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FOREWORD

Who are we in this Postmodern Jewish Philosophy NETWORK? How do we read texts? In response to this question from Nina Cardin, editor of SH'MA, a few of us put together an issue of SH'MA on "How To Read a Text: Approaches in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy" (SH'MA 25/488, Feb. 17 1995; copies can be ordered from CLAL, 99 Park Eve., Suite S-300, New York, NY 10016: 212 867-888). The issue offers excerpts from our NETWORK's discussions of BT Gittin (Aryeh Cohen, Ed Feld, David Weiss Halivni, Jacob Meskin, Robert Gibbs, and Peter Ochs) and also brief excerpts from our culminating, face-to-face discussion at the American Academy of Religion last November, 1994. The issue has also attracted many new members to our Network. To welcome them here, I would like to extend the SH'MA issue a bit by offering a theo-philosophical homily about who we are in this Network and how we read. Later, we will also print out the full versions of four responses to the AAR session.

On Reading-With

We don't read alone. You might consider this a rallying cry of at least a significant sub-group of the Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Network. We read with. "Ehyeh imach," says God to Moses out of the Burning Bush, "I will be with you"; and being-with is a postmodern theme, in three senses:

We don't read alone. This means, first, that the text we read is not a naked text whose meaning displays itself to anyone who would see it. It is a text that speaks in certain ways to certain groups of people. We read with-others as part of some group. That is a rabbinic rule of reading that is being repossessed by postmodern scholars. A second meaning is that, even when reading individually, we read-with. As shown by late modern analysts of interpretation theory, we read with presuppositions. A text doesn't simply mean something, but means something with respect to the beliefs and pre-understandings we bring to the text. Postmodern reading may be distinguished from modern reading, however, by its assumption that there is an ultimate presupposition without which reading is not the reading we have in mind: namely, that we are reading with-God (even if Jewish readers are not accustomed to encunciating this partnership so explicitly.) This third meaning, we might say, is the biblical assumption recovered by postmodern readers. We read with others, we read with our assumptions, and we read with God's presence.

By postmodern reading, we mean simply whatever reading comes after modern reading (and we expect there will be many more kinds yet to come!). By modern reading, we mean a reading that witholds assent to inherited traditions of reading until certain questions about them can be answered satisfactorily to suspend commitment to inherited forms of reading for fear that those readings may carry with them some germ of error or illusion or imperialism and, striking out on its own says, "we have ourselves, alone, to rely on. Let us make use of whatever faculties we have of ourselves alone our reason and our feelings to erect for ourselves some criterion against which to judge the validity of our ancient texts." To say we are "postmodern readers," then, means that we are disillusioned with this modern stance, having found that it breeds irreconcilable oppositions between merely rationalist and merely emotivist rules of reading. We fancy ourselves, at least, to inhabit a third stance. This is not a climactic one, to be sure; ours is too sad a posture to claim for itself any triumphalism. Seeking to resume some of the reading that modernity interrupted, we attempt to listen once again to inherited traditions, while

also acknowledging our own modernity and, with it, the gap of uncertainty and ignorance that now separates us from these traditions.

As for who we are, specifically, within this NETWORK. Speaking for at least one sub-group of NETWORK members (and others will speak for themselves on these pages!), I'd conclude that, as gathered here, we are scholars trained in a variety of modern discourses: historical-critical, literary, social-scientific, philosophic. At once proficient in these discourses and suspicious of their inadequacies, we bring them to the classical texts of our traditions to read texts in ways we have not done before. The texts of primary interest to us are biblical and rabbinic (talmudic, midrashic) as well as kabbalistic, medieval-philosophic, and, of more recent vintage, Jewish-American, -European and Israeli literatures. In this early stage of the group's practice, study of Talmudic texts serves as a prototypical introduction to the three modes of reading-with I mentioned earlier. Unlike traditional and modern readers, we do not presume to recognize before the fact of reading the behavioral authority of the specific texts we read nor the optimal method for uncovering what the texts have to offer us. We come with various, strong hypotheses about what this authority and this method may be, but the matter is to be resolved only through our interactive dialogues with the texts and with each other. This open-endedness might be daunting were it not for our faith in the guiding power of the corpus of texts to be addressed and of our emergent community itself.

This issue features the following sections:

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FUTURES.

MEMBERS: We want you to identify your dialogue partners, but the list is too long now to place at the beginning of the issue.

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TALMUD AND POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY: Responses to our November 1994 Study Session

After our 1994 AAR session in Chicago where we studied Gittin 34b-35a with Aryeh Cohen several NETWORK members offered informal reflections about what they experienced. Here are some illustrations.

A New Beis-Midrash? Michael A. Signer, The University of Notre Dame

...Entering the room, I was immediately surprised by the variety of people who had gathered for study: both men and women, with and without

kippot. We were encouraged to join in the festive atmosphere by partaking of wine and food.... As we engaged [initially] in good-natured banter about our session, my suspicions were aroused. Was the session going to be what Sam Heilman called "Lernen," where the text studied became for the formal basis for social activity? "Lernen" in traditional synagogue life is an important ritual of community formation; . . . however, it rarely produces new . . . insights into the text. While suspicion still raced through my mind, Aryeh [Cohen] read one sentence from the Gemara text. He asked for volunteers to translate and interpret. Several people offered contesting translations and interpretations. Instead of playing the role of omniscient narrator, Aryeh acted as moderator for these interpretations, allowing them to play off one another. Philology and . . . questions of dating the scholars in the Gemara did not dominate the discussion.... What a difference from my own Talmudic studies at Hebrew Union College, where all questions about a sugya could be resolved either by presenting the best text, the best etymology, or by proving that the text before us was derivative from yet another place in Talmud where is appeared in 'clearer form.' As the evening continued, any idea of hierarchy within the group disappeared. Aryeh may have been our guide into the text, but his role as guide turned into companion–Talmud chaver. All of us brought our academic backgrounds toward explaining the sugya in Gittin : historians, feminists, linguists, and philosophers. Each approach brought to light new questions which enriched our understanding of the few lines under consideration.

One of the highlights of the evening occurred when we discussed a hypothetical argument in the Gemara that began with the technical Aramaic term hava amena ("I might have thought"). I had understood that, when this term appeared, the Gemara wanted to put forward an argument which would then be rejected in favor of another opinion. [Speaking in the vernaculars, first, of a Hebrew-Aramaic-Yiddish, then of the American university,] Aryeh explained that, within the Talmudic method of the Brisker Yeshivot, this term provided an opportunity to open up a broader discussion. Someone else aded that, according to his

experience with the later responsa, these hava amena arguments often provided the basis for legal decisions which differed from the generally accepted halakha. [Such comments] introduced me to a culture that transcended the Talmudic text, yet was an essential part of its afterlife.

In those hours at the AAR/SBL, I felt that I had experienced the best of what postmodernity offers. No single person determined the meaning of the text. The session incorporated elements of performance. Our interaction with each other was mimetic of the Gemara we studied: people offered opinions, raised questions, and provided explanations. The atmosphere was serious, but it also took into account the '"play" in the text itself. This is the play between speakers in the text and the generations of commentaries in writing, and ultimately the transformation of the written Torah into the oral Torah of the classroom. As a group studying, we had constituted a beit midrash, a house of seeking.

According to the Talmudic dictum, divrei torah kadorbanot: the words of Torah are like thorns. In Robert Alter's paraphrase, divrei torah kadur banot: the words of Torah are like a children's ball game. In the hours of our study, I felt enriched by both learning and play. . . . Both my intellect and spirit were refreshed, just as the siddur indicates, torat hashem temimah, meshivat nafesh: God's Torah is whole; it revives the spirit.

Postmodernism and the Feminist Construct Laurie Zoloth-Dorfman, Children's Hospital in Oakland

If the traditional concerns of modernity are the dominance of facticity over nature, the dominance of scientific method over religiosity, and the autonomy of the newly constructed self in opposition to its context, then postmodern thought seeks to reclaim the importance of context, culture, and community in the study of text. In our postmodern Jewish philosophy group at the AAR, the text we study is Talmud, in context, and again in our context.

What is striking in the traditional study of our sugya in Gittin (and hence notable in this brief feminist reconsideration of the text) is the absence of attention to the essential horror of the ma'aseh (of the women and the dinar). But a feminist, postmodern reading allows the narrative of the ma'aseh to bring us to an abrupt stop. Here we have a woman who is surrounded by death, a widow whose loss is worn on her by virtue of the name she bears, named only by her loss. It is her ruptured life that stands at the heart of the feminist problem, rather than the challenge of the woman's voice to . . . an authority that stands silent before the fragility of life and the seeming randomness of death. Death frames the sugya. The women is bereft and obliged to her children (and perhaps the children of her husband?) and yet she remains in the usual order of the world, doing the mandatory daily tasks of breadmaking. . . She is accused of something, the threat is unclear, and she resists the accusation. Again death: the inexplicable death of childhood made explicable, named and caused by the actions of the mother. Another ma'aseh repeats the theme: the woman who is named death-of-her-husband raises her voice to resist and inexplicable illness falls onto her male antagonist.

The discussion moves on to themes of the construction of the law, and I am still left with the woman and her dying child, left in the silence of the text to her blame in the midst of her virtuousness . . . . Does this story make sense? In what sense can you really make a loaf of bread and miss a dinar as you kneaded it? The stories of the disruption of the household order in ways that are absurd from a woman's gaze frame the frailty of the explanatory order: keep a woman from her certainty, a stand so authoritative that she could swear by it, and perhaps the sudden death of children can be avoided.

Such a discussion is mirrored in other familiar texts that name the explanatory cause for the frequent, inexplicable tragedy, death in childbirth as rooted in a woman's omission of the mitzvah of hallah (mishnah shabbat 2:6). Such a reading (such a tragedy for such an ordinary error) uncovers other potent "meanings." It may be that the text is about

the ma'aseh, rather than the ma'aseh being explanatory to the text. In other words, the halachah is an effort to make meaning of the loss of sons and husbands in the apparently virtuous and ordinary life, and of the grief and anger than might be directed at religious authority at such a moment. Hearing the voice of the subject in this way pulls out the undertone from beneath the reading, reminds us that the cultural context might have allowed for such a robust complexity, and invites us as readers into the clamorous community of the Talmudic world.

On Close Reading, Women, and Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Gail Labovitz, The Jewish Theological Seminary

Close reading, it might be argued, has always been a hallmark of Talmudic study: Rashi was a close reader, as were Tosafot and the many other commentators known to us. What makes a post-modern reading different is the choice not to seek only a "holistic" reading, harmonizing the sugya within itself and with other sugyot, but to look at how the pieces that make up the sugya contribute to (or sometimes undermine) the argument being made, to try to find how a given text constructs meaning. A postmodern reading seeks the opposite of harmonization, searching out the points of conflict: gaps in the text, what Derrida called aporia.

...What, however, are we to do with a sugya that constructs such a negative image of women? This is, of course, not a question limited to this sugya or this piece of scholarship. What are women who remain committed to Jewish texts and tradition, but to also their own equality and full humanity, to do with the misogyny that is to be found in those texts and traditions? Granted, postmodernist readings sometimes help answer these questions as well as raise them; other readings of Aryeh's, as well as those of Daniel Boyarin, Charlotte Fonrobert, Rachel Adler, David Kraemer and some of my own work, sometimes points out the ways in which seemingly sexist texts undermine themselves, or suppress, but do not erase, retrievable counter-voices more positive towards women. Postmodernism's emphasis on the multiplicity of possible readings opens

up space for challenging interpretations that make the most misogynistic interpretations of a text normative. The postmodernist understanding that meaning and reality are "constructions" allows for deconstructions" or, hopefully, "reconstructions". But the questions remain. How much can we deconstruct and reconstruct and still be sure that what remains will feel authentically Jewish to us? Even if I completely accept Aryeh's methodology and the resultant reading, his paper remains a profound challenge to me. The Meaning of Postmodern Jewish Philosophy

Steven Kepnes, Colgate University and The Shalom Hartman Institute Postmodern Jewish philosophy turns to the Talmud for alternatives to the objective, scientific scholarship performed by the solitary scholars of modernity: this means to the Talmud as a text that demands to be read aloud and studied in the community of others not as an object of mere scholarship but as a source of personal and intellectual renewal.... Our attitude in approaching talmudic texts is thus "generous" from the beginning: we read in the spirit of Willard Quine's "principle of charity," or Paul Ricoeur's "second naivete" a post-critical hope that the text has the capacity to be enlightening, even redemptive.

We realize that what we are after cannot be won without the scholarship of our modern forebears. We know that, in order to reap the philosophic benefits of this study, we must learn the requisite languages, know of variant manuscripts, have a basic knowledge of the text's historical contexts. But while we learn from this scholarship, we also bring to it our own "postmodern" questions and agenda.

Our study session of Gittin at the AAR was a case in point. Postmodern philosophers arranged the session, established its parameters and invited its participants a mixture of philosophers, talmudists, men, women, young and not so young. The friendly but serious atmosphere allowed both for technical questions of clarification and more general questions of meaning. The talmudic text and not the leader became central and around this text a communitarian inquiry ensued. Aided by beer, food, and the

quiet gurgling of a nursing infant, something of what I have called the hermeneutics of I-Thou could be seen at work. But the high point of the session occurred as our feeling of community gave us the freedom to consider not just the aesthetics of the talmudic text become thou, but also the specific content of the sugya in Gittin. Asking . . . what this text said about the status of women in that society, we all heard one of our female colleages utter a cry of protest and pain: Do you realize what the text is actually saying about women? What does this mean for women today? What does this mean for me? . . . [In other words,] the Talmudic text confronts us with immediate demands: [not just to study for its own sake, but also] to ask the question: What does this mean for me? And the answer to women reading [our text] seems to be [that...] men do not deem you trustworthy; they find you to be dangerous, problematic, both powerful and weak.

What, then, does all this mean for postmodern, Jewish philosophic study of the Talmud. It means that, beyond the structure, form and aesthetics of the texts, we also need to pay attention to the actual content and to the relation of that content to lives actually lived and living. In this way, in their hopes for repair of the fragmentation . . . brought about by the modern condition, postmodern Jewish philosophers should continue to look to talmudic texts for intimations of tiqqun ha-olam. The jurisprudence is so rich, the aggadot so theologically gripping that they cannot fail to be rewarded. But they will also have to consider anew . . . to what extent the redemption they seek can be won in conformity to the prescribed laws [of the Talmud] ....Here again we will face the very modern problem of observant modern Jews: how to remain faithful both to rabbinic Judaism and to such modern ideals as the individual's autonomous moral responsibility, women's equality, and social justice....

CORRELATIONS IN ROSENZWEIG AND LEVINAS: RESPONSES TO ROBERT GIBBS

As previewed in NETWORK 3.4, The Academy of Jewish Philosophy held a symposium last December on Robert Gibbs' dialogic study of correlations in and between Rosenzweig and Levinas. It was a remarkable session, whose far-ranging studies of Jewish thought merits a replay on these pages. Gibbs' own response to the responses will come in our next issue. (For an introduction to the book, see Martin Srajek's overview in 3.4)

Questions to the Author Almut Sh. Bruckstein, The Hebrew University

Although it says in the "Mishnah" in "Pesachim", "machtil begnut umesayem beshavakh," "begin with criticism, and conclude with praise," I shall first want to give you an account of why I am so impressed with your "Correlations" before asking you to respond to some of the questions and comments that materialized out of my reading. Reading "Correlations" has been an experience of true learning. For me as a student, teacher, author, and lover of Jewish thinking, your commentary became an instructive and engaging guide through the texts again. I am impressed by the way you employ both structure and content in support of your own position; I am thinking, for example, of the way in which you arrange all your chapters in a double cycle of introductions, logic, ethics, and social theory, thereby taking up the rhythm of the great recurrent themes in the "Star of Redemption" itself, and how effortless this formal structure then corroborates your own claim of Levinas' adapting Rosenzweig. Your situating the chapters on Levinas within the Rosenzweigian sequence of topics seems to bear out your claim. Furthermore, I am taken with your idea of leaving room within your own text for the explicit role of the "authorial I," who acts as a subjective guide through the ascending order of chapters, inviting us to enter, locating us on the map of the whole and leaving us with a directive hint at the end of each chapter. This "authorial I" creates in itself the sort of "distention" in time, which you discuss with reference to Rosenzweig's Sprachdenken another example of how structure turns into content, and content into structure. Would you agree to defining that as a "turning inside out?" I

am impressed by the way you introduce historical influences on R and L without engaging in "intellectual history;" how you have the figures enter the scene and swiftly leave it again, strictly tied to your sovereign analysis of some carefully defined subject: for example, Rosenstock-Huessy tied to "grammar," Woelfflin to "theory of art, "Shushani to talmud;" and how — with just a few words — you manage to insinuate these figures at key points of R's and L's philosophical development. In this way, your conceptual analysis of Schelling, Cohen, and Rosenstock-Huessy echoes, or even re-enacts R's own reading at the eastern front of World War I, and your discussion of L's search for "Greek" within the "Hebrew" is illuminated by the agenda of topics discussed at the "French Colloquia" from 1957 to 1989.

One more word of admiration, about your "Rashi" chapter on "substitution, " . . . in which you — by means of your commentary — become that substitution yourself, substituting for the reader who is engaged in reading a text by Marcel on "substitution." I found this an ingenious hermeneutical move, playing with content and structure, turning content "inside out." The Rashi layout allows for a subtlety and depth of interpretation which would be difficult to attain otherwise. Personally, I am grateful to see you creating another post-modern precedent of this talmudic model, by which you are paving the way for future commentary. Let me then move from this short-shrift of admiration to a more explicit critical reading: in terms of your magnificent and innovative analysis of R's grammar, we herewith move from the cohortative to the interrogative mood.

I. Question: On "Philosophy and its Others."

My first question relates to the very first lines of your book," philosophy and its others." What or who are these others? You, of course, treat that question at length, pointing to the paradox of any conceptual search for philosophy's non-conceptual other. You claim to have found the key to a specifically Jewish other to philosophy in a radical ethics of concrete

responsibility, hinging upon the radical transcendence of God. This Jewish other to philosophy you then simply term "Judaism." ....Philosophy is "Greek," ethics is "Hebrew." For the reader who views your text through the lens of the Plato-Maimonides-Kant-Cohen-Schwarzschild tradition, your juxtaposition of philosophy and ethics, or philosophy and Judaism, is puzzling. It is puzzling, since you align yourself from the very outset with the Heideggerian/Levinasian equation of Western philosophy and ontology, ignoring Plato's claim that something beyond rational hypothesis lies at the core of rational, ethical discourse: an "an-hypotheton," which really is a "no-thing" or limit to rational knowledge, and which translates into the idea of the god. Needless to say, the entire rationalist tradition is based on this Platonic idea of a "non-hypothetical" good; in other words, ever since Plato, "transcendental" or "critical idealism," in the name of philosophy, rejects the Levinasian equation of philosophy and ontology, and ever since Plato the opposite claim, namely that philosophy equals ethics and that rational thinking is itself based on the idea of radical transcendence, is put forward in the very name of "Greek" philosophy itself.

From this perspective, your a priori definition (deconstruction) of ethics and radical transcendence as "Jewish others" to philosophy seems self-contradictoy. I may even borrow your own thesis "that R should be read as a post-modern philosopher,"(10) in order to prove the point just made, namely that ethics and radical transcendence underlie philosophy insofar as she gives an account of herself. (Taking your disqualification of modern philosophy with respect to ethics seriously, I shall come in a minute to the question of whether at least Cohen's Platonic logic should not rather qualify as post-modern philosophy.) Your entire chapter on Cohen's principle of origin, in which you read Cohen's logic as the "proto-cosmos" for Rosenzweig's ethics, seems to emphasize this criticism of your philosophy/ontology equation and of your subsequent philosophy/ethics correlation, even if the connection between R's logic and his ethics is itself a non-linear one.

II. Question: On your use of the term "Judaism"

My next question is related to the first. In what sense do you employ the term "Judaism," which you use as a variable for the "other" in your assumed correlation of "philosophy and its others?" You maintain that the meaning of the term" correlation" refers to the relationship between philosophy and this one other, Judaism.(4) Do you arrive at the term "Judaism" by means of deduction or induction? In other words, do you mean by Judaism "Hebrew thinking," with its emphasis on ethics and the radical transcendence of God? — in which case its correlation to philosophy would be meaningless, since the term" Judaism" itself would have turned into a philosophical construct, as Cohen impressively argues in his introduction to "The Religion of Reason." Or do you mean by "Judaism" the body of Jewish sources, written and oral tradition, and so forth? In this case you would have a problem defining what is to be considered a "Jewish source," since you placed "Jewish" on the opposite side of philosophy, and have therewith ruled out its function as a conceptual guide. Only if you were to admit that "Jewish" itself is a conceptual construction, then the term "correlation" between philosophy and these two Jewish sources would seem sensible. However, you would then be reverting to "correlation" in the sense of Cohen's title "Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism," in which you have a correlation between Judaism — which you then would have to recognize somehow as a "religion of reason" — on the one hand, and its sources, on the other. But in either case, no matter how you use the term "Judaism" — whether in the deductive sense of an a priori philosophical concept or in the inductive sense of a body of texts — you will run into a contradiction with your idea of a correlation between philosophy and Judaism, since in both cases you would need Judaism on the conceptual side in order to make sense of "correlation."

III. Question: On "Origin"

Your tracing of Cohen's concept of origin in Rosenzweig's Star is fascinating innovative and instructive. Your application of Cohen's logic, which is a "detour via nothingness," in your discussion of ethics is truly illuminating. You indicate that the priority of the other in her relation to me, as well as her uniqueness, is logically implied in Cohen's infinitesimal integration of dx and x. But do you then take Cohen's "detour via nothingness," his idea of integrating limits through nothing, to its most far-reaching conclusion? In order to elaborate on this question, I shall recall Cohen's logic of origin in its most archaic form. Cohen takes the most simple of all logical propositions, "A is not-B," and gives it a twist of infinity whose implications for post-modern philosophy, I think, may carry us even farther than your reading allows us to realize. Let me quickly tranlate our simple proposition "A is not-B" as the integration of any subject "A" with its limit "B," where the integrative factor is the infinitesimal nothing expressed in the privative term: "non-B." You then argue that this relative nothing is a mere technical means to originate something.(49) You therefore term it a "path of affirmation" — which does account for R's primordial "yes," as an infinite affirmation of knowability, but which cannot account for R's primordial "no," indicating the radical freedom implied in the statement of "thus and not otherwise."

I should like to disagree with you on the latter conclusion. We both agree that Cohen's entire proposition of origin turns on the concept of the infinitesimal nothing. I agree with you that this infinitesimal nothing guarantees and produces continuity. It does this due to its definition as a limit; but since this limit is defined as nothingness — and we do not compromise on that just because we call it an infinitesimal nothing, as if it were to then become something — it accounts for discontinuity and difference precisely up to the point of the limit of reason. Your claim that R constructs what lies beyond the limit of knowledge with critical epistemology (50) seems to ignore the power of negation in Cohen's limit-definition; only in terms of Hegel's dialectic, which operates within a geometrical model, would it make sense to talk about a "beyond" of the limit. In Cohen's differential logic, that which you call "beyond the limit

of knowledge" is the limit of reason. It is the "necnon" in Cohen's definition of "Deus necnonnaturata," and it accounts for the uniqueness of the other in Cohen's construction of "You and I."

Let us concentrate then on the negative function of limit. In any integration of dx and x, dx denotes the infinitesimal and x the limit. In the epistemological context, the infinitesimal nothing points to an infinite abyss of not-knowing; it is this not-knowing which separates us from the limit of reason. In the ethical context, it denotes an infinite abyss of not-knowing the other, since this other is herslef conceived of as the limit of the integration. One does not add to the alterity of the other by claiming her to be beyond my limits of knowledge. It is enough to say that the Other constitutes that limit to my knowledge. Cohen's equation of limit and origin leads then to the ethical conclusion that it is the Other who originates the Self. Cohen even dares to say that the Self does not exist, and turns it into a task produced by the other.

This very same limit-idea exists in Plato's idea of the good as something which lies beyond rational deduction, an "an-hypotheton," something beyond hypothesis and being, constituting a transcendental origin of both knowing and not-knowing. Levinas develops the ethical primacy of the Other without taking advantage of the Platonic idea of the "an-hypotheton," which acknowledges a non-rational ground and limit of human knowledge. His argument against this interpretation of the Platonic idea might simply be that the neo-Kantian concepts of limit, nothingness, and origin are themselves conditioned upon the principle of identity and therewith bury the other in a "logic of the same." If so, the question becomes whether Cohen's "detour via nothingness" has indeed the potential to become the logical foundation for postmodern discourse on alterity. If it does, Cohen is the first post-modern thinker. If it does not, how to avoid reverting to dogma?

Did Rosenzweig Reject Hegel? The Challenge of the System for Postmodern Thinking Martin Srajek, Illinois Wesleyan University

Robert Gibbs' recently published book, "Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas", is one of the best of its kind in the last two decades. It constitutes a major step on the way towards a comprehensive understanding of the philosophical and theological underpinnings of modern Jewish thought. Gibbs shows how modern Jewish thought, culminating in the work of Rosenzweig and Levinas, has begun to rethink itself as genuine Jewish philosophy. His book reveals a double emphasis: on ethics, displayed through his analysis of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas; and on the question of Judaism's relationship to the rest of the non-Jewish world, displayed through his analysis of Rosenzweig. The connection between ethics and the All with respect to Judaism is what places Gibbs' study squarely in the most recent postmodern discussions about the questions of God, identity, ethics, and dynamics. One gets the impression from reading Gibbs' book that Judaism indeed is postmodernism, a thesis with which I highly agree. While Habermas has shown that Jewish philosophical thought is intricately woven in with the philosophical discourse of modernity, Gibbs shows especially in the seven rubrics that conclude his book that Judaism's true locus is in the area of ethical postmodernism. This marks the achievement of a major task and it opens new avenues for philosophical thinking.

Despite this achievement, however, the book is not without problems. In particular, its alignment with postmodern philosophy will have to be challenged. One of postmodernism's salient characteristics is its reappropriation of Hegelian dialectics without, however, succumbing to what many consider to be Hegel's most severe problem: totality. Yet, Gibbs claims that Rosenzweig must be seen as a philosopher who attempts to sever his ties from Hegel for ethical reasons. We therefore have to ask the following questions: on what basis does Gibbs claim Rosenzweig's anti-Hegelianism? and in what way can it be said that Rosenzweig's and Hegel's approaches parallel each other? We will see that Rosenzweig not only fails to severe ties with Hegel but also, in his own way, creates a system of thought which is superimposed on the world and totalizes it. By

totalizing the world through systematic thought, Rosenzweig identifies himself as a modern rather than a postmodern thinker. Rosenzweig may, indeed, have attempted to divorce his own thinking from that of Hegel, but his approach remains thoroughly Hegelian in nature. The main reason is that Rosenzweig uncritically appropriated system-building as a means to express the truth of Judaism. In light of a study of Hegel's ethics, moreover, I believe we must reexamine Gibbs' claims about the ethical nature of Rosenzweig's thought.

On what basis does Gibbs claim Rosenzweig's anti-Hegelianism?

I assume throughout this piece that Gibbs' view ultimately coincides with that of Rosenzweig rather than with Hegel. Gibbs recognizes Rosenzweig's dependence on the thought of the idealists and on Hegel in particular: as he points out, their vocabulary finds its way back into the thought of Rosenzweig (p. 7). However, Gibbs indicates that Rosenzweig appropriates this vocabulary negatively, as something that he has to overcome and "struggle through" (7). For Gibbs this struggle is indicative of the continual overcoming of the philosophy of Hegel. However, he concedes that the term "struggle" not only points away from Hegel but also brings to mind the thetic-antithetic-synthetic structure of the Hegelian argument itself. Nonetheless, Gibbs is convinced that in the end-result, Rosenzweig's struggle "produce[s] new philosophies: philosophy of the existing self, philosophy of writing, philosophy of the will(3). Based on this assumption of the production of new philosophy/ies Gibbs then claims that this new philosophy is not Hegel's, but is rather one which has become significantly other through the process. . . Philosophy is replaced with altered philosophies and thus cannot reign as the self-consciousness that assimilates everything else into its program, system, or project. (3)

Gibbs is making three points: first, he argues for recognizing the quality of otherness that attaches to these new philosophies; second, these new philosophies do not just attach to the old one, but they indeed replace it; and, third, there is a modus difference, whereas Hegel's was philosophy,

this is the era of philosophies. These, then, are the qualities which must also serve as Gibbs' criteria for understanding how far Rosenzweig has moved away from Hegel.

The quality of otherness, Gibbs acknowledges, is not really a sufficient category for understanding how Hegel's absolute idealism has been overcome. Rather, as for example in the case of the existentialists, otherness indicates "contemporary philosophy's entanglement with speculative idealism" (34f). While Rosenzweig's is one of these entangled philosophies a powerful assertion of "our epistemological humility, for knowing we do not know" (34f) Gibbs credits Rosenzweig with more than just acknowledging final philosophical ignorance. To him, Rosenzweig's philosophy rejects the "unceasing movement of the dialectic of negation, as well as [the] reconstruction of the coordinates of opposites. . . of the limit and the infinite, committing himself to protecting the unknowable from the tentacles of speculation" (34f). . . . Humility, in other words, is an attitude not just of conscious ignorance but really the rejection of a relentless rebellion against that ignorance in favor of a resignation to ineffability.

In Gibbs' reading, "epistemological humility" becomes a state rather than a dynamic. But I fail to see the humility in this change. The state that replaces the dynamic of Hegel's philosophy is sanctioned by asserting an ineffable which, precisely because the unceasing movement of the negative is rejected, now grows to mythological proportions. If the movement is rejected, we have reached a position or state of philosophical complacency equalling the one with which Hegel has been charged. It is not "knowing that we don't know" but "not knowing that we don't know, then finding out that we don't know, and then forgetting it again, only to find out once more" that would accurately assess that what is going on is a process of remembering and forgetting. I, however, cannot refer to my own humility, for that is vanity. If humility can be known , it is through a judging third person.

Gibbs' argument for humility indicates his search (and perhaps Rosenzweig's as well) for a position of knowing. Gibbs is aware of this tension, and claims that "it may be that to know that we do not know we must make use of philosophy's pure, rigorous logic, for only with such logic can we prevent philosophy from assimilating the discontinuity of actuality to the sphere of reason's dominion" (55). In other words, we need to use thought in order to find out that thought cannot do the job. This is the essentially Cohennian point: We know that the unique God cannot and must not be comprehended or apprehended, but there is a logical way of approaching such understanding without violating either the "cannot" or the "must not."

The problem in this argument is its connecting an implied choice of method (the use of logic) with the air of humility that accompanies this choice . Do we really have choice when it comes to the categories of thinking? Gibbs implies something to that effect when he connects the imperative task of using the logical categories of thinking with the task of prevention. The dilemma is, and at this point I prefer the term "dilemma" over the term "humility," that we cannot but use those categories. The choice of reason is no choice. Once this is realized, it is only a short step to seeing that what is needed is not humility but rebellion. Rebellion, however, is negation, endless negation. Yet, for Rosenzweig rebellion and fanaticism are exactly what should be avoided when it comes to getting closer to God, in particular, when it is through the unending dialectic of negation. For rebellion would be negation both of the reason that opposes it and the reason that attempts to integrate it.

Rebellion also is the theme of what Rosenzweig (and Gibbs) rejects as "view-point philosophy" (39). Such view-point philosophy would no longer be able to refer to a backdrop of philosophic justification, it would be limited to itself only. View-point philosophy exists in the momentous but relentless defiance of reason as anything larger than itself. Rosenzweig believes that philosophy and view-point philosophies are irreconcilable opposites. That is, he replicates the Hegelian conviction that philosophy

is the universal and not the particular. Thus in Rosenzweig's and Hegel's view the development from philosophy to view-point philosophy (as in Nietzsche and Kierkegaard) amounts to the loss of philosophy altogether.

Can we rebel while staying within the system of reason, without abandoning it? This is a daunting question with possibly explosive potential. My preliminary answer is that we cannot. Does this mean that rebellion is impossible from the outset? Rebellion that outlines itself as staying within the system amounts to nothing but the failure to rebel. Rebellion, however, that is as fanatic as was Nietzsche's is true rebellion: one that forgets itself and its purpose at the moment of rebellion and only later realizes that, even then, it did not escape the logic of reason. Only this type of rebellion is likely to change reason itself.

By defending the conscious use of the categories of reason, or of the state as a way towards justice, Gibbs, along with Rosenzweig, undermines any view of justice as a rebellious, chaotic, and ever-changing force (257).2 Rosenzweig, it is clear, is aware of this ever-changing character of the force of justice, but he is unwilling to let this awareness translate into a rejection of the state. Instead he sublimates the urge to rebel and lets it reemerge through art as the "human production of passions" (257). This type of productive art is nothing but another flight from reality, here the reality of the oppressive state. It divests the world of politics and the state of passion or suffering and instead claims that these are produced in art. However, if it is art that produces these passions, why should anyone, unless she is a masochist, want to be an artist? And even if such a person existed, why would she want to return to society? Why not stay in the realm of art and experience passion? Furthermore, what would such a person do, if she did return to society? If art produces passion, then society, not being able to relate to it, will fail to understand it. From the perspective of the the non-masochist the question is what else should motivate the return to society but the wish to forget passion? What would be the connecting link? In both cases, for the masochist and the anti-

masochist, the realm of art and passion seems closed off to that of the state. Justice will, then, never emerge from the production of or reflection on art.

The escape into art is nothing short of Hegel's escape into thinking. It is a change in reference-points, to be sure, as thinking for Hegel expresses what the world seems to reject most oneness; while art, for Rosenzweig, expresses what the world rejects most suffering. In both we encounter a problematic dualism between the world and another realm.

Gibbs' program mediately given through his assessment of Rosenzweig's critique of Hegel seems overly enthusiastic: first, in its alleged distance from Hegel, and, second, in the claim to being an ethical philosophy. Like Hegel, Rosenzweig wants to retain control through the act of knowing, he wants to use reason as a tool to get closer to the irrational, he rejects view-point philosophy (and therefore the irrational!) for fear it might turn into fanaticism, he understands the state as a vehicle for fulfilling justice, and like Hegel he believes that truth does not lie in this world but somehow outside of it. The rejection of view-point philosophy combined with the false humility of ignorance amounts to a rejection of rebellion and constitutes, therefore, the dismissal of any genuinely ethical moment.

Rosenzweig and the Problem of Ethics

Rosenzweig did not really have ethics in mind when he wrote the Star. His goal was to write a book that would allow him and his readers to recast Judaism in such a way that it would become clear even to the non-Jewish reader that Judaism is not only an accidental positive religion, but that it has conceptual aspects which are devoid of all historical contingency and therefore unfold by necessity. Rosenzweig, in other words, substitutes Judaism for Hegel's system. Or, to make it clearer, Rosenzweig gives us Judaism as a system instead of philosophy as a system. The system consists of three parts: logic, language, and community and all three parts are designed to show adequately how from a Jewish perspective the world must relate to its beginnings, to its being

in the world, and to its ultimate condition. He has not succeeded in breaking the spell of what makes the figure of Hegel so towering and unbearable precisely also in postmodern thought, that is, he has failed to break the spell of the system itself. His system, like that of Hegel, has the flaws of all systems: it is over-generalizing, abandoning historic detail for the sake of the argument, it understands certain particular things as representative of the whole, etc. Like any system it is a lie. But as system it is a beautiful lie, like that of Hegel.

The ethical problem of the 20th century, however, is precisely the system. (Gibbs' introductory remarks about Hegel's legacy show that he is aware of this as well.) This century, more so than any other, has taught us that the lie on which the aesthetically appealing system is built can become a practical compulsion. It is the voracious appetite of ideology that does not shy away from devouring everything other than itself. It is the desire to equalize and unify where there is still obstinate and stubborn difference. Not even a generation away from the Holocaust, Rosenzweig overlooks this problem. Systems of thought were the rage even at that time. Heidegger, Gadamer and Husserl still wrote out of the desire to create systematic thought. The voices from the Frankfurt School that attempted critiques of systems social and philosophical were hardly heard at that time.

Hermann Cohen, whose work also belongs into the circle of those who wanted to create systems of thought, at least understood that philosophy and theology must finally be measured against the very severe measuring stick of social justice. Rosenzweig, on the other hand, does not even bring up this problematic. Ethics for him is really about the question that Hegel had already asked, about the relationship between the particular and the universal: ethics as "Lebensanschauung" and ethics as "Weltanschauung" (Star 11). It is about the question of the position of ethics with respect to questions about the world and God (Star 16, 21). Rosenzweig criticizes traditional ethics for being unable to provide the individual with a stronger sense of the whole, the All in which, qua ethical being, he or she

participates. That is, he points out that traditional systems have put too much emphasis on the individual and have ultimately succeeded only in defining ethics as that which I am and do rather than as that which I am as a member of a community (Star 61,90). What it means for Rosenzweig to be part of such a community is to understand the commandment to love one's neighbor. Rosenzweig points out, however, that my neighbor is really only a variable ("Platzhalter") for the All ("den Inbegriff Aller") (Star 243). Rosenzweig, in other words, de-emphasizes the individual other as my neighbor and he turns her into a variable for the sake of the whole community.. . . One must therefore ask whether it is the case that, as Gibbs claims, Rosenzweig has in mind an ethics that frees the individual, or is his ethics not rather one that submits the individual to a different absolute? Has Rosenzweig not just shifted the emphasis from the logic of the part and the whole to the logic of the single individual with respect to the whole community? What do we gain from Rosenzweig's considerations?

The suspicion that Rosenzweig is not really interested in ethics is strengthened by the fact that terms like "the ethical", "ethics," or "the other" rarely come up in his text (they do in Levinas' text, however) and I feel compelled to ask Gibbs if there are other terms that indicate Rosenzweig's interest in ethics, terms, perhaps, that belong to the context of the third decade of this century and therefore have to be decoded before they can be understood as ethical. Rosenzweig, it is true, attempted to rethink the notion of relation, and if anything is important to ethics it is the issue of how to relate to my neighbor, to God and to the world in general. But Hegel was concerned with relations as well. The dialectic of the spirit is, above all, a reflection on how things physical and metaphysical relate to each other. I would be content to hear that Rosenzweig thought it his own calling to fill the relational concepts of Hegel's philosophy with the material givenness of Judaism (similar to how Cohen uses Kantian philosophy as a framework for Judaism as the religion of reason). But if this is the case then one can hardly claim that Rosenzweig really overcame or rejected Hegelian philosophy. What he

ends up doing appears to be nothing short of an affirmation of an All that initially he thought untenable and, I gather, un-ethical.

Gibbs concludes with a reflection on the scope and direction that Jewish philosophy should take in order to lead the way to a new era of social, political, and theological thought. Although these categories reflect the potential that is inherent in Jewish thought as a whole, neither Rosenzweig nor Levinas can be counted on as unproblematic candidates for such an approach. The criticism that follows is, therefore, not directed towards these categories themselves, but rather towards Rosenzweig and Levinas as their appropriate representatives.

Let me begin with rubric 2. Gibbs here urges us to understand the primacy of ethics not as "the cognition of truth" but as "the transformation of praxis." Neither Rosenzweig nor Levinas are good candidates with whom to begin this process. Neither engage in praxis nor do they transform it. Their transformation is one of epistemological categories. This is itself an important prerequisite of praxis, but it is not praxis per se.

Rubric 3: Rosenzweig's philosophy emphasizes sociality but the cost is the loss of individuality. Levinas deals with the individual, he understands it as the central problem of ethics, whereas Rosenzweig avoids it. Sociality cannot be had as the opposite of individuality but as the differential product of the one and the All.

Based on this, I think, Gibbs is right in rubric 4 to point to the prophetic quality of all speech. The very form of speech understood as the address of the other is already the matrix from which social action can emerge. But, against Rosenzweig, I would submit that speech is what eludes the system. It cannot be said, especially not through grammar. His attempt to map out speech and dialogue underscored by Gibbs' meta-discourse on it pull speech back into the realm of theory and systematic thought.

With respect to rubric 5, neither Rosenzweig nor Levinas are able to bring the material needs of the community into the focus of their works. Both are too concerned with transcendence to be able to stay within the realm of the material.

The call for the suspension of the state in rubric 6 is a very powerful symbol of what it will take to implement any ethics at all. For the suspension of the state really stands in for the suspension of the system. If we can live socially and communally without being in need of enforcing a system as the artificial backbone of our unity then the state will have become superfluous.

Rubric 7: Jewish philosophy, possibly Rosenzweig's less so than Cassirer's, Soloveitchik's, Schwarzschild's, and Cohen's, is one that aims at social practice, as halakhic practice. If this orientation could become part of the ways we do philosophy, then philosophy as a system would make way to philosophy as a differentially produced narrative. It would be a philosophy that truly orients itself between act and thought rather than just towards thought.

Here also is the space for rubric 1. The universality of accessibility is the goal of every philosophy, every philosophical system in particular. That in part is the reason why systems are invented in the first place. I would suggest that this universalism should not be phrased in terms of what we will do some day, but in the agreement that nothing we do or institute can not be put in question again. It is the agreement that ethics is an infinite task and that the only universal available to everyone is participation in that infinite task. Messianism understood as an infinite task is the only way to keep the otherwise all-encompassing, and all-devouring system in check.

NOTES

1. For the connection between rebellion and negation cp. Albert Camus, "L'homme rvolt", Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1951. 2 Compare on this

point Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law," Cardozo Law Review, 1993. In this article Derrida equates deconstruction with justice. Since deconstruction's most salient feature is the demonstration of the lack of solid conceptual bases for laws, principles, doctrines, etc., it has a thoroughly uprooting effect. To say that deconstruction is justice, is to say that justice is always deferred and that in its stead we have the striving for justice which is which both makes and unmakes laws. It is, in any event, a situation in which we can never quite disconnect ourselves from the chaotic matrix of lawlessness.

"Correlations" in the Profession of Modern Jewish Philosophy

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Among the disciplines of Judaic Studies, modern Jewish thought is often regarded as a distant cousin who is much admired for her acquaintance with the ways of the world but who, for the very same reason, is often looked at askance. Compared to the more generally recognized branches of Judaic Studies,(1) Jewish philosophy or thought is "so young that it is only now beginning to develop consciousness of self."(2) When it comes to the modern period, some deny the very existence of such a discipline(3) which, in our simile, amounts to an outright denial of one's relatives. Given this precarious status of the discipline, the need is evident for intellectually stimulating and well reasoned introductions to the complex problems that have concerned modern Jewish thinkers. If such introductions are to satisfy a philosophical rather than merely historical interest, they must provide more than the individual profiles of thinkers whose ideas were shaped in different circumstances of intellectual history. While we are in need of expository writing, the ideal introduction must go beyond a description of the thought of diverse individuals. The thinkers in question not only built one on the thought of the other but they shared a fundamental awareness of the need to make sense of Judaism in the context of modernity as well as of modernity in the context of Judaism. If this shared awareness is admitted as the common intellectual basis of

modern Jewish thinkers, one will expect that an introductory essay on modern Jewish thought address the question of a common agenda of Jewish philosophy in the modern era. The reader is interested in an account of the convictions that compelled modern Jewish thinkers to challenge universal morality and culture from within the symbolic system of Judaism. If such an underlying agenda or a set of common convictions can be identified, such result may ultimately serve as a toe hold for an agenda of future Jewish thought.

An alternative to this method suggests itself when one suspects the historical and intellectual relations between the thinkers in question to be less evident than necessary for such a straightforward derivation of a systematic agenda from their historical expositions. In this case, one may be tempted to substitute one's own agenda for future Jewish thought, or an account of the basic correlation between particular Jewish thinkers that one finds particularly in agreement with one's own agenda.

Robert Gibbs has given us a specimen of the latter kind of introduction to modern Jewish thought. Based on thorough textual studies, "Correlations" is an elaborate exposition of the thought of Franz Rosenzweig (1888-1929) and Emmanuel Levinas (born 1906). Not satisfied with mere historico-exegetical expositions, this study aims to highlight "correlations" between the thought of these 20th-century thinkers. More than mere historical correspondences or dependencies of the later on the earlier thinker, these correlations are understood as pointers in the direction of an agenda for postmodern Jewish philosophy. But Gibbs goes even further. The agenda that emerges from reading Rosenzweig and Levinas is characterized by a common interest in making Judaism a plausible "other" of philosophy, of spelling out the inherent challenge of Judaism to contemporary secular thought.(4)

Gibbs' focus on Rosenzweig and Levinas is openly arbitrary. Postmodernism is distinguished by a certain eclecticism, and the justification for grouping other modern Jewish thinkers around these two

is suggested by the gradual emergence in the book of "family resemblances": similarities of emphasis and effort in the thought of a larger group of individuals (including Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, and Gabriel Marcel). Gibbs shows that the underlying intention of postmodern Jewish thought that makes for this family resemblance is a "radicalization of ethics." The name Gabriel Marcel alone suggests that this pivotal philosophical intention of "radicalizing ethics" is not an exclusively Jewish theme. Ethics and morality as such are neither exclusively Jewish concerns nor are they products of modernity or postmodernity. Social justice and lawful conduct have been major elements of premodern Jewish thought, originating, as it does, in classic Israelite prophecy with its social criticism and continuing throughout the sources of Judaism from wisdom literature to Mishna, Talmud and Midrash, and from the "Duties of the Heart" to the works of the Mussar movement. As a topic of philosophical reflection, ethics, or practical philosophy, was bequeathed to and impressed upon the West through the works of Plato and Aristotle and has remained a pillar of every standard work of philosophy ever since the Middle Ages. Furthermore, Judaism exerted a direct influence on the Western philosophical tradition through Christianity. All this complicates the task of differentiating between "Hebrew" and "Greek" contributions to the development of Western ethical theory. Given these multiple and complex influences on the allegedly post-Christian and postmodern philosophical mind, it does not come as a surprise that a definition of the proprium of Jewish philosophy ("the radicalization of ethics") is accompanied by a disclaimer of exclusivity.

Gibbs presents his agenda for postmodern Jewish thought in a set of "rubrics" for Jewish philosophy. These rubrics boast agreement with Bible and Talmud, albeit not in their "plain sense." He explains neither how one arrives at such "plain sense" nor how the non-literal sense that he agrees with is methodologically distinguished from "eisegesis" of the sort that is commonly found in the works of philosophers and other creative homilists. The agenda for Jewish thought that is thus unsupportedly

asserted as "consonant with Jewish sources, particularly Midrash and Talmud" is nevertheless to be regarded as non-exclusive. This non-exclusivity is based on its inherent universality which is, of course, an ethical universality. The first rubric states that while postmodern Jewish philosophy might take the form of a meditation on a Talmudic text, it nevertheless speaks of universal experiences such as "speaking or eating with another person." Since we are dealing not with these experiences themselves but with philosophical reflections on their constitutive meaning for "sociality," the "universality of access" is limited to "poets, artists, writers, philosophers, theologians, scientists, social critics, etc." While this group does not have to be Jewish (hence the universality) it must be professional, i.e. qualified to follow the argument presented in works of Jewish philosophy.

Whatever weaknesses one may find in "Correlations", the work is a paradigmatic introduction to 20th-century Jewish philosophy. It focuses on a selection of modern or postmodern Jewish philosophers but it does so with a view to disseminating the thought of Rosenzweig and Levinas beyond the small circle of students of modern Jewish thought. Gibbs wants to reach out and engage philosophers and philosophically minded Jews and non-Jews outside the community of specialists by presenting them with what he sees as an inherent challenge of postmodern Jewish philosophy to postmodern philosophy. "Correlations" is ultimately about the inherent and vital correlation between philosophy and Judaism sought by Jewish philosophers, a correlation that, according to Gibbs, should be sought also by "philosophy in general" or by "neutral" thought. I assume that by the latter he means a type of discourse that is not determined by denominational interests — a discourse among professionals and educated people who (and who does not uphold this fiction?) are used to putting reason and understanding before the irrational biases of religious affiliation.

In order to reach a wider audience, Gibbs decided to do with few references to other supporting or alternative interpretations of the

thinkers he presents. He hopes that his expositions are self-sustaining even when they are unusual. The author notes that there is a whole archeology of Judaism as the "other" of Western thought, an archeology worthy of extensive elaboration. . . . I find many of Gibbs' expositions brilliant, lucid, helpful, and to the point. Whoever has tried to read the Star of Redemption from beginning to end and to put down in writing what it means will appreciate the amount of energy and discipline required to produce such concise expositions. What I miss is a more complete recognition of the work of others. While Gibbs notes the names and works of some authors on Rosenzweig, he fails to mention more recent monographs that present complete expositions of Rosenzweig's main philosophical work and that, like Correlations, treat Rosenzweig as a philosopher.(5) In this sense, Gibbs' claim of presenting an innovative reading of Rosenzweig by treating him as a philosopher rather than a religious thinker seems slightly exaggerated. One gets the impression that previous writers merely perpetuated the image of Rosenzweig as a baal t'shuva and saintly martyr and that none had thought of making the attempt of decoding the elaborate structure and symbolism of the Star in order to represent its underlying philosophical argument. My own experience with reading Rosenzweig began in 1983 and the relevant authors have all been dispassionate fellow-readers and teachers, most of whom were not even Jewish. What is true of the study of Hermann Cohen is also true of the study of Franz Rosenzweig: until recently there has been little communication between US and European scholars. American philosophers outside the narrow ranks of students of Jewish philosophy had little interest in post-idealist Continental thought unless it dealt with Heidegger or was written in French; Jewish Studies in general have only recently become a popular field and have turned into a source of marketable items. In Germany, on the other hand, interest in neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, and speech-thinking has been sustained for several decades and has increased in the wake of the reassessment of the interruption of the German intellectual tradition. To claim Rosenzweig for general philosophy makes much more sense in the context of German academic philosophy, where idealism and post-idealism still dominate the

lecture halls and where philosophical and theological authors, both Catholic and Protestant, have been continuously and increasingly interested in reintegrating the Jewish voice that was once part of a German philosophical discourse.(6)

Since people in this country don't like to learn foreign languages, they need translations. One form of translation is provided by Gibbs — a translation of one tradition of thought into the language of another. The other form, which is not made superfluous by Gibbs' book, would be an English edition of the works of Rosenzweig. In such an edition one would want to include not only a new translation of the Star (Gibbs correctly laments the quality of the existing one) but also a translation of his letters, diaries, and minor writings. In my opinion, the letters and diaries provide a much better commentary on the Star than the essay on the "New Thinking" in which Rosenzweig talks to an anonymous audience.(7) There are a few historical and biographical points in "Correlations" that could be slightly improved. For example, in the admittedly preliminary sketch of Rosenzweig's life ("Two Lives" p.5), he is characterized as the "child of an assimilated German family" whose intellectual path led him from medicine to history to philosophy. While these characterizations are not entirely wrong, they are not entirely right either. His family, despite its assimilation, included Rosenzweig's uncle Adam, a devoutly religious Jew of tremendous personal influence on young Franz who, as the only one among his assimilated but still Jewish peers, asked for Hebrew lessons as his 13th-birthday present. According to the recollections of Victor von Weizscker and Theodor Heuss, Rosenzweig was proudly Jewish even before his so-called t'shuva. Finally, Rosenzweig's study of medicine was an aspect of his Studiengang, a Brotstudium to satisfy his father rather than an aspect of his intellectual history (his Bildungsgang). Also, Eugen Rosenstock did not "persuade Rosenzweig to convert." While Rosenzweig, following his nightly conversation with Rosenstock and Rudolf Ehrenberg, was in a state of inner turmoil and considered conversion, Rosenstock did not know what his statements of faith had caused in his student and interlocutor until 1916 when, in the course of

their correspondence, Franz Rosenzweig first disclosed the chain of events that had taken place in the meantime.(8)

The central intention of the book is to demonstrate a potential of modern Jewish philosophy (in its agreement with "Talmudic" Judaism) to function as a significant "other" for contemporary academic philosophy. In keeping with the "ideal introduction" that we sketched above, rather than giving a mere exposition of the thought of some of the major modern Jewish thinkers, Gibbs aims to present a tentative but original synthesis of modern Jewish philosophy as a coherent and correlated movement of thought that is of significance to universal thought. Although Gibbs modestly defers to Rosenzweig and Levinas on whom he merely seems to comment his agenda is original and it is this agenda more than anything that deserves our attention. (An aside: the complicated situation of authorship thus created is indicated in formulations such as this: "This ideal agenda is not simply a summary of the two thinkers who caused this book, but neither is it a priori.") On the other hand, the agenda does not develop out of nothing but emerges from an attentive reading of Rosenzweig and Levinas. The commentary form adopted by Gibbs is in itself an application of the philosophical principle that seems to guide the development of postmodern Jewish thought, except that instead of the classical sources of Judaism, the modern Jewish philosophies themselves become the classics that are the text on which we comment without merely reiterating their meaning. The ambiguity between exposition and original synthesis is thus intentional and in keeping with the message, which is this: while I speak I primarily respond to what has first been spoken to me, the author as the truthful broker of the word that first came to him and made him, first a listener/reader, then an author.

Once this premise of the literary situation is made clear, the justification of Gibbs' choice of authors and of what he sees as the inherent challenge of modern Jewish thought to philosophy becomes plausible. Objectively speaking, the picture of modern Jewish thought (as of . . . any other thought for that matter) is far more complex and contradictory than

suggested in this work. But Gibbs is not speaking objectively. He speaks as someone inspired by Rosenzweig and Levinas and, in a certain unmistakable way, by Cohen. Hence one cannot complain, for example, when Gibbs makes no effort to reconcile the "Suspension of the State" that he postulates as an element of Jewish thought (see rubrics 6 and 7) with Zionism and the Jewish state. Nor can one complain that this postmodern eclecticism regards the Holocaust as a non-event or at best as an event devoid of decisive intellectual content.

....Let me turn, then, to the question of what significance Gibbs assigns the Holocaust in the context of modern Jewish thought. From the way in which Gibbs deals with this question I infer (for no where in the book is this conclusion spelled out explicitly) that he does not regard the Nazi attempt to eliminate the Jewish "race" as a philosophically significant event. Thus, when the Holocaust is mentioned in connection with Levinas, it is immediately integrated with the "millennia of abandonment." It is quite evident that God was just as silent during atrocities committed against Jews before this century, just as God has been conspicuously silent when others than the Jews were the victims of "ethnic cleansing." It would seem justified, therefore, to answer the question of a philosophical impact of the Holocaust on our understanding of Judaism, philosophy, and ethics in the negative. Instead we are made to realize that the content of these questions ("Where is God?" etc.) may be less significant than their form: "Our theology today seems to consist in large measure of questions." The Holocaust is, thus, assigned the role of boosting a particular aspect of the grammar of speech-thinking, namely the new mood of the interrogative. This is not a trivial aspect of Gibbs' exposition of speech-thinking, either, since it is the only innovation he suggests in the context of Rosenzweig's characterization of the moods of language. But this limited philosophical significance of the Holocaust in the context of Jewish thought is achieved through a reification of this event that contradicts its alleged linguistic significance. The possibility of claiming the Holocaust as the true origin of the new mood of the interrogative, a mood supposed to inform and enrich our common theological language, depends on perceiving the Holocaust

as an objectively unprecedented event. Only if conceived of as historically unique can the Holocaust be presumed to generate an unprecedented quality of speech. Gibbs has, however, ruled out the uniqueness of the Holocaust. If, on the other hand, the Holocaust were an atrocity that differs only quantitatively from other attempted genocides, then its "uniqueness" concerns only the particular victims for whom it is naturally unique, not however us who are not among them and for whom the Holocaust is "history." In this case, the newness of the mood of the interrogative can also only concern the particular victims alone. Only they had and continue to have the right to consider themselves beyond the realm of ordinary speech. For us who have not been victimized in this way (and who feel that one must not want to be victimized in this way in order to be fully human and capable of the full gamut of human speech), such victimization is simply beyond imagination and must remain so. Or, if there is only a quantitative difference between the degree of victimization experienced in the death camps and "ordinary" forms of suffering, it is misleading to invoke the Holocaust in the context of discussing the interrogative other than by way of illustration. Gibbs' discussion of this whole complex of questions is not satisfactory and it should, perhaps, have been left alone altogether. There are two additional reasons why Gibbs' discussion of the Holocaust remains ambiguous. First, in a work that sets itself the task of spelling out universal implications of Jewish ethics, the particularity of Jewish suffering and of concrete Jewish history in general (including Zionism) have no place. In this way, however, the work loses an element of Jewish authenticity that is necessary if Jewish thought is to function as a genuine "other" of philosophy. Secondly, the category that applies to the language of the victim is the category of accusation. Since the days of Prometheus and Job, the victim of God's silence in the face of meaningless violence has been accusation, not interrogation. Even if the two are collapsed, it is the victim alone, more precisely the victim who still addresses God alone ("my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"), who can claim the right to charge God. To claim the interrogative as a genuine mood of language is to mistake pious contemplation of the suffering of others with a form of authentic language.

While Gibbs almost manages to save his thesis by associating the interrogative with the often invoked experience of insufficiency, this association should be considered in the context of prayer, a context that is conspicuously reduced from a form of speech to a mere body of theological contents.

All this is not to detract from the evident merits of the work. Gibbs represents Rosenzweig's philosophical intentions correctly. Although I am relatively unfamiliar with Levinas, the little I have read confirms that Gibbs' exposition of his thought is equally competent.(9) Common to Rosenzweig's and Levinas's Jewish philosophical impulse is the theme of "radicalization of ethics." While a more systematic and less exegetical exposition might have made it easier to follow the argument, the point is well taken..... Within this larger context, the continued emphasis on sociality, social justice and the ethical situation of human beings seems to be a specifically Jewish contribution. At least it can be said that from Marx to Bloch, and from Cohen to the Frankfurt school, Jews worshipped socialism as if it were the essence of the Ten Commandments.

At the end of the 20th century, then, we are told that this is indeed the underlying theme of modern and postmodern Jewish philosophy and its imperative for the next millennium: a reminder that justice on earth is the goal and the task for Jews and non-Jews alike. On the other hand, we are told that this imperative is not to be confused with a rehashing of the 19th-century claim that the Jews have a genius for ethics. It is not clear to me how such confusion can be avoided. The ethical imperative has not changed just because the current philosophical paradigm is post-neo-Kantian rather than Kantian. But here we should not take the assertion of a difference lightly. While the Kantian and neo-Kantian Jewish and other ethics culminated in a correlation between autonomous individuals and a constitutional state, the post-modern formulation aims at an open but communally structured society, i.e., a society that constitutes itself in an infinity of responsibility of each for others beyond the divisions of class, race, gender, and religion; an "open" society aiming at constant social

criticism. In other words, the agenda for postmodern Jewish philosophy is to read the Talmud with a political agenda similar to contemporary communitarianism and to boost this agenda with appropriate readings of the Talmud. Whoever agrees with this agenda will find Professor Gibbs' Correlations an important theologico-political event. Whoever doubts that Jewish philosophy is served by such alignments with the Zeitgeist will still find Gibbs' expositions of Rosenzweig and Levinas brilliant and thoughtful bridges to the thought of two of the most significant thinkers of the 20th century.

NOTES

1. Cf. Friedrich W. Niewoehner (1980), "Vorueberlegungen zu einem Stichwort: 'Philosophie, Juedische'" in: Archiv fuer Begriffsgeschichte 24:195-220.

2. Marvin Fox, "Graduate Education in Jewish Philosophy," in: New Humanities and Academic Disciplines, The Case of Jewish Studies, (ed. Jacob Neusner), The University of Wisconsin Press (off-print, s.a.), p.121

3. Cf. Fox ibid.

4. A similar agenda is evident in Kenneth Seeskin, Jewish Philosophy in a Secular Age, Albany: Suny Press, 1990

5. See Anna Elisabeth Bauer, Rosenzweig's Sprachdenken im "Stern der Erloesung" und in seiner Korrespondenz mit Martin Buber zur Verdeutschung der Schrift" Frankfurt/Main etc.: Verlag Peter Lang, 1992 (=Europaeische Hochschulschriften, Reihe XXIII Theologie Vol. 466); Paola Ricci Sindoni, Prigioneri di Dio, Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929), Edizioni Studium, Roma 1989 (=La Cultura 37); Adriano Fabris, Linguaggio della revelazione, Filosofia e teologia nel pensiero di Franz Rosenzweig, Genova 1990 (=Ricerche Studi e Strumenti – Filosofia 15); Hans Martin Dober, Die Zeit ernstnehmen. Studien zu Franz Rosenzweigs "Der Stern der Erloesung", Wuerzburg 1990(=Epistemata, Wuerzburger Wissenschaftliche Schriften, Reihe Philosophie, Band84); Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik, Franz Rosenzweig, Existentielles Denkenund gelebte Bewaehrung, Freiburg/Muenchen, 1991 (= Alber Reihe Philosophie)

6. Note the curious fact that an earlier version of this review was originally read at a panel in which all reviewers were natives of Germany, one a converted Jew, the other a non-Jew, and the third neither a non-Jew nor a non-Christian.
7. The more recent edition of Rosenzweig's letters and diaries is sadly far from complete but is still a splendid resource of which most American students are deprived. See Franz Rosenzweig, Gesammelte Schriften, published by Martinus Nijhoff, I (The Hague, 1979) and III (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster, 1984). For a critique of this edition see Michael Zank, Christlich – juedisches Gespraech im 1. Weltkrieg. Eine Analyse des Briefwechsels von Eugen Rosenstock und Franz Rosenzweig aus dem Jahre 1916 (unpublished M.T.S. thesis, Heidelberg University, 1986) p. 52 n.41 and p. 54f. n. 44
8. I have described the exchange between Rosenzweig and Rosenstock further in "Christlich-juedisches Gespraech" (see previous note). Speaking of Rosenstock. Perhaps the strongest emphasis in Gibbs' exposition of the philosophical doctrines of the Star is on the third part, with its sociological constitution of communities through a common structuring of temporality. The sociological thinking that Rosenzweig develops in this context under the heading of "in tyrannos" owes a great deal to Eugen Rosenstock's construction of concrete sociality out of a common calendar which Rosenstock first presented to Rosenzweig in a letter of July 19, 1916 [Eng translation in Judaism Despite Christianity (ed. Eugen Rosenstock), Alabama: University of Alabama Press,1969, pp.89ff and Rosenzweig's answer from Sept. 5, 1916 ibid. pp. 91-94. Cf. Helmut Jenner, "Die Auffindung des Kreuzes der Wirklichkeit" in: Mitteilungen der Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy Gesellschaft,16. Folge, February 1972, pp. 1-7.]. Rosenstock later developed this into a full fledged sociology. [Cf. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessey, Soziologie, vol. 1: Die Uebermacht der Raeume, 2. edition, Stuttgart, Berlin, Koeln, Mainz: Kohlhammer, 1956 and vol. 2: Die Vollzahl der Zeiten, first edition 1958.] For Rosenstock the correspondence with Rosenzweig was important not because it concerned the affirmation of "Judaismdespite Christianity" but because it was in this private exchange that took place in the middle of the war that Rosenstock

first disclosed his own sociological ideas for a "new thinking." Cf. Rosenstock-Huessy, Ja und Nein. Autobiographische Fragmente, Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1968, pp. 45f, 70ff, 103f.
9. A characterization of Levinas' Jewish thought similar to that of Gibbs can be found in Joelle Hansel, "'After You' – The Concept of Sanctification in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas" (Hebrew) in: Daat. A Journal of Jewish Philosophy & Kabbalah, nr. 30, Winter 1993, pp. 5-12. This whole issue of Daatis dedicated to the philosophy of Levinas.

FUTURES

Our futures this issue are electonic: Back issues of the NETWORK are now archived on World Wide Web. Courtesy of Drew's System Coordinator Scott Wood, the archives are being made available via Drew University's World Wide Web server. This means you no longer have to go through us to retrieve back issues. Just follow this procedure: use URL http://www.drew.edu/~pmjp to view the archives. You will need to use a WWW browser program such as Lynx, Mosaic or Netscape to access the archives. Ask your System Manager! If you are not set up, you'll have to bother us directly for back issues.

We are now in the process of placing Norbert Samuelson's Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Dialogue on Listserv. NETWORK member Lance Fletcher recommended and explained the move. And David Seidenberg and of the engineered it for us on the Jewish Theological Seminary's system. The dialogue list will accessed at:___. Members may join by writing to Norbert at___.; he'll sign you up.

We have gained many new members since the past issue. We invite any member to send in a "New Member's Introduction," as illustrated in our previous issues!

NETWORK MEMBERS: Brad Artson, Congregation Eilat, CA Sid Axxinn, Temple U." Roger Badham, Drew U. David Bakan, Willowdale, Ontario Michael Balinsky, Northwestern U "Lewis Barth, HUC-LA Leora Batnitsky, Princeton U Dustin Bauer, U. Idaho Edward A. Beach, U. of Evansville Steven Bob, Glen Ellyn, Illinois Gerry Berg, Sweet Briar C, Virginia Avi Bernstein, Stanford Univ Timothy Beul, Emory University Andrew E. Benjamin, U. of Warwick Kalman Bland, Duke U. Tom Bridges, Montclair Cllg Marc Bregman, Hebrew Un Cllg (Jersl) Daniel Breslauer, U. of Kansas Don Breslauer, U. of Michigan Eugene Borowitz, HUC/JIR, New York Aviva Bower, Finland Daniel Boyarin, UC Berkeley Jonathan Boyarin, The New School Jean Cahan Michael Carasik Steve Carr, U. of Texas Stuart Charme, Rutgers U. JH Chajes, Yale U. Aryeh Cohen, Brandeis Phil Cohen, Brandeis Richard Cohen, U. of Alabama Philip Culbertson, St. Johns, Auckland Perry Dane, Rutgers Law School Gilad Ehven Gerda Elata Tamara Eskenazi, Heb Un Cllg (LA) Rabbi Edward Feld, NYC Charlotte Fonrobert, U. of Washington Harvey Forman, Tigerteam Steven Fraade, Yale U. Barbara Galli, McGill U. Marilyn Garber, Cal State Jay Geller, Rutgers U. Robert Gibbs, Princeton U. Robert Goldenberg, Stony Brook Michael Gottsegen, CLAL William S. Green, SUNY Buffalo Yudit Greenberg, Rollins Cllg Peter Haas, Vanderbilt U. Marv Hammerman Susan Handelman, U. of Maryland Scott Hennesy, U of Va. Steven L. Jacobs, Tmpl. B'Nai Shalom Martin Jaffee, U. of Washington Howard Joseph, Concordia U. Canada Michael A. Kagan, Le Moyne Cllg Mark Kaplowitz, Princeton U. Marilyn Katz, Wesleyan Steve Kepnes, Colgate U. Peter Knobel, Beth Emet, Evanston, IL Alan Krinsky, Wisconsin U. Lance Fletcher, Free Lance Academy, NJ Rabbi Gail Labovitz, JTS Nancy Levene, Harvard U. A.J.Levine, Vanderbilt U. Ze'ev Levy, U. of Haifa Kris Lindbeck, Jewish Theol. Sem. Tod Linafelt,Oxford U. Dan Lusthaus, Macalester Cllg Shaul Magid, Rice U. Judd Maltin, Slacker U. Dow Marmur, Toronto Barry Mesch, Hebrew C., Brookline, MA Paul Mendes-Flohr, Hebrew U. Jacob Meskin, Williams College Marty Morgenbesser Linda Motzkin, Skidmore C Jay Nathanson, U. of Western Ontario Peter Ochs, Drew U. Manuel Duarte Olivera, Lisbon,