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FOREWORD

L'shanah tovah!

For our shared work, this is a year pregnant with many new possibilities. We have many new plans and projects to tell you about, including a new Network Editorial Board with nine new Contributing Editors. But all we'll mention now is that our new Managing Editor is David Seidenberg of the Jewish Theological Seminary. The time to tell you about the rest is after the New Year, in our October/November issue, 4.4. For now, the present

(issue) is too full to leave room for (words about) the future! G'mar Hatimah Tovah!

Peter Ochs

CONTENTS
POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

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A Case Study in Jewish Ethics– Three Jewish Strategies for Solving Theodicy

Norbert M. Samuelson, Temple University

Prima facie the answer to the question, "Can there be a Jewish ethics" is, "Of course, why not?"[1] There are two parts to this answer: "of course," and "why not?" The "of course" part is that Jewish thought and life are filled with both prescribing moral behavior and thinking about moral issues, so much so that the judgment that there are Jewish ethics is as apparent to common sense as the judgment that there is a physical world. The "why not?" part says that anyone who doubts that there are, either is ignorant, an anti- semite, or a philosopher, and these three categories are not mutually exclusive.

The "why not?" reply has two possible philosophic answers, neither of which strike me as terribly interesting. First, no obligation can be called "moral" whose import is not universal; Jewish ethics are imperatives that arise from a particular entity (the deity of Abraham) making demands on another particular entity (the Jewish people); consequently, obligations in Judaism are not universal, and hence are not moral obligations. Second, the reasons that Jewish thinkers give to explain moral obligations in Judaism are the same reasons that all philosophers give for all moral obligations; ethics are about the reasons for imperatives and not about the imperatives themselves; hence, while some Jewish moral obligations may be distinctively Jewish, there are no distinctive Jewish ethics.

Together, these two replies say that particular moral imperatives and/or moral arguments cannot admit distinctions between individuals and/or subgroups of collections of individuals within the human species; the Jewish people are a subgroup; Jewish ethics apply specifically to the

Jewish people; hence, there are no Jewish ethics. Or, to say the same thing in different words, either Jewish ethics are not distinctively Jewish or they are not ethics. There are two reasons why the question does not strike me as terribly interesting. First, it is not obvious why ethics to be ethics must have a universal domain. It seems to be perfectly reasonable, in fact common-sensical, that some individual or individuals in one time-space setting may have very different, but none-the-less absolute, moral obligations than the same individual or individuals in another time-space setting or other individuals in the same time-space setting. Second, there is no single thing that can be called "Jewish ethics." Rather, this is a general term that ranges over a variety of very different positions Jews have taken on moral and ethical questions from a variety of significantly different philosophical standpoints, and this diversity in no way disqualifies Jewish ethics from being both Jewish and ethics.

However, the question entails another question which to me is interesting, viz., is there anything in Jewish ethics that is philosophically interesting in the sense that it suggests a fresh approach to doing ethics that is different from what we already find in other sources of Western civilization besides Judaism? Here, my answer is that there is at least one, and it is on that one that I want to focus, through example, in this paper. In this case I want to look at three different Jewish approaches to solving the so-called problem of theodicy. In all three cases the solutions are significantly different from the ones commonly recognized in our Christian biased heritage of philosophical ethics.

The so-called problem of theodicy involves positing three propositions which appear to be mutually incoherent. They are: (A) God is perfectly good. (B) God is perfectly powerful. And (C) there is evil. Any two of these three may be asserted without contradiction, but one of the three must be denied. God may be (B) perfectly powerful and (A) good if (~C) there is no evil. Conversely, there can be (C) evil if (~B) God has limited power and/or (~A) is not good. In general, the problem is resolved by denying any combination of the three propositions. [2] Of course which of these

options is chosen depends on what theologians mean when they say "God", "good", "evil", "power", and how the adverb "perfectly" modifies these affirmations. Throughout the course of the history of Jewish thought every possible move has been made to varying degrees, and several of them have been made in radically different ways. I will limit myself here to only three of what I consider to be the most interesting examples.

1. God is neither perfectly good nor powerful–The View of Genesis in the Torah

Whatever were the views of the different authors who wrote the different parts of the Pentateuch, a fairly consistent picture of the universe emerges from the text that the Jewish people inherited from its priestly editors in the sixth century B.C.E. That picture contains one fairly specific version of the problem of theodicy and poses a clear solution to it.[3] The problem focuses on a fairly specific event, viz. the destruction of the first Temple and the exile of the people of Judea to Babylonia. According to this view God created the universe for a single primary purpose–to provide the space and time for sacrifices to be offered to Him. The successful fulfillment of these acts constitutes the end by which all actions are judged to be good or bad.

In this context moral values are applied both ontically and socially. Ontically the term "good" is associated with separation and order. At first the universe exists as a single, homogeneous whole that is judged to be chaos. Gradually God introduces a set of distinctions, all of which are understood to overcome chaos and are called good.[4] The progression of separations functions at two levels simultaneously, one involving the space of the universe and the other involving the occupants of that space. Light is separated from dark, sky from earth, dry land from the seas on the surface of the earth, the land of Israel from other lands, and eventually Mt. Zion from other locals within the land of Israel, the space of the Temple from Mt. Zion, and the space of the Holy of Holies from the Temple mount.[5] At the same time, the inhabitants of the sphere of the

earth are separated from the inhabitants of the sky, humanity from other living creatures on and in the sphere of the earth, the nations that descend from Abraham from the other nations that descend from Noah, Israel from the other families of Abraham, the Levites from other Israelites and eventually the Cohanim from the other Levites.

The concluding ontic goods–a separate priest class who performs its defining function in a separate space–are themselves not mentioned in the Pentateuchal narrative. But their existence is always present throughout the narrative as the end towards which the biblical story points beyond itself. They are the paradigmatic references for the term "holy" (kadosh), a term that functions within the narrative for what is of ultimate value. They are holy because they are separate, but they are separate because of the key role they play in making actual the purpose for which the universe was created–the literal service of God.[6]

Socially the term "good" is associated with obeying God's commandments. The differentiated regions of space are commanded to generate living occupants without limit, while the light inhabitants are ordered to rule their celestial region and the human inhabitants are commanded to govern their terrestrial region. The nations of humanity are given a set of laws beyond procreation to govern their society, while Israel, in the middle book of the five books, is given an extensive law code to create a nation whose central purpose is to carry out the sacrificial laws described within the very heart of that middle book.[7] Israel is constituted to be a nation whose primary task is to prepare meals where the holy people in their holy space dine with the holy God of the universe three times per day on weekdays and four times per day on the holy Sabbath. During the week there is labor as well as feast, but on the Sabbath there is only feast. More precisely, it is a day of continuous feast, for both God and humanity. It is this day that provides the Torah's primary vision of the end of days. Sabbath is the goal towards which all of creation points. It is the paradigm by which all good and evil are to be judged.

It is this cosmic schema that is the context of the biblical version of the problem of theodicy. There is evil, since the Temple has been destroyed and the priests cannot perform the tasks for which Israel exists, for which the universe was created. Evil exists because Israel failed to obey God's commandments. Hence, the God of the Pentateuch is not perfectly powerful, for there is service that he needs that he cannot perform himself. Clearly He is more powerful than anything else in the universe. He and He alone, after all, is the force that can either create or destroy it. But that power has limits.[8]

Similarly, but less obviously, He is not perfectly good. He performs acts of which He must repent, i.e., acts that fail to bring about His desired ends, not the least of which is the creation of humanity. Certainly from this respect–the human–He is not perfect. For humanity exists within the universe for God; neither God nor the universe exist for the sake of humanity. Clearly he is better than anything else in the universe. He and he alone, after all, define what is good and what is bad. But that goodness, like his power, has limits.

2. While God is perfectly good and powerful, there really is no evil–The Views of Maimonides and Gersonides in Classical Rabbinic Philosophy

The solution to the pentateuchal problem of theodicy provided the framework for the development of the second Jewish polity under the policies of Ezra and Nehemiah. The new Judah became a state that remained faithful to its Toraitic constitution, namely, to serve God no matter what the human price. With the rise of Hellenism that price became enormous. Because Judah refused to reconstitute itself into an acceptable political model within the Hellenistic world, it became the poorest of nations within the empire, and because it believed that its deity was the ultimate power in the universe, it fought three disastrous wars against the pagan Romans. Judah's failure to win those wars constituted a second, major occasion for the redefinition of theodicy within the perspective of Jewish thought.

Scripture taught that the first Temple had been destroyed because Israel had failed to keep God's commandments. But the second Temple was destroyed precisely because the nation did obey God's law. Clearly, if God is the creator of the physical world, the universe should now come to an end, and, if it does not, then its continued survival must be for some other reasons than continual communal dining by a small portion of humanity with the creator God of the universe. In other words, it cannot be true that the destruction of the second Temple is really evil. Rather, it must serve some as yet unrecognized divine good. Furthermore, if even the destruction of the Temple is not really evil, then all the lesser evils from a human perspective must not really be evil. But what could that purpose be and why does it remain hidden from even the chosen people of God's humanity?

The second Moses–Moses Maimonides–provides a second myth in his Guide of the Perplexed,[9] to solve the second paradigm fact of evil. Again, the first paradigm was the destruction of the first Temple, whose cosmic solution was presented in the name of the first Moses as the myth of creation. The second paradigm is the destruction of the second Temple, whose cosmic solution is hinted at by Moses Maimonides in his myth of the Sabians.[10]

Maimonides reports the following story: The universe as God created it was perfect, as was everything within it. More precisely, everything was created to be perfectly what it was supposed to be. That does not mean that anything created was absolutely perfect. If everything were absolutely perfect, then everything would have been God, and there would not have been a world other than God.[11] Rather, the universe as a whole was perfectly a universe, and everything within it was perfectly what it had been created to be, including Adam, the first man. That Adam was perfectly a man entails that he was no less, but also no more, than any human. With respect to knowledge, he knew perfectly everything that a human could know, but he knew nothing that was beyond human

knowledge. In general that meant that he understood everything that he perceived through his senses and he had the mental ability to make valid logical inferences from that experience, but he had no views on any subject the knowledge of which was beyond the limits of experience. The topics of such trans-empirical based knowledge fall under the general heading of metaphysics. It includes cosmology, cosmogony, and theology. Angels are capable of such knowledge, but not human beings. At best people can have opinions, but they have no basis to know whether or not those opinions are in fact true. And Adam, being a perfect human, knew only what he knew he could know, i.e., physics, and did not even think about what he could not know, i.e., metaphysics.

However, humanity also had the ability to extend its powers beyond its original nature. Its first extension was to develop agriculture. By nature what grows are a mixture of plants, some of which are fit for human consumption and others of which are not. By the simplest act of farming, viz. weeding out what they could not eat, to leave more room for what he could, the first humans made nature (from a human perspective) better, and by so doing made it unnatural. From this beginning developed a nation of farmers, known as the Sabians,[12] who extended all of their abilities beyond the confines of the human species into the power domain of the angels. However, in so improving themselves, they introduced into the world error and sin. In other words, by improving the universe for humanity they in fact made it less perfect in itself than it had been. The problem was that while the original human was perfectly human, the improved human was imperfectly angelic. While humans limited their thought to what humans could know, they reasoned without error, but when they improved themselves to reason about what only the angels and God could know, they reasoned badly, i.e., they made mistakes that had dire consequences for both humanity and the universe.

The Sabians drew an analogy between their farms and the universe. Their land lacked human order and value until they, the farmers, imposed structure upon it, transforming it from a wasteland into farms. Similarly,

the universe as a whole exhibits order and value. Hence, by analogy, just as they had imposed structure on one segment of the space of the universe, so there must be an entity, who, like a farmer, imposed divine order and value on what had originally been the disordered, valueless space of the universe. That entity is the Creator of the Universe, the only being worthy of worship as a deity. But who would that God be? The question was right. The order of the universe does suggest that it exists by intention and not by accident, and the existence of an intelligent product does suggest an intelligent producer. But, again, this is a question for divine entities to ponder, not for mere humans, who, in consequence of their limitations, gave false answers. They looked about them for what they could find to be the most excellent entities within the realm of their experience to worship as deity. Rightly their attention focused on the celestial beings– the sun, the moon, and the constellations, who they proclaimed to be their gods. Their reasoning was correct as far as it could go. What is most excellent is most worthy of worship, and of all that they could experience the living entities of the sky are most excellent. But they are not the creator; they are merely creatures. The true creator lay beyond anything that could be given within the domain of human experience. Hence, the first humans progressed from having no religion, like animals, to worshipping deity, like angels. But the religion they formed was profane. Having transcended the appropriate agnosticism of their origin where they knew nothing about deities, they became idolators, who worshipped false gods, the gravest form of sin, for the universe had been created to serve its creator, not creatures.

The human decline from human perfection in its advance beyond primordial human nature had equally dire consequences in ethics. Originally human beings did not think about what is right and what is wrong. They behaved naturally, without reflection. However, as they developed their ability to manipulate nature, they came to realize that humans need not always act in accord with their nature, that in fact they could deliberate and make choices that were counter-intuitive. They then began to think about what they ought and ought not to do, and in so

doing, because of their limitations as human beings, they made bad decisions, often disastrous, decisions that eventually led to the corruption of the generation of Noah, corruption so profound that it threatened the survival of the universe as a whole. In consequence, God was forced to destroy humanity through a universal flood and to begin his universe anew. But this second beginning differed from the first. Recognizing that humanity could not remain forever within the confines of human nature, God provided a political model for humanity to develop a kind of society in which it could know the difference between metaphysical truth and error as well as moral right and wrong. That model is the Torah that God revealed to Moses at Sinai. Torah is here understood to be a national constitution that has universal consequences. Through obedience to its law, Israel could in time develop into a kingdom of angels, who, armed with celestial wisdom, could lead the rest of humanity to an end of days when all human beings would become divine.

So much for what Maimonides explicitly states in the text of the Guide. Of course the problem is that Israel, being very human, cannot understand adequately what the Torah says, including the reasons for its social legislation. Hence, Israel, like all of humanity, always has the option, through ignorance, to choose to disobey. To the extent that Israel disobeys, it prevents the coming the end of days; to the extent that Israel obeys, it hastens that coming. Maimonides believed that progress toward the messianic ideal of an end of days was more likely than decline towards the Noaitic flood limit of an end to the universe, and that the destruction of the second Jewish commonwealth itself contributed to that positive evolution. Furthermore, he believed that to whatever extent Israel obeyed God's law, it improved its moral and conceptual talents, and to the extent that Israel so improved, the possibility of even greater obedience to Toraitic law improved. Increasingly Israel, and eventually the rest of humanity, would understand God's purpose in creation, and through that understanding the apparent evils that occur in the world would become intelligible and, in consequence, avoidable. But progress would be slow, slower than even Maimonides himself anticipated.

It is against the background of the myth of the Sabians that we should understand what Maimonides says explicitly about theodicy. From an absolute perspective, God is perfectly good and powerful and there really is no evil. To be sure from this perspective the created universe is not perfect. But it could not be and still be the world. It is, as Leibniz would later say, the best of all possible worlds. In other words, though the universe is not perfect, because it cannot be better than it is, its imperfection does not constitute real evil. In fact, the only evil is human ignorance, a defect that the Torah was created to overcome.

How ignorant are we? Prima facie Maimonides suggests that our ignorance is absolute. The distance between what we know of God and the universe as it is in itself is infinite, and, because it is infinite, it is unbridgeable. But this surface reading of Maimonides' words cannot be correct, for if it were, then, no matter how our wisdom improves, we would be no closer to the messianic ideal, and, if there can be no progress, then the legislation of the Torah would have no practical value. On the one hand, it is clear that for Maimonides the actual world is infinitely remote from the divine ideal, but, on the other hand, it must be possible to progress towards it. The reconciliation of these apparent opposites is found in Maimonides' negative theology.[13]

The critical datum underlying Maimonides, and all subsequent Jewish philosophical analysis of God-talk, is that God and God alone is the creator while everything else is a creature. Hence, there is a fundamental difference between God and everything else, a difference so extreme that no positive human language can literally be applied to God. A general term can be predicated of any number of subjects in the same way (i.e., with the same meaning) only if in the relevant respects these subjects belong to the same species. Where a single general term is predicated of two or more subjects from different species, the meaning of the subsequent sentences is radically different (e.g., "the boy is big" and "government is big.") In such cases, the meaning of the stated general term

is equivocal. In what way equivocal and how the different uses are related depends on the way the relevant subject species differ. Whatever these ways are, it is most extreme in the case where a single term is predicated of both God and anything else, for here there cannot even be a common genus, let alone a common species.

In subsequent centuries Maimonides was understood to have claimed that the difference is so radical that any attribution of anything to God is, from a human perspective, unintelligible. Gersonides offered a less extreme, theologically more acceptable, account of the difference in meaning between predication of God and anything else.[14] Basing himself on the way that Aristotle (in his Metaphysics) applied the term "ousia" to a substance and any other kind of subject, Gersonides judged divine attributes to be "pros hen" equivocal, i.e., to apply primarily to God and only secondarily to anything else. This means that the secondary usages are dependent on the primary usage in the following two ways: (a) the meaning of the predicate term when applied to something other than God contains a reference to its primary divine meaning, so that the truth of the secondary meaning is logically entailed by the truth of the primary meaning, and (b) the fact described in the sentence that contains the secondary predication is causally dependent on the state described in the sentence that contains the primary predication. For example, to say that certain persons are good states something about how those people are related to God, so that what it means to say that they are good involves a statement about how they are related to God's goodness, and how God is the ultimate cause of their goodness. In brief, statements about the Creator express ideals which, as such, are related to comparable statements about all and any creatures of God.

How the two classic Jewish interpretations of divine attributes, Maimonides' and Gersonides', are different from each other is not obvious.[15] On final analysis Maimonides may have intended something like what Gersonides subsequently spelled out. In fact, given the way

that Maimonides' theory of divine attributes was interpreted by Hermann Cohen's disciples, there is little difference.[16] For both Jewish philosophers, divine attributes express ideals that are related, as a primary and a final cause, to what is actual. All divine attributes express God.[17] But the actual in principle never is God.[18] The term "Creator" expresses God's relationship to the world as its first cause. He is the source from which the universe unfolds. And the term "Redeemer" expresses God's relationship to the world as its final cause. He is the telos towards which it moves. The perceived universe of time and space persists between these two transcendent poles of origin and end.

3. While God is perfectly good, he is not perfectly powerful–The Views of Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig in Modern Jewish Philosophy

In Cohen's understanding of Maimonides (and through Maimonides, of authentic Judaism), divine attributes are to be understood as moral ideals.[19] In general, given any simple affirmative predicate P, what it means to say that God is P is that God is not Q, where Q is the complement of P. Hence, to say that God is good means that He is not bad, that He is powerful means that He is not weak, etc. But then, since no attribute literally understood can be predicated of God, why can we not say with equal validity that God is Q, which correctly understood means that God is not P? Maimonides' answer is that we may predicate of God only those attributes that the Torah affirms of Him, and the reason why Scripture says what it says is because the affirmed attributes are all human excellences. In other words, all statements about God are in reality disguised moral imperatives, where a statement of the narrative form, "God is P" means the commandment, "Strive to become P." What links the declaration to the imperative is the principle of holiness, "You shall be holy as I the Lord your God am holy." (Lev 19:2) In other words, the content of theological statements about God are entirely ethical, and the religion of the people of Israel who proclaim them is a political program

to redeem the world. This Cohenian reading of Maimonides' theology has informed all subsequent Jewish theology.

From this perspective, the problem of theodicy dissolves.[20] As a moral ideal God is perfectly good. More accurately He is *the* good. But as an ideal He has power only to guide. The actual work of the transformation of the universe into something good is the obligation of human beings. They and they alone, in all of their imperfection, have the power to realize moral values in lived life. The nature of the world as God created it has order and structure, but that order is morally neutral. On this understanding of the biblically based faith of Israel, what Genesis means when it says that God calls His creation "good" is that He has produced one kind of creature, the human, whose task is to create good, i.e., to transform what are ontically only things into something socially of value. In other words, God creates the human, but it is the human who creates value.

Cohenian Judaism posits two ways to view reality–narratively as it is viewed in natural science and history as something that is, and imperatively as it is viewed in religion and ethics as something that is not what it ought to be. The former way views the world in terms of objects subject to physical laws. The latter way views it in terms of personal relationships subject to moral rules. From the former perspective, there is no evil. There are only facts and fictions that are either intelligible or unintelligible. From the latter perspective there are only occasions that create moral obligations which may or may not be obeyed. Buber called the former the I-It relationship and the latter the I-Thou. Within his language God is "I-Eternal Thou," by which he meant that God functions perfectly as the paradigm for human moral obligation. Rosenzweig formed a picture of the reality where life is lived between these two perspectives. The former is the fore-world (Vorwelt) of things that he calls "elements." The latter is the over-world (uberwelt) of ideals that he calls "structure" (Gestalt). Lived life in the world is an infinite set of movements from distinct nothings of things toward individual

somethings of value. Infinitely remote at both ends of the flow of human and physical history is God, as an element at the creation the world, and as truth at its redemption. As such, God is not of the world, even though He is what makes it intelligible. He is never actual, but He is ultimately, ideally, all that really-truly is. There is a deep divide between what is actual and what is true that human beings in the world bridge through God.

To be sure there are important differences between the Jewish philosophies of Cohen, Buber and Rosenzweig. But they do not differ in the general guidelines that they inherited from Maimonides' expression of biblical theology. Consequently, they share in common, albeit in different languages, the same reconciliation of the problem of theodicy. Only God is good, only what exists in the world has power, and only humanity has the power to make good a world that is not inherently so.

4. Concluding Remarks

In our story what Jewish philosophy has to say about theodicy is now concluded, it is worth noting that the two main classical Jewish accounts of theodicy arose in response to two specific events, the destruction of the first Temple for the editors of the Torah and the destruction of the second Temple for the rabbinic philosophers. In contrast, the modern Jewish philosophers presupposed no such paradigmatic event for their speculation. If there is one, it would have happened after they wrote their major works. It would have been the Holocaust. Several contemporary Jewish theologians believe that this event requires a rethinking of Jewish theology no less radical than the changes required by the destruction of the second Temple. The most notable of these thinkers is Emil Fackenheim.[21] He argues that the Holocaust is so demonic and so distinct that it nullifies the truth value of all previous philosophy, including Jewish philosophy, and that it renders all subsequent philosophy, including Jewish philosophy, impossible.

Personally I do not share this radical judgment. While the Holocaust was a great disaster for both the Jewish people and for the world, it does not merit a conceptual status that is qualitatively beyond that of the destruction of the first two Temples. Nor does it raise anything conceptually new beyond what the above accounts of theodicy, all other factors being equal, can handle. None of this is intended to minimalize either the great evil of the Holocaust or its critical importance for contemporary Jewish history and life. It is only to say that in itself the Holocaust raises no special perspective for solving, or at least attempting to solve, the problem of theodicy.

In conclusion, there are a number of features of the above description of Jewish philosophic accounts of theodicy that I would like to highlight. Firstly, the problem of evil is seen in terms of collectives rather than individuals. For Rosenzweig, as for the editors of the Torah, moral issues range primarily over nations and only secondarily over their citizens. In general, in marked contrast to most modern thought, individuals exist as parts of collectives; collectives are not mere mental groupings of individuals. Secondly, judgments of individual events as good or bad are based on teleology. No event in itself has moral value. The universe is either viewed ontologically from a scientific perspective, in which case moral judgments are inappropriate, or from a political perspective, in which case events are judged from the perspective of a revealed vision of both the origin (creation) and the end (redemption) of the universe. Thirdly, neither standard of judgment, creation or redemption, is, was, or ever will be anything actual in the perceptible world of time and space. Rather, both are ideals that function perpetually for humanity to know that what is is not yet good and can always become better. It is in this sense that all of the solutions to the problem of theodicy turn on positing myths. Here the term "myth" functions in much the same way that Plato used it in the Timaeus,[22] as a picture or story or model that is inherently something more than opinion but less than knowledge, that as such is somewhat, but not entirely, intelligible.

NOTES

1. This paper was delivered at the Academy of Jewish Philosophy session on "Jewish Ethics," at the Association of Jewish Studies Annual Meeting, December, 1994. It expands an earlier piece, Solutions to Theodicy out of the Sources of Judaism, Religious Education 84, 1 (Winter, 1989) 55-67. A previous version of this present paper was written for the Studies in Jewish Theology series that Dan Cohen-Sherbok edits for Edwin Mellin.

2. viz. (1) ~A B C, (2) ~A ~B C, (3) A B ~C, (4) A ~B C, (5) ~A B ~C, (6) ~A ~B ~C, and (7) A ~B ~C.

3. What follows in this section are conclusions based on a reasonably rigorous literary analysis of the Hebrew text, particularly the first chapter of Genesis, in my The First Seven Days: A Philosophical Commentary on the Creation of Genesis, (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993).

4. The terms employed in the biblical narrative are "good" (tov) and "chaos" (tohu vavohu), which are understood to be opposites, which entails that "order" (seder) is associated with good while "evil" (ra`) is associated with chaos, even though these latter terms are not explicitly used in this way in the biblical text. However, the association of these sets of terms will be made explicit in subsequent (medieval) rabbinic, philosophic commentaries on the biblical text.

5. i.e., beyond the time line of the Pentateuchal narrative, which concludes as Israel begins to take possession of its land and create a nation, a nation whose destruction concludes the narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures.

6. The Hebrew term is "avodah", whose concrete referent is the sacrificial activity of the Temple cult. It is the detailed description of this literal divine service that occupies the central (and therefore most important) place within this literary composition by the exiled Babylonian priests who edited the Torah.

7. cf. Leviticus. On the judgment that the editors of the Pentateuch followed a onion-like, as opposed to a linear, structure in constructing the Torah, so that what is most important is set in the middle of otherwise parallel texts in the extreme, see Jacob Milgrom's commentary on the Book of Numbers, The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), especially pp. xvi-xxix of the Introduction.

8. In what follows I accept the view of Steven Schwarzschild that the Messianic Age functioned for Maimonides as an asymptote, i.e., as an ideal limit intended to provide humanity with a model for moral judgments that can in actuality be approached but never realized. Cf. Schwarzschild Moral Radicalism and Middlingness in the Ethics of Maimonides Studies in Medieval Culture 11 (1977) 65-94.

9. In the Guide, Book III, chapter 29.

10. This explanation of why everything was not absolutely perfect is not explicitly stated by Maimonides in the passage in question. However, it is implied. My explicit statement is a summary of what Maimonides' predecessor, Abraham Ben David Ha-Levi (Ibn Daud), said in the The Exalted Faith Book 2, Basic Principle 6, chapter 2, 203b16- 204b16 of the Mich 57 manuscript in Oxford University's Bodleian Library of Solomon Ibn Labi's Hebrew trans. from the original Judeo- Arabic. Cf. ibn Daud, The Exalted Faith (Ha-'Emunah ha-Ramah), eds. Norbert M. Samuelson and Gershon Weiss; trans. Norbert M. Samuelson, (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1986), pp. 242, 246-47, 251.

11. Who the Sabians of Maimonides' myth/story might be is a topic of scholarly debate. My personal guess is that they are the Chaldeans.

12. In this article I accept the general guideline of Hermann Cohen and his disciples who understand Maimonides' negative theology to mean that

divine attributes state moral, asymptotic ideals. A sampling of relevant sources is: Zevi Diesendruck, The Philosophy of Maimonides, Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook LXV (1935): pp. 355-68, and my three articles: On Knowing God: Maimonides, Gersonides and the Philosophy of Religion, Judaism (Winter, 1969) pp. 64-77; The Role of Politics in the Torah According to Maimonides, Spinoza and Buber, Community and Culture: Essays in Jewish Studies, ed. Nahum M. Waldman, (Philadelphia: Gratz College, 1987), pp. 193-208; and Divine Attributes as Moral Ideals in Maimonides' Theology, The Thought of Maimonides: Philosophical and Legal Studies, ed. Ira Robinson, Lawrence Kaplan and Julien Bauer, Studies in the History of Philosophy, Volume 17, (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon Press, 1991), pp. 69-76.

13. In Levi Ben Gershon (Gersonides), Milchamot Adonai (The Wars of the Lord) III-IV, (Riva di Trento: s.n., 1560 and Leipzig: K.B. Lark, 1866).

14. This is a topic that should be, but has not as yet been, adequately discussed by contemporary students of medieval Jewish philosophy.

15. Like his intellectual Jewish teachers, Maimonides and Gersonides, Baruch Spinoza affirms a God who is perfectly good and powerful and denies the reality of evil. However, his interpretation of these three claims stands in intentional and explicit opposition to their religious Jewish solutions of the problem of theodicy. He objects to their judgment that the world is good.

16. For Maimonides and Gersonides this is a consequence of God's radical unity. No attribute can express part of God, because God can have no parts. Similarly, no attribute can express something that merely is true of God, because then God could be other than He is, which would entail that God could be influenced by something other than His own nature, which would entail that God is not perfectly powerful. Consequently, every divine attribute is God.

17. Cohen will say that to affirm anything actual as good would constitute idolatry, which is a consequence of both the radical separation between God as Creator and the world as His creation, and the radical separation in principle between the is and the ought.

18. The following works by Cohen are relevant to this discussion: Das Prinzip der Infinitesimal-Method (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1968). Judische Schriften , ed. Franz Rosenzweig (Berlin: 1924), and Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen der Judentums (Frankfurt a.M.: 1929).

19. The following application of the philosophies of Buber and Rosenzweig to theodicy is based on my discussion in An Introduction to Modern Jewish Philosophy, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989). My interpretation is based on the recommended readings listed at the end of each chapter.

20. One should read all of his writings to see the development of his most original and insightful analysis. However, clearly his most mature, and conclusive, work is To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought, (New York: Schocken, 1982).

21. p. 52b. There Plato invokes mythology, which he calls "bastard reasoning" (logismu tini nothu), as the appropriate way to talk about "space" (chora). See Richard Dakre Archer-Hind, The Timaeus of Plato (New York: Arno Press, 1973), and Francis MacDonald Cornford, Plato's Cosmology. (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1966).

KABBALAH AND POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

Responses to Shaul Magid's "From Theosophy to Midrash, Lurianic Exegesis on Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden" (published in Network 4.2).

Editor's Note: These comments and those to come in Volume 4.4 will set the initial terms and voices for our discussion at the American Academy of Religion Meeting (Philadelphia, Sunday November 19, 9pm).

I. Elliot R. Wolfson, New York University

Magid's study raises important questions for students of kabbalah as well as for those interested in hermeneutics and Jewish philosophy more generally. Magid distinguishes the attitude towards Scripture in the writings of the disciples of the sixteenth-century master, Isaac Luria, from other hermeneutical approaches to Scripture found in Jewish sources, including midrashic and kabbalistic documents such as Sefer ha-Bahir and the Zohar. Whereas the other midrashic and kabbalistic sources are predicated on the notion of Scripture as an open text–a text that allows for alternative readings, the Lurianic kabbalists operate with the notion of Scripture as a symbolic reading of a meta-text. The term "meta-text" denotes the theosophical- cosmogonic system that informs their textual interpretation. The details of the system are clearly not derived from Scripture. The base text of Scripture, therefore, is transformed into the symbolic articulation of the theosophic and cosmogonic realities that shape the foundation myth of Lurianic kabbalah. Scripture ceases to be an open text for it is viewed no longer as that which yields a multiplicity of readings. In that respect one may speak of the meta-text stabilizing the text in such a way that the the peshat (contextual sense) is delimited to the particular expression of the symbolic worldview of the Lurianic myth.

Magid tellingly refers to this process as the redemption of Scripture from its own symbolic garb. This concurs in some measure with the language of Hayyim Vital in Sha`ar ha-Hakdamot: "When [the Torah] is in the world of emanation it is called kabbalah, for there it is removed from all the garments that are called the literal sense (peshat) from the expression 'I had taken off (pashateti) my robe' (Song of Songs 5:3), for [the literal sense] is the aspect of the external garment that is upon the skin of the

person, sometimes spread (mitpashet) over him, and this is the essence of the meaning of the word peshat."[1] By a play on words, the literal or contextual sense, the peshat, is here identified with the garment in which the Torah is robed, for the word pashat means to take off or to remove. The stripping off of the garment occurs in the world of emanation, the first of four worlds that corresponds to the realm of the divine sefirot. Elsewhere Vital explicitly correlates the four worlds of Emanation ('atzilut), Creation (beri'ah), Formation (yetzirah), and Making (`asiyyah), with the four subjects of Kabbalah, Talmud, Mishnah, and Scripture.

The correspondence between the worlds and these texts is not merely theoretical. On the contrary, by reciting the appropriate text the soul is said to be bound to the corresponding world.[2] According to another tradition of Vital, the four levels of meaning, peshat, remez, derash, and sod, alluded to in the acronym pardes,[3] correspond to the four worlds. Hence, the masters of Scripture correspond to the world of `asiyyah, the masters of Mishnah to the world of yetzirah, the masters of Talmud to the world of beri'ah, and the masters of kabbalah to the world of 'atzilut.[4] In slightly different terms this tradition is reported in the name of Vital by Soliman ibn Ohana, the Torah in the world of Making is disseminated[5] by way of peshat, in the world of Formation by way of remez, in the world of Creation by way of derash, and in the world of Emanation by way of sod.[6] Just as the four worlds are occasionally described by Vital (reflecting earlier sources) in a Neoplatonic fashion as the progressive concealment or garbing of the divine light, so the different layers of meaning in the text may be seen in this manner.[7] In the sphere of emanation the Torah is called kabbalah for there is nothing but pure interiority, the esoteric meaning related exclusively to the dynamic processes of the Godhead. If I understand Magid correctly, it is to this phenomenon that he refers to redeeming Scripture from its own symbolic garb. The "symbolic garb," which is the external garment of the peshat, consists of the historical narratives and the cultic rituals from which Scripture is liberated.

Magid presents two passages to illustrate the point that for the mainstream Lurianic kabbalists reading has the soteriological task of repairing the biblical text. The first, which is from Sefer ha-Likkutim, deals with the birth of Adam and Eve, and the second, which is from Likkutei Torah, is about the two portraits of Adam and the nature of sin. Even a cursory glance at the Lurianic texts leaves one with the distinct impression that these complex theosophical notions are not in the least derived from Scripture nor do they appear to respond to any particular exegetical issue in the texts. There seems to be no hint whatsoever in the base text for the hermeneutical moves imposed by the main mythical symbols of Lurianic kabbalah. On that score there can be little disagreement with Magid. But is one justified to argue on this basis that the "Lurianists no longer have to read Scripture"? What, after all, would be the conception of the biblical text operative in the Lurianic material that would validate such a conclusion? Only after considering that question can we be in a position to determine the role that Scripture, and in particular the contextual meaning, plays in the overall Lurianic worldview.

In spite of the important differences between the two passages cited by Magid, for heuristic purposes it is possible to view them as making a similar claim. When one cuts through the layers of technical jargon so typical in Lurianic texts, it becomes evident that both passages deal with the problem of the gender of Adam, manifest in the human sphere and in the higher worlds, including the anthropomorphic configuration of the sefirotic lights in the world of emanation. In both passages there is an expressed concern with the feminine counterpart to the male and the necessity of gender dimorphism for the biological preservation of the species. Vital interprets the account of creation and the sin of Adam and Eve in terms of a theogonic process in the Godhead, which is essentially the splitting of the male androgyne into masculine and feminine. The ultimate purpose of the sexual mating of male and female is to restore the male androgyne or to reintegrate the feminine into the masculine.[8]

The process of gender bifurcation is presented in symbolic terms as the gradual purification (berur) of the feminine aspect of the divine, which is are represented as the seven primordial forces of unbalanced judgment (symbolized by the kings of Edom who ruled before the kings of Israel) contained within the masculine. As a result of the construction of the feminine (tikkun ha-nukba' or binyan ha- nekevah) through this process of purification, the aspect of Malkhut was in a position of back-to-back. i.e., it was not fully constructed. The reason given for this lingering imperfection is that final purification could only come about through the actions of man since he is in the "depths of the shells, the secret of `asiyyah, in which there are the secret of Malkhut and the strong judgments, and the shells are rooted there. These feminine waters could not be recitifed until the first Adam came, and by means of his actions and his prayers the thorns are cleared out from the vineyard. Through him all the feminine waters are purified."[9] Had Adam not sinned, the forces of impurity would have been kept separate from the realm of holiness. Insofar as this aspect of Malkhut was not purified before the creation of Adam, the male and female personae in the divine (Ze`eir 'Anpin and Nukba') were joined back-to-back, for if they had been turned face-to- face then the demonic shells would have had the opportunity to be attached to the posterior of the feminine. However, in order for the male and the female to procreate, it was necessary for them to be face-to-face, an idiom used in kabbalistic literature to depict sexual union. In order to circumvent this problem, the Father (Hokhmah) and the Mother (Binah) imparted to Malkhut the feminine waters of Binah resulting in the elevation of Malkhut to the palace (i.e, Binah). Within that palace Ze`eir 'Anpin and Nukba' are united in a face-to- face encounter.

However, this situation was only temporary for when Ze`eir 'Anpin and Nukba' descended in order to produces the souls of Adam and Eve, which were produced by their union, they returned to their original status of being united back-to-back. Hence, the souls of Adam and Eve emerged out of this union. Had Ze`eir 'Anpin and Nukba' been united face-to-face, Adam and Eve would have come forth in a perfect state and all the worlds

would have been complete. Adam and Eve, therefore, were created in a pattern that reflects the ontic situation of the masculine and the feminine in the divine. In order for Adam and Eve to mate sexually, it was necessary for God to separate them so that they could become autonomous beings with the potential to face one another. With every righteous deed the demonic force is subdued, the feminine waters of Malkhut are purified, and the male and female attributes of the divine are united face-to-face. Had Adam not sinned the face-to-face union of the masculine and the feminine would have been the permanent ontic reality. However, Adam did sin and as a result of his actions an aspect of the feminine waters of Malkhut was not purified. During moments of sexual intercourse the face-to-face relationship is temporarily restored, but immediately afterwards the status of Malkhut vis-a-vis the male potency regresses to back-to-back. In the exilic and fragmented state the act of sexual intercourse is endowed with theurgical significance for it facilitates the face-to-face encounter of the male and the female and the consequent purification of some holy sparks entrapped in the demonic shells.

In the second passage, Vital expresses the relationship of the male and the female in terms of the distinction of Adam in the world of Formation and Adam in the world of Making, which is related to the two biblical accounts of the creation of Adam in the first and second chapters of Genesis. Given the standard gender attributions, it follows that the Adam in the higher ontic plane, the world of Formation (yetzirah), is valorized as masculine and the Adam in the lower plane, the world of Making (`asiyyah), is the feminine. Thus, 'adam de-`asiyyah assumes the role of the female in relation to 'adam di-yetzirah. Vital employs this kabbalistic symbol in order to explain the contextual sense of the narrative in Gen. 2:7-25. The Adam placed by God in the garden of Eden to whom was given the command not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is identified as 'adam de-`asiyyah because 'adam di-yetzirah (alluded to in Gen. 2:7, wa-yyitzer yhwh 'elohim 'et ha-'adam) does not need to be so commanded since he is pure and not subject to any evil. By contrast, the commandment makes sense when applied to 'adam de-`asiyyah for the demonic shells

(kelippot) are attached to this figure. The peshat of Gen. 2:15 is, therefore, that God took 'adam de-`asiyyah from the world of Creation (beri'ah), which is above the world of Formation (yetzirah), and placed him in the Garden of Eden in the world of Formation to serve as the aspect of the feminine in this ontic sphere. Thus the verse uses the feminine form bah to refer to this garden and it also employs the words `avodah and shemirah to characterize man's activity therein for the demonic shells are linked to this place.

In this stage there is no autonomous feminine counterpart to the male because it was divine intention that the world of `asiyyah would fulfill this function in relation to the world of yetzirah. But this plan was not satisfactory because at some point in the process of the evolution of the worlds the element of `asiyyah descends to form its own sphere and thus can no longer serve as the feminine mate of 'adam di-yetzirah. The problematized situation of the male having no feminine counterpart is related in the verse "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Anticipating the problem, however, God creates the remedy by constructing (through the aspect of binah in the world of yetzirah) the feminine out of the 'adam di-yetzirah. This is presented as the contextual meaning of "And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman" (Gen. 2:22). In this case the feminine is on the same ontic footing as the male, i.e., both derive from the world of Formation (a point related to the words of Adam in Gen. 2:23), and thus the possiblity of sexual mating is assured. Vital explains this in another way in terms of the "secret of the severance" (sod ha-nesirah), a kabbalistic motif that is based on the midrashic idea of the division of the original androgynous Adam into male and female. Up to this point all the worlds were in a state of back-to-back, which is to say that the unification was not complete. The mystical significance of God's forming the feminine by splitting her off from the male is that all the worlds are rectified through the face-to-face union.

What in God's name does any of this have to do with the scriptural text? Precious little, one might be inclined to answer. Yet, upon closer reflection it seems that in a profound way the intricate theosophic symbolism is related to some issues that emerge from an exegetical engagement with the text of Scripture, especially when viewed through the prism of rabbinic aggadah. In my opinion the common denominator of the two passages, which is related to various biblical verses, is the issue of gender bifurcation and the temporary state of the feminine as distinct from the masculine. Magid himself reaches a similar conclusion and in the note mentions that his view concurs with my own.[10] I will not here enter into a lengthy discussion of this issue. Suffice it to say that the Lurianic discussions of gender, especially as they are related to the creation of Adam and Eve in the first chapters of Genesis, are exegetical elaborations of tendencies implicit in the scriptural text (particularly as it is perceived through the lens of rabbinic theology). The hermeneutical strategy, therefore, is to preserve the text by uncovering the deepest meaning latent within it.

I am not certain that the attempt to distinguish the zoharic and the Lurianic approaches to Scripture is entirely defensible. In spite of the important differences between the two corpora, it seems to me that in both the interpretation of the base text of Scripture is shaped by what Magid has called a meta-text. It may be the case that for the zoharic authorship the meta-text is more multivalent than it is for the Lurianic kabbalists, but that is a quantitative rather than a qualitative difference. Let me clarify the point by referring to an earlier study of my own that Magid approvingly cites. In "Beautiful Maiden Without Eyes: Peshat and Sod in Zoharic Hermeneutics," I argued that in a number of thirteenth-century kabbalistic sources, including the Zohar, there is a convergence of the peshat and the sod, the contextual meaning and the esoteric sense. That is, beyond the linear and hierarchical stratification of the biblical text into the different levels of meaning (the number four emerges by the end of the thirteenth century as paradigmatic), the zoharic author(s), like several kabbalists in the pre-zoharic period, e.g., Jacob ben Sheshet and Moses ben

Nahman, maintained that the peshat is, or contains, the sod. The Torah is garbed with several layers of meaning but at the core is the "text," which is apprehended above all by the mystic exegete in an erotic face-to-face encounter. From one perspective what is disclosed (or, one might say, disclothed) is the sod, the mystical core, but, from another perspective, this is the peshat, which is the text itself. The text, of course, always stands in relation to a reader for the meaningfulness of the text is revealed only in and through the hermeneutical realtionship. I will take the liberty to cite my own words:

"The movement of zoharic hermeneutics may thus be compared to a circle, beginning and ending with the text in its literal sense. For the Zohar the search for the deepest truths of Scripture is a gradual stripping away of the external forms or garments until one gets to the inner core, but when one gets to that inner core what one finds is nothing other than the peshat, i.e., the text as it is. To interpret, from the perspective of the Zohar, is not to impose finite meaning on the text, but to unfold the infinite meaning within the text…. By decoding the text in light of sefirotic symbolism the theosophic Kabbalist recovers that which is at work within Scripture, at least as viewed from his own perspective."[11]

In that context I employed the technical term "appropriation" as used by Paul Ricouer to convey the idea that the interpreter is recovering what is at work in the text or resaying what is said in the text. In a second passage from that study I related the hermeneutical strategy to the zoharic parable wherein the Torah is compared to the beautiful maiden without eyes:

"The maiden without eyes, therefore, signifies that the text in and of itself is "blind," without sense; whatever meaning the text has is imparted to it by the open eye of the reader…. The mystic, full of eyes, gives sense to the eyeless text by his bestowing glance, a glance that bestows by disclosing that which is latent in the text. The constitution of meaning in the hermeneutical relationship underlies the task of reading according to the Zohar. Paradoxically, this act of bestowal is characterized as an

appropriation of that which the text reveals from within its concealment."[12]

The "true" peshat of the biblical text is revealed exclusively to the kabbalist who has exposed the text, or who has seen the text exposed. What the text is ultimately about is the dynamic structure of the Godhead.

In my opinion, one could make a similar claim for the Lurianic kabbalists. The peshat is the particular garment that the Torah assumes in the lowest of the four worlds. But the Torah is essentially the same in all of the worlds. The progressive condensation of the infinite light (seder ha-hishtalshelut) is a process that corresponds to the various forms of meaning that the Torah adopts in the different worlds. Just as the mystic can perceive the divine light in the material substances of this world, so can he perceive that the garb of the contextual meaning is in fact the mystical body of Torah. To be sure, for the unenlightened the peshat as it is in itself is the lowest form of disclosure. Such a person may not get beyond this level and thus he will not comprehend the esoteric meaning implicit in the peshat. Thus, in one context, Vital uses the following image: masters of Scripture are like eggs, masters of Mishnah like the chicks, and the masters of kabbalah like human beings.[13] For those who cannot perceive the esoteric meaning of the text it is necessary to kindle the spark by other theurgical means so that they might attain that which is concealed. For the kabbalist, on the other hand, the hermeneutical task is to remove the external layers covering the inner core of Torah. But what does he find at that core if not the letters of the Torah? And what are the letters of Torah if not the peshat in the truest sense, viz., the text fully undressed? Reading is indeed a laying bare.

Magid has perceptively understood this key aspect of Lurianic kabbalah to which he refers by the poignant expression of redeeming Scripture from its symbolic garb. I wonder, however, if it is necessary to view this as fundamentally different from the hermeneutical approach of earlier kabbalistic sources, especially the Zohar. I tend to see continuity here and

the common element is the presumption that the peshat and sod converge such that the theosophic meaning is in fact an unfolding of that which lies coiled in the words of Scripture. Following the particular orientation of the anonymous author of Ra`aya Mehemna and Tikkune Zohar[14], Vital is critical of the literalists who are concerned only with peshat. This does not mean, however, that he is of the opinion that study of the peshat can be ignored by the kabbalist.[15] On the contrary, in his introduction to Sha`ar ha-Hakdamot, he explicitly states that the external, contextual and internal, symbolic meanings are related like the soul to the body, and one is in the image of the other.[16] In light of this hermeneutical correspondence, it does not seem reasonable to me to speak of completely divesting the body of the text from its symbolic garb. The (hermeneutic) visibility of the scriptural text on all levels is dependent on the text being properly attired. The text, therefore, remains open so long as there are eyes that take note.

NOTES

1. Cited in E. R. Wolfson, "Beautiful Maiden Without Eyes: Peshat and Sod in Zoharic Hermeneutics," in The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History, ed. M. Fishbane (Albany, 1993), 198 n. 116.

2. Sha`ar ha-Mitzvot (Jerusalem, 1978), 83; Peri `Etz Hayyim (Jerusalem, 1980), 356. See L. Fine, "Torah as a Rite of Theurgical Contemplation in Lurianic Kabbalah," Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times, vol. 3, ed. D. R. Blumenthal (Atlanta, 1988), pp. 31-33.

3. See G. Scholem, On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism, trans. R. Manheim (New York, 1969), pp. 53-61; I. Tishby, The Wisdom of the Zohar, trans, D. Goldstein (Oxford, 1989), pp. 1085, 1091-1092; A. van der Heide, "Pardes: Methodological Reflections on the Theory of the Four Senses," Journal of Jewish Studies 34 (1983): 147-159; Wolfson, "Beautiful Maiden," 155-156; M. Idel, "PaRDeS: Some Reflections on Kabbalistic Hermeneutics," in

Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys, ed. J. J. Collins and m. Fishbane (Albany, 1995), pp. 249- 268.

4. Sha`ar Ma'amerei Razal (Jerusalem, 1898), 16b; Sefer ha-Gilgulim (Przemysl, 1875), ch. 68:91d.

5. The Hebrew term is "titpashet", which carries the double connotation of to spread forth and to disrobe. By using this term Vital wished to convey the idea that the Torah spreads forth a particular hermeneutical level in a manner of taking off a layer of clothing.

6. The text is published in Likkutim Hadashim me-ha-'Ari z"l u-me- Rabbi Hayyim Vital z"l, ed. D. Touitou (Jerusalem, 1985), p. 80.

7. See, e.g., Likkutei Torah (Jerusalem, 1963), pp. 9-10.

8. For more detailed discussion of these motifs, see E. R. Wolfson, "Woman–The Feminine as Other: Some Philosophical Reflections on the Divine Androgyne in Theosophic Kabbalah," in The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity, ed. L. J. Silberstein and R. L. Cohn (New York, 1994), 166-204; idem, "Erasing the Erasure/Gender and the Writing of God's Body in Kabbalistic Symbolism," in Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism (Albany, 1995), pp. 49-78 and notes on pp. 155-195.

9. Sefer ha-Likkutim (Jerusalem, 1913), 5a.

10. Magid refers to my study in n. 36. The correct citation is "Crossing Gender Boundaries in Kabbalistic Ritual and Myth," in Circle in the Square, pp. 79-121 and notes on pp. 195-232. In that study I analyze earlier kabbalistic sources as well as Lurianic materials.

11. "Beautiful Maiden," pp. 171-172.

12. ibid., 186-187. Y. Liebes, "Zohar we-'Eros," Alpayyim 9 (1994): 97 n. 182. Liebes neglects to cite the continuation of my argument that indicates that my position is what he presents as his own view. I argued that the hermeneutical theory implied in the zoharic parable is that in bestowing meaning on the text the interpreter draws meaning out from the text. My use of Ricoeur's term "appropriation" is meant to convey precisely this idea. Moreover, Liebes does not refer to the second passage, in which I make the point explicitly that interpretation in the Zohar is an unfolding of the infinite meaning within the text.

13. Sefer ha-Gilgulim, ch. 68, 91c.

14. See Tishby, Wisdom of the Zohar, pp. 1089-1108; P. Giller, The Enlightened Will Shine: Symbolization and Theurgy in the Later Strata of the Zohar (Albany, 1993), pp. 59-79.

15. The study of peshat (of Scripture and of halakhah) was part of the standard textual regimen advocated by Luria. Some of the relevant sources are cited in Toledot ha- Ari, ed. M. Benayahu (Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 248, 319, 320. On the presumed existence of a composition by Luria focused on the contextual meanings of Scripture (peshatei ha- mikra'ot), see the comments of Benayahu, op. cit., p. 356.

16. The relevant passage is translated in Wolfson, "Beautiful Maiden," pp. 187-188.

II. Michael Satlow, University of Virginia

Shaul Magid has raised a number of fundamental hermeneutical issues in his intriguing paper. His contention, it seems to me, has two parts: first, that by reading Scripture into a pre-determined meta-text rather than allowing "a meta-textual thesis to emerge from a reading of the base-text," Lurianic exegesis breaks with previous Jewish exegetical programs; second, that Lurianic exegesis serves to flatten rather than expand the text,

reducing a potential multiplicity of readings to a single one. Given that few texts humble me as completely as those that emerged from kabbalistic circles, I will confine my remarks to some thoughts on how these two contentions play out, especially vis-a-vis rabbinic literature.

Shaul's first contention raises a number of obvious questions. Foremost among them is whether the rabbis have any notion of "peshat" in the sense that the term is used today. Most scholars today assert that the notion of "peshat"–a simple, or obvious meaning of the text,
to be contrasted to other midrashic meanings–is a contribution of the later biblical commentators. For the rabbis, or at least certain rabbinic circles, there is no "obvious" meaning, accessible through universal reason. Rabbinic interpretation of Scripture is rooted in tradition and follows a somewhat rigid (if creatively applied) set of hermeneutic rules. Unlike peshat, this system is not open to privileging one reading over another by labeling it the only logical reading. The very development of the notion of peshat, even when supplemented by "midrash" and "sod," begins a process of limiting interpretive possibilities.

A larger, and more complex, issue is that of the relationship of midrash to the base-text. While the rabbis do seem at times to work in an entirely textual universe, frequently we see the impact of non- textual factors on their exegesis. Contemporary realia, for example, intrude on otherwise "pure" exegesis; exempla, drawn from contemporary political structures or daily life, often are used to illustrate scriptural exegesis. Although the polemical content of midrash has been grossly exaggerated, some midrashim do appear to be polemical. In neither case can we say that the rabbis approached the text free of knowing what they were going to do with the text. More to the point, literary exegetical programs certainly influenced at least the selection of midrashim that were included in a given corpus. While Neusner probably overstates the case, different rabbinic works do appear to have distinct editorial programs that help to determine their content. Rather than view all "midrash" together, we might consider how midrash functions within specific works. One corpus

might genuinely promote an "open" reading of Scripture, while another might attempt to limit exegesis. Why, for example, does the Sifra look so different from Vayikra Rabbah, even though both use the same base text? The former offers very narrow readings (e.g., "man" means not a boy; "his garment" means not her garment) that, when compared to the lengthy interpretation of Vayikra Rabbah or even to other tannaitic midrashic corpora, might have been selected precisely to conform to a pre-determined exegetical program.

Even for the rabbis, myth might have played a role. Gary Anderson is currently working on a piece in which (following Peter Schaefer's suggestion) he contends that some midrashim (specifically those that cite Psalm 8) were generated from now-lost Jewish myths about Adam. Whether or not this is correct, it underlines the fact that we know so little about the background of rabbinic midrash. Because we do not know the myths that might have generated midrash does not mean that a priori we should exclude the possibility that Scripture was shaped to conform to mythic structures, albeit not in the comprehensive manner of Lurianic kabbalah. The fitting of Scripture to a reductionist meta-text is hardly new for Jews; Paul did this many years before. There is a long and full Patristic record of reading the Hebrew Bible into a single myth. The Christian use of Hebrew Bible in this way may have been a factor in discouraging earlier Jewish adaptation of this technique. Did Christianity loom so small for the residents of sixteenth century Safed that they had no fear of appropriating this form of hermeneutic? These echoes would no doubt have influenced the reception of such a reading.

Shaul's texts are fascinating precisely because they are so rabbinic. Both texts–though especially text A–rely heavily on midrash. Much of text A, in fact, looks like a selection and integration of readings found in Bereshit Rabbah. I wonder, then, if it would not be more accurate to modify Shaul's contention: ultimately it is midrash–previously processed Scripture–that is being fitted into the meta-text. That is, are we seeing the harmonization and smoothing of midrash rather than Scripture?

Finally, it is hard for me to resist trying, however crudely, to fit the phenomenon noted by Shaul into a larger picture. In its attempt to reduce the meanings of Scripture, how truly unique was Lurianic kabbalah? Centuries earlier, Rashi, using "peshat" and careful selection, began to weave together coherent interpretive structures from diverse midrashim. The sixteenth century itself saw the height of one of the most reductionist movements in Jewish history, legal codification. Even the Tosafists can, on one level, be seen as trying to create a seamless whole out of the impossible contradictions of the Talmud. Lurianic kabbalah, as a program that attempts to limit Scripture to a single meaning, would be very much at home in this environment.

III. Oona Ajzenstat, McMaster University

1. Harold Bloom

Shaul Magid's study reflects what is good in the current scholarly approach to midrash and corrects some of what is wrong. I refer to the recent shift away from arid scholarly discussion of whether certain sorts of midrashic gap-filling are "legitimate" or "illegitimate," legitimate midrash being tightly exegetical, and illegitimate midrash being what is "launched and sustained by the reader's subjective concerns… rather than by the text's own norms and directives" (Meir Sternberg, Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 188). Such criteria work relatively well if all commentary is peshat, but it is very difficult to see when a drash is true to the norms and directives of the original text. Talk has therefore moved gradually onto a more fertile ground that accepts midrashic reading as in some sense unavoidably revisionist. James Kugel sees such revision as necessary updating, but still maintains that midrash is primarily exegetical. Michael Fishbane goes further: for him midrash is often "promethian" reinterpretation, a covert challenge to divine authority. Ithamar Gruenwald goes further still, writing that "midrash is chiefly concerned with the creation of meaning–not with exegesis". ("Midrash"

in Michael Fishbane, Midrashic Imagination, 9) And finally, reader response criticism and other new forms of reading call upon us to abandon any remaining distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate commentary.

Shaul Magid's position takes all this into account and goes beyond it. While aware that all readings can be said to be revisionist, he nevertheless asserts that some are more so than others. His description of the Lurianists' redefinition of peshat in light of an extra-biblical meta-text shows us how their commentaries, like none before, set themselves up in defiance of their father-text. The virtue of his analysis is that his standard for what might be called legitimacy–which the Lurianists fail gloriously to attain–is not the repetition of peshat, but a general openness to peshat or compatibility with it.

One literary critic who has made much of the idea that all texts are revisionist is Harold Bloom. Bloom too does not entirely do away with the old distinction between legitimate and illegitimate; instead he reverses it. For him, only the most heavily revisionist readings are good, because only these are "strong." All writing is misreading: that is, all writing is commentary or midrash. Writers have a natural love-hate relationship with their tradition, and to be a strong writer ultimately depends on being able to kill one's father-text(s). Shortly after Bloom first published this theory (Anxiety of Influence, 1973), he began to read the works of the Lurianists and was pleasantly surprised, he says, to find he'd been doing kabbalah all along. In the next book (Map of Misreading, 1975), he defines reading as a six- step process which I will let Susan Handelman describe for me: "Bloom swerves, attempts to complete his precursors, empties himself out, erects a counter-sublime, and faces a return from the dead" (The Slayers of Moses, 209). We have here, according to Bloom, the Lurianic myth thrice repeated: in each of the three pairs there is a contraction or emptying–which is in essence catastrophic–followed by a regaining which amounts almost to a self-divinization. The Lurianic hubris is perfect for Bloom, who wants to say that, in the end, the new poet

not only writes his own poems, but also comes, to all intents and purposes, to have written the precursor's poems as well.

Magid's discussion of the way the Lurianists "redeem" the text through their meta-text sounds close to Bloom's analysis; both see a soteriological dimension in (re)writing. But it is not clear how common Magid thinks this sort of thing is, nor indeed, how much he likes it. Bloom, of course, is a devotee and believes that the sort of revision accomplished by the Lurianists is the purview of the very few: Milton, Blake, Dante, Stevens and the J author among them. For my part, I do not admire the undeniably strong texts of the Lurianists; the Torah is not a work I think needs strong reading.

2. Moral Implications

Magid raises questions about the Lurianists' hermeneutical principle that the words of Scripture symbolize cosmic reality, as opposed to the rabbinic principle that Scripture precedes cosmos, and therefore cosmos can presumably be said to symbolize Scripture. But surely the use of the word "symbolize"–a word that suggests a one-way relation–clouds the issue. Neither Torah nor cosmos can be said to symbolize the other; rather Torah and cosmos exist in a special relation of mutual expression. The cosmos, to the extent that it is finished, expresses the blueprint laid out in Torah; correspondingly, the Torah, to the extent that it is finished, displays the fullest possible expression of cosmos.

A new criterion arises here to measure the legitimacy of textual claimants to the position of Oral Torah. True representation of cosmos becomes a mark of legitimate midrash. In effect, good commentary reflects and fosters ethical reality. Although it requires some arrogance to apply this criterion, it is even closer to the heart of the matter than Magid's notion of a given text's openness to peshat. Take the difference between Philo (a weak or relatively legitimate reader) and the Lurianists. Like Luria, Philo has his own extra-biblical meta-text; this is not the difference. But where

Magid says the difference is that Philo is open to Peshat, I think his very openness arises from the fact that his meta-text does not stand ethically or metaphysically contra cosmos. Similarly, the Lurianists closedness to peshat follows from the fact that they do stand contra cosmos.

To explain how the Lurianists stand contra cosmos (and thus contra Scripture) one would first discuss the similarities between their rewritings and the texts of the Valentinian gnostics. Similarities in the central myths of the two traditions have long been recognized and need not be discussed in full. In the two passages Magid discusses, two gnostic themes come to the fore: the need to rise to a purer realm, unaffected by human action, in order to generate purely, and more importantly, the inescapability of sin in the impure realm. That human sin is the inevitable result of mis-relation in the cosmos not only removes from human beings the need to obey divine command, but also opens the possibility that those who know the esoteric truth will act deliberately against the precepts of the peshat, molding themselves along the lines of the cosmic rupture in order to facilitate its fixing. Tikkun may now imply not the performance of halachah (already the dubious notion of "pressing for the end") but, rather, reduplicating the dysfunctional structures of cosmos; in effect, redemption by sin.

There is evidence that the ideas I am calling gnostic play out in strange sectarian activities: town orgies, murder and war. I see Lurianic kabbalah as comparable to gnosticism, while the Zohar–which, as Magid mentions, does not set itself up in defiance of peshat, or, I add, of cosmos–is comparable to mysticism. Obviously the mystic versus gnostic rubric does not clarify all the gradations in the messianic believer, from the shoulder-shrugger to the crazed activist, but it allows us to see that the Lurianists present an extreme that is more than revolutionary. As a response to destruction and devastation, their writings are irrensposible. They play Scripture and cosmos false. They are not laments, but calls to the ugliest of arms.

POSTMODERNISM AND PUBLIC JEWISH LIFE

Questions for Reform Judaism After the Critique of Modernity

by Herbert Bronstein

Editor's Note: This is a slightly edited version of a speech made at the opening of the Second Academic Convocation of Reform Rabbis on December 12, 1994. The theme was "Judaism, Modernity and Postmodernism"

As exponents of a movement in Judaism born out of identification with dominant elements of modernity, Reform rabbis at the end of the twentieth century have a two-fold and ironic relationship with modernity.

Modernity is, of course, associated with the triumph of Reason and Science in the West and with the exclusive claims of an empiricist epistemology focused on the control of nature. Science and technology brought miracles of healing, communications, transportation, and material betterment of the conditions of life to multitudes. And yet, with the self-justification that the West represented an "advanced" form of humanity bringing higher civilization to "backward" people, the same science and technology which brought was harnessed to an ideology of imperialism which brought destitution to multitudes and degradation to the lands and cultures of many peoples.

The Enlightenment, on whose banner was inscribed the fervent affirmation of the autonomy of the unshackled reason of each individual, produced in various places and times movements of tolerance and emphasis on human rights, and for the Jews, therefore, emancipation and entrance, however fitful or gradual, into the civil order. But the identification of modernity with the reason of ancient Athens was not

sufficient to ward off the Holocaust, as science and technology, fruits of modernity, were put to use to devise means of human extermination in the most efficient way possible and with the least residue.

Some think Modernity to be a framework so powerful as to be akin to a spiritual medium, even though it is materially based and its impetus is the rationalization of all behavior and the denial of worth to any knowledge or bodies of thought that cannot be quantified or measured. Thus modern society, on the one hand, and religion on the other, have come to be understood as opposed or, minimally, dichotomous. It is wide-spread in the modern consciousness that a primordial religious tradition affirming the realm of the soul or spirit must be inherently opposed to modernity in ways that earlier exponents could not have foreseen.

Modernity is also associated with the process of modernization, faith in which was to redeem "stagnant" areas of the world and release human beings from wasteful "superstition" (associated in many minds with religion). At the same time, this process brought with it "the rationalization" of all relationships on behalf of utility and productivity. To use Marxian concepts, the "cash-nexus" as the connection between human beings has resulted in widespread dehumanization and alienation from others and from work.

North America is considered by many to exmplify the processes of modernity and modernization. Reform Judaism blossomed in the United States, and, as Reform Jews, we are "products" of a movement which considered itself not only a response to modernity but an embrace of modernity. A hallmark of Reform Judaism has been its advocacy of religious ideas which would represent at once the ancient prophetic spirit of our faith and the leading edge of the cultures of Europe and America.

But by the end of this century, which has seen a tremendous growth in Reform Judaism, many if not most of the presuppositions of Modernity have suffered extreme critique. Western imperialism, two World Wars,

the Holocaust, Vietnam, have shown to what demonic uses Reason, Science and Technology, which multitudes served as gods, can be put. Further, the bond between reason and autonomy, once indissolubly linked in human thought, has been dissolved by the "hermeneutics of suspicion." Freud, Levi-Straus and the critique of ideology have vaporized the illusion of a free transcendent reason and of autonomy itself.

Surely it is time for exponents of Reform Judaism to assess this new situation. Up until modernity, rabbinic learning was rooted in the Transcendent, in a spiritual dimension, and there found its motives, sanctions and imperatives. In Classical Reform, rabbinic learning harmonized Jewish tradition and the premises and principles of modernity. But what is our stance now, after our loss optimism in the power of reason, and later, science and technology, to bring about "Progress," that great slogan of modernity that once many of us identified with our own Messianic vision? What do we now think of the faith that a militant denial of heteronomy alone–the fervent assertion of "freedom," a word central to the vocabulary of the current reform sabbath and daily prayer book–would not only liberate the individual from oppression but would also release the finest moral traits in humanity?

Reform Jewish scholarship committed itself to the empirical. Nelson Glueck, President of the Hebrew Union College, embraced the institutional manifestation of empiricism, not the model of the traditional Yeshiva, but the modern university, as the paradigm for the Reform rabbinical school. But while the concern for intellectual honesty is essential to regular liberalism, some may wonder whether this fervent or even exclusive commitment to the empirical is still good for the Jews or humanity, not to mention for rabbinic education; and whether or not, after all, a good deal has been lost for the Jews and the rabbinate in the process.

Our situation is doubly ironic. The ideal of intellectual honesty, the scientific spirit, and our historic consciousness along with canons of

academic integrity have enabled us to understand that just as the Reform movement has its parentage in the Enlightenment, so, for other reasons not so noble, it is a movement which consciously or not, and with a motive of entry into the civil order, often identified itself with a reformist Protestant agenda: an attack on the "quackery" and "carnival show and trappings" of ritual in general. In the process, we also now see in retrospect that Reform borrowed the "Core and Husk" theory of Liberal Christianity (viz. Feuerbach's The Essence of Christianity) on behalf of a universalist ethics that rejected particularist ways of life. This negation of ritual and observance, a disdain which eased our assimilation of Christian modes of worship and norms of "civil behavior", resulted in the rejection of our particular Jewish tradition and of entire sections of our textual treasures, only recently now being recovered. And that recovery is one aspect of a very confused postmodern situation which again, ironically, questions the capacity of our recovered texts to deliver any fixed meanings!

We must devise questions and approaches that would at least focus on some of these issues. Who of us would want to give up a commitment to the ethical dimension of monotheism and social consciousness as the inner spirit of liberal Judaism itself? But we may now, at the same time, wonder whether sundering ethics from ritual life may be contrary to the phenomenon of Judaism itself! Today there is a yearning for the retrieval of tradition; as a result, most liberal rabbis embrace both social consciousness and observance. But so far, in the current way of thinking in liberal congregations, ethics and social action are over here in the "synagogue program," and observance and practice over there, and there has been as yet no adequate integration of the two.

Despite a postmodern critical stance, how can we preserve those aspects of the heritage of Modernity so precious to us? Above the 'aron ha-kodesh at the Plum Street Temple in Cincinnati, Isaac Mayer Wise's synagogue, are inscribed the words "rosh d'varecha emet"–the first of Your principles is truth. How can we preserve the passion for factual truth and yet at the

same time subsume its results into a pursuit of spiritual meaning of the kind that empiricist epistemologies cannot deal and therefore often reject? Can there be a "meta-noetic" curriculum in a Reform Jewish Yeshiva that absorbs critical science and yet retains transcendent significance, the enchantment and mystery of our texts and stories? How can we reserve the right autonomously to dissent from obfuscation in traditional institutions of authority which conflict with what we consider to be the best of our sensibilities and, at the same time, remain aware that these sensibilities may be culturally, determined? And how can we, at the same time, find the authority, without which the passion for "truth" or "right" has no moral fundament and without which the rabbinate has no true weight nor the rabbinic role any gravity? What relationship does the recovery of engagement with sacred texts have to do with the spiritual life? What is the religious motive for studying Torah in our time equal to that of the late medieval Jew: "torat adonai m'shivat nefesh," the Torah of God restores the soul (to its Source)? (Psalm 19)

After the mindless massacres in this century, the terror of our history, our own continuous witness to a vision of history as a butcher block in a way Hegel could never have conceived, can we discover a vision of the end, or a recovery of time-fulfilled in the present, which can call forth the best of the kind of energies and fervor that our early forbearers in this our own movement felt in their work every day?

Perhaps the fundamental issue, after first our embrace with modernity and then its critique, is the question of our relationship with the Transcendent. By the term "transcendent," I mean a reality that transcends the material dimension of existence and that therefore eludes the determinism of material existence and the methods of analyzing material existence. In philosophy it is what is referred to as the metaphysical; in religion, what multitudes have spoken of as "God", the various names, attributes or emanations of the Divine encountered in revelation or theophanies, and the apprehension of those theologians who, out of the context of sacramental communities, think about the relationship between

the Divine and the human; and in the custom of popular speech it is what is referred to as the "signature," or "footsteps" of the Divine, and "signals of transcendence." By using the word "transcendence", we speak of the realm connected to our sense experience not only through the sublime works of art and poetry, but also through myths, symbol and metaphor, and sacred observance, the realm to which Jewry has related by such means of discourse as midrash aggadah, and the praxis of halacha. An essay of Hannah Arendt published late in her life entitled, "Thinking and Moral Consideration," (1971) gives us another kind of reference point:

"What has come to an end [in modernity] is the distinction between the sensual and the super sensual together with the notion, at least as old as Parmenides, that whatever is not given to the sense… is more real, more truthful, more meaningful than what appears; that it is not just beyond sense perception but above the world of the senses… what is "dead" is not only the localization of… eternal truths' but the [temporal/eternal, sensual/supersensual] distinction itself…. Meanwhile, in increasingly strident voices, the few defenders of metaphysics have warned of the danger of nihilism inherent in this development; and although they themselves seldom invoke it, they have an important argument in their favor: It is indeed true that once the super-sensual realm is discarded, its opposite, the world of appearances, as understood for so many centuries, is also annihilated. The sensual, as still understood by the positivists, cannot survive the death of the super-sensual. No one knew this better than Nietzsche, who, with his poetic and metaphoric description of the assassination of God in Zarathustra, has caused so much confusion in these matters. In a significant passage (in the Twilight of Idols), he clarifies what the word God meant in Zarathustra. It was a symbol for the supersensual realm as understood by metaphysics; he now uses instead of God the word 'true world' and says: 'We have abolished the `true world'. What has remained? The apparent one perhaps? Oh, no! With the 'true world' we have also abolished the apparent one.'"

By which I take it both Nietzsche and Arendt mean the world in which we live with its conflicts, issues and problems of the kind we must now address, none of which issues could exist without assuming transcendence.

The recovery of transcendence is at the root of all other issues we must address, as the purpose of rabbinic or Jewish learning. Without an enduring realm in which are rooted the moral principles to which we fervently aspire and only dimly perceive, the entire issue of autonomy versus authority dissolves for lack of a dialectic. If we define autonomy, as liberal Jews must, as a choice against idols, there can be no autonomy without an abiding structure or nomos with which to identify the base and basis of our choice. Without authority rooted in some transcendent reality beyond the self, the only resolution that can emerge from a multiplicity of self aggrandizing wills (in a Hobbesian war of the many against the many) will be determined by the idolatries of state, nation, folk party, or dominant interests. Since we lack a discourse of the transcendent, and with this, a discourse of the Sacred, and have become so estranged from such a discourse, there can be no integration of the praxis of the Sacred on the one hand (observance, liturgy, meditation) and the moral, ethical, and social consciousness on the other hand. Without the transcendent the entire realm of ritual becomes what Freud said it was: an infantile narcissistic self-deluding impediment to courageous living, or a guru-centered, inculcated intoxication. For the liberal stream of Judaism especially, our social consciousness, like roses cut from the bush and enjoyed for a while in a vase, our ethics, cut from the living tree or bush of the Jewish way of life, which is rooted in the soil of the Sacred, ultimately wilt and wither in the desiccating heat of radical relativism and of lives cut loose from any purpose beyond the service of their own successes.

The transcendent is finally the metier of the rabbi, and of course, the Jew. Rabbi Akiva's parable of the fox and the fish is apposite here; the fox enticing the fish to leave their watery world and come out into the

wonders of life on dry land. This was Akiva's answer to the Romans who encouraged the Jews to leave the way of Torah and join the pagan culture of Hellenized Rome. When rabbis leave the realm of the transcendent, our own element, we are inevitably swallowed up into whatever is contemporary in this culture. These are some of the issues which, through engagement with our texts, our own modes of learning and discourse, we must continue to engage.

FUTURES

KABBALAH AND POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY: Final responses to Shaul Magid's paper are due October 10. Plan to join us at the AAR. For our next issue, 4.4, final responses to Magid's paper are due October 15. IF YOU PLAN TO OFFER COMMENTS, PLEASE LET US KNOW NOW, via e-mail to ___.

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