validating and self-explicating intuition, on which Cf. Charles Peirce's various critiques) OR it is confessional (in which case its use for a public exchange like ours is questionable). The preferable alternative is to start with text.

I trust we would discover that the text has authority because it is God's word, but that is claim we arrive at through a process of reasoning, not through a claim about experience. Perhaps you say we begin with a claim about the text's authority? That's OK too, but then we are starting with the whole context of our inquiry (community, history, text, experience, the questions that move us here in this place for this reason, and so on) not just text and certainly not just "God." I'd in fact prefer this whole context as a beginning; otherwise we are playing a foundational sort of game by some other name. We start where are we are when we start asking to start. Only God started with God.

SAMUELSON:
Martin Srajek pointed out to me last night that the very fact that a text is a thing and God is not a thing makes a text, rather than God, a preferred starting point from a post-modernist perspective. This thesis seems OK as far as it goes, but, without the assumption of something about God and/or

the Jewish people (better God), why should the text be a Jewish one? Why not begin, for example, with a Shakespearian sonnet? Why not something from Greek mythology?

Against a commitment to the primacy in value of Jewish survival, see Rosenzweig's STAR III:1 "Schicksal und Ewigkeit." If Jews are going to root their thinking in the Jewish people, rather than God, then it seems to me to follow that the Jews are to be just another people like any other people. If yes, then certainly there is no basis at all to guarantee their survival. In Rosenzweig's terms, all people who find their identity in anything like land, language, history, culture, et.al., must accept that while they may extend their life, they cannot avoid their death. In these terms Kepnes' concern for postmodern thinking is another instance of Rosenzweig's characterization of pre-modern (let alone modern) thinking, viz., a futile passion to overcome (vainly) one's own death. The Jewish people have lived a long time. Why (without reference to God) should their death now be "untimely?"

ON JUDAISM IN THE UNIVERSITY

PETER HAAS:
Here are some responses to the previous issues of the newsletter. Since I am in the middle of preparing a response to EUGENE BOROWITZ's (GB) RENEWING THE COVENANT, I will approach the items in the newsletters our of the context of my thoughts concerning GB's Postmodern Jewish theology.

I wonder at some comments throughout the newsletter that the university should not set the Jewish agenda. After reading GB, whose book I think assumes academe, I wonder why not. After all, some 50% of Jews receive a college degree of some sort, a number that compares favorably with the number of Jews receiving any kind of systematic religious education. The discourse of the university seems to be the most appropriate for a large number of (non-Orthodox) Jews out there. I think making the university

the locus of the next phase in Judaism has its perils, but it does follow along the lines of a number of trends: the post-Rabbinic secularization of Judaism (the center of Jewish life is moving from synagogues to Community Centers, for example); the displacement of Talmudic education by secular professional education for the bulk of post-Orthodox Jews; the adoption of Western culture in both America and Israel as the vehicle for living Judaism. Is it possible/feasible for Universities to take their place as a locus of Judaism alongside (or in opposition to) community centers and synagogues? To put the question in practical terms: should "our" audience be other scholars, rabbis or Federation leaders?

I wonder about GB's use of the label "post-modern.". In some sense he has the same idea in mind as many in the newsletter have argued, namely, "what comes next after modernity." But he also has a specific content to postmodernism. He sees it as the dialectic synthesis between the (now discredited) modern emphasis on the individual and the older, rabbinic/Orthodox emphasis on the transcendent Gd and community. Postmodernism, at least for GB, subsumes and combines these convictions. I have some doubts about this Hegelian scheme, although I think GB makes it work.

I personally have some difficulty with homologizing the difference between aggadah and halakha with the distinction between ethics and law. My own study of the responsa literature convinces me that principles of the good and the right animate the halakha just as much as they animate aggadah. What we have, I submit, are different literary genres growing out of different communities; the law-ethics distinction is ours and is imposed. In fact I think the two are inseparable. If the university does become a or the new locus for a or the postmodern Judaism, then it seems that we have to address the concrete practice of Judaism (the halachic sphere) even if what emerges is a different halakha than the Orthodox one. We might want to warrant emerging Judaic practices through aggadic (literary?) means rather than the rabbinic reliance on the "posek," but I think we doom ourselves to irrelevance if we deal only on the abstract

plane of ethics and forget the maaseh. At least as far as I know, no Judaism that has abandoned halakha entirely has been able both to maintain that and survive (note the re-rabbinization of Reform, for example, or how Zionism has yielded not Judaism but secular Israeli statism). So my question: does postmodern Jewish theology include the creation of a postmodern halakha?

DANIEL BRESLAUER:

In response to Peter Haas, I want to clarify at least my view, if not that of others who advocate the University as the setting for modern Jewish communal life, sensitivity, and also halakha. I do not see the University as the only place for Judaism in modern America. Rather I think that the University takes as its central task the academic study of texts written by and about Jews for various reasons at various times. In every case the "text" takes on a different shape and sense. Even gathering all the different interepretations into one composite will not create a unified or single "Judaism." As a by-product of the academic enterprise, however, a common commitment to texts arises. It is this that the university can contribute to the wider Jewish community.

Bialik once said that the Tanach is like the seed that contains everything within it in potential; the aggadah is like the flower that attracts to itself that which is necessary for reproduction; the halakha is like the fruit that represents the culmination of the entire process and contains within itself the seeds to start the process anew. If scholars are to have a self-conscious "agenda" other than that of good scholarship, it should be to fit into the cycle of life (Pete Seeger has a song expressing the wish "tune my body and my brain to the music in the land.") When we see our activities as part of an on-going process, then both halakhah and aggada, action and reflection, take their place in the chain of development. In many ways I take a deterministic view point: if what we call "Judaism" does not possess enough natural strength to produce ideas, actions, and institutions, then it is too sick for me to do anything with. If, on the other hand, my reflections as an academic awaken a desire to do things differently, then,

without my "intending" it, Judaism has used me as its instrument of survival.

A note about God: I find discussions about divinity literally beside the point. If, as I carry out my work, I experience a reality that I can later call God, well and good. If not, nothing is lost, because acknowledging or not acknowledging divinity does not make it more or less real. Yes, I can act in bad faith and proclaim an atheism that I know is false. Yes, I can proclaim a theism that I know is false. I cannot see the point of doing either of these.

Finally back to my first point-the university. Maimonides wrote his GUIDE and opposed the French Yeshivot because he thought an inaccurate theism was undermining Judaism's chance for survival. I doubt that he was completely correct in his assessment. I, at least, do not think that I can or should attack beliefs held by the mass of American Jews, just because I think they are wrong. Nevertheless, if I think that the type of Synagogue ideology and Zionist ideologies that abound today leave many Jews looking for an alternative, then I can call their attention to what I do, which is look at texts honestly, seek to make sense out of claims about the divine, the human, and revelation, and by being as true as I can to what I find, hope that I point to one possible and perhaps attractive way of standing in the chain of being that calls itself Judaism.

Bialik is often misunderstood. That great seed he called the Tanach served him not as a monument to be honored but as the raw material out of which he created his poetry, essays, and stories. That's what I mean by the "texts" or "Torah." People took him too literally when he spoke of the Aggadah. He did not mean just the texts he edited nor the whole range of Jewish sources. He includes the type of creative work he exhibits in "Megillat HaEsh." (Not for nothing does Gershon Scholem compare Agnon and Bialik as anthologizers; both did not resist the temptation of adding their own creations to so-called collections of material). Aggadah expresses the principles, the ideas, the themes that animate life. For Bialik, this spirit of

the folk has a palpable reality. For me, any dynamic approach to texts offers a similarly attractive means of energizing the source material. Finally, and most importantly, Bialik's writing about Halakha was focused on a process of doing. He did not mean that Jews today should follow the same halakha as that of the older generation. He meant that thought without deed was evanescent. The trap set for intellectuals is overly rationalizing things. Life is more than thought.

ON THE HOLOCAUST IN JEWISH STUDIES

SAMUELSON:
Steve, in response to your question [offered outside the network] about why I don't think the Holocaust has a lot to teach us in terms of Jewish theology, what I have to say is very close to what Borowitz says in RENEWING THE COVENANT. What I'll say now takes for granted what he says in that book.

While the Holocaust was politically a devastating event, it raised nothing new conceptually for Jews, viz., most pre-Holocaust Jewish theologies (especially normative political Zionism, classical orthodoxy, and radical secular humanism) would have not problem fitting the data of the Holocaust into their schemata. (For example, for the Zionists it verifies that Jews need power to survive; for the orthodox it verifies that when Jews abandon halakha bad things happen to them; and for the secularists, it verifies that there is no correlation between observance and reward/punishment). In general, the Holocaust does not compare to the destruction of the Second Temple as an even that ruptures the way Jews view their world. In fact, the closest thing to a "rupturing event" was emancipation (also not in the same league as the destruction of the Temple), which first and more critically called into question the inherited classical rabbinic world/life-view. (A similar case might also be made for Newtonian physics).

The case is different for Christians. The fact that a world that had become fully Christian, that gave us a Christian civilization unchallenged by any other religious tradition (for the war against Islam was won by he beginning of the 20th century), could deteriorate into the idolatry/paganism of the Nazis is a significant challenge to any form of Christianity that holds that the duty of Christians as Christians is to act in the world (for example, advocates of a social gospel). For them, the Holocaust is, or at least should be, a central concern. Perhaps that is why the most successful models for understanding the Holocaust (notably those of Elie Wiesel's novellas and Sidney Lumet's "The Pawnbroker") are christological.

BRESLAUER:

Norbert, you refer to "the most successful models for understanding the Holocaust" I think the terminology of "understanding" is problematic. Bialik saw the problem more clearly in "Ba-ir HaHarega." Lines 175-219 outline a ritual service that, as God informs the prophetic "I" of the poem, is inadequate to the event. The poem contrasts prayer, which only increases a sense of shame, to protest, which redresses it; it calls upon the prophet to replace self-effacing confessions with a deadly and poisonous silence. Zipora Kagan suggests that Bialik is balancing halakha and aggada throughout the poem. Here, the halakha of ritual observance contrasts with the aggada of Jewish self-perception. Halakha crystalizes in deed who we think we are and then creates this self-image through its repetitive power. If, however, the repeated self-image fails to produce such a self, then the liturgy fails to work effectively. That happened with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and became the impetus for the construction of rabbinic liturgy; that happened again in the Middle Ages-both during the period of massacres and the Crusades and after the expulsion from Spain- and left impressions on Jewish liturgical practice. Even the Enlightenment does the same thing. The new liturgies-even new Orthodox liturgies-meet the crisis of a new Jewish self-image. The new aggadic self-understanding demands its manifestation in liturgical halakhic formulation.

That seems to me to be one effect of the Holocaust-a touchstone of whether our halakha and aggada do in fact mesh one with another. The claim that the various modern ideologies from secularist to Orthodox can deal with the Holocaust is beside the point. The real challenge is whether in understanding the Holocaust these ideologies are true to the self-understanding of modern Jews. Here is where symbolic and liturgical writing becomes crucial. We do have "Yom HaShoah" and "Yad VaShem." Have these symbols helped us grasp more fully who we think we are and how we construct our Jewish identities? Here, I think, is where Borowitz is exactly on target: Jews began thinking about the Holocaust when it became a clear symbol for the modern loss of faith in progress. Lumped together with Hiroshima, Watergate, and Viet Nam, the Holocaust reveals that we are more unsure of human potential, more wary of proffered universalism, than our official ideology often suggests. Borowitz frequently, and, I think most effectively in his latest book, strips off the mask that keeps us from recognizing who we are. The Holocaust symbolically challenges modern Jews in the same way and is, therefore, extremely important. What is needed is a way to take the symbolism of the Holocaust and integrate it into how and what we pray so that we see our real situation more clearly and shape ourselves accordingly. I suspect that until such revisioning of Jewish halakha occurs, the aggada of confronting the Holocaust will be unsettled and unsettling.

SAMUELSON:

Dan, I have no argument with what you say. It raises the following questions for consideration. On your terms, the issue of the Holocaust is not "understanding" it, that is, placing it within a framework that makes intelligible what has occurred in the past so that we may make intelligible what will occur in the future (which is the enterprise of science, philosophy and [with respect to religious concerns] theology). Rather, the goal is more instrumental, viz., how are we to represent this event (use it as a communal symbol) to accomplish what we (in this case, as Jews) want to accomplish (which is the enterprise of politics).

On these terms a different set of questions arise. (Possibly different from what was Steven Kepnes' concern.) Will, for example, symbols like YOM HA-SHOAH have lasting value in the Jewish religious community? Do the symbols accomplish what we want them to or do they accomplish other things, for example, functioning as a rationale for rationally and/or morally questionable behavior which both cheapens Judaism and the events of the Holocaust? Is this the right way to discuss the Holocaust ritual, or have I merely applied the classical (paradigmatically modernist) Reform method of judging all ritual? If yes, how are we to evaluate this new ritual of which you speak? It's not like wearing KIPPOT or keeping KOSHER, because, since the ritual in question is new, it lacks (as yet) the force (whatever that is) of being traditional. If our use of the event cheapens it (as did Hitler's use of Wagner and German mythology), then in the end we accomplish nothing of value. (How are "postmoderns" supposed to make these kinds of decisions? Isn't this what Borowitz is talking about?)

BOROWITZ:

Insofar as I really understand the situation I find myself, more in agreement with Norbert than with Dan. I think that "reason" has a critical role to play in keeping our action responsible (to God via the Covenant). If I didn't think so, I wouldn't spend so much time reasoning about what I experience and believe. My polemic is not, I believe, extended to every possible kind of philosopy or use of reason. If Norbert can carry through the project of reuniting math/science with ethics/value, then, depending on what it allows religiously, that "reason" begins to sound appealing to me. I polemicize against H. Cohen because I think unreflective types in our community still use the word "reason" or "rational" in his sense (bastardized) and don't see that his integration of the two doesn't stand. Worse, what has tended to be the fate of "reason" in recent decades has torn asunder what Cohen/Kant integrated. I am not closed to any future kind of rationality, and I therefore await Norbert's convincing his philosophic peers of his variety of reason/value. That is to say, when

rationality will once again be somewhat widely understood as the reason/value that Norbert claims it can be, then I am once again quite willing to consider how much greater a rationalist I can be. And I think I said something like that in the book.

SRAJEK:

I find that, in the discussion between Norbert and Dan about the Holocaust, the old notion of separating life and philosophy is still around. I fail to see why you don't consider the two to be in reciprocal connection. It seems to me that any event that happens to us is automatically integrated/integratable into reflective activity. But that does not mean that it is integrated exclusively. In his book LE DIFFEREND, Jean-Francois Lyotard describes how, once they have occured, events immediately change their character and turn into literal entities, that is, entities that consist of signs rather than of real things. An infinite chain of signifiers now separates us from the event itself. That in itself seem s a very frustrating realization. Yet, it emphasizes what Dan said earlier about the symbolic character that the Holocaust could and should have for us. If our relationship with it is constituted only through signifiers, then it is nothing but symbolic. I believe we won't make any progress in understanding how to think about these things unless we begin to learn how to devise models that better explain the intricate relationship between life and theory. Based on my reading of Levinas and, especially, Derrida, I believe that we should look at both the pure event and the pure theoretical reflection as the extreme limits of an asymptotic function that stretches out between them. What we do now, here, and anywhere else is described by the function which is equally defined by its origin and its telos, yet will not coincide with one or the other. That means we are stretched, and it is very uncomfortable. Derrida calls this relationship a tonal relationship because, depending on whether we stretch more or less, we will produce a different sound as a product of the differential relationship between event and theory. By the way, about the relationship between thought and life, check out Robert Pirsig's new book LILA. A little self-indulgent at times, but still

valuable reading for everyone who likes to think but is worried about forgetting life at the same time.

KEPNES:
(responding, again, to #7) Norbert, I found your short but pointed remarks extremely interesting. Indeed, when I said that I had found Holocaust Theology compelling I wasn't being totally honest. I have begun to question my own adherence to the Fackenheim, Berkovits, Greenberg, A Cohen claim about the primacy of the Holocaust to contemporary Jewish Thought, and one reason I asked for clarification of your remarks was to help me sort out my own revising position.

I have been appalled by the extent to which the Holocaust has come to dominate popular discussion of contemporary Jewish theology and to define Jewish identity for Jews and even non-Jews in this country. When I teach my Holocaust course I get 300 students signing up. This is contrasted with 15-20 for my "Intro to Judaism" and "Mod Jewish Thought" classes. We have got to concentrate more on the ways that Jews have productively and creatively approached and thought about life than on the way in which they died in Europe from 1939-45.

Now let me briefly respond to your remarks. You mentioned three types of thinking that the Holocaust doesn't radically challenge. 1. Orthodox 2. Secular. 3 Zionist. Your arguments are compelling, but you do not address some other groups that are of crucial import. You do not address those intellectual, University trained Jews - the bulk of American "conservative" and "reform" Jews who often pose the questions of the Holocaust most starkly. You also do not address the academic theologians directly, and you finally don't face, head-on, the issue of theodicy. On theodicy, one could argue, as the Holocaust theologians often do, that the the pre-Holocaust theodicies cannot handle the Holocaust. Or one could take your approach and say that they do. If the latter, what particular pre-Holocaust theodicy makes most sense to you and why? Do you take the position that God gave humans free will, that the Holocaust is a problem of human evil

alone and that it therefore raises questions of anthropodicy and not theodicy? Is it that God came down into human history only at Sinai and cannot come down again without bringing the messiah? Do you like the "hidden God"/ "eclipse of God" view? Jew as "suffering servant?" Israel as God's answer? A God of creation who responds by continuing to create the world and new Jewish life? As a Jewish philosopher, how do you personally respond to the issues of theodicy that the Holocaust raises?

SAMUELSON:

Steven, in response to your concerns about Holocaust study: First, I don't take neo-rabbinic popular Jewish institutions (Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist etc.) seriously as sources for Jewish thought, although many of the people committed to these (in my judgment) political institutions are important Jewish thinkers, not the least of whom is Gene Borowitz. So, what you would say to Jewish students who identify themselves with these institutions is not different in itself from what you woould say to other students. It is, if you were teaching political theory, like asking what you would say to students who were democrats or republicans or socialists.

Second, a solution to theodicy is one question and how the Holocaust affects a solution is a different question. Whatever is weak about any pre-Holocaust solution remains just as weak after, and whatever is of value after the Holocaust remains just as valuable.

In RENEWING THE COVENANT, Gene raises the question of a finite God in a way that is relevant to these issues. Some of the question relates to theodicy, but by no means all of it. Part of what is at stake is how we read what Scripture says about God: for example, why does Gene take Scripture so strictly when he opts for a personal over an impersonal God? Isn't the textual case for a finite deity over an infinite deity equally compelling?

ON HESCHEL'S EPISTEMOLOGY, WITH A PRAGMATIC TWIST

BRESLAUER: (in response to comments by Samuelson on Borowitz' new book)

I know that many here disagree with me, but I think that Heschel is far more convincing than most people think. One has to take his essay "Saadya's Search for Certainty" as a reflection of Heschel's own search. While his rhetoric may at times seem extreme (always a danger when you try to use language to create a reality for the reader-when the conventions of language change, your message is changed), his main argument is neither as irrational nor as religiously imperialistic as Gene (Borowitz) at times suggests.

Heschel argues: 1) that, valid as they are in their own spheres, science and philosophy cannot bring certainty. Heschel would agree with Norbert that science and rationalism do not claim to give definitive answers, but (and perhaps with Gene) Heschel would say that human beings constitutionally need more than just technical knowledge. They need a firm sense of the grounding on which they stand; 2) the insufficiency of technical knowledge, combined with the human imperative for more than technical knowledge, force people to look beyond rational experience; rationalism itself points beyond its own limits by identifying its own boundaries and the human need to cross them; 3) human culture, or at least Western religious culture, presents the compelling fact of Torah (that is of a claim to knowledge based on an event that transcends reason), which has shaped who we are and how we think. Since there is no more logical place than Torah in which to seek that to which rationalism sends us, why not look there for the answer to rationalism's questions? And, says Heschel, Torah does provide the answers: God requires things of human beings beyond what common sense requires. These demands of Torah are verified by their compelling power and their ability to resolve the problems that rationalism leaves open. I still do not see the flaws in that argument.

SAMUELSON:

Dan, I have always felt that there was more to Heschel than I have found in his writings, and I have looked forward to others' making sense out of his work. On your presentation of Heschel's thesis, let me ask a question to draw out Heschel's argument in more detail. Let's grant that "since there is no more logical place than Torah in which to seek that to which rationalism sends us, why not look there for the answer to rationalism's questions?" Now, however, we need to explain more about what is involved in looking to Torah. Is Torah the words of the accepted Jewish canon of Hebrew Scriptures? Does it include rabbinic commentaries on Scripture, and so on? Or, is Torah more like Buber and Rosenzweig (at least in THE STAR) suggest, viz., God's presence to Israel, so that the written words are not revelation but a communal (therefore human and political) response to God's presence? If the former, how do we interpret that word and what difference do the hypotheses of modern biblical criticism make (viz., if those published words are a human product, how have we transcended reason)?

BRESLAUER:

Norbert, I believe that Torah is, indeed, the words of the Jewish canon, the rabbinic commentaries on Scripture, the Oral Torah, and anything that any talmid hacham will say in the future! It is both God's specific commands and the response of specific human beings to those commands! At one point Heschel says that the Torah is both: a revelation of God and a co-revelation by humanity.

Heschel is both a minimalist and a traditionalist. His minimalism answers your question of what to do with biblical criticism. His traditionalism answers your question about transcending reason. Heschel writes of carrying "on a battle on two fronts, trying to winnow false notions of the fundamentalist, and to dampen the over-confidence of the rationalists." (GOD IN SEARCH OF MAN, 272). On one level, he denies that the problem of the Bible is historical or chronological. The point is not who wrote the text when, but what does the text mean as an expression of the divine demand? He calls this the "level of faith." The fundamentalist

misunderstands this dimension of revelation. For Heschel as a minimalist, God's words cannot be extended to every part of the biblical text. He refuses to be bound by a maximalist claim that faith requires that every biblical, rabbinic, medieval, or modern Jewish statement be regarded as the very word of God. He does this because he is not only being pragmatic (although he is also being that, since he says, in THE INSECURITY OF FREEDOM, that "maximalism is not the way to this generation), but also realistically skeptical. He admits that much in the Bible is not of value, that much reflects the period in which it was written, the prejudices of a particular culture, and the like. In this way he answers the fundamentalists who demand "faith" in everything without realizing that only a minimum of the Torah speaks with the absolute voice of divinity unmixed with human responsesponse (10% God's word, 90% human response).

That 10%, however, is a real percent! Unlike Buber, Heschel finds a content in the Torah-whether biblical, rabbinic, modern, etc. Despite its variety, he sees a common theme throughout-a theme that he identifies as the very word of God: human beings are challenged, human beings feel that more asked of them than reason, environment, or instinct requires. He discovers in the Bible examples of men (and, yes, we today can say that these are male examples because of the socio-cultural-political realities of the biblical authors; this would not disturb Heschel) who have extraordinary sensitivity. What seems like ordinary business dealing to us, seems like a scandal and outrage to them; what seems like everyday history appears like a nightmare of inhumanity to them. Specifically then, Heschel identifies an essential divine command: to be human a person must be more than human.

Heschel identifies a second level of religious understanding. Not only is faith needed, but also creed (sometimes he divides these two into depth theology and theology; I prefer faith/creed). Here he rejects the "overconfidence" of the rationalist. The rationalist thinks that, with a minimum of faith, it is possible to generate specific deeds and actions

using reason. Heschel denies this. Tradition supplies what reason alone cannot-guides for how to fulfill the command to transcend human insensitivity. In Western civilization, certain biblical models consistently enable us to do this: the Sabbath teaches us to transcend space and to sanctify time; prayers surrounding eating, drinking, daily activities help us move from self-centeredness to a more inclusive consciousness.

Yes, against the fundamentalist, Heschel will say that these models need constant revision. The halakhic process itself admits this. Still, against the rationalist, Heschel reminds us again and again that we must look backward to our past for models, that we cannot start anew every time we seek to answer God's challenge (that was Buber's error although, I think more a personal problem for him than a necessary error in his philosophy). Here is where the Torah transcends reason. Reason will tell us that there are many ways to respond to the divine command to surpass ourselves. The Torah testifies to the human reality that we require culturally specific means to do this, and it provides those of us who stand in this culture tested techniques for attaining this.

The longer I think and reflect on this, the more I am convinced that Heschel combines the best in the existentialist tradition of Buber and Rosenzweig with the best in the pragmatic tradition of Kaplan and Ahad HaAm. Heschel also sees his arguments as part of the long rationalist tradition from Saadia and Maimonides through Hermann Cohen and his disciples. Personally (unlike Gene Borowitz, I think), I have never been really comfortable with that tradition, and so I tend to stress the first two aspects of Heschel. Heschel, however, offers cogent proofs for the existence of God (much in the manner of David Novak, he sees them as confessional expressions of how human beings respond to the fact of God's impingement on their lives) and argues for reason's own recognition of its limitations.

Yes-I think Heschel needs closer study than most people have given him, perhaps because they've been seduced by his use of language. (I wish he had never read Joseph Conrad!!!)

SAMUELSON:
Dan, on your understanding of Heschel, how are we to decide what content in the biblical/rabbinic tradition is divine and what is human?

BRESLAUER:
The divine content is the demand for an extremist response to the world's ills. The rest is working that out in terms of real ills, real possiblities, real applications. The Bible tells us: God is calling out "I need you, I am in pain." The prophets et. al. point toward how we feel empathically with that pain and how we can respond accordingly. Some times and places require different types of responding (PS., Moses, like Jonah later, couldn't deal with God's pain until he experienced his own pain, thus the shattering of the tablets story).

OCHS:
Friends, a general comment on the previous month's discusion. The electronic dialogue itself appears to have generated a postmodern mode of philosophic discourse: each author functions like Rav A or Rav B in redacted gemara discussion, but from philosophic premises, or at least philosophic responses to fundamental questions. Is this not the postmodern gemara? To extend the model, perhaps the redactor would identify a range of "real, experienced crises in the communities to which we belong and practice" as the context and stimulus of each phase of dialogue. Then these crises represent points of interruption in the community's formal practices (in an earlier discussion, Dan Breslauer called this the halakhic discourse of our self-images, or somthing like that). Reasoning arises in response to these interruptions - as an instrument of listening (to HEAR the cries in those interruptions); of inquiry (to identify the character of the cries, the conditions of the interruption as much as is possible); of analysis (to offer ways of

examining pertinent elements of these conditions); of responsive hypothesis-making (to generate hypotheses about what indeed is the matter and about what may be done to mend it, by mending the community, and so on). On this model (a pragmatic one, of course), reasoning retains its link to practice because it emerges only for the sake of clarifying and responding to ruptures in that practice (I'm thinking here of Dan and Norbert's dialogue about when liturgy ceases to perform its work; about when Jewish self-image needs restatement, and so on. Dan offered a classic pragmatic analysis extended to some uncharted territory; Norbert offered the classic philosophic questions that elicit such an analysis).

God enters this process on two sides (plus as many more as God may choose!): 1) the interrupted practices are the saving remnants of past events of this kind; in each case, these are modes of behavior infused with Torah/Halakha/Haskafa (including science) and brought through interruption into direct contact with divine negativity or correction. The tradition attributes the Torah-(etc.)- infused behavior to God's positing speech (of which the Tanakh is a prototypical record). But this God is encountered immediately only when the behavior fails and we hear the divine NO; 2) some will say that God returns again as the ground of hypothesis-making: that is, as the condition of imaginative possibility or creativity. Shefa perhaps. Divine effulgence. I don't know. Divine energy to be sure, but the context-specific contents spewed forth in hypotheses must acquire their specific character from the individual thinkers' experiences. I'm left with divine negations, divine energy formally, and the contents of present experience and - most signficantly - of past records, especially the canonized ones, as measures of the Jewishly sanctioned authenticity of the contents.

In this approach, perhaps closest to Dan's contributions (but with more trust in reason, understood this way), the Shoah would emerge as an interruption of unique proportion - an interruption of course to the degree that we HEAR it that way in our given modes of reasoning-response.

Perhaps I misstated this. Perhaps it is better to say, more of ourselves since that's what we have to work with, that we may attribute TO the Shoah many of the interruptions we actually experience in our practices or have experienced the past few decades. The interruption is a fact, or not, of our practice. The claim that it is the Shoah that interrupted is a claim of reasoning - and thus belongs to post-holocaust thought. If so, this thought would be compelling only to the degree that it generated hypotheses about how actually to mend the interruptions.

BOROWITZ:
Peter, I take it that the "interruptions" needn't only be negative, or must they be? It has always seemed to me a question about pragmatism. Thus in the religious life, as Heschel's "argument" indicates, what interrupts can be quite positive, like wonder, the sublime, etc.

OCHS:
Gene, do interruptions include the positive? Pragmatists tend to say no, in part because they fear the totalizing consequences of ontologicallly founded claims. Aristo's sense of wonder leads perhaps to scholastic dogmatisms. The only way to check (verify or not-falsify) claims of wonder (unless they remain merely subjective reports) is to see either what other claims they falsify (in which case they are the conditions of a negative interruption after all) or if they are falsifiable. If they are falsifiable but not yet falsified, then the question is in what sense they contribute to our system of practices. If they falsify others, then we return to the previous comment. If they falsify simply by adding, effortlessly, to what we already have, then there is no interruption and we take them in as we do everyday perceptions of new sights. But I'm not settled with what I have just said. I've always wanted to find warrants for wonder, but have as yet been able to find only the warrant of subjective pleasure/growth or of hypothesis-making (that is, that wonder contributes HYPOTHESES about what we may possibly see and do in order to repair the interruptions we have or may yet suffer).

SAMUELSON:

Peter, do you know Rosenzweig's discussion of what makes a WUNDER a WUNDER? It seems relevant to the discussion.

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OUT OF ISRAEL

ADI OPHIR (of Tel Aviv University and of the Van Leer Foundation) has recently written an expanded version of his essay, "Beyond Good: Evil - An Outline for a Political Theory of Evils" (of which earlier versions appeared in TEORIA-VE- BIKORET (Theory and Criticism) and in THE PHILOSOPHICAL FORUM XXI.1-2 (1989-90). In a complex and far-ranging essay of some 60 pages, Adi offers a number of theses worthy of our readers' consideration and responses: for example, a critique of classical and modern, metaphysical theories of the Good; a critique of modern social contract theories; theories of distributive evil and of social justice grounded on the prevention of suffering. He places his theory-building in the context of his concerns about what he calls the superfluous suffering of Palistinians in Israel, and he offers, to boot, a theory about the performative context of theory-building. Readers, please enjoy these excerpts and send your responses to the editor. The responses will be included in future issues, along with more excerpts.

Beyond Good: Evil - An Outline for a Political Theory of Evils
(excerpts from Parts 1 and 2, of 9 parts)

Adi Ophir

I

In this paper I attempt to sketch a first outline for a "political theory of evils" that may clarify the concept of evil in a social and political context Evil has a presence that cannot be comprehensively expressed as a negation or absence of good, and in contrast to the discussion of the concept of good, the discussion of evil cannot be limited to the spheres of ethics and metaphysics. Evil is a product of social activity, and therefore

social and political philosophy is the natural and correct context for understanding it Evils are "what there is" not less, and in fact more, than happiness, pleasure or freedom; the presence of evil is the practice of the production and distribution of evils in society, "the order of evils" The order of evils is a contingent social product and hence is open to change. Two categorical imperative will be derived form this: the imperative to act for a reduction of the evil produced and distributed in society, and the imperative to permit the conversation of evils that have not been prevented I will propose a reformulation of the social contract, an essential component of which will be a critical interpretation of social reality int he light of the distribution of evils within it. A social epistemology in which evils, their production and distribution, are the main object of knowledge and representation, is at the same time a critical theory with the regard to the social reality being examined. This critical dimension will become evident when I focus on the local Israeli context in which I live and write.

Recently, thinking about evil has played a certain role in research on the Holocaust and in the philosophical discussion that has enveloped around attempts to understand it Naturally enough, this discussion, in its Israeli context at least, does not involve a critical study of the concept of evil itself. The presence of evil in Nazi Germany is so intensive, decisive, and so near in time and place, that it appears to threaten to erode any attempt to examine the concept of evil in its modern historical context. On the contrary: the evil that Nazism embodies is apprehended both as a threat and as evident, so much so that it serves as an absolute, objective criterion for the judging of other forms of evil in other contexts. To frequently this comparison imposes distorted analogies upon political and historical debates, analogies with which the Israeli public discourse is saturated to exhaustion-point. Analogical thinking in the shade of the Nazi evil block attempts at thinking about evil in itself and at thinking about it in other historical contexts and in less horrible situation; and less horrible situations are terrible and numerous enough.

To think today about evil in a political and historic context one must bypass the sphere in which most of the discussion of evil take place at present, especially in the Israeli context: the Holocaust and Nazi Germany. A bypass of this sort will also include the theoretical attempt to identify and interpret the roots of the "absolute" or "radical" evil created by the modern totalitarian regimes, Stalinism and Nazism foremost, as such attempts have been expressed in the writing of thinkers like Sartre, Marcuse, Arendt or Popper. If we leave wholly out of account the meta-political thought that developed in Europe in the shadow of the World War, the field of Theoretical discussion of evil remains almost entirely empty. The lack of attention that modern political philosophy has devoted to an explicit discussion of evil has profound historical roots. Since Plato, and more distinctively since Plotinus and Augustine, evil has been defined as a privation of good, and attempts to explain it, to the extent that there have been such, have been mediated through the concept of the good. In the Western metaphysical tradition, from Plato until Leibniz at least, evil is a negative sign for the fixed and constant presence of an essentially whole and perfect entity the manifestions of which are always partial: the perfect Good, the Good itself, which, especially in the tradition of Christian thought, is identified with God. Evil is seen as present in the world because of the instinctive part of man, which is marked with the seal of original sin, testimony to the infinite distance between this flawed and lacking human entity and the perfect Good, which is never to be found in the world but is always beyond and outside it. And thus, paradoxically, the Good, which by definition, is a whole and perfect presence, is always absent, while evil, which is always existentially present, is defined only as an absence. In the utilitarian tradition, in contrast, good and evil are predicates of situations and human qualities, but the antithetical opposition between good and evil remains. The utilitarians do indeed cast doubt on the possibility of transforming the predicate "evil" into a substantive "evil," but they leave the relations between good and evil unchanged: evil is the sign of the contrary of good, which may always, after the appropriate transvaluation, be substituted for it.

There have of course been exceptions, whose interpretations of the concept of evil deserve detailed attention, but these, it seems to me, do not contain anything that will advance the discussion in the political context. In Hegel, for example, the discussion of evil concludes with a characteristic dialectical sublation (Aufhebung): the concept of evil, which derives, as in Kant, from the arbitrariness of the individual will, is explained by being introduced into an all- encompassing historical context, which internalizes and negates its original meaning; the opposition between good and evil is presented as a necessary step in Reason's dialectical process. German Idealism after Hegel shifted the presence of evil from man and original sin to actuality as a whole, and posited the concept of evil in a distinctively metaphysical context. Schopenhauer took this move to an extreme and saw evil as a kind of primary, omnipresent entity. The outcome of this philosophical move was a no less empty gesture of "pessimism," the immediate meaning of which is political escapism and a renunciation of any attempt to understand evil in the context of a concrete historical human reality. In Nietzsche , the point of view of the Will to Power may for its part lead - and indeed did lead - to a too facile, hasty and dangerous identification of evil with the multitude, with the "plebeian" human element, and, at the same time, with everything that is "too human" for the superman, the man of free spirit.

The most significant exception in the history of thought was perhaps Michel de Montaigne. Montaigne "put cruelly first" (Shklar) on his inverted scale of virtues. He examined and described various forms of evil in isolation from the hypothetical situations or utopias in which these forms of evil are excluded. Since he saw the causing of physical suffering for its own sake as the most vicious form of malice, Montaigne was able to examine evil without retreating to the bosom of the Supreme Good or to a merciful (Christian) God from whom such good flows in abundance. In this way Montaigne succeeded in articulating various conceptions of evil and in placing them in a changing framework of relations according to changing moral sensibilities He did all this while avoiding the traps

inherent in a relativistic stance towards the moral sphere, because despite all his skepticism he retained an unequivocal condemnation of cruelty, for the causing of superfluous physical suffering, suffering which could have bee prevented without harm to the victim, the perpetrator or any other person, i.e., pointless suffering or suffering for its own sake.

The concept of good, too, has received little attention from modern political philosophy. Kant gave a legitmization to a dubious, transcendental, concept of a "supreme good" ("Summum Bonum"), but he did this only after he had established the boundaries of critical moral judgment and the foundations of its guiding principles. The Kantian supreme good may be interpreted quasi-metaphysically or quasi-historically, but in both cases it deviates from the boundaries posited by critical practical reason, and is permitted as a region of hopes only. In the framework of the discussion made possible by the Kantian critique, there is no hope of knowing with any certitude what the supreme good is, and the center of gravity of the moral discussion shifts to the formal characteristics for the moral judgment. Modern Kantians in moral thought, like Rawls or Habermas, have continued and deepened this true, after giving up, without regret, the dialectical chapter in the Critique of Practical Reason (the only place where legitimization is given to the supreme good) and the concatenation of the discussion in Kant's minor writings. They have developed rational procedures from fair struggle between competing conceptions of the good life. The surplus weight given to the concepts of justice and justification in modern moral doctrines, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, derives, inter alia, from the suspicion towards any theoretical stance that claims to represent the good itself in any exclusive manner. Thus, for example, in Rawls's theory of justice, the concept of good is allocated a marginal position. Rawls claims that the good is "congruent" with justice but cannot serve as a basis for a theory of justice According to Rawls, there is no need for any agreed concept of good and there is also no chance of such a concept being found; justice is adequately served if within the existing multiplicity of competing conceptions of the good, it is possible to settle justly among conflicting

attempts to actualize competing life-projects proposed by these conceptions.

II

Nevertheless, despite its exclusion of the concept of good and its disregard of the concept of evil, a theory of social justice seems to me a convenient place from which to begin the discussion of evil in a political context. Such a choice is appropriate to a critical position that rejects any attempt to attribute to humans a constant essence from which the human good may be derived; a critical theory of justice may be expected to propose a way to settle among competing views of the desirable social order that are based on competing claims to represent or shape such an essence.

Correspondingly, skepticism towards any claim to know the supreme criterion of moral judgment requires a shifting of the discussion from the question of what is worthy or good to do, to the question of how to settle among competing answers to questions about values; a theory of justice should propose principles of social order in a situation of co-existence of competing scales of value. A theory of justice will thus also have to cope with competing conceptions of evil and with struggles between individuals and groups striving to reduce by political means the quantity of evil that has fallen to their lot. In the modern discourse of political philosophy, the concept of evil marks a lacuna which does no oblige, but certainly invites, an opening of the discussion of evil in the framework of a theory of social justice. As a point of departure for my argument I will choose the theory of justice of the American philosopher Michael Walzer, with whose picture of the social world I am in general agreement.

At the basis of Walzer's theory of justice is a descriptive model of modern society, which essentially corresponds to the model of social space proposed by the French cultural sociologist Bourdieu. This model presents society as a cluster of spheres of activity that are more or less differentiated from each other, among which there are complex hierarchical and lateral relationships, the obtaining of which is also constantly at stake in power

struggles. The means of production are, of course, a kind of capital; control of means of production determines positions in the economic and political field. Capital and positions are the goods that are offered in every society, for distribution according to changing practices. Social conflicts occur around anything that is conceived of as distributable: "distribution is what social conflict is all about," Walzer states in Spheres of Justice. Principles of distribution are supposed to regulate the movement of capital by means of: (1) the direct distribution of forms of capital that serve as means for the acquisition of goods; (2) control over the allocation of people to positions, positions to people, and the limitation of the maneuvering-space of the various positions. In each sphere there exist exchange relations (in the market commodities are exchanged; in the academy knowledge; in the political sphere, positions of power; and so on); among the spheres there exist relations of conversion. It is possible to convert a degree into money and vice versa, scientific authority into economic capital and vice versa or political authority into sexual pleasure. Generally there is no agreed procedure for fixing the prices of the conversion

Just principles of distribution are determined both within each particular sphere and in the conversion relations among the spheres. The more autonomous the spheres, the smaller the possibility of conversion of goods and positions among them. A free pluralistic society is one in which success or failure in one sphere does not entail advantage or inferiority in other spheres, and where it is impossible to easily translate capital and position in one sphere into capital and position in other spheres. In contrast, in a society controlled by a tyrannous regime there is one privilege sphere, the goods acquired in which are convertible into those of every other sphere. A theory of social justice is not simply a theory of just distribution, but rather a theory of the various social spheres, of the inter-relations among them, and of just distribution within each of them. A society in which the possibilities of arbitrary conversion are very limited, although within each sphere the law of the jungle reigns, is not a just society. A society where in each sphere the principles of distribution are exemplarily just, but capital and positions are converted within it in a free

manner among the spheres and thus arbitrarily foil the results of the distribution determined by the principles of each sphere separately, is not a just society. A theory of social justice requires an accounting of the principles of distribution in each sphere, on the one hand, and of the relations of inter-dependence among the spheres, on the other. Such an accounting requires us "to map out the entire social world." But to map out the entire social world means also to map out spheres of evils, not only of goods.

A suitable description of the social reality , cannot limit itself to those social processes in which "people conceive and create goods, which they then distribute among themselves" (Walzer), because at the very same time as they create goods people conceive and create "evils" too, and distribute them among themselves, mainly among others Like goods, the modes of production and distribution of evils are reproduced in a more or less ordered manner within the various spheres of social action and interactions I want to claim that an "evil" is a no less concrete social object than the goods that are used to produce it, to protect oneself against it or to get rid of it; that in every society there are several spheres of evils which sustain an inner logic of inter-relations and have a relative autonomy, and in every society there are evils, the prevalence and presence of which cuts across the boundaries of the autonomous spheres of goods. True, each isolated evil is describable in terms of the negation of a good. But such a reversal is inadequate, because the symmetrical relation which applies to each goods-object separately does not apply to the spheres of the goods themselves; the spheres of the production and distribution of evils cannot be superposed upon the known spheres of goods.

What is an evil? Anything that causes a person suffering, pain, discomfort or brings about a worsening, temporary or permanent, of her condition, as grasped from her own point of view, or form the point of view of another who seeks her welfare or tries to understand her. This is a flexible definition, suspiciously and intentionally so. In principle, anyone can define anything as an evil, and there is no point in seeking a universal

criterion of evil that will distinguish between subjective and objective identifications of evils or between interested and disinterested definitions. The critical-skeptical stance I declared for earlier denies the validity of any such criterion, for if one were possible this entire discussion would be superfluous. This discussion is necessary precisely because a universal criterion is not a possibility. At the same time it is clear that to interpret situations and things as evil is not an idiosyncratic matter; it can be justified and disseminated culturally as part of a discourse in which an entire community of interlocutors take part. As such it is of course a matter for argument and re-interpretations. The re-interpretation has clear boundaries: you don't argue with a person who is screaming in anguish about her pain, at the most you'll try to relate the pain to a different cause than the one conceived by the person suffering. When there is pain, the subjective is the objective; precisely for this reason the distinction between pretense and authentic expression, which is so problematic in any other context, applies in its simple sense in the case of pain, and does not involve a matter of principle. The further we move from the body and from the immediate experience of pain, the greater the space of possibilities of incompatibility between the suffering individual's conception of evils and that of the other observing her from the side. The smaller the immediate component of the experience of suffering, the sharper the difference between an evil and evil per se, and the greater the possibilities of proposing a context in which the good of a suffering person may be understood as requiring her to take the punishment of evils. But a person can also lovingly accept even terrible physical pain; in brief, evils (the opposites of goods) are not necessarily evil (the opposite of good) Often, evils are conceived of as being completely beyond human control, like an incurable disease, and earthquake, or a volcanic eruption. But even in cases of natural disasters - the earthquake in Armenia is a recent example - on moment after the earthquake there begins the creation of social mechanisms for the distribution of the evils that have suddenly poured down so abundantly.

A theory of social justice in particular and a theory of political morality in general must delimit the discussion of evils from two directions. First of all one must totally discount evils that descend from heaven, and begin the discussion from a moment after the earthquake. Secondly one must totally discount haphazard human behavior. Also, behavior that causes evil which does have a certain regularity in the context of an individual's life, and which can be explained as the expression of a personality type, for example, but cannot be related to social conditions, does not belong to the present universe of discourse. The sphere that interests us is the sphere of evils in the production, dissemination and distribution of which there is some kind of social regularity, a regularity that may be connected to defined social practices and structural patterns of political action. What I need to show now is not that there is such a sphere - this, I think, is self-evident - but that the description of it cannot be superimposed on the description of society as that cluster of spheres of goods mentioned earlier.

DESCRIPTIONS

Here are abstracts of the recent work of two new members of the BITNETWORK:

BARBARA E. GALLI, McGill University

Rosenzweig prompts me to be concerned with boundaries and relationships between philosophy and poetry; the limits of and new beginnings arising out of traditional philosophy; the collapse of philosophical totality by the "other;" notions of time-questions of "when" over "what is;" and, of course, speech.

I am following a method of philosophizing which Rosenzweig did so well with poems by Jehuda Halevi. He stated that he understood a poem only once he had translated it, that there is vastly more worth in translating one line than in writing a ten-page disquisition "about." To Rosenzweig, all speech is translating, even within the same language. He claimed that he did not understand a poem until he had translated it, and would therefore do so precisely in order to be permitted to respond. He maintains that true

word is word and response. Except for the Star (and Das Buechlein vom gesunden und kranken Menschenverstand), Rosenzweig's corpus primarily comprises essays, lecture drafts, addresses or letters written to a specific other or others.

I have translated all ninety-five of Rosenzweig's reflective essays to the Halevi poetry, and the Afterward to his translations. Each essay, sometimes in groups, warrants a response. I am working on this. Shortly to be published is my article which cites at length translated excerpts from Rosenzweig's note to the encyclopedia article on anthropomorphism. In the winter of 1992 I shall submit my response to Rosenzweig's "The Secret of the Form of the Bible Stories." In the spring of 1992 my complete translation of "The New Thinking" with a lengthy introduction should appear in a slim volume. A few weeks ago I completed my translation of "`The Eternal One': Mendelssohn and the Name for God." My response will take into account John Hick's God Has Many Names.

MICHAEL OPPENHEIM, Concordia University
Mutual Upholding: Fashioning Jewish Philosophy Through Letters, Peter Lang, forthcoming Fall 1992.

The work consists of six letters of chapter length, along with six brief responses. Each letter is addressed to a colleague and friend, and reflects in style, tone and themes the relationship and particular issues discussed by us over the years. The letters draw upon and extend some core insights of Franz Rosenzweig, especially in terms of the way that speech embodies interpersonal dynamics and the role of the language of God as person in everyday life.

I find the fashioning of philosophy through letters to be exciting and intriguing. The "book" responds to a current philosophical quest to explore that which traditional philosophy has not written, by way of the genre of the letter. Equally, it seeks to take into account that world beyond the solitary thinking self, through speaking with and writing for specific

other persons. Consequently, the "book" is very personal. However, it attempts to witness both to the need for philosophy to reflect the concrete life in dialogue of the philosopher and to the relevance of such dialogues for a larger audience.

Among the themes explored are; the relationship between philosophy and religion, the contributions of Rosenzweig and Buber to modern philosophy and modern Jewish thought, the role of interpersonal relationships in the religious life of contemporary Jews, the meaning of anthropomorphic metaphors for God in religious life, the revelatory character of speech, and the challenges that the Holocaust, feminist Judaism, and religious pluralism pose for the understanding of God as person.

I have also completed two essays that might be of interest: "Franz Rosenzweig and Emmanuel Levinas: A Midrash or Thought Experiment" (forthcoming in Judaism), and "Welcoming the Other: The Foundations for Pluralism in the Works of Charles Davis and Emmanuel Levinas." As you can see form the titles, I am trying to work through issues concerning the relationship to others-a variety of others-by exploring stances of particular religious thinkers. The first essay examines the overturning or rupturing of the self through such relationships, and the second explores the need for a plurality of understandings of religious pluralism.

MEMBERS' NEWS ITEMS

LARRY SILBERSTEIN sponsored a remarkable, postmodern sort of conference at Lehigh's Berman Center last May, with three full days of eclectic responses to the question of The Other in Judaism. Taking advantage of Larry's hospitality, STEVEN KEPNES sponsored a post-conference gathering of postmodern Jewish philosophers. About twelve BITNETWORK members reviewed, with much animated talk, papers by Larry (on Zionism as ideology) and ADI OPHIR (on the Haggadah, power and politics), an essay on legal pragmatism and remarks from DANNY

BOYARIN on the Talmud in postmodern perspective. The two day session appeared to open some unexpected subterranean movements; it was fun, too. Soon after the conference, JACOB MESKIN departed for a year (or?) in Israel. Soon after that, the Israeli political scene turned upside down; for a few weeks in July, there was (we must record it) even a sense of euphoria there on the left to center. We don't know if Jacob contributed to any of this. But we pray for more. We'll miss EDITH AND MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD's presence in New York. We wish them well at Rice University (where Edith has a chair in the Philosophy of Religion), and we look forward at the very least to their presence at the AAR, and of course to Edith's leadership there.

On AAR matters, please note a news item on this BITNETWORK in the next Religious Studies Newsletter. And please join us in San Francisco this November for several events at the AAR annual meeting of special pertinence to BITNETWORK themes:

POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AT THE AAR SAN FRANCISCO MEETING

Sunday November 22, 9:00 am
Hermeneutics of Visionary Experience in Judaism

Sunday November 22, 1:00 pm
Derrida and Judaism

Sunday November 22, 9:30-11:00 PM, H-Plaza B
Postmodern Jewish Philosophy: "Politics and Art" (An open meeting of the Bitnetwork. Discussion initiated by: Yudit Korn Greenberg, Steven Kepnes, Peter Ochs, Larry Silberstein.)

Monday November 23, 9:00 am

Hermeneutics and Critical Theory in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy (with L. Silberstein, S. Kepnes, D. Tracy, T. Masuzawa, A. Peperzak, B. Zelechow.)

AFTERWORD

The next issues of BITNETWORK VOL. 2 will be devoted in part to members' responses to issues raised in this issue. Please send reponses to the editor, through BITNET or the mails. Deadline for responses to be included in the next issue is OCTOBER 15. Speak, freely!