Journal of Textual Reasoning (Old Series) 5:4 (December 1996)
ISSN: 1939-7518

by individual contributors, rights are retained by the editor of this Network.

Subscription:
TEXTUAL REASONING is sent free of charge to electronic mail addresses. Back issues are archived on worldwideweb: access URL "http://www.drew.edu/~pmjp". Hardcopies cost $6/issue; $15 per volume (3-4 issues).

Send requests and payment to
Michael Zank, Dept. of Religion, Boston University, 745 Commonwealth Ave,
Boston, MA. 02215, Tel: (617) 353-4434, Fax: (617) 353-5441

Submissions:
Electronic mail to: _____or disks (preferably Apple/Macintosh, Word) to Michael Zank, (address as above).

* * * * * * * *

DEAR NETWORK MEMBERS,
This is the final issue of Textual Reasoning for 1996. In it we introduce you to a recent restatement of the central doctrine of the Jewish rationalist tradition, the doctrine of ethical monotheism. Lenn Goodman's book GOD OF ABRAHAM, erudite and elegantly written, is a philosophical book and a work whose philosophical statements are formulated out of an engaged reading of the classical Jewish sources. In this sense it is an instance of 'textual reasoning.' Furthermore, with its emphasis on the ongoing project of a mutual interpretation of the God of the Hebrew prophets and the Platonic idea of the Good, Goodman's GOD OF ABRAHAM speaks to the central demand to future Jewish philosophy, as formulated by Robert Gibbs, namely that of radicalization of Jewish ethics. These comments may suffice as a justification for dedicating a whole issue of a journal associated

with Jewish postmodernism to a philosophical essay that is decidedly modern.

We solicited a number of responses to the work that would represent a variety of perspectives. We are delighted that Allan Arkush, David Burrell, Menahem Kellner, and David Weininger responded to our invitation by contributing substantive statements to this discussion. riginally, we intended for Lenn Goodman to respond to all of his critics in this issueas well. This project was cut short by the passing away of Lenn's wife, Madeleine, who died only a few months after having been diagnosed with a tumor in her brain. This volume is dedicated to her memory.

Goodman's work has also been reviewed elsewhere. What distinguishes this group of reviews is, as we hope, a difference in style and intensity compared to the run of the mill academic review. Goodman's book was chosen for review because it is a highly engaged and engaging argument for the ethical implications of the idea of monotheism in the Jewish tradition. The reviews, in no less of an engaged and engaging manner, point to both strengths and weaknesses in Goodman's position. This collection, then, may serve as a model for what we regard as an intelligent way of reviewing of a contemporary book. But, if it is really successful, it may also serve as a point of departure for a more far-reaching discussion on the position of our members on the modernist paradigm of Judaism in light of postmodern criticism. Does Jewish postmodernism imply that we have relinquished monotheism as an ethical idea and, if so, what should take its place? Does Jewish postmodernism make an argument more convincing to the philosophical sceptic for both Judaism and morality? A strong modernist and ethical monotheistic position such as Goodman's can reinvigorate and clarify the project of Jewish postmodernity and serve as a touchstone for its claims to validity.

PAST AND FUTURES

— The Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Network continued its series of study-meetings at the American Academy of Religion in November in

New Orleans. Jacob Meskin summarized his essay "Critique and the Search for Connection: On Levinas' Talmudic Readings" (see *TR* vol. 5 no. 2) and led a lively discussion on what Elliot Wolfson identified as a "Litvak" approach discernible in Levinas's reading of BT Menachot, 99b-100a. Problems highlighted were that of the rabbinic construction of the concept of continuity, as well as the proper time of dedicating oneself to the study of Greek wisdom.

— The Association for Jewish Studies meeting in Boston was an occasion to see a number of our members in action. We may want to consider having some kind of informal meeting on those occasions, too, which could serve also as an introduction of TEXTUAL REASONING to those members of the AJS who are not yet familiar with it or have formed unfounded opinions about our discussions and approaches. If anyone has a creative idea about how to go about presenting ourselves more plausibly to the broader audiences at the AJS and at the meetings of other learned (or not so learned) societies (e.g., the Eastern and Western Divisions of the APA), let us know. Any initiative that can help us to broaden our base and widen intellectual horizons is welcome.

— For the AAR conference in 1997, we plan to have a study session on Jewish mysticism. Pinhas Giller has volunteered to lead this session. Please check the upcoming issues of TR for more information.

— A reminder of the upcoming conference:
TEXTUAL REASONING: AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND RABBINIC TEXT READING JUNE 15-17, 1996 – DREW UNIVERSITY, MADISON, NJ

The conference has the following proposed schedule.

Sunday
12-2pm Registration and Lunch

2:30 Opening Addresses: Textual Theme for the Conference: Talmud Torah

3-5:30 First Session: TALMUD
Torah as feminine: feminization of rabbinic study
First Presenter: Daniel Boyarin
Group Break-Out Sessions
First Respondent: Robert Gibbs
Session Chair and Second Respondent: Susan Handelman

6-8pm Dinner with music and midrash

8-9:30pm Beginnings: A Panel on Emergent Methods in Text Study
Chair: Shaul Magid
Presenters: Charlotte Fonrobert
Maeera Schreiber
Miriam Peskowitz

Monday
9-10:30 am Second Session: BIBLE
Torah Revealed (diber, amar…)
First Presenter: Tikvah Frymer-Kensky
First Respondent: Virginia Burrus (patristics scholar)
Session Chair and Second Respondent: Aryeh Cohen

11-1:30pm Third Session: MIDRASH
Talmud torah as prayer?
First Presenter: Michael Fishbane
Group Break-Out Sessions
First Respondent: Steven Fraade
Session Chair and Second Respondent: Steven Kepnes
Plenary Discussion

3:30-5pm Fourth Session: TALMUD

Re-membering Torah: Chat'u yisroel (they forgot and they remembered)–??
First Presenter: David Weiss Halivni
First Respondent: Menachem Loberbaum
Session Chair and Second Respondent: Peter Ochs

Panel of Christian Theologian-Respondents
George Lindbeck, David Ford, Daniel Hardy

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE WRITE TO:
POCHS@DREW.EDU

****

RESTATING ETHICAL MONOTHEISM: A DISCUSSION OF LENN E. GOODMAN, *THE GOD OF ABRAHAM*

Introduction: Michael Zank

THE RESPONSES
1. Allan Arkush
2. Goodman's Response to Arkush
3. David B. Burrell, C.S.C.
4. Menachem Kellner
5. David Weininger

INTRODUCTION
The following is a collective review of Lenn Evan Goodman, *God of Abraham*, (Oxford, New York, etc.: Oxford University Press, 1995). More accurately, perhaps, it is the beginning of a conversation on what may safely be deemed one of the most interesting recent Jewish philosophical books. This essay is composed of several readers' reactions and a few words by the author in return. Some of the participants have written more formal reviews elswhere which will not be duplicated here. When we

asked the authors to respond to *God of Abraham* we did not solicit the formal and polite kind of academic chat that usually goes under the heading of review but rather asked for strong statements on Goodman's formidable defense of ethical monotheism. Still, for those who have not yet read the book, some introductory information may be useful.

Versed in a number of areas, ranging from anthropology to analytical philosophy, from classical philology to medieval and contemporary Jewish thought, Goodman argues for the relevance of a core concept of Judaism for the contemporary discourse on morality and ethics. God of Abraham is an argument for the perennial validity of ethical monotheism. Although the author argues with and from within the Jewish sources, his work is anything but sectarian or parochial. It can be read by anyone interested in the philosophical underpinnings of the idea of monotheism.

The scholarship is impeccable. It contains the fruit of twenty years of study and research which has long established Goodman at the core of such learned societies as the American Philosopical Association and the International Academy of Jewish Philosophy. Here, however, Goodman's scholarship coalesces with a passion for the kind of ethical thought which many perceive as the quintessence of Judaism.

The work is densely, sometimes almost aphoristically, written without, however, being obscure. It is tightly argued and packed with insights worth meditating, and may serve as a sophisticated exposition of Jewish thought from the Bible to the present.

The book is divided in eight chapters, dealing, respectively, with (1) The Logic of Monotheism, (2) The Existence of God, (3) Monotheism and Ethics, (4) The Doable Good: The Individual and the Community, (5) Ethical Monism and Ethical Pluralism, (6) Monotheism and Ritual, (7) The Biblical Laws of Diet and Sex, and (8) Time, Creation, and the Mirror of Narcissus.

The first chapter develops the characteristics of biblical monotheism on the background of considerations on myth, natural religion, magic, and the development of Greek philosophy. The biblical source at the center of the argument is Genesis 22. Goodman's explanation of the famous story of the Sacrifice of Isaak — or, as it is called in the Jewish tradition, the Akeda, or Binding, of Isaak — is ingenious and demonstrates why one should not assume with Kierkegaard that Abraham should be considered the father of a religious faith that begins where moral reasoning comes to an end. Goodman's "God of Abraham" is liberated from the Christian juxtaposition of "Gesetz und Evangelium." (But see Weininger, below!)

The question of biblical cosmogony and its relation to morality also receives its first consideration here, a topic more prominently dealt with at the end of the book. The first chapter culminates in passages on the psychological and critical functions of ethical monotheism, in a critique of Christianity, and in a characterization of monotheistic prayer.

Chapter 2 addresses the classic arguments against theistic faith and the problem of proofs for the existence of God. Here Goodman deals with authors such as Hick, Alston, Berkeley, Hume, Schlick and Carnap, Descartes, Kant, Ayer, Russell, Quine, Findlay, and Leibniz.

Following this critique of arguments against the assertion of God's existence, Chapter 3 asks for answers which the monotheistic idea of God provides to the following questions:

1. "Can any mere existence have practical, moral relevance?" I.e., is there a connection between facts and values? And "Is the idea of God no more than a projection of our moral demands and spiritual longings?"

2. How do you get from a universal imperative to specific and concrete commandments? Furthermore, if specific and particular imperatives are imbued with divine sanction, how do you avoid fanaticism?

3. What is the relation between divinely imposed obligation and "the autonomy crucial to moral agency?"

In Goodman's view, the specific modulation Jewish monotheism provides for ethics concerns the correlation between individual dignity and responsibility for others ("equity and equality"), concretization of obligations, and a particular interest in the "integration" of interests which are otherwise at variance. (cf. pp. 100ff)

If Chapter 3 operates on the basis of some general assumptions and problems concerning ethics, Chapter 4 begins to explore the major bodies of Jewish literature more inductively asking for their inner coherence or their underlying contribution to the ethical implications of monotheism.

Here Goodman deals successively with what he calls "three basic idioms", namely the "Mosaic, Prophetic, and Rabbinic." (p. 116) The theme guiding this review of the classical sources is the relation between individual and community.

Goodman focuses his account of the moral implications of the Mosaic constitution on the institution of the Sabbath, here — not surprisingly — understood as the quintessence of social morality. Reminiscences of the liberation from slavery and the institution of norms of equity and justice go hand in hand in the Mosaic law. Goodmann determines the "fundamental social commandment of the Mosaic corpus" in the commandment to "Love thy neighbor as thyself." (p.122) Similarly unsurprising in content but no less elegantly and wittily presented — including some more contemporary elements such as the focus on the sexual imagery used by the prophets — are the chapter on prophetic social criticism and on the work of the rabbis.

If the author fails to aspire to originality in any of these three parts of his presentation of the sources, he nevertheless manages to give a sharp profile of what has been the consensus among liberal Jewish scholars for

the past one hundred years, deviations and disagreements in the detail notwithstanding. The summary of this review, however, reveals that the political agenda has shifted. Goodman argues namely for a combination of economic liberalism and mutual solidarity for the sake of providing the condition for each individual to pursue human perfection. In Goodman's words: "If we draw together and sum up the values we encounter in the Mosaic, Prophetic, and Rabbinic norms about the individual and the community, we find economic autonomy as the root and fruit of freedom. (…E)conomic autonomy underwrites spiritual dignity and intellectual independence (…). And it is the perfection of the human subject that the Law pursues." (p. 139f.) Goodman's argument, therefore, does not simply walk on well-trodden ground but it ends in a set of rather apt descriptions of the categories by which halakha establishes human dignity. So, for example, "strict legalism and proceduralism" are seen as serving "not just the social order but (…) individual rights, conceived in terms of positive human deserts of well-being and of privacy." (p. 140) Goodman, thus, successfully exemplifies how a scholar of religion may describe the phenomenological structure of a particular community truthfully out of observations on the construction of moral values within specific literary, ritual, and social contexts.

Chapter 5 continues the survey of Jewish sources by discussing two medieval views on ethics, one monistic (Maimonides), the other pluralistic (Saadia). Goodman, as can be expected, argues for a compromise between the two extreme positions.

Chapter 6 raises the issue of the relation between ritual and moral obligations. Here Goodman deals with Marvin Fox's critique of Saadia's concept of rational commandments and, again, with Maimonides. More centrally, however, Goodman presents his own tentative "Philosophy of Ritual" (pp. 193ff), ritual defined here as "a symbolic action that has values among the objects of its intension and that expresses attitudes toward those values through the modalities of its performance." (p. 211) The argument for the rationality of rituals arrives at this general conclusion by

way of an extended and often personal meditation on prayer, symbolism, law, and the way in which meaning is constructed within a society. All this ends in a defense of the rationality of all commandments against Fox's restrictive concept of rationality (p. 212).

In Chapter 7, the author brings his anthropological interests to bear on the discussion of the biblical laws concerning diet and sexuality. These laws which seem to constitute the most archaic part of the Torah are interpreted in light of their intention to "frame an ethos." (p. 215) The book would not have been complete without such an exploration of the very concrete ways in which ethos is established in Judaism by imposing bondaries and separations onto human conduct by virtue of the imposition of the categories of *tum'ah* (impurity) and *tahara* (purity). Goodman emphasizes the fact that the way in which the Pentateuch declares things as pure or impure is characterized by an "overlap" in levels of meaning associated with this pair of categories. Namely, purity/impurity concerns a continuum of aspects ranging from "homogeneous/adulterated" to "hygienically clean/unclean" to "suitable/unsuitable food" to "suitable/unsuitable conjugally" to "suitable/unsuitable for sacrificial use" to "morally acceptable/unacceptable" to "spiritually elevated (kadosh)/spiritually impure." (cf. p. 216, abbreviated) Further topics explored here are "Incest, Violation, and Personhood" (pp. 219ff) and "Blood and Symbolic Violence" (pp. 223ff), general remarks on how the Torah constructs religion (pp. 226ff), prohibited species (pp. 230ff), and circumcision (pp. 233ff).

The final chapter turns to the problem of metaphysics, dealing with aspects of contingency, design, and newness as elements of the assumption of the createdness of the world. The aim is here to argue for the plausibility of creation. Modern cosmology is reviewed here, too, yet the fact that the Big-Bang theory is cited in support of their position by creationists plays only a minor role in this intricate discussion. Hypotheses about the origin of the universe are but one among other

arguments which are reviewed in order to show how one can arrive at the conclusion that it is most reasonable to assume that the world is created.

Goodman utilizes the concept of time developed by Henri Bergson in order to argue for the openness of the future from its determination by the past. The concept of time Goodman favors corresponds to our intuitive experience of the thickness and asymmetry of time. The duration of the present is relative, depending on whose presence it is. It comes to an end with the conclusion of the event it measures, namely at the moment that the event slips into a past which is fullly determined.

With creation is associated the notion of creativity which characterizes human beings in particular. A variety of arguments from scientific, philosophical, and literary sources converge to enhance this notion. The creativity of God seems to function here again as a regulative idea, preventing our taking ourselves as divine. ("The Mirror of Narcissus" pp. 266ff)

So far the content of the book. The very scope of issues dealt with by Goodman is daunting and commands our attention. It should be clear from the outset that the responses given below are only first attempts to address a few of the theses described above. We had hoped to publish these responses together with contrasting statements by Lenn himself. However, this project was halted, at least temporarily, by the death of Madeleine Goodman. This issue of *Textual Reasoning* is dedicated to her memory.

(Note: Michael Zank's above survey of the contents of *God of Abraham* is adapted from "The God of Sinai, the God of Creation, and the God of Abraham: Three Recent Books in Jewish Philosophy" in *Modern Judaism* vol. 16 (1996), pp. 291-316)

1. RESPONSE: ALLAN ARKUSH

I find the picture Lenn Goodman paints in God of Abraham as well as in his other works to be in many respects a very appealing one: An inspiring but unobtrusive God, no divine "browbeating", no trace of any apocalyptic eschatology, the restoration of a non-elitist teleology, the repudiation of moral relativism without the renunciation of pluralism, an approach to Jewish law that is fully compatible with untrammeled human autonomy and, indeed, with liberal democracy.

I like to hear Goodman's voice. In complete correspondence to the teaching it transmits, it is both serene and sober. Goodman is gentle but firm in his (never pedantic) disputes with others. And while he may sometimes overwrite, he more often speaks with astonishing and deeply moving eloquence.

Goodman shows the way to be both free and Jewish — not residually Jewish, not merely essentially Jewish, but thoroughly Jewish, a link in the chain of tradition. He makes this an attractive choice — but still only a choice, not an obligation. For the Torah, for Goodman, is not God-given but God-inspired. It provides a way to know God and to live with God, but by no means the only way or even the way in which an individual Jew has a duty to live.

What if one of us were to come to Goodman and say the following: I find your natural theology irresistible. I recognize that you stop short of affirming the certainty of God's existence, but the case you make for it is powerful enough for me. I think you're right about human perfection, too. I'm happy now to view the universe as you have portrayed it and to strive to attain perfection by pursuing the path you have outlined — but I don't see any reason why I should have to do so within the context of a Jewish community living in accordance with Jewish law. I can grope my way toward perfection by myself, or rather, as nothing other than an American.

If I understand him correctly, Goodman's response to such a visitor would be to say that there is indeed no reason why he should have to take his

place in the Jewish world. But he shouldn't delude himself into thinking that by disencumbering himself of his Jewishness he will obtain a better shot at perfection. He will do so, on the contrary, if he stays within his tradition. As Goodman puts it on page 93 of God of Abraham: "what presents itself to us as the word of God, for moral purposes, is not the sheer epiphany of the Absolute, but the mediated ideal of humanity, as specified morally and prescribed culturally in laws and traditions, literary models and systems of practice. True, we need not, indeed we cannot, accept or reject all that we receive en bloc, but we do receive and respond to integrated and concatenated systems of norms, not isolated precepts, which would have little meaning on their own. Part of the integration of such norms is their historical, ethnic, communal embeddedness, and part of their concatenation is their linkage to religious ideals and a heritage of shared experience, thought, and values, including ideas about the divine." Why should one abandon one's inherited place in such a system when it has so many benefits attached to it?

This is, in the abstract, a powerful argument. And it only gains in strength through Goodman's analysis of the specifics of Jewish law and his elucidation of their utility. This is not to say that what Goodman has to say would necessarily suffice to regain the Jewish loyalty of our hypothetical visitor, but it could almost certainly neutralize any objections he might have to the preservation of Jewish tradition, at least by people other than himself.

What I find difficult to imagine, though, is a community of such people upholding and developing Jewish tradition while understanding it more or less as Goodman does — as divine in inspiration but altogether human in origin, and malleable enough to be adjusted to fit all of our moral requirements. In most people's minds, a commandment interpreted as Goodman understands it will not be a commandment at all but merely an advisable policy. And it is hard to imagine advisable policies winning out in the long run against the Evil Inclination.

(Allan Arkush is Associate Professor of Judaic Studies at SUNY Binghamton)

2. LENN GOODMAN'S RESPONSE TO ALLAN ARKUSH

Naturally, I am flattered at the warm response that Allan offers to the picture I have painted in God of Abraham, and I'm glad that he sees it as a picture. A philosopher, in my view can do no more. My "but" comes where his does. He wants to know what reason I can offer to one who finds my natural theology not only serene and sober but also irresistible, yet still finds in it no reason to remain (let alone become) a Jew, living in the Jewish community, committed to its norms and values, etc. He finds me stating such a reason when I urge (on p. 93) the powerful efficacy of Judaism as an integrated system of values and ideas that is discarded or neglected only at one's cost. That might secure tolerance or even support for the Jewish project as a focus for others, but it will not secure commitment, Arkush argues; it will not sustain the communal life of a people. The existential sense of Jewish identity and the categorical rather than prudential force of the mitzvot are missing, and the absence of the former, Arkush suggests, accounts for the absence of the latter.

I think that much of what Arkush says is right. Yet I differ with him in the end. Let me start by saying what I think my job is as a practitioner of Jewish philosophy. The analysis of existential commitments is not part of that job, as I see it. I take such commitments to be primary and primitive. There is nothing that I can reduce them to, and I do not think that even if I could analyze such commitments that kind of talk would do anything to enhance such commitments in my readers. There are plenty of writers who can massage and appeal to, titillate or offend such commitments, but I don't think that amounts to philosophy. I can develop reasons that I think would help people to make sense of the Jewish commitments that they find in themselves or others (parents, friends, their own children), but I don't know how to do an a priori deduction of Yiddishkeit, and I have lots of reasons to believe that such a project would fail if attempted.

I hold what I have not yet publicly called a vaginal theory of Jewish identity, if the subject must be broached. That is, it is our mothers who make us Jews and who make us willing or unwilling to confine our libidinous and procreative attentions (one of the great discoveries of the 20th century, besides that of atomic energy, was that these are not necessarily the same) to others of our own nation. Mothers do not, I have noted, generally elaborate arguments in behalf of either aspect of their role in this regard. That is, they make us Jewish without telling us why we should be so, except perhaps with circularity, urging that if we do not, the future of the Jewish people is in jeopardy. Nor do they justify the more restrictive aspect of their role. The grounds they give for discouraging, say, intermarriage, or interfaith dating, are similarly suppositious.

I do not take these facts, if and when they are facts, as evidence of irrationality or primitivism, chauvinism or the like on the part of mothers. I take them as evidence that questions of identity are existential questions and as a result, not very successfully reduced to terms other than their own. This does not bother me, any more than any other affirmation of an identity or project bothers me until I know what the identity or project is about. It is at that point, in my view, that Jewish philosophy, at least as I practice it, gets into the act.

I cannot tell someone why to be Jewish, and I'm very dubious that others will have much success either in answering that question. Once the matter has been problematized and the issue has been raised as a question something precious has already been lost. What I can try to do, and what I have tried to do in several places is to address the question that arises first in my own case, "How can I be Jewish?" and to answer it in ways that might prove satisfying intellectually, morally and aesthetically — and even serene and sober — to others.

That is, I am Jewish. The question is, what can I make of that? The answer that I find is in terms of the intellectual adequacy and moral strength of the Jewish tradition, articulated as a living and integrated way of life for

individuals and for a community in interaction with other individuals and other communities. A dialectic of selectivity will be necessary, from which emerges what I have called critical appropriation of what is viable an survivable in the tradition. Our reason and our moral sense are vital in that dialectic, but they are not infallible and should be laid open to learn from the tradition. Of course, we can learn from any tradition. And we have done. But the practical and conceptual benefits of coherence should not be ignored. Not everything that we can understand can be fitted into our lives — or should be.

Part of my intention, when I do Jewish philosophy is to leave the tradition richer than I find it. The tradition and its history have already proved themselves worthy of the effort, on my behalf and that of others.

Rival traditions have their problems, and I am not so ecumenical as to avoid pointing them out, when it is not out of place to do so. But I would be very far from saying that a sincere adherent of another faith could not find the good life (or, for that matter, that all sincere adherents of Judaism have found it). That would be silly. Judaism is a way to the good life, and in many ways for many people the most adequate there is. I don't think more needs to be said for it than that. If I find the value of Judaism (along with its intellectual and moral affinities to other traditions), I've given a name and a reason to what it is that Jewish mothers, with a powerful life-preserving emotion, are trying to defend. I've said something about why it's worth defending, and about how we can differentiate what it is in it that is indeed worth defending, and what ought rightfully to be uprooted.

As Arkush clearly sees, addressing questions of this kind, about pluralism and Judaism requires one who has any sense and is not simply a bigot or an ethnic mystic to steer a course between relativism (which in Judaism amounts to a death wish) and atavism. That is something I have tried to do in passages like the one that Arkush cites. I don't find any value in anything simply because its Jewish. But I do find lots of value in Judaism and in Jewish commitment, communal and personal, because of what

Judaism has to say and do; because of the mission of the Jewish people, which has been well articulated (far more articulately and concretely worked out than any other ethnic mission), lived for and died for, and shown itself to be worthy of the sacrifices made in its behalf, both as a way of thinking and as a way of life.

I'll close with a piece of Euclidean and a piece of post-modern advice for other philosophers. From Euclid we learn not to try to analyze the elemental. From the post-moderns, that what is elemental is a matter of perspective. To which I would add only that a good philosopher, like a good painter, needs a good sense of perspective, that is, needs to know what to take as a primitive and what to seek to derive.

3. DAVID BURRELL, C.S.C: ON THE VIABILITY OF GOODMAN'S ARGUMENT

I have reviewed the book for Modern Theology, setting forth there my immense appreciation of this extended inquiry in philosophical theology. Philosophically, LEG shows how reason must operate in a living context, and illustrates how that can work when the context is a faith-tradition. Religiously, he argues persuasively for the witness of the Torah as a living context for God's rational creatures, showing them how to respond wholeheartedly in the midst of life for the gracious gift of that life. His scholarly grounding in Islamic classics is evident throughout, as well as their influence on his understanding of reason in context, however critical he may be of certain Islamic intellectual syntheses. With regard to the other Abrahamic faith, Christianity, he avoids having to display its intellectual integration of cognate issues, allowing himself to be guided by Moses Maimonides, and so dispensing himself from having to trace the Rambam's further reaches into Aquinas. As one familiar with the territory, and especially of the use to which Aquinas put his Jewish and Islamic predecessors, I can detect only two gaffs in presenting the Christian tradition, and neither of these affects the thesis of the book: an oblique reference to God's having "three distinct natures"(35)–a term assiduously avoided in trinitarian doctrine, and a few allusions to "original sin" which

overlook the spectrum of views among Christians on that matter as well as the functional analogues in both Judaism (yetzer ra') and Islam (jhiliyya). What profoundly unites the Abrahamic faiths, however, serves as the very leitmotif of his study: the free creation of the universe by one God, highlighting the freedom of rational creatures to respond to that original gracious gift.

So what misgivings I have concern not the truth of LEG's thesis so much as its viability. But since the truth it intends is a practical one, they may be telling. Allow me to clarify my own context before beginning. I am writing these reflections in the Monastir Stavroulakis in Hania (Crete) after a brief but intense visit with friends in Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the wake of the recent Israeli elections, composing them on the Catholic feast of Corpus Christi, one of the great "fulfillment" feasts, whose readings from Deuteronomy and from John 6 emphasize God's nourishing those whom God loves as his own. Allow me to begin with the more theological perspective, for it may also shed light on the socio-political reading.

In the course of John 6, Jesus makes explicit reference to Israel's journey of faith in the desert, with God sustaining them with manna ("bread from heaven"), before asserting that he is "the living bread that came down from heaven"(Jo 6:51). Furthermore, by contrast with the manna in the desert, "whoever eats of this bread will live forever," and "the bread that [he] will give for the life of the world is [his very] flesh." If the contrast with Exodus is stark–"they died, but the one who eats this bread will live forever"(6:59); manna is merely bread while this bread is Jesus' own flesh (i.e., a living symbol of his death and resurrection); and the manna was sent to Israel while the bread that is Jesus offers life to the entire world–nonetheless the comparison is intended to be as compelling. For as manna was food for Israel in the desert, so Jesus' flesh (his death and resurrection rendered present) is food for everyone who follows him; and as Israel's journey was one of faith in a promise to God's own people consequent upon a divine act of liberation, so anyone's life can become a journey of faith in a promise open to all, consequent upon the death and resurrection

of Jesus which opens a path for everyone to think effectively of their life as a "return to the Father" from whom all gifts come, beginning with creation.

What spans the contrast is the invitation to see one's life as a journey with God in faith, yet a difference in scope and in modality dominates John 6. A word on the gospel of John might be apropos, because of its touted "anti-semitism." The ubiquitous reference to "the Jews," notably in John's passion narrative, has in fact triggered Good Friday pogroms throughout history. Yet scripture scholars, beginning with Augustine, took this expression–ambiguous in its reference as between the entire people or "the Judeans," the reigning aristocracy–to refer to the "leaders of the people," the phrase authorized by the bishops of Canada for liturgical reading of the passion narrative. The phrase cited here, however, "for the life of the world," is a deliberate Johannine contrast between the revelation of God on Sinai to Jews and God's revelation in the Jew Jesus to all human beings. In a similar vein, John 12 frames Caiphas' cynical response to the problem which Jesus created for "the Judeans" ruling at Rome's leave ("it is better that one man die for the sake of the nation"), editorializing: "he said this not of himself but as high priest, so that all God's people might be gathered into one." So the John who clearly asserted that "salvation comes from the Jews" now emphasizes how that salvation enjoys a vastly enhanced scope. And this is what returns us to LEG's thesis concerning the Torah as providing a living context for rational creatures to return all to the One from who we have received all: to ask whether that need be the only way? And while the Torah is clearly paradigmatic for LEG and his tradition, and instructively so for anyone who has come to appreciate the riches of that tradition, nevertheless other paradigms do exist for guiding one's response to the gift of creation–specifically those within the Abrahamic family of faiths: Christianity and Islam.

I shall deliberately avoid explicit comparison with Islam here, for the sake of brevity, but I shall contend that the promise of Jesus, sealed by his death and resurrection, immeasurably increased the scope of the original

promise to Abraham, and that so universal a scope portends a different mode of patterning the response of faith to the promise so renewed. Indeed, reference in Genesis to offspring abundant as the stars in a desert sky offered one more impulse to early Christians to read Abraham as their father as well. The sense that a promise universal in scope calls for a different mode of patterning one's response was presaged by the existential judgment of Jewish believers in Jesus when they had to ask themselves whether pagans who had adopted "the Way" should be circumcised or not. With that single decision, Jesus' followers became a successor faith to Israel, interpreting their Abrahamic parentage no longer literally in generational terms but metaphorically–or as the early church writers tended to put it, "spiritually." Yet parentage they would claim (as would Qur'an believers as well), assuming the title of "new Israel," so provocative to Jews (especially with the interpretation given it in the Letter to the Hebrews) yet utterly essential to Christians' sense of the continuity of the divine promise.

Why dispense with circumcision? One could retrospectively generate a plethora of reasons, but one complex consideration may suffice to guide our reflections: the new promise is rooted not in a people, one by physical generation, but in a faith open to all peoples, so it must be open to diverse tangible signs of incorporation. Potentially open to all human beings, and so to all peoples or nations, Christian faith could not allow its rootedness in one culture to hinder its taking root in others. Here we may find the rationale for two infelicitous contrasts: the early church's predilection for spiritual versus material, as well as the Enlightenment's recourse to universal versus particular. Yet pace Hegel, any tradition will exhibit the need for particular patterns, which is at the heart of LEG's thesis, but a faith open to all cultures must allow for differences in those patterns. I am particularly beholden here to Karl Rahner's prescient 1979 lecture, variously reprinted and dubbed his "worldchurch" thesis, in which he offered a fresh periodization of Christian history, fixing 70 and 1970 as symbolic dates bracketing nineteen centuries of western European Christianity, noting how the initial decisive point, turning on circumcision

and marking the "parting of the ways" of the new faith from its parent faith, has been matched by a contemporary one, wherein Christianity is now facing other major world religions as dialogue partners. While the missionary movement of modern times had no explicit rationale for respecting cultural differences, and much attendant political motivation for disdaining them, those who had discovered ways in practice of enculturating Christian faith found themselves finding Christ as much or more than bringing him to the rich cultures which they encountered. In anticipation of "reader-response" criticism, the response of their listeners gave them a fresh outlook on Jesus and of the gospel teaching.

So while LEG's thesis challenges the false polarities of patristic and Enlightenment Christian apologetics, the paradigmatic character of that thesis, linked as it is to the Torah and its history of commentary, is challenged by Jews who harkened to the voice of Jesus as fulfilling what they had long heard. What supplants the Torah for these peoples? What could? Nothing, of course, except the Word of God, since only God's word can possible abrogate other words of God. So the gospel replaces the scriptures? Hardly, yet Jesus can fulfill them in such a way that portions of them cease to be paradigmatic for his followers throughout a world redolent of many nations. New patterns will be taken from Jesus' own life and practice. Again John can be our guide: after washing his disciples' feet on the eve of his own death by crucifixion, Jesus tells them: "You call me Lord and master, as indeed I am. But as I have washed your feet, so you are to wash one another's feet" (Jo 13). He will also commission them in a unique way, by reminding them that they should no longer regard themselves as his servants but his friends, and on the strength of that bond they must "go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last" (Jo 15:15). Who would dare tell a group consisting largely of sturdy males to go out–not to do great deeds, but–to "bear fruit," unless it be the very one who made himself bread for us, thereby calling us as well to become bread for others?

A second take on LEG's thesis is stimulated by my recent visit to Bethlehem and Jerusalem, in the wake of the recent Israeli elections. For

not only does he present the Torah as the paradigmatic context for returning all to the One who graciously bestows all, but what is presented is one paradigm for that community. As my friend Stanley Hauwerwas, whose ethics is staunchly ecclesiocentric, is constantly challenged: where is this church of which you speak?, so we may press our friend Lenn Goodman: which Torah-community? This can hardly be a fatal question for a Jew, of course, who must be adept at responding to the plurality endemic to Judaism. But his thesis deserves a fresh look in the light of the state of Israel and the new Jewish identity forged there in the past half-century. One cannot help but contrast the community which LEG delineates with respect to the Torah's concern for "the stranger" with attitudes towards "the other" which predominate in Israel. One could easily respond by appealing to the ideal versus real canard, of course, but I shall contend that there is something more specific at stake. It seems to be inherently tied to the dream of a "Jewish state," whose outworking accentuates all the ambiguities in that phrase, replete with its potential for conflicting interpretations. Using LEG's own discussion of the corrosive influence of a contextless form of reason on the Torah and its hold on the community, and especially its efficacity in forging a community (184-85), it would seem that fears attendant upon a rational presentation of the Torah, exhibited by Yesheyahu Leibowitz and others, are minor in comparison with the parallel promise of a modern (Jewish) state! (And those who know Leibowitz' writings and attitudes toward the pretensions of the state should be quick to note that just such a context may have motivated his thought quite decisively.)

Faced with the lure of a Jewish state, why not transmute Torah observance into efforts to make that dream a reality? As a young diaspora Jew casually remarked, contrasting his observance in England with his own and others' in Israel, "why go to synagogue in Israel?" (American Catholics can note a similar attitude in Italians towards their faith: if it's in the blood stream, why bother to participate in Sunday mass? And there is the fact often observed about United States Jewry: that concern for the state of Israel can all too easily assume the focus of their observance.) But what is that

dream? In what does the vision of a Jewish state consist? That vexed question was underscored by the recent election as its results displayed the variety of answers to it. One way to present my analysis is to recall that the conventional polarities in Israeli society–secular versus religious–are not on all fours with those in the disapora: assimilated versus observant. For "assimilate" can carry the connotation it does in the diaspora only when it envisages a foreign, that is, a non-Jewish culture. But when the context is a Jewish state, the dream or the promise requires a consensus, however overlapping or pluralistic, and the elections told my "secular" friends that their dream was emphatically not the consensus. So much so that they feel disenfranchised, divorced from their state, that is, the state of their dreams. (A friend reminded me how apt is the image of divorce here, as his recent trauma had forced him above all to give up the dream of what their marriage together could have been.)

In this case, of course, the "others" who won the right to set the agenda and to define the terms of public debate (by a firm Knesset majority) were not goyim but other Jews, notably "religious" Jews with a set of priorities for a Jewish state quite different from theirs. Furthermore, the difference turns decisively on convictions which my friends have long associated with their Jewish heritage, and which figure prominently in LEG's depiction of the Torah as a context for human life as well–especially regarding "others," which translates into "peace-making." The elections do not determine who has the more accurate reading and appraisal of that heritage, of course, but the differences which the elections display may lead thoughtful people to ask what criteria might decide such a question. Indeed, to wonder whether a "Jewish state" can be a coherent notion, or whether the particularity celebrated by LEG will not inevitably translate politically into we versus them? And where "them" has long been "the Arabs," now "them" must forcibly include Jews with conflicting visions for the (Jewish) state of Israel.

One is reminded here of Ren Girard's thesis regarding the origins of violence in societies: it can be traced paradigmatically to contradictions

latent in their founding (or obvious, as in case of the United States' Declaration of Independence and Constitution on recognizing slaves as human beings), as these work themselves out in subsequent generations. Those latent in the notion of a "Jewish state" can be variously identified, but two curiously cognate temptations emerge: the obvious one of turning the state into the vehicle which LEG has sketched out for normative Judaism, or alternatively, the parallel temptation that having a Jewish state makes such a vehicle redundant, so that what normative Judaism demanded and supplied can now be replaced by devotion to the state. The first fairly characterizes the nationalistic "religious right," while the latter portends a "secular" vision for Israel. The presence of both visions clearly portends unending conflict with "others" within or without, unless or until economic and political realities demand a series of rapprochements with others–within and without–to the point where a Jewish state is forced to become something more inclusive. Whether this be by way of a confederation or a Middle East common market, "they" must be included in "our" self-conception in such a way that the very notion of a "Jewish state" is relativized. By economic and political forces, I have suggested, since ideologies on the subject can only clash. (What turns out to be ironic in this formula, especially for those who regard political Islam as a retrograde pariah ideology, is that similar hopes have been entertained for its transformation.)

How are these reflections germane to LEG's thesis? In one sense, they are quite independent of it, since the issue of political Zionism does not emerge in his picture of normative Judaism. Yet it has come, of course, to dominate the Jewish ethos, and an impartial reader can hardly read his winning descriptions of the context which the Torah can supply for a humane community without being confronted with conflicting visions in Israel, the erstwhile Jewish state. It would hardly be strange had my friends, however "secular" they may have had to style themselves in the peculiar polarities generated by the "religious" [dati] sector of Israeli society, not assimilated a similar picture of their society, projecting it "religiously," one might say, onto their state, only to find that the majority

did not see it their way–or his. So the project of a Jewish state has taken the intramural debates regarding normative Judaism and cast them onto a political stage where lives are at stake. How can Lenn Goodman's thesis address this current impasse?

(David B. Burrell, C.S.C., is Hesburgh Professor of Philosophy and Theology, at the University of Notre Dame)

4. MENAHEM KELLNER ON THE AKEDAH, THE RABBIS, AND MAIMONIDES

Lenn Goodman's God of Abraham is a remarkable work. To my mind it will be read for generations and will more and more come to be seen as a modern-day guide for the perplexed. The book presents a vision of Judaism with such a richness of insight that Jews of all stripes (not to mention non-Jews) will be enriched by reading it. By showing the rationality inherent in Abrahamic monotheism, Goodman succeeds at the task which Hermann Cohen failed at in his religion of reason out of the sources of Judaism.

There are two small points and one larger point in the book with which I find myself in considerable disagreement. They do not really affect the wider thesis of the book at all but I present them here as a small contribution to the ongoing discussion which this book is bound to stimulate among monotheists, philosophers, and anthropologists.

The two small points relate to an interpretation of Maimonides and to Goodman's reading of the Akedah. Goodman interprets Maimonides as holding that all believers have a share in the world to come (p. 161). It can easily be shown (as I and others have done) that for Maimonides only the philosophically sophisticated enjoy a share in the world to come. This follows from Maimonides' adoption of the Aristotelian definition of human beings a rational animals. Only those born to human parents who actualize their intellectual potential are truly human and it is only humans who enter the world to come.

According to Goodman's very attractive reading of the Akedah story, Abraham passed his test by refusing to sacrifice his son Isaac. He thus proved that he had successfully internalized the logic of monotheism, which abhors human sacrifice. I personally would be very happy were this reading correct. Unfortunately, it does considerable violence to the biblical text. After the angel tells Abraham not to sacrifice Isaac, and after Abraham acquiesces (one need not be a parent to imagine with what relief), the angel continues: "And he said, Lay not your hand upon the lad, nor do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you did not withhold your son, your only son from me." The test clearly was to see whether or not Abraham would indeed sacrifice Isaac. This is brought out in the sequel, where the angel promises many rewards to Abraham, "because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son…" Abraham is rewarded for trying to sacrifice Isaac, not for refusing to sacrifice him.

I myself have often thought, but rarely said (after all, I do want my kids to get married!) that Abraham failed the test of the akedah because of his willingness to sacrifice Isaac. This proved that he had not truly understood the nature of the God of Abraham (in this I surely agree with Goodman). God learned that even the choicest of humans (as Halevi characterized Abraham) was not sufficiently sophisticated to realize that the last thing in the world that God would want was human sacrifice. Thus Abraham was not given the Torah and many generations had to pass before his descendents were sufficiently purified to receive it.

This discussion of the akedah brings me to my major point of disagreement with Goodman. He opens the book (p. vii) with the claim that, contra Pascal (and Halevi), "in Jewish tradition, the God of Abraham is the God of the philosophers and scholars, and Pascal's dichotomy between simple faith and reasoned inquiry is a false one." This claim is important to Goodman, since he wants to insist that Abraham (and all true monotheists after him) understood the true nature of God, as opposed to

experiencing it, or taking it as an object of naive faith. I think that his book would stand with a much weaker (and historically more accurate) claim, to wit that the idea of monotheism fully "unpacked" contains all that Goodman finds in it, but that the Patriarchs, Moses, the Prophets, and certainly the Tannaim and Amoraim did not themselves understand all, or even much of what is actually inherent in the notion of ethical monotheism.

Thus, Abraham did not know the God of Abraham as well as Maimonides did, and both Abraham and Maimonides together did not know the God of Abraham as well as Lenn Evan Goodman does.

The point to which I am objecting appears to be central to what Goodman is about his book and he returns to it often. Thus: "The idea of God, then, that emerges from moral experience and from contemplation of nature is that of a being of absolute Perfection. Preservation of this idea is the raison d'etre of Israel's ethnic continuity" (p. 31). The very language used here, "a being of absolute Perfection" (Goodman capitalizes the "p") is clearly foreign to biblical and rabbinic modes of expression and only makes sense in the context of Greek philosophy. So, too, his similar claim that "the mitzvot intend the Absolute" (p. 60). And again, "Monotheism is the belief, well grounded in our grasp of nature, that the divine is absolute and so not finite, nor contingent, or conditioned" (p. 78). Goodman wants to attribute such sentiments to Abraham, to Isaiah, to Rabbi Akiba. These are, for him, "the perennial norms that give unity to the Jewish project of defining what the God of Abraham expects of us" (p. 116). To my mind, he is simply reading Maimonides (and others) back into earlier strata of Judaism.

On the other hand, Goodman is right, I think, and this is the main message of his book, in claiming that "monotheism goes hand in hand with critical theology, a theology that examines the ideas it employs, and so continuously refines its concept of God, as the dynamic of the idea itself requires" (p. 33). But this very claim should allow him to agree with what

I wrote above, that Abraham's conception of God was less sophisticated than that of Maimonides, and Maimonides' conception of God was less sophisticated than that of Lenn Evan Goodman. I should like to note, by the way, that Maimonides himself would have no problem with the last part of this statement. He could easily admit that Goodman's metaphysics grows out of a more correct physics than his own and is thus truer.

Why do I object to this thesis of Goodman's? It is, I think, simply false. This is hardly the place to go into a detailed account of how I think the Rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud approached theological issues (I take it up in detail in a forthcoming book, must a jew believe anything?) but Goodman seems to be imputing to them (and to the Patriarchs and the Prophets before them) a much more self-consciously theological stance than the texts support. His very use of the term "monotheism" (from the Greek, monos, "single" and theos, "god") connotes certain philosophical and theological conceptions about God which were never explicitly expressed in pre-medieval Judaism. Rabbenu Bahya ibn Paquda, and following him the Rambam, for example, were sure that to be a believer in one God a person had to understand certain ideas concerning the nature of that one-ness, ideas which derive clearly and directly from a philosophical universe of discourse. I simply do not understand why Lenn Goodman feels compelled to impute these ideas to Abraham, the Prophets, and the Rabbis.

There is a further reason why I am not happy with Lenn Goodman's way of presenting this issue. By reading Rambam back into the Rabbis as I take him to be doing, he gives support to a vision of Judaism (one to which he himself certainly does not subscribe) which makes possible theological definitions of Orthodoxy and consequent witch hunts. The view of Judaism which, it appears to me, Goodman inadvertently accepts makes possible statements like the following (by Rabbi Dr J David Bleich): "One widespread misconception concerning Judaism is the notion that Judaism is a religion which is not rooted in dogma." Dogma, for Bleich, is a "fulcrum of Judaism" and "does not stand apart from the normative

demands of Judaism but is the sine qua non without which other values and practices are bereft of meaning." (These statements are drawn from J. David Bleich, *With Perfect Faith: The Foundations of Jewish Belief* [New York: Ktav, 1983], pp. 1-2.) Bleich's discussion rests upon the unarticulated assumption that the medieval Jewish philosophers (whom he cites) express views held by the Tannaim and Amoraim (whom he does not cite). Other Jews (not David Bleich!) use this (incorrect) assessment of the nature of rabbinic thought to justify the establishment of theological criteria of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, something the Tannaim and the Amoraim never did (but which Maimonides certainly did do).

The presentation of my discomfort here with Lenn Goodman's "theologification" of Patriarchal, Prophetic, and Rabbinic Judaism also explains why I cannot accept his reading of the akedah or his claims about Maimonides' willingness to accept non-philosophers into heaven (as if it were up to Maimonides!). Goodman's reading of the akedah imputes to Father Abraham a much more fully developed conception of ethical monotheism than we have any reason to suspect he actually held (or was held by the author of Genesis). His claims about Maimonides and places in the world to come for non-philosophers seek to sand off the rougher edges of Rambam's radical Aristotelian reading of Judaism and allow him back into the mainstream of ethical monotheism that Lenn Goodman sees as the leitmotif of Judaism from its very inception.

Goodman, as I understand him, wants to show the rationality inherent in Abrahamic monotheism. I certainly agree with him about that (after all we both agree that Judaism was revealed by God and we both worship a God who does nothing arbitrarily, who is absolutely perfect and intends only good for creation). Where we part company is his further claim that this inherent rationality was explicitly understood by Abraham, Isaiah and Akiba. I do not think that he has to make that claim, I do not think that it is true, and I think that it lends itself to misuse.

The funny thing about all this is that by outward criteria I am probably "frummer" than my cherished friend Lenn Goodman, while in this review I have expressed opinions that would probably be found "less frum" than those of Lenn Goodman's by many Orthodox Jews today. (That they would be wrong counts for very little, of course, in today's Jewish world.)

(Menachem Kellner is Dean of Students and Wolfson Chair of Jewish Thought at the University of Haifa, Israel)

5. DAVID G. WEININGER: GOODMAN AND KIERKEGAARD

Lenn Goodman's project in *God of Abraham* is vast; to say that it seeks to detail the theological foundations for a Jewish ethical monotheism doesn't really give one an idea of the richness and density of his book. As is fitting to his topic, LEG finds himself in dialogue and in conflict at every stage with the philosophical and religious tradition from which his project originates. In fact, his disagreements with his predecessors in philosophical theology are among the most illuminating points of his work. Among these, one of the most revealing is his debate" with S. Kierkegaard over the reading of the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22.

Since LEG's reading is framed as a response, we should remind ourselves of SK's famous interpretation of the binding of Isaac. In *Fear and Trembling* SK sees Abraham's decision as nothing less than an affront to the ethical mind. The patriarchal figure emerges as one who stands outside of traditional–i.e. Kantian–morality, regarded as the element of *universalization* inherent in moral law. The key to his act is that Abraham asserts the *particularity* of his act over against the generalization of ethical duty. This privileging of the individual SK infamously names *faith*: "Faith is precisely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal…." (55) Hence, "[Abraham] acts by virtue of the absurd," because his act seems to so directly flout moral law. (56)

Thus, SK represents the whole story as a *temptation*, inasmuch as "the temptation is the ethical itself, which would hold [Abraham] back from doing God's will." (60) This is one of the clearest expressions of the nexus formed by ethics/faith/God: Abraham serves God by asserting a faith that *of necessity* carries an antinomial relationship to the ethical. We should note that the similarities between the two interpreters are conspicuous, given the disparity of their respective conclusions. Both LEG and SK are monotheists, and both wish to preserve the absolute character of divinity. And both see in Genesis 22 a potentially tremendous propraedeutic value–that is, they see its educational (in the sense of the German word *Bildung*) potential as overriding the question of its status as historical event. Finally, both are concerned with the implications of the story–and especially with the figure of Abraham–for
ethics and its relationship to religion.

However a close look at *God of Abraham* discloses the depth of the divergence between the two. To start with, LEG sees the event as a trial, but not a temptation to Abraham: "For some tests are demonstrations: they discover not new knowledge for the deviser of the trial but new understanding *to* observers and recipients of its report." (21) This trial is intended for Abraham to discover via his own experience the limits of his devotion. This assumption is crucial for LEG's argument: only by supposing that it was *solely* as a demonstration for humanity's own benefit–through Abraham–that God knew its outcome from the start can LEG hew to his conclusion that God who tolerates neither violence nor evil of any form. Hence the propraedeutic: "The reward of Abraham's steadfastness and trust in God's justice is the public discovery of an Absolute that brooks no evil." (22)

Secondly, the fact that God entreated Abraham to sacrifice Isaac while an angel's words sufficed to halt the act is a key hermeneutic element for LEG. As he quotes Mendel of Kosov, "None but God can order us to take a life, but an angel suffices to demand that we save one–even if it contravenes divine command." (22) The decision to bind Isaac was made

after careful, deliberate reflection, but the determination to spare his life was made in the instant. God's command defied conventional reasoning, hence the edict must issue from the divine. Abraham's decision was made in the full knowledge of God's overriding love and goodness; hence it was *Abraham's* decision. So *only* an angel's interdiction was required for him to make the choice to spare Isaac. So, when revelation told Abraham two contradictory things, he acted alone but in conformity with what he knew to be God's inherent goodness. In this way we understand LEG's claim that Abraham's act was not one of "blind obedience," but of "moral insight," (22) for it is made on his own with divine *aid* rather than on divine *edict*: "Abraham's trial tested his conviction…by refining, strengthening, giving substance to his nascent conviction of God's goodness." (23)

Note that this is one of the strange points where LEG and SK seem to coincide and diverge: they seem to agree that Abraham's determination takes place in the moment of 'existential decision'; however, where SK sees that decision an assertion of irrational faith over an ethics of blind obedience, LEG sees the emergence of a faith strengthened and substantiated by knowledge of God's goodness. LEG admits that "Modern readers may come to the biblical account…from [SK's] famous meditation on the subject." (24) Perhaps unconsciously, LEG makes a very important statement about SK's version of the story: it is a reading that is characteristic of modernity; in this sense he is right that SK reads his own Protestant sense of faith onto the biblical narrative, as well as a very Kantian version of ethics. SK did seek to free the Genesis story from its context so as to preserve what he saw as its existential value; *Fear and Trembling* is written precisely as a response to modern notions of ethical life, not as an exercise in biblical hermeneutics. This brings us to one reason for preferring LEG's reading: his is a far more nuanced interpretation which sets itself out specifically as one component of a larger project with which it is consistent. One cannot see, however, how SK's interpretation could fit in with a reading of the Bible as a whole. To read the Bible as a grounding of ethics is a very plausible, if very daunting,

task; to read it *against* ethics seems rather incredulous. However, this should not detract from the force of SK's version of the story. As stated earlier, it is marked by its response to a prevalent early modern view of ethics, and signalled a clear departure from it. And that is one more characteristic which the two authors share, for it seems that LEG's project is a response to the need he sees today for a grounding of ethical monotheism, analogous to SK's argument for a conception of faith that would rescue the individual from its submission to universality. So, if we start by asking who has the "correct" interpretation of the Genesis story, we might do well to conclude by questioning whether we *need* one. It might be beneficial to see both interpretations as products of various stages of modernity, and as components in the very different overall products of two radically different thinkers.

(NB: Page references to Goodman are to *God of Abraham*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. References to Kierkegaard are to *Fear and Trembling*, trans. H. & E. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. In the discussion of Kierkegaard I was aided by James Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard*, Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1983.)

(David Weininger is a Ph.D. Student at the Department of Religion at Boston University)

****

TEXTUAL REASONING. THE JOURNAL OF THE POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY NETWORK VOLUME 5 (1996), NUMBER 4