Being Ethical in a Postmodern Age: Toward a Jewish (M)Orality

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The Rock and the Pit

Human beings often seek meaning and purpose in their lives. Moralists and teachers articulate principles to help give direction to the effort to make life worthwhile. When asked for advice, these leaders often resort to illustrative examples. They point to the lives of others in the past as a model for the present. Isaiah 51:1 speaks out of such a tradition when it advises those who "seek the Lord" to look "to the rock whence ye were hewn, and the bottom of the pit from whence ye were drawn out, unto Abraham your father." That admonition seems clear enough—to find out what you should do, look to the example set by Abraham.

Yet what example does this paragon of Jewish behavior provide? The biblical record is confusing at best. At times Abraham acts like a willing and obedient servant of the Lord. When called upon to abandon his past, his culture, and his family, Abraham unhesitatingly obeys. He appears "slavishly dependent" on God (Genesis 12).[1] This dependency leads to a nomadic life. Abraham travels without finding a home; his adventures may seem to lead to the "promised land, " but he must finally purchase even so basic a need as a burial plot from unsympathetic strangers. The Abraham pictured in this portrait is rough-hewn and unfinished, unsophisticated and dependent.

The image of a more urbane and sophisticated Abraham sometimes replaces the nomadic one. This Abraham negotiates as a shrewd and calculating fortune-hunter, turning apparently disastrous events into opportunities for success (Genesis 12, 13, 20, 24). Other stories show Abraham as a gallant warrior, mustering his troops to rescue his nephew Lot who has been kidnapped by enemies (Genesis 14). Abraham the warrior models the strength and power of successful leaders.

Other passages weave Abraham into a different type of warrior—a warrior against God. In these passages the hero demonstrates great courage

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and argues against the divinity. God has determined to destroy Sodom and Gommorah. Abraham protests that such a destruction would affect the innocent as well as the guilty. Claiming that "the Judge of all the world must judge righteously, " Abraham convinces God to change his mind (Genesis18). He shows no fear when contesting the injustice he thinks God is about to perpetrate. This version of Abraham as a lion of faith contending with the deity contrasts with that of Abraham the obedient who accepts divine commandment as unquestionable law. The accepting Abraham can even acquiesce to the command to sacrifice his only son (Genesis 22).

The Textual Abraham and the Oral Abraham

Traditional Jewish biblical interpretation recognizes this dilemma. Jewish exegetes claim that a superficial reading of the "Written Torah, " the biblical narrative itself, requires the supplement of the "Oral Torah, " the interpretive process that expands, transforms, and reshapes the inscribed text. From this perspective the textual Abraham obscures the oral Abraham; morality depends not in imitating the Abraham buried in a literary past , but in evoking the living Abraham in the oral present. The morality of Abraham's model is not inscribed in Genesis but waits for the vivifying spirit of spoken commentary, of a return to orality.

This oral perspective takes on greater specificity from an exegesis of Isaiah 51:1. The text, as noted above, advises Jews to look toward Abraham because he is a "rock" and "the bottom of the pit." These terms can be interpreted as forms of oral reconstruction. Abraham can be brought to life as the "rock"against which Jews must measure themselves or as the "bottom of the pit, " whose example enables them to cope with the historical disasters of their lives. The textual Abraham is neither a rock nor a pit, but merely a possibility waiting to be brought into oral potential. Some readers may evoke Abraham the rock and feel the despair of not measuring up to the ideal. Other readers may evoke Abraham in the pit and find consolation for their sorrows. The Abraham of the biblical text bewilders readers. The Abraham of the oral tradition reflects the choices readers make, the moral direction in which they themselves decide to move.[2]

The "moral" of Abraham depends on the "oral" interpretation we give to his story as it unfolds in the Jewish tradition. Jewish thinkers today follow in the tradition of biblical exegesis which makes the enigma of Abraham a story waiting to be retold. It appears that they, like earlier interpreters of the "written Torah, " seek to reinfuse it with the power of speech, of the "oral Torah." Emmanuel Levinas, for example, does not deny that the Bible presents Abraham as the first Jew, as a parochial exemplar for a chosen people. Yet Levinas probes more deeply into Abraham as evoked by the Oral Law and envisions the oral Abraham as a paradigm not just for Jews but for any human being. He asks,

"Who are the heirs of Abraham?" and answers that "the heirs of Abraham are of all nations; any man truly man is of the line of Abraham."[3] As Levinas reads the text, Abraham is a model of moral humanity, of any ethical person. The literal Abraham gives way before the interpreted one.

Levinas, despite recognizing that his Abraham is that of the rabbis and the so-called "oral tradition, " would resist saying that the moral of Abraham comes from recapturing the oral nature of the original tale. He seeks a (m)oral from the narratives about Abraham by doing what he calls "translation." He retextualizes the written word rather than detextualizes. To make it moral he refines the art of reading narrative, not of telling narrative. Several Jewish thinkers share Levinas' desire to decode the biblical text, to reread it, if not retell it, in new ways that reflect their meeting with the inscribed text.

Genesis 22: Ethical Dilemmas

One particular text generates a fecundity of interpretations, oral responses, and reinscription: the tale of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son to God, the story known in Hebrew as the *Akedah*, the Binding of Isaac. Of all the biblical narratives, Genesis 22 seems the most morally ambiguous and ethically challenging. The story is a curious one. God"tests" his chosen "friend" Abraham by demanding that he deliver his only son as a burnt offering. This "test" is, in itself, strange. The hero must carry out a murder. There is no rationale given or excuse offered. The sacrifice will not save another—Isaac's half-brother Ishmael gains nothing from this death. Abraham's obedience to God's command will achieve no great boon to humanity—no winds will fill the sails of ships on their way to a great battle, the wrath of no voracious serpent is assuaged by this act. The divine command not only appears arbitrary, but it contradicts what God has previously promised. Abraham has been assured that through Isaac his lineage will be established. If Isaac dies, God is proven a liar. Not only must Abraham transgress the prohibition on murder, but in the process he destroys divine credibility.

A second problem in the story of Genesis 22 stems from the hero's silence throughout the narrative. He does not share his intent with any other person. His wife Sarah is unaware of what will come to pass. The young men accompanying him on the journey with Isaac are given no hint about the ensuing sacrifice. Even Isaac who boldly questions his father receives only an evasive answer. Abraham is silent not just before other people, but before God as well. In other stories Abraham does not keep silent but protests against the divine will. When the cities of Sodom and Gommorah were to be destroyed Abraham argued until God granted him concessions. Abraham did not stand by idly when his nephew Lot was taken hostage by a foreign king, but actively entered into battle himself. Yet this hero does remain silent in the face of God's outrageous request.

What can explain Abraham's reluctance to give voice to his feelings either to other people or even to God? Why is he so willing to murder his child?

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son never comes to fruition. As Abraham prepares to carry out the act that God has demanded, an angelic voice calls to him. Abraham does not even hesitate, but complies with the angel immediately. Why should Abraham abandon God's commandment at the request of a lesser being, a mere angel?

The three questions just raised—the strangeness of the divine command, the silence of Abraham, and the alacrity with which Abraham heeds the angelic call—have evoked discussion in contemporary Jewish ethics. This discussion suggests how recent Jewish thinkers imagine the ethical ideal, how they construe moral behavior among Jews today. Contemporary Jews give expression to their rereading of Abraham's trial during the *Akedah*. As they do so they show how it is possible to recover if not an orality within the narrative, then at least a morality hidden by the textual narrative as presently inscribed.

The Body of Abraham, The Body of Isaac

The Bible tells the story of the *Akedah* dispassionately, almost as if it were an example of automatic behavior. The biblical narrative focuses on actions, not intentions. It never reveals what Abraham felt, how Isaac responded, or even how it wants the reader to respond. Modern interpreters experience this absence and try to evoke the personalities behind the actions. In doing this they follow the lead of Soren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* which, in its examination of the story of Abraham, contrasts the objective basis of ethical obligation with the subjective and indecipherable reasons of faith. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, according to Kierkegaard, flows from his personal, subjective nature. It takes place without rational justification, merely as a personal response to a divine voice. Ethical sacrifices, like that of Agamemnon, by contrast, who offers up his daughter for the good of the community, seem to Kierkegaard both rational and universal.

This retelling of Abraham's story gives it an oral immediacy, but, at least from Kierkegaard's perspective, at the expense of its moral value. As Kierkegaard tells the story, the trial for Abraham is not just that of giving up his son. It is giving up his son for no good reason. No one can understand why someone should obey the command of a deity who asks for such a sacrifice. While sacrifice in several contexts could be defended as rationally necessary, Abraham's situation, Kierkegaard argues, is radically different from those contexts.[4]

This retelling of the story focuses on the uniqueness of Abraham, of how Abraham is different from all other people. For Kierkegaard this evocation of a unique individual inevitably leads to a diminution of his ethical stature. Very few modern Jew-

ish thinkers agree entirely with Kierkegaard's understanding of Abraham. Some interpreters, however, do learn from him the lesson of subjectivity as an important human reality.[5] The story of the sacrifice of Isaac in this context is less a general example of how the religious and the ethical collide than of how a father and son face each other during a time of crisis. The passion of Kierkegaard for the people behind the story, the individuals whom the text seems to swallow alive, draw Jewish thinkers to emphasize the personal issues at stake in Genesis 22. The story directs attention not to the actual plot but to the sentiments which it empowers. Newer interpreters bring the face of the protagonists to the fore, and with the face the entire body. Isaac embodies Abraham; in sacrificing Isaac's body, Abraham offers up his own.

Interpreting Abraham this way means that the specific command that Abraham hears, in this case the sacrifice of his son, is less important than the passionate attention to individuals that the story arouses. This new focus extends Jewish ethical concern to those who have been excluded, suppressed, and kept outside the conventional spheres of discourse. Women, blacks, the sexually and culturally oppressed become the sources of revelation that mainstream morality ignores or seeks to deny.[6] This willingness to move beyond stereotypes and conventions to look at the subjective reality of suffering individuals leads to an extraordinary transformation of Jewish scholarship, particularly in the spheres of sexuality, family, and gender analysis.

Several recent books investigate eros and sexuality in the Jewish tradition, tracing their display and containment from biblical and rabbinic times through the present.[7] It may seem strange to speaks of the Jews as the "people of the body" rather than "people of the book, " but the two are not mutually exclusive. The books that Jews have written have focused on the human body in all its aspects.

Sometimes the recent Jewish scholarship reads books literally and finds in them insights for modern Jews struggling with their sexual identity. Sometimes scholars read the books "against the grain" to uncover the hidden voice of women coming through stories about those who spin in moonlight, those who die in childbirth, and those who are abandoned without recourse to divorce. Sometimes books raise questions concerning their own embodiment as in the homoerotic poetry of Jewish writers living in a Muslim culture. By attending to neglected voices recent Jewish moralists widen the scope of possibility for Jewish ethical activity and creativity. Yet this openness to silenced voices in bodies that are often ignored begs the question of whether a voice deserves hearing or not. By focusing on Abraham and Isaac as embodied saints, as exemplars of the passionate subject, one can avoid the task of determining whether the voice that issues from this person or another is indeed authoritative. Awareness of the other—as body, as face, as other—does not, on its

own, create a complete Jewish ethics. Another oral evocation of Abraham must complement the one evoked by an emphasis on subjective individuals.

Divining Covenantal Responsibility

The openness of Abraham's attention to voices, faces, and bodies that may bring the divine message raises problems, despite its radical appeal. The world today resounds with a cacophony of passions, of competing voices, of opposing faces, of disparate bodies. If all that the story of Abraham represents is the supreme importance of individuals, where can Jews find guidance in learning which individual to heed when the sounds of two equally powerful voices clash in their ears? Is there a way to blunt the implication of the story that "it is permissible to commit murder, provided the right conditions are met"?[8]

Many Jewish thinkers solve that problem by pointing to the conclusion of the story of the *Akedah*. Abraham remains silent when God tells him to sacrifice Isaac; he also remains silent and obedient when an angel tells him to spare Isaac. That latter silence is at least equally as important as the first silence. While only God's voice can require murder, even an angel can reverse the decision. Abraham, some say, faces two trials: he is tested to see if he will obey God's absurd command, and he is tested a second time to see if he will disobey God by listening to a compassionate angel. He passes both tests. Not only does he follow God's demand, but he readily abandons it when a lower being, speaking for compassion, tells him to desist. That he obeys the lesser voice represents his greater fidelity, his higher moral choice, and this, these writers say, represents his greatest achievement.[9]

This envisioning of the story compares the first command (of the trial-God) to the second command (of the angel), and considers the second more important. The Bible does not make such a comparison and remains silent on why Abraham should heed an angel rather than God. Jewish writers who initiate a new "oral Torah" augment that silence with a commentary that emphasizes the overriding authority of concern for other people. This idea follows the lead of Emmanuel Levinas whose view of Abraham grows out of his general philosophy. That philosophy points to the Other which meets you face to face as the source of moral obligation.[10]

Concern for such an Other becomes the cornerstone of many recent Jewish moral writings. When Levinas reads the story of the *Akedah* he finds its climax in Abraham's willingness to listen to the angel. Abraham heeds the call to attend to Isaac's needs rather than to God's commands. Abraham is able to hear the angel because the reality of Isaac is more important to him than an abstract divine imperative. Abraham proves himself to God when he can abandon God and care more about Isaac, the other person who stands beside him, than about the divinity.

"Perhaps, " Levinas comments, "the ear that Abraham had for hearing the voice that leads him back to the ethical order has been the highest moment of the drama." This view exalts Abraham as a model of compassion rather than Abraham as a model of the subjective.[11] The story of an absurd command to commit murder, to circumvent ethical concerns for the other, ends with the triumph of the ethical, affirming that religion does not contradict ethics.

That ending undermines the divine claim to authority which dominates the first part of the tale. Abraham rejects God's power in favor of compassion for Isaac, even when that compassion is articulated by one lesser than the divinity. To become an ethical self means standing against power for the sake of another, out of a sense of concern and love for those who suffer. The Abraham imagined in this retelling of the tale only heeds those voices which call for compassion. This construction of Abraham legitimates only those authorities who demand an uplifting of the powerless.[12]

According to this interpretation Abraham's actions in Genesis 22 are similar to his deed in Genesis 18, when he defends Sodom and Gommorah. In that case of defense, he goes beyond God's compassion to teach divinity itself the meaning of concern for others. His attention to the angel also teaches God a lesson—Abraham, not God, as it were, outlaws child sacrifice in ancient Israel. This ability to instruct God illustrates a classic Jewish theological concept, that of covenant. Covenant implies that human beings and the divine have complementary roles to play;each requires an action on the part of the other. This means that while, as the first understanding of Abraham suggests, Jews do listen for God's voice and seek a commanding obligation that transcends convention, they also refuse to give up their freedom of choice. They look for criteria beyond the claim of divinity to justify their deeds.

Covenant demands that both God and human beings grant freedom to each other. Humanity not only needs freedom from divine authority to make ethical choices. God needs humanity tobe free so as to glean the wisdom born of human compassion.[13] The idea of covenant suggests that while Jews do follow God's lead and often venture into the unconventional, they also refuse to accept a divine dictum that seems less compassionate than more accessible angelic voices. Jews understand their ethical responsibility as "grounded in obligation" but nevertheless as requiring the "sense of freedom" which permits them to reject an apparently religious duty when it conflicts with the call for compassion.[14] The covenant idea invests Jewish ethics with a peculiar dialectic. Jews boast of their voluntary ethical choices; yet they follow a clearly outlined legal procedure(halakhah). They look for guidance in a revealed set of texts, yet they challenge those texts against the criteria of compassion and humanistic concern. Jewish

ethics appears to arise from intellectual study of the tradition, yet that tradition calls upon its followers to use their emotions be a source of moral insight.[15] This duality arises from the double role that Abraham fulfills as partner with God—he heeds the divine voice, but heeds other voices as well.

Silence and (M)orality

Abraham's silent acceptance of the angelic voice turns out to be an active protest against divine injustice. The biblical story does not credit every silence with such a purpose. Genesis 22 implies that Abraham is also silent toward others—his wife, his servants, and his intended victim. Some recent Jewish ethicists look to that strange silence for still a different perspective on Abraham's moral model. Why does Abraham remain silent? Because he knows that any answer will be a lie. If ethics means responding to the demands of the other, to listening to the call for compassion, then every response to any single other must be inadequate. To say yes to one implies saying no to another. Ethics, in so far as it chooses between equally possible options, is, itself, a "temptation" in which one must refuse one obligation in order to accept another. The only way to avoid the temptation, to remain fair to all who call, is to refuse to heed any voice at all. The only way to remain ethically pure is to remain ethical inactive, to refuse to say a word, to refuse to make any decision.

The curious thing about Abraham's silence, however, is that he cannot maintain it. While his devotion to moral truth restrains him from sharing his secret with his wife or companions, he eventually must break his silence and speak to his son Isaac. That broken silence, those words that should not have been spoken, produce a singular morality of their own. In the story Isaac asks Abraham, "Where is the lamb for the sacrifice?"Does ethics provide a definitive answer that Abraham can give? If he remains silent, Isaac will become suspicious. If Abraham tells the truth, "You are the lamb for the slaughter, " Isaac may flee. Instead of using either reply, Abraham gives a non-answer, "God will provide a lamb for the slaughter, my son." Certainly this reply is "true." But its very truth is hidden and obscured. In whatever way interpreters retell Abraham's answer, it remains an oblique rather than direct response to Isaac's question. Abraham, as one commentator points out, "speaks in order not to say anything." This is a paradox in that speech actually creates silence; an unanswered question would have been a truer response than the misleading words. Abraham, however, cannot escape the paradox, that is the tragedy of all ethical choice. To decide for God is to decide against Isaac; to decide for Isaac is to decide against God; silence betrays speech, and speech betrays silence.[16] Abraham decides to act; by so doing he answers an ethical demand but he also makes an immoral choice.

Those who take Abraham as the model of Jewish religion build a theo-

ry of religion and its relationship to the moral out of this paradox. Religion, understood through the story of Abraham, places a person in an impossible predicament. It defines morality as heeding a cry of compassion and then constructs a reality in which no one person is adequate to respond to every call. Religion requires its followers to act; yet any single act prevents the fulfillment of its alternative. Religion refuses to allow its followers to judge between those who call to them for compassion, but it also refuses to allow the luxury of inaction.To be religious means to be trapped—one must speak the truth, but speaking is a lie; one must act for compassion, but every compassionate deed is also a betrayal of compassion. One ideal inevitably conflicts with another.

This recognition has been argued most persuasively by the so-called "postmoderns." Jacques Derrida, a thinker closely associated with postmodernism, understands the Abraham story in this way. For Derrida, Abraham's confusion is that of every person, since in reality the distinction between "moral responsibility"and "moral irresponsibility" evades human understanding: "Abraham is thus at the same time the most moral and the most immoral, the most responsible and the most irresponsible of men."[17] Like Abraham one speaks not because words convey the truth but because one cannot maintain silence, because any moral decision requires a reflexive act of immorality that balances it. In terms of amorality of orality, this perspective prefers silence but demands speech. It knows that both texts and orality are misleading, but it refuses to retreat into a silence that may be true but ineffective.

Reflections on the implications of silence resound in recent Jewish ethical writing. Certainly silence has its detractors. Many Jewish thinkers uphold the necessity for speech. Silence is too great a temptation to receive any theological support. These thinkers charge that silence breeds isolation; a world without speech is a world without community, a world of intense privacy. The retreat into silence can also be a form of denial, a refusal to cope with the horrors of abuse and cruelty that people face. A therapy of recovery demands speech, requires confession and confrontation. Silence is a "conspiracy" which perpetuates rationalization, pretense, and cowardice.[18]

Yet other Jewish thinkers defend silence as an act of courage. Silence, these writers aver, is not merely the absence of speech. It does more than just interrupt the flow of words. This interruption is itself a beginning, a face that must be confronted. Silence has a tangibility, a reality of its own that demands respect. For itself, and not just as the opposite of words, silence plays a role in Jewish theology. Language acts in a double way; it conceals as it reveals. Silence too is double; it reveals even as it conceals. Religious faith comprises the power of silence no less than the power of words, the message that comes from the absence of sound.[19] Silence and

orality share a partnership of morality on this reading.

Both the defenders and opponents of silence have impressive arguments. The controversy, however, is even more complicated. It may be that neither silence nor the absence of silence is possible. Elie Wiesel, whose writings on the Nazi slaughter of six million Jews demonstrate an eloquence on behalf of memory, sometimes imagines that silence alone responds effectively to that event. His novel *The Oath* tells about the mad man Moshe who extracts a promise from the novel's hero. That vow is one of silence. The witness must remain mute in the face of the memory that he bears. Wiesel's hero almost accomplishes the task. He then faces a choice—he must fulfill his oath and allow an innocent person to die or he must speak and save a life. He chooses to betray silence through speech.[20] That is the lesson modern Jewish moralists draw. The price demanded by silence is too high. Just as Abraham breaks his silence with misleading words to Isaac, so a Jewish morality must learn to speak even at the risk of not saying enough or of saying too much. Even the legacy of the *Shoah* stands between the morality of silence and the necessary betrayal of speech.[21]

Conclusion: The Tragic Vision of Jewish Ethics Today

This ambivalence toward expression highlights a third major characteristic of recent Jewish ethical thinking—awareness of the tragic situation in which we all must live. We suffer through trials that we cannot surpass. We confront evils that we cannot escape. The Jewish thinker today, whether emphasizing silence, speech, or an ambivalent stance between the two, recognizes this reality. Jews today who look for purpose and meaning in their lives find strange guides to the tradition. Abraham, the source of hope from the bottom of the pit, is a postmodern role model. He instructs Jews today in the willingness to act even without absolute certainty, to embrace the risk of being wrong, and to find the courage to enact a partial morality in a world that does not permit us ever to achieve the impossible morality which must, nevertheless, remain our aspiration.

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1. John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 12.

2. See *Zohar* II 83b, but contrast this interpretation of Isaiah 51:1 with that given in *Zohar* I 122b where Abraham is the "rock"of faith from which Jews come and Sarah is the hole of the depths of compassion from which they draw inspiration.

3. Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 99.

4. See the discussion in Jerome I. Gellman, *The Fear, the Trembling, and the Fire: Kierkegaard and the Hasidic Masters on the Binding of Isaac* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994). Cf. Manfred H. Vogel, "Kierkegaard's Teleological Suspension of the Ethical — Some Reflections from a Jewish Perspective, " in his *A Quest For a Theology of Judaism: The Divine, the Human and the Ethical Dimensions in the Structure-of-Faith of Judaism, Essays in Constructive Theology* (Lanham, MD:University Press of America, 1987), 257-86.

5. On how Jewish writers appropriate the personalistic aspects of Kirkegaard's thought while rejecting much of his interpretation of Genesis 22, see Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 74, 171, 173.

6. See Laurence J. Silberstein, "Others Within and Others Without: Rethinking Jewish Identity and Culture, " in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohen, New Perspectives on Jewish Studies (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 1-34.

7. See David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture,* The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics, no. 25 (Berkeley:University of California Press, 1993); and several works either written or edited by Howard Eilberg-Schwartz: *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon, 1995);*People of the Body* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), and with Wendy Doniger, *Off With Her Head!: The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

8. See Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 9.

9. See Abraham Joshua Heschel, *A Passion For Truth* (New York:Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 227.

10. On Levinas' general view of ethics and its relation to his understanding of Judaism see Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen, SUNY series in Philosophy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 83-115; and John Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics*, Warwick Studies in European Philosophy, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1995).

11. See John D. Caputo, who cites this passage from Levinas in his "Instants, Secrets, and Singularities: Dealing Death in Kierkegaard and Derrida, " *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, ed. Martin J. Matsutik and Merold Westphal, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 223.

12. See the discussion in Alison Leigh Brown, "God, Anxiety, and Female Divinity," in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, 66-75.

13. See the defense of individual freedom and its necessity for God as well as human beings given throughout, in Eugene B. Borowitz, *Exploring Jewish Ethics: Papers on Covenant Responsibility* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990).

14. See Arnold Eisen, "Covenant, " in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements, and Belief,* ed. Arthur Allen Cohen and Paul Mendes Flohr (New York:Scribner, 1987), 107-112.

15. See the discussion of the dynamics of Jewish ethics and Jewish law in Zeev W. Falk, *Religious Law and Ethics: Studies in Biblical and Rabbinical Theonomy* (Jerusalem: Mesharim Publishers, 1991), especially 5, 11, 17, 81, 89, 123, 171.

16. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death,* tr. David Wills, Religion and Postmodernism series, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 60, 64; see also 55-84.

17. Ibid., 72, 77.

18. See David R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 266; Michael Oppenheim, *Mutual Upholding: Fashioning Jewish Philosophy Through Letters* (San Francisco: Peter Lang, 1992), 131.

19. See André Neher, "Silence, " in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements, and Belief,* 873-879; David J. Wolpe, *In Speech and In Silence: the Jewish Quest for God* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992).

20. Elie Wiesel, *The Oath* (New York: Random House, 1973).

21. See the discussion of Wiesel's *The Oath* in Michael Berenbaum, *The Vision of the Void: Theological Reflections on the Works of Elie Wiesel* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 93-102.