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I. Introduction

The idea of individual freedom is perhaps the most significant and enduring notion of modernity. However, it is also one of the most perplexing problems of human existence. Countless social institutions, philosophical discussions, and scientific projects revolve around the tension between the ideal of individual freedom and facts about the human condition that suggest the opposite. There are two types of barriers between freedom as a basic notion of humanity and actual human existence. The first is the causal and physical conditioning of our behavior and tendencies, specified in growing detail in scientific disciplines such as cognitive and neural science, psychiatry, etc. The second type is individual conditioning by wider social and global states, including direct coercion of behavior by use of psychological, physical or institutional force. This type of hindrance to freedom is revealed in such studies as sociology and economics as well as ethics and political theories. Both types of hindrance to freedom oppose the ideal of individual freedom pictured as free mobility and choice, on the one hand, and self-determination and autonomy on the other. In order to do justice to both types of obstacles to

freedom as an ideal, I refer to its reverse as *determination*, a notion that couples the causal and physical conditioning of our behavior together with the historical-political as well as psychological constraints upon individual self-determination.

One of the most challenging social institutions to the notion of individual freedom is religion. Religion places restrictions upon individual freedom in all senses of this term. It restricts behavior by establishing structures of authority, it is based upon a fixed set of beliefs, and it interferes with individual self- determination. What makes this case of the freedom/determination tension particularly baffling is the voluntary character of religious communal affiliation since modernity. Modern individuals seem to be committed to their right of self-determination, their free and open-ended creative thinking, and their liberal, autonomous practices. Why then would they voluntarily surrender their freedom to a religious community with its determinative power over the individual and restrictive scope of ideas and customs?

Attempts to understand this tension, usually within psychological, anthropological and sociological frameworks, assume a certain view of human socialization and mass behavior. They also assume a dichotomy between modes of religious behavior and individual freedom as described above. These accounts explain religious affiliation as a social phenomenon. Accordingly they describe the implications of this affiliation on social and political processes and questions of personal status, decision-making, and social and professional mobility. However, these accounts don't capture the *experience of individuals* within religious groups with respect to the tension between freedom and determination, and they in effect leave out an essential piece of this puzzle. What does it mean for a religious individual's sense of freedom to choose to join, or continue to affiliate with, a religious community? What is the consciousness that accompanies the engagement in such a community?

In the case of the Jewish religion, the problematic character of the voluntary surrender to religious commitment is strengthened by the unique nature of Jewish belonging in the modern world: Jewish practice is particularly restrictive and all-inclusive. Why then surrender so much

of one's life experience and world to communal religious norms? Why choose to affiliate with an ethnic group whose historical experience includes so much danger through persecution and hatred? Why drag a historically revealed God into one's frame of reference when our modern moral, communal, and political institutions, as well as our instrumental and emotional constructs, do so well without God? And similarly, why involve oneself with religious, traditional communal authorities when even one's civil obligations are sometimes too restrictive to bear?

In this paper I do not attempt to describe the individual experience of affiliation with a religious community in phenomenological or psychological terms. My intent is to explore the philosophical basis for the claim that an affiliation with a religious community is not necessarily a hindrance to a notion of individual freedom. This question is closely related to the question of faith and the extent to which a person committed to religious faith does so at the expense of reason, the dominance of which is closely associated with the modern notion of freedom. My argument has two phases. In the first, I distinguish between two senses of individual freedom, namely, autonomy and personal freedom. In this phase, I show that an idea of transcendence that underlies our thought system and an affiliation with a particular community of discourse are both necessary for the development of thought and therefore do not deny autonomy, but condition it. In the second phase, I explain through the notion of a community of inquirers why development of reason—and therefore freedom—entails social affiliation, and I suggest an alternative notion for the *lack* of personal freedom that we usually associate with traditional religious communities.

II. Heteronomy, Autonomy, and Thought

Modern philosophers began their detachment from scholasticism by denying the right of religious authorities to be the exclusive carriers of God's truths and God's will. By endowing reason with this authoritative power, they opened the way to the freedom of individual thought and action. This is the type of freedom I refer to as personal freedom. But it is

Kant's critique of reason that introduces the idea that human reason's uniqueness is in its power to *make* the laws. Law-making, and not merely law-discovering, is now considered the basis of the kind of knowledge that we pursue. The challenge that this idea poses to religious thought is its denial that it is God who makes the laws of our thinking, at least as far as the human mind can demonstrate. But Kant poses an additional implication for religious truths. Kant's notion of human autonomy, self-lawmaking, also challenges any particularistic notion of truth and sets of values. According to Kant's understanding, conveyed in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, all rational creatures are autonomous, i.e., they are their own lawmakers. Using reason in order to create laws also includes the realization that every other rational creature is a lawmaker. It is therefore part of the golden rule of ethics and the basic dignity of human existence to acknowledge this nature of human reason universally and to respect it.[1] So, apart from challenging the idea that moral law is derived from tradition and does not afford each individual the honor of their own lawmaking, by endowing reason with universality Kant denies the rationality of particular systems. This is to say that religious and moral systems that are founded upon a particularistic, historical or national foundation cannot compete with the universal morality that is derived from reason alone and does not involve particularistic and contingent historical conditioning. The challenge to Jewish law is particularly disturbing since, beside the obvious heteronomy of its origin, it is exclusively based upon the particularities of a specific community in specific historical circumstances. 19th century Jewish thinkers, such as Herman Cohen and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, worked hard to show the affinity of the tenets of Judaism to the demands of the human

[1] In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant suggests a number of formulas for his Categorical Imperative. The second, the "Humanity" formula, states that we should never act in such a way that we treat a human being—that is a rational being, whether ourselves or others—as a means only, but rather always as an end in itself. The third formulation includes the notion that all rational beings have "a will that legislates universal law," and we have to act in such a way as respects this aspect of humanity (Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998], ch 2).

autonomous, universal reason. The thinking of scholars such as Maimonides, and other Jewish thinkers with a rationalist bent (i.e. with tendency towards rationalistic views) who attempted to harmonize their contemporary version of reason with their religious tradition, aided the 19th century thinkers (such as Cohen and Hirsch). But by engaging in this work they left much to be substantiated concerning the validity of the Jewish forms of life and faith in its particularistic modes.[2] Many 20th century thinkers were engaged in an existential and phenomenological critique of the rationalistic tradition and of German post-Kantian Idealism. Jewish thinkers such as Rosenzweig and Buber were able to expose the problematic nature of the rationalization and universalization of the divine/moral imperative. In their thought, they delegate the human relationship with the divine and the divine moral law to a realm that is outside of reason and therefore not accountable to it. Rosenzweig attempts to salvage Jewish particularism by pointing to the necessarily personal and communal aspects of the moral imperative. He explains revelation as a type of relationship that is not exhausted by rational explication, but is necessary for constructing a moral ethos. He also demonstrates that social-moral participation within a religious community includes a development of a particular language, and that this language is an essential part of human-divine communication. In a different way, but similarly divorced from reason, Martin Buber bases morality on actual personal encounters with real people or with God, and not on the type of objectifying reason that Kant teaches.

For many Jewish thinkers, the historical events of the 20th century and the risk of assimilation added urgency to the quest of substantiating Jewish particularism. This urgency is a result of both the disillusionment with the Western version of human reason in regard to morality and the

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[2] It should be noted, however, that works by Peter Ochs and Steven Kepnes illuminate aspects of the works of Jewish philosophers such as Herman Cohen who do make a case for the particularistic expressions of Jewish tradition. See Peter Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 290-300, and Steven Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning,* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23-78.

material danger to the continued existence of the Jewish people.[3] The universal moral implication of the extreme outbreaks of violence and persecution also added an urgency to found an ethics upon a less elusive basis than Western ideals of humanism and reason. However, in one respect, many postmodern religious thinkers are still Kantian: they still view the autonomous self as the focal point of ethical discussion. According to this notion, as mentioned above, it is the essential capacity of a rational human being to be her or his own lawmaker. This means that humans are the ones that organize their environment according to laws that they have a mental capacity to establish, and also that they are the legislators of the rule by which their societies live. Morally, it means that every human being has a right to his or her own self-legislation and that everyone commits to respect this right to human dignity. Understanding human freedom in terms of autonomy is, of course, the basis of recognizing nations' rights to political self-rule. However, the commitment to every individual's human dignity has been extended in the last few decades to rejecting the pretension of privileged cultural positions. Accordingly, no ethical or political system of a social group has superiority over positions of any other social or cultural subgroup. This challenge to the supremacy of Western modes of thinking is one of the major shifts behind postmodern trends and the moral basis for arguments of movements such as feminism and multiculturalism.

But the moral principle of individual autonomy still poses a crucial challenge to postmodern religious thinkers. The belief that God is in some way behind important values that concern human behavior challenges the notion of individual human autonomy. Ari Elon, an Israeli liberal thinker, expresses this by drawing a distinction between an autonomous (in Hebrew, *ribboni*) and a rabbinic (*rabbani*) Jew. This pun is designed to rebuff the traditional notion that God is the creator of human beings in his image and therefore has moral and religious sovereignty over them. According to Elon's Nietzschean twist, humans are in fact the ones who

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[3] See, for example, Eugene B. Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew*, (Philadelphia, P.A.: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 70. Hence, Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant*.

created God in *their* image, and instead of *managing* their own creation, they *worship* it. What is worse, they subjugate their fellow human beings to their gods' imagined social hierarchies. The only hope for a just society, where every autonomous individual is treated with the dignity he or she deserves, is that we stop worshipping the very gods we ourselves create.[4]

Elon's solution works for those who, like Mordechai Kaplan's American Jewish adherers, have lost interest in envisioning anything beyond the realm of nature. However, there are those existential religious thinkers who, like Rosenzweig and Buber, do include the encounter with transcendence in their account of human experience. These thinkers have an interest in retaining the moral force of the traditional notion of a transcendent God, while holding on to the ethical centrality of human autonomy. Another way to incorporate an idea of transcendence into the ethical discourse is displayed in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas analyzes the experience of encounter with the human Other as the foundational principle of his philosophy. In consequence, he places all the force of the ethical demand within the actual human community, but outside the reach of one's subjectivity and reason. Levinas' phenomenology describes how a personal, factual human encounter generates such a forceful psychic reaction that the subject (the I, the *same*) is drawn to a total submission of his or her self to the responsibility toward this Other. This encounter is described in terms of an actual sight of the Other's face. The sight of the face of the Other holds within it all the force to shock me into realizing my absolute responsibility towards the Other human's moral demand. In this way, individual autonomy is compromised by a heteronomous, non-rational, but inevitable experience that generates an emotional reaction. This leads to the birth of an ethical self, one that is necessarily drawn out of his or her solipsistic stance to total responsibility to the particular Other, the person in the encounter.[5] This

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[4] Ari Elon, "Alma Di," *Shdemot* 113-114 (Summer 1990): 28-29.

[5] Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics and the Face," in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, P.A.: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 194-219. Idem,

experience is what creates the moral personality, and the fact of responsibility to those I actually encounter. But the universal principle of justice, the responsibility towards general humanity, is a rational construction. In consequence of the forceful *personal* encounter we create a set of principles that involves the third person, and these become principles of *universal* justice. In this way, the personal non-rational encounter leads to legislation of sets of rules that belong in reason and have universal extension.[6] Levinas raises the question of freedom in his discussion of the will. The freedom of the personal will is a complex movement between the encounter of the I with the Other as infinity, and the fact of my inevitable impending death. This complexity expresses the tension between the will as an inner subjective consciousness and the will's need to objectify itself through exteriority, in rational institutions.[7] But regardless of this problematic movement, the will as a free self can develop only by way of the encounter with the Other and the will's experience of heteronomy—the Other as commanding responsibility.

The place of the traditional God in this phenomenology of human encounter and birth of morality is of interpretational interest within the study of Levinas.[8] For this essay's concern, the philosophical innovation of Levinas serves to show that to develop a moral stance that centers on human claim to sovereignty does not necessarily entail rejection of a heteronomous encounter. Quite the opposite: it is questionable whether an autonomous subjectivity enclosed in its own scope of reason can produce or validate the moral imperative that "thou shall not kill" as an absolute demand of one human being towards the other.

"Subjectivity and Infinity," in *Otherwise than Being: or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh, P.A.: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 131-140.

[6] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 278-280; *Otherwise than Being*, 159-160; 212.

[7] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 232-247, see also note 21.

[8] See, for instance, Bernhard Waldenfels, "Levinas and the Face of the Other," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 67-70.

III. Personal Freedom

The argument I have presented above shows that an 'I' subjectivity may be weakened when an actual encounter with the heteronomous Other burdens me with the responsibility of his or her well-being. But this subjectivity is free in the Kantian autonomous sense, because it is using reason to derive principles of morality that govern its behavior and worldview. Consequentially, I argue a heteronomous element serving as the starting point of reasoning does not deny the individual's autonomy as lawmaker. But this still does not exclude the limitations that an affiliation with a given group with given sets of practices places upon our individual, personal freedom.[9] The individualistic element of the modern humanistic project sets out to ensure that every human being is free to engage in thought experiments and to make practical choices apart from his or her communal affiliation. If communal identification and an acceptance of a set of practices are a result of accepting the authority of heteronomous transcendent sovereignty, then this individual separateness is challenged. In this case, the factor that limits personal freedom is standing within a social group and committing to the group's norms in practice, and not a lack of autonomous capacity. The distinction between *autonomy* and *personal freedom* that I drew above leads me to the notion of "selfhood" and to explore how the social-religious place in which the "self" is situated impacts the extent of the self's freedom. In the Talmudic reading "The Temptation of Temptation," Levinas challenges the Western notion of freedom of thought that understands knowledge as

[9] In one of his conclusions to *Totality and Infinity* (302-304), Levinas presents freedom as the spontaneity of a "moving force," which is put into question by the Other. Still, freedom, which he calls "an infinite exigency with regard to oneself" appears as a continuing struggle to fulfill itself, and being put into question by the other that submits one to judgment and denies one's aloneness. In this way Levinas creates the dependence of justice as reflection on the encounter with the Other, and also sociality. But he does not address by this discussion the problem of personal freedom with respect to commitment to a particular community.

something that can be achieved *a priori*, prior to life experience.[10] The Western ideal, exemplified by the "Cartesian stance" is to employ a reflective position that is totally disengaged from any former commitment to real life experience. Levinas calls this philosophical ideal "the temptation of temptation": the temptation of knowledge that is acquired while distancing oneself from the dangers of experiencing and error. Levinas understands this aspiration to knowledge as an attempt to include the totality of being within oneself, without acknowledging a call to my consciousness that comes from the outside:

> The subordination of any act to the knowledge that one might have of that act, making up in this manner for its dangerous generosity. It will no longer leave the other in its otherness but will always include it in the whole, approaching it in a historical perspective, at the horizon of the All.[11]

In Western philosophical tradition, this inquisitive stance is contrasted to childish ego. In its naïveté, the childish ego is purely engaged within the world and does not distance itself from its own experiencing self to reflect and acquire knowledge: "An ego simply and purely engaged is naive."[12] The naive stance is alluring because it is spontaneous and generous, but it is also impossible and dangerous, or provisional. It cannot provide the assurance, the certainty, and the predictability that the theoretical, distanced, disengaged stance provides. However, the disengagement has its own shortcomings: Levinas wonders if disengagement "may *not* constitute the ultimate condition of man" (emphasis mine). This leads him to search for a third possibility, one that evades the dichotomy between knowledge and naïveté. His reading of tractate Shabbat 88a and 88b of the Babylonian Talmud affords him the opportunity to define this third possibility, which he calls *Temmimut*. This term means literarily "wholeness" and is used in the Bible to connote moral and religious

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[10] Levinas, "The Temptation of Temptation," in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 1990), 30-50.

[11] Ibid., 35.

[12] Ibid., 34.

uprightness. As Levinas defines it, *Temmimut* is the human stance that allows the People of Israel to respond to the event of revelation with "we will do" before they say "we will hear." According to Levinas' analysis, this is the commitment to accepting the Torah that comes before the possibility of freedom, but it does not deny freedom because it is beyond freedom. It is the "yes" that begins freedom. For Levinas, adherence to the Torah, or in his expression the "good," by those who said "we will do and we will hear" is not the result of a choice between good and evil. It comes before the possibility of that choice. It does not exclude choosing evil, because the "we will do" is not a simple praxis as opposed to theory; it is an actualizing of self that comes prior to examining the possibilities from a non-committing distance. This is the true uprightness: a pact with the good [13] —not the purity of the trusting soul, but "the structure of a subjectivity clinging to the absolute." [14] The rabbis understand God's biblical demand as a violent act: God inclines a mountain over the Israelites like a tilted tub as a death threat if they won't accept the Torah. This enforcement allows Levinas to draw an analogy between the Talmudic exegetic remarks and his phenomenology of human relationships. The demand of God in the Bible is as intrusive as the demand of the human Other's face for my ethical responsibility. The doing before hearing is the acceptance of responsibility to Others before theoretical knowledge. This *Temmimut*, he claims, is an ethical configuration. Ethical configuration is denied of those who choose, in the name of logic and knowledge, not to engage in worldly action. Their disengagement, excluding adherence and indulging in temptation of knowledge, the Western philosophical stance, is logically tortuous. It is actually, contrary to the rationalistic instinct, a degradation of reason, and it results in the corruption of morality.[15]

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[13] Ibid., 43.

[14] Ibid., 48.

[15] Ibid., 48-49.

Levinas also makes a stronger distinction concerning the two stances. He distinguishes between the ego that exists before an exit from being and the ego after this exit. Saying "I will do" is an exit from being because in it we give in to a weight exerted on one point of being by the responsibility towards the Other. In this, the 'I' accepts that not everything in the scope of my experience is part of my horizon. There is Otherness, a totally exterior to me, yet human, element. The responsibility is towards a creature, which is another being, but a being "of which the ego was not the author,"[16] i.e., the Other. But this is a choice before a decision between good and evil; it is just an acceptance of the responsibility, not the particular adherence to it. The force of this choice before choice is that it is the very moment the ego is established. This is because to be a self is to be responsible. In this moment, the weight of the wholeness of being is tipped against the "point," the human suffering. The acceptance of the point, the responsibility for the call of the Other's suffering, creates the separation from being and its apparent surrender of freedom.[17] But this condition of hostage is an essential modality of freedom, and not an empirical accident. It is not a contingent choice made by a possessor of freedom that has the privilege of always remaining above it all. It is the moment that creates freedom. From this point of encounter with the personal Other onwards, the ego is invited to consider the "third party" and all other humans are implied in the suffering that the ego responds to. This invitation is to justice, to weighing matters, and therefore to thought. This freedom of using one's freedom is also the appetite for sin, of preferring the 'I' to the 'you,' of egoism.[18]

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[16] Ibid., 49.

[17] Levinas explains the break from being that the face of the Other generates in me as the essence of language: "Language is a relation between separate terms." This separating happens as the face of the Other I "refuses" to be part of the chain of being that expresses itself within logic and its "specification descending from genus to species." By this refusal the Other remains absolutely transcendent and forces me to enter into

discourse, and thus language is established. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 194-195.

[18] Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 49-50.

Levinas' rejection of the possibility of ethics before engagement casts doubt upon the claim that strong social affiliation and commitment curtails personal freedom. As in the case of autonomy, one's engagement in the world seems to be the condition for freedom and thought and not what prevents it. Engagement means acting within a human framework, be it the most basic familial encounter, which means positioning oneself within a particular social context. Levinas does not commit all logic and thought to this posterior stance, for he does describe philosophic activity of rational deliberation in avoidance of the worldly engaged stance. Further, Levinas describes a solipsistic subject that receives the external shock that submits him to the Other. So as a center of ideas, a self already exists before its social relationships. But the ego, and with it the specific logic of ethics, is created by the actual human encounter and the response to it. The moment in which the subject is drawn out of its solipsism by the call of the Other is a constitutive moment in the life of the subject, one that has a destructive force regarding the self that was before.[19]

I would like to explore further the possibilities of an engaged, committed self in relation to the question of personal freedom within a traditional religious community in general and a Jewish one in particular. As shown before, Levinas' analysis opens the question of the possibility of autonomy within a context of a self-committed to a heteronomous voice. But the distinction between the disengaged stance and the ego after human encounter, after experiencing real life, also casts doubt upon the possibility of freedom outside of a given human community. The ego that is free to choose between good and evil only after it committed to an Other, and in that makes a choice of being in a particular manner, raises the possibility that there is a necessary limit to our freedom as individual selves. In other words, a self that does not commit to any transcendent burden in consequence of its material human encounters pays a price of

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[19] Idem., *Totality and Infinity*, 201-204. Xavier Tilliette discusses the question of the Ontological status of the existing subject in view of this destruction in *Levinas in Jerusalem: Philosophical Interpretations and Religious Perspectives*, ed. Joelle Hansel (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007), 11-26.

losing out its humanity, or in Levinas' terms, it amounts to a corruption of morality. This may allow an extension of the notion of freedom, i.e., adherence to transcendence *and* to a particular human community allows not only autonomy as a lawmaker but personal freedom as well.

IV. Eugene Borowitz: A Covenantal Notion of Judaism

A very different thinker that poses a notion of self that already incorporates a moral stance is Eugene Borowitz. Borowitz's writing of Jewish philosophy emerges from a standpoint of Jewish public interest and not, as the case of Levinas, from a primary philosophical ethical interest. Borowitz also operates within a very different philosophical mood, that of American Pragmatism. This approach, that has its roots in the last decades of the Nineteenth century in the thought of Charles Sanders Peirce and William James, turned during the twentieth century into the philosophical basis of American secular democracy. According to the twentieth-century version, informed in large part by the thought of John Dewey, values emerge within given societies as part of their experience in order to facilitate their common existence in their encounter with natural and social environment. In his *A Common Faith,* Dewey promotes an idea of God that, like other ideals, is "neither completely embodied in existence nor yet of ideals that are mere rootless ideals, fantasies, utopias. For there are forces in nature and society that generate and support the ideals. They are further unified by the action that gives them coherence and solidity."[20] For Dewey's envisioned American public, God is a unified principle that integrates the ideals of goodness and is confirmed by the actions and moral achievements of their larger community. The ontological questions surrounding God's existence are not of interest. What is important is that under the direction of *God as a unified ideal* the American public is engaged in a common quest to sustain and ameliorate their existence as a moral community. Borowitz follows

[20] John Dewey, "Faith and its Object," in *A Common Faith* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 1934), 50-51.

this philosophical ground of thought and engages in a quest for a set of values that will enhance a Jewish non-Orthodox "common faith."

In addition to the Pragmatist set of assumptions, Borowitz operates within a tradition of Jewish thinkers that goes back to Hermann Cohen's nineteenth century *Ethical Monotheism*. Cohen's rationalistic approach to the thought of Judaism received, for American Jews, important refreshment in Mordechai Kaplan's naturalistic thought, based on American Pragmatist and sociological frameworks. In view of the apparent inability of modern minded individual to accept the super-natural, Kaplan reformulated the traditional notions of Jewish communal existence: Judaism in not a nation, nor is it a religion in the narrow sense, but it is a "civilization." He explained the emergence of tenets of Jewish religion as a set of values that allows Judaism as a civilization to thrive. These specific Jewish values are their *sancta*, sacred objects, which are necessary to the development of the Jewish community throughout history. The group should not discard these sacred objects, for they are an important part of the group's self-identification. However, it is a mistake to continue to give them a supernatural status, especially in view of secularization and assimilation. Since the reason for the mass abandonment of the Jewish nationhood is the inability to identify with the traditional religious supernatural ideas, it is preferable to clear these ideas from their supernatural signification. Kaplan's view also allows the sense of human dignity that is connected to the Kantian self-legislator since it is the Jews, as members of a common civilization, that are responsible for the creation of their own particularistic "sancta"—not the external dictation of God.[21]

Borowitz conducts a critique of modern Judaism on the basis of this Pragmatist understanding of Jewish nationhood, but he is searching for a better model for the balance between individual freedom of choice and the

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[21] Mordecai M. Kaplan, "The Proposed Version of Judaism," in *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (Philadelphia, P.A.: The Jewish Publication Society, 1981), 171-224.

communal value system.[22] He presents his spiritual quest as a paradigm shift from modern to postmodern Jewish thought. This shift includes the realization that "Judaism is far more concerned with action than with thought"[23] and the move from a universalist and individualist ethics to a particularist one, based on cultural group identification.[24] Both these characteristics are considered "postmodern" because they constitute a critique of modernism in general and modern Jewish thought in particular. Borowitz's analysis of "Modern Jewish Thought" is a critique Hermann Cohen's rationalistic and idealistic interpretation of Kantian philosophy.[25] In his *Ethical Monotheism,* Cohen constructed transcendence in terms of logic and subordinated every aspect of reason to ethical rationalism. Revelation and prophecy, in his thought, are not a communication with something beyond the human mind but rather a breakthrough in thought, the ability to have a more comprehensive concept of truth.[26] In his *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism,* Cohen defines three basic tenets of Judaism: caring for fellow humans, atonement, and a messianic endeavor, and he explicates them as a realization of rational ends that correspond to divine law. Within its historical context, Germany of the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, Cohen's "religion of reason" helped modernized Jewish rationalists remove the barriers between them and Christian humanists. This "rationalistically ordered theology" of Judaism allowed educated Jews to defend their presence and participation in the general society while retaining their Jewish affiliation. The problem of this

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[22] Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant,* 259-265.

[23] Ibid., xi.

[24] Ibid., 14-15.

[25] Norbert M. Samuelson rejects Borowitz' understanding of Cohen's rationalism and claims its influence on Twentieth Century Jewish warrants a much more central place than Borowitz grants it. See Samuelson, "A Critique of Borowitz' Postmodern Jewish Theology," in *Reviewing the Covenant, Eugene B. Borowitz and the Postmodern Renewals of Jewish Theology*, ed. Peter Ochs with Eugene B. Borowitz (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2000), 95-99. Hence *Reviewing the Covenant*.

[26] Ibid., 141.

theology is the thinning of Jewish experience: practices that do not fit one of the three tenets mentioned above were considered ethnic and local, not essential to the spirit of Judaism, and therefore easily abandoned. This approach rendered many expressions of Jewish life irrelevant to modern Jewish life, at least theoretically. The paradigm shift that Borowitz wrote about as early as 1961 is a result of the disillusionment with German Idealist's universalization of reason and of disappointment with the ethics of the Western world. Like other post-Shoah Jewish theologians, he is in search of a much more substantial idea of the experience and expression of Jewish life, as well as a stronger anchor for morality than Western thought. Borowitz's particularistic notion associates action, group identification and theology with a Jewish ethos that can explain why Jews still choose voluntarily to be part of the Jewish faith. This association drives him to term his emerging thought about Judaism "Covenantal," and his 1991 "Renewing the Covenant" is an attempt to give a methodical account for what it means.

One of the important foundations of Borowitz's covenantal theology is its holistic nature. Holism is the anti-atomistic claim that individuals, in any system, do not stand in isolation. Rather, all individual things are *relata* that obtain their distinctiveness within the context of a relationship. Postmodern holism can be viewed as a shift back from a modern atomistic perspective of relationships, modeled after Newtonian physics, to a medieval model of individuation. According to Medieval models, individuals achieve their status as parts of wholes, and don't have separates substances.[27] Within the relationship every element has a field effect and therefore cannot be determined individually. According to this model God and the Jews stand in an ongoing relationship structured by Torah as record and mandate. This covenantal relationship between God and the Jews is itself an element in the larger covenantal relationship that God has with the entire human race. The Torah in Borowitz's non-Orthodox model is not a gift given by God to the people but neither is it a

[27] See Samuelson in *Reviewing the Covenant,* 101.

human invention. The Torah, as the other *relata* in the covenant, is a result of a specific type of interaction between God and the Jewish people.

When Borowitz comes to the task of explicating the nature of the *relata* as components in the covenant, he incorporates American Pragmatism. Thus, he sees group values in term of the activities and goals given societies posit to themselves. He then critiques the value's ability to generate fruitful goals and to be conducive to societal growth. Borowitz first asserts the spiritual reviving and continuity of Jewish religious nationhood as a critical issue. Based on empirical facts, he suggests that the covenantal relationship between God and Israel is the crucial element in the construction of values in Jewish existence. After ascertaining that God, Israel, and the Torah are the three essential elements of the covenant, he explores their content according to traditional, modern, and contemporary (postmodern) modes. In each section of his work, he presents the notions of God, Israel, and Torah respectively, according to other thinkers or schools from medieval religious thinkers to Kaplan's naturalistic Pragmatism and Buber's relational phenomenology. He explains why these versions of the three notions are not of use to contemporary Jews, who adopt some major ideas of modernity and secular-democratic ways of life. Borowitz then goes on to search for content for each term that is more conducive to a theology for postmodern Jews. While defining the holism of a non- Orthodox Jewish theology in one of the introductory chapters of his book, Borowitz determines that a covenant that involves Torah, Israel, and God must include, respectively, a notion of duty and the Torah as the literary source and the foundation of authority; loyalty to the Jewish people; and a notion of the divine that "enables life with God." To these Borowitz adds messianic hope that situates Jewish life ever in a perspective of the future. Note how all these terms carry a pragmatic value for contemporary non-Orthodox Jewish life. The idea of God he promotes in the covenantal relationship is a good example: "Life with God" means for him *"a life of personal piety, in which we see all our experiences, our failures as well as our activism, in divine perspective. life of faith in which, despite the frustration of our plans and hopes, we remain confident that God's rule continues and we can therefore steadfastly*

hope for God's vindication of the good; a life of prayer, one in which we can speak to God out of the fullness of what we are and long for."[28] All of these requirements are meant to help us retain God's centrality in our lives despite the (postulated) inability to accept a metaphysics of a transcendent yet personal and imposing being. Borowitz himself points to the complexity of this notion and says that he needs God to be at the same time powerful and weak. God has to be powerful, transcendent, and exalted enough to serve as the source of duty, but on the other, hand God has to be weak enough to be both involved and personal and yet removed enough so we can remain independent free individuals.[29]

Borowitz's Pragmatist method of explicating values yields an important conception that addresses the problem of the freedom of the faithful individual. When Borowitz addresses the nature of "Israel" in the covenantal bond, he introduces the notion of a "Jewish Self." The Jewish Self stands in relation to God *"not in bare individuality but as one of the Covenant people."*[30] Borowitz attempts to transform the secular conception of autonomy which, committed to the modern value of universal selfhood, always puts 'self' first and 'Jewishness' second. For him the covenant is the primal, elemental ground of Jews' existence, and the very participation in it generates a 'self' that is grounded in a particular context yet exercises free choice and substantial personal judgment. In order to illustrate this idea, he recalls Orthodox contemporary rabbinic authorities that are accepted by their communities as halakhic decisors. These rabbis claim the right to issue directives to the community on the basis of their "knowledge/sense" of Torah, though they cannot validate their stand on a specific issue by citing direct halakhic precedents. Borowitz wants to derive from this his model for non-Orthodox "Jewish Selfhood." This self is autonomous yet *"so fundamentally shaped by the covenant that whatever issues from its depths will have authentic Jewish character."* To elaborate on the

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[28] Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant*, 60.

[29] Ibid., 100-102.

[30] Ibid., 71.

nature of "Jewish Self," Borowitz defines five premises for Jewish duty exercised by Jewish Selfhood: life that is personally and primarily in involvement with the one God of the universe; a selfhood that is inextricably bound to ethnicity with its multiple ties of land, language, history, tradition, fate and faith; a selfhood that is radically historical, i.e., conscious of the spiritual continuity of the covenant; orientation to the future in messianic hope; and lastly, the Jewish self, despite the covenantal tie, exists in full individuality in its separateness, idiosyncrasy and freedom.[31]

I find Borowitz's idea of a Jewish Selfhood very helpful for the question of freedom within the boundaries of a religious community. A self that is predominantly Jewish by virtue of standing within a covenant with God—a self whose conceptual foundation, imagination, and point of reference all draw from the sources of Torah—is a self that stands within the boundaries of the religious Jewish community. However, it is questionable whether Borowitz's notion of Jewish selfhood and the covenant relationship he describes is strong enough to account for the totality of the experience that constitutes belonging to a traditional religious community. Like many Pragmatists in the post-Heidegger/post-Wittgenstein/post- Derrida American intellectual circles today, Borowitz commits only to a realm that is within the reach of language and human discourse.[32] He does not argue for a logical validation of the autonomy of human selfhood, since the ontology involved in such a claim runs in the same linguistic circle we all run in according to the postmodern philosophical mood. Instead, he simply posits it as a cultural fact. The fact is that personal autonomy is the one inheritance of modernity that he, as representative of postmodern and non- Orthodox Jewish thinkers, would not give up. His "Jewish Selfhood" is expected to be an authentic source of thought and imagination that generates Jewish discourse and practice. But as authentic as it may be, it has to confirm to the humanistic ideal of

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[31] Ibid.,288-295.

[32] See my "Studying Torah as a Reality Check," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 2, no. 16 (2008): 151.

an autonomous self. The heteronomy that seems to be necessarily entailed in a religious stance has to accommodate the autonomy principle, not vice versa. This point is important because in the basis of Borowitz's spiritual quest is the re-introduction of a "Jewish language" out of which scholars and practitioners of Judaism operate. This "Jewish language" has apparently been abandoned by Modern Jewish thinkers who preferred to assimilate the "Greek" conceptual system as they were situating an autonomous self at the core of their reason. Thus they engaged in rational, universalistic, and scientific discourse as a basis to any discourse about Judaism. A "Jewish Self" is one that has a more balanced "Jewish" set of linguistic and cultural references, values, and interests. How then does he accommodate into his thought the heteronomy, necessarily involved in a Jewish conversation about divine command and Jewish practice? For Borowitz, the heteronomy seems to be a mixture of a framework that as a free grown- up Jew I choose to make my own, and something that I am already, essentially, defined by. My autonomy is expressed by the idea that by my choice the heteronomous element, God, serves as a moral and emotional anchor. But in this relationship it is I, the Jewish Self, who uses the language of my Jewish acculturation to determine how God's divine force relates to my human world.

Is this notion of Jewish selfhood strong enough to generate what Borowitz hopes for? Borowitz is seeking a substantial dynamic Jewish existence that can retain Jewish religious participation and promote a high standard of piety and ethical life in the larger community of humankind. Does his notion of a covenant achieve this goal? According to Borowitz's own criteria, as quoted above, a notion of God means "a life of *faith*, a life of prayer, one in which we can speak to God" and eventually also somehow know "God's *answering concern*" (emphasis mine).[33] Does this evasive language do the trick? Does an "answering concern" have enough force to draw together communities *and* prescribe piety? The answer, at least partially, will be determined by the actual future of religious Jewish

[33] Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant*, 60.

liberalism. However, conceptual analysis can already show that by its own pragmatist standards, Borowitz's notion of duty lacks some of the force we expect from a religious stance. In a collection of essays in conversation with *Renewing the Covenant* both David Novak and Yudit Korning Greenberg claim that the covenantal relationship Borowitz describes lacks authority. Novak says that Borowitz's description of the God/community relationship lacks some essential element of the covenant, the inequality of God and humans, the fact that the covenant is exclusively initiated by God and that God's word is binding and not given to dialog. These characteristics of the covenant are what create the authority of halakhah, which Borowitz sees as a dynamic human response to God's ethical import.[34] Korning Greenberg questions the ability of a weak God, a dignified 'self' making independent decisions, and a non-authoritative Torah to dictate specifically Jewish duties, and he wonders whether a "post-halakhic" Judaism can even dictate values concerning social and political justice.[35] Both place the source of the tension in the fact that Borowitz is writing from the perspective of a personal religious experience instead of a rational or factual necessity. This "phenomenology of personal relationship," according to Novak, is too dependent on "one's personal and privileged moments of contact with God" and has no communal teeth. In fact, Borowitz does present his religious experiences in very personal terms, and it is questionable whether the type of religious assurance he gains through it can be a model for communal growth in a mostly secular cultural framework.

It seems to me that the weakness of the covenantal relationship that Borowitz describes lies in the lack of totality and exclusivity of the experience that he expects of the "Jewish Self." Borowitz himself, as quoted above, uses the term "faith," so he does seek the mental power that the term signifies. And although he criticizes modern Jewish discourse for taking a philosophical step back instead of talking from within the Jewish community, he himself situates Jewish selfhood in a safe distance from a

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[34] *Reviewing the Covenant,* 84-87.

[35] *Reviewing the Covenant*, 57-59.

"naive" stance. Borowitz employs Wittgenstein's "language game" to justify the reasonable use of discourses in Judaism that do not comply with Western-Greek standards.[36] So, defining oneself as a "Jewish Self" is engaging in a language- game that does not exclude participation in other language games, such as the scientific one. Note how different this notion of selfhood is from Levinas' moral self who is violently thrown into a position of accepting responsibility. It is not surprising, therefore, that the elemental notion of Borowitz is "covenant," with its implied freedom of choice, while the elemental notion for Levinas is a forced encounter that preconditions choice. But can a "Jewish Self" that is born out of a forced encounter with a transcendent God, or a voice that embodies the spirit of the community and has transcendent force, still be free? This question can be formulated from its reverse: is Borowitz's double demand of strong Jewish selfhood and personal autonomy a true possibility for a modern person?

The problem of freedom in the context of religion arises precisely because an attachment to a religious community is commonly understood to be a much more total and all-encompassing experience than Borowitz's description allows. If a person has faith in God's involvement in human affairs according to the terms of a religious community, then he or she excludes the possibility that events are arbitrary or incidental. In this case, one firmly believes that occurrences have the meaning that the communal discourse affords them and doesn't merely expect "to be inspirited by God's own strength" as Borowitz puts it.[37] This all- encompassing mental stance does not exclude moments of doubt or freedom of thought. But doubt, once taken seriously on a rational, emotional, or behavioral level, has a very high stake for the believer. Prolonged doubt or its logical consequence is devastating to the emotional well-being of a religious person and a cause of dramatic changes in one's self-identification. For the believer, giving in to doubt is like losing a center of gravity, an

[36] Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant*, x-xi.

[37] Ibid., 60.

Archimedean point of the self that holds things together. The element of psychic graveness concerning the 'self' does not emerge from Borowitz's description of the covenantal relationship and his use of "language game." This is not because this kind of faith is not included in Wittgenstein's explication of the use of languages. The stance Borowitz describes lacks critical gravity because of the way in which he envisions the free-spirited open-ended conversation in the covenantal community. Borowitz is careful to draw a distinction between the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox solely on the basis of their approaches to matters of personal autonomy. But his description implies another distinction between the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox. Accordingly, Orthodoxy is a total immersion in a "mental stance," and non-Orthodoxy is a sense of affiliation that, both in the emotional and the rational sense, is much more loose and forgiving.

My insistence on the all-encompassing power of the experience of commitment to a religious community does not exclude an acknowledgment, and even participation in, the "language games" that seem to be contradictory to that of the religious tradition. A religious person can also be a scientist who approaches illness with the most acute analytical thinking and the most advanced technologies of modern medicine. In this case, he belongs at once to two communities of discourse: a religious and a scientific one. But when that person allows a tragic failure to come home and becomes emotionally distressed, the content of the upheaval is not the shock of the limit of human reason and science; it is the challenge that suffering poses to the ability of the faithful to experience divine providence. In this case, Wittgenstein's notion of language game *is* useful, especially in circumstances when one is drawn to two different responses to life- situations. In the above case of illness, when one turns both to modern medicine and to prayer, one participates at once in two language games. However, participation in prayer is not the result of a devotion to "what we Jews do in cases of illness" or a distanced reflection upon the order of the universe. Prayer is an automatic behavioral response, one that answers the most basic human needs for care, security, and meaning.

But how do these considerations, that delegate the religious affiliation to the self's emotional and psychic sphere still allow for personal freedom, free use of reason and individual autonomy? In order to show how it is possible to combine these elements I use an epistemological Pragmatist model. Specifically, I would like to show how Peirce's epistemological explication of the growth of reason could solidify the notion of Jewish selfhood and explain how religious commitment and practice can constitute a self's response to life experience.

V. Peirce's Pragmatist Model of Knowledge Quest

Pragmatism is a reaction to two important thought trends of the end of the nineteenth century: German Idealism and Positivism. Both deal with Kant's critique of reason by denying that anything beyond phenomena is real. Hegelians turn the ideal into the real by identifying between our ideas, "the human spirit," and phenomenal historical reality. In contrast, Empirical Positivists deny the rational legitimacy of discussing any metaphysical ideas: anything that is beyond the given to our senses is non-sense. American Pragmatists, similarly to continental Phenomenologists and Existentialists, shift the burden of their philosophical thought to actual human experience. On the one hand, they admit that all we know is within our experience. Accordingly, their philosophical discussions center on how human experience works to shape our concepts and our worldviews. But on the other hand, they refuse to deny the legitimacy of philosophical discourse about ideas that cannot be analyzed in terms of direct experience. Instead, they treat these ideas—such concept as "Reality" and "God" as well as ethical, religious and cultural values—as generalized terms that help us organize our actual experiences. The question of these entities' ontological status is considered to be outside the scope of the philosophical discussion.[38] Their reality is

[38] *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, M.A.: Belknap Press, 1931-1958), volume 5, paragraph 553; Hence: Peirce, *Collected Papers*, followed by volume and paragraph numbers.

often discussed as a function of their ability to qualify our experiences and correct and improve our conceptual systems in order to advance our well-being in the encounter with the world.

Peirce's Pragmatist critique of Rationalism and Positivism is instructive to the question I discuss here because of the manner in which he deals with the epistemological tension that defines the interest of modern philosophy: the relationship between what is interior to our mental perception and what is independent of it. Peirce's epistemology struggles to do justice to an encounter with an independent element because of his philosophical identity as "a scholastic realist of a somewhat extreme stripe."[39] However, he refuses to allow such an encounter to extend outside of the scope of experience at both ends of the process of knowledge acquisition: the moment that triggers the knowledge quest, and its culmination in a set of truths. Consequently, he describes an experience of encounter with something exterior, as well as a hypothetical end of the process in which truth is settled. However, Peirce insists that both of these moments occur within experience and that there isn't any "intuition," a direct perception of "Reality."[40]

Furthermore, there is no parameter, beyond recognized methods of reason, to establish the truth of our sentences in consideration of their correspondence to something that is external "Reality." An important part of this picture is Peirce's insistence that the advancement of knowledge is not an individual matter but happens within a "community of inquirers," the human carriers of the knowledge quest. The inquiry seeks to settle doubts that emerge from dissonances between sets of symbols about the world and actual experiences. The human inquirers use the scientific method and logical operations of creating hypotheses or "abductions," deducing implications, and applying inductive reason to experiments that create sets of rules. The scientific method ensures that these rules demonstrate an ever-growing affinity to actual experience.

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[39] Peirce, *Collected Papers,* 5.470.

[40] Peirce, *Collected Papers,* 5.265.

Peirce's description of this process obtains further articulation by the logic of relationship and the theory of signs he develops. According to his phenomenology of thought, there are only three basic logic relationships and they don't depend on the subject predicate distinction: these are firstness, secondness, and thirdness. These basic logical relations correspond to categories of thought through which our knowledge advances. Firstness is a relation that indicates no duality. When a person has a feeling, he is completely one with that feeling. If I experience a thought that comes up in my mind, it is represented to me by what he calls "icon." I don't experience any separateness, but I am one with it. Secondness, however, implies a relation between the 'I' and something else: "The type of an idea of Secondness is the experience of effort, prescinded from the idea of a purpose." Peirce is careful not to exceed the limits of his phenomenological analysis and therefore does not imply an ontology of external force by positing a relation of secondness. He is careful to remain within experience:

> The existence of the word *effort* is sufficient proof that people think they have such an idea; and that is enough. The experience of effort cannot exist without the experience of resistance. Effort only is effort by virtue of its being opposed; and no third element enters. Note that I speak of the *experience*, not of the *feeling*, of effort. Imagine yourself to be seated alone at night in the basket of a balloon, far above earth, calmly enjoying the absolute calm and stillness. Suddenly the piercing shriek of a steam-whistle breaks upon you, and continues for a good while. The impression of stillness was an idea of Firstness, a quality of feeling. The piercing whistle does not allow you to think or do anything but suffer. So that too is absolutely simple. Another Firstness. But the breaking of the silence by the noise was an experience. The person in his inertness identifies himself with the precedent state of feeling, and the new feeling, which comes in spite of him, is the non-ego. He has a two-sided consciousness of an ego and a non-ego. That consciousness of the action of a new feeling in destroying the old feeling is what I call an *experience*. Experience generally is what the course of life has *compelled* me to think.[41]

[41] "A Letter to Lady Welby," in Peirce, *Collected Papers* 8.330.

As mentioned above, Peirce includes these logical elements in his idea of knowledge as inquiry and theory of signs. Peirce's innovative claim about signs is that they don't constitute a relationship between two elements but between three elements: the sign, its object, and the sign's interpretation, the fact of the sign standing for that object. Pierce calls this existing understanding of the relation between the sign and its object the "interpretant," and he insists that without being an interpretant, a sign would not constitute a sign but would be a senseless thing. In this analysis, Peirce alludes to his basic anti-Cartesian idea that there is no "intuition," that no thought is connected to something external to reason. If I relate a sign to an object by reference to a prior operation of interpretation, then the sign and the object of it are part of my thought, of reason, and don't reach outside of it. This point also explains the term "thirdness": "its genuine form, Thirdness is the triadic relation existing between a sign, its object, and the interpreting thought, itself a sign, considered as constituting the mode of being of a sign."[42]

Peirce extends the "triadic" relationship of signs to a phenomenological description of the process of inquiry that constitutes knowledge:

> Generally speaking genuine Secondness consists in one thing acting upon another: brute action. I say brute, because so far as the idea of any law or reason comes in, Thirdness comes in. When a stone falls to the ground, the law of gravitation does not act to make it fall. The law of gravitation is the judge upon the bench who may pronounce the law till doomsday, but unless the strong arm of the law, the brutal sheriff, gives effect to the law, it amounts to nothing. True, the judge can create a sheriff if need be; but he must have one.[43]

Peirce clarifies our inability to speak about this brute action in terms of feeling because it is never felt without an involvement of the "judge," the non-brute operations of thought and imagination. However, the phenomenology of experience shows him that this is an essential part of

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[42] Ibid., 8.331-332.

[43] Ibid., 8.330.

the analysis of knowledge. Peirce further explains thirdness as a category of thought and claims that it is mediation between firstness and secondness: "Category the Third is the Idea of that which is such as it is as being a Third, or Medium, between a Second and its First. That is to say, it is *Representation* as an element of the Phenomenon."[44] Representations, as elements of any phenomenon, are developed by us into laws, and collection of laws becomes scientific theories. This amounts to his claim that the act of interpretation that connect signs, their interpretants, and brute experiences is an act of making laws that have the capacity to predict future experiences. Peirce uses these notions to show how the idea of the sign as the basic unit of thought, and his three basic logic "valencies" explain the full extent of the operations of thought. These operations are involved in understanding the whole scope of meaning in language, from the most basic signs of language to the creation of elaborate scientific theories.

The Pragmatist element of these considerations is the principle that no pursuit of knowledge is solely theoretical. Meanings and theories arise within the context of attempting to refine the symbols, concepts, and theories we use, in order to improve our experiences. Peirce understands this improvement as a function of our ability to predict future experiences through our theories and thus have better control over them. Peirce first gives an explication of the Pragmatic principle in his famous 1878 essay "How to Make our Ideas Clear." In this early expression of his thought, he says that the sole meaning of our concepts and sentences lies in their influence upon our senses.[45] But in 1905, after having developed his logic of signs and involved in the phenomenological analysis of knowledge—and in order to disassociate himself from James' and Schiller's version of Pragmatism—he refines his definition: "The entire intellectual purport of any symbol consists in the total of all general modes of rational conduct which, conditionally upon all the possible different circumstances and

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[44] "Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism," in Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 5.66.

[45] Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 5.402.

desires, would ensue upon the acceptance of the symbol."[46] According to this Pragmatist principle, meaning is what I interpret symbols to signify in terms of the rules they contain. The rules are conditionals that predict consequences of given circumstances, and what courses of action are connected to these consequences. So, the pragmatic element of meaning has to do with the meaning's capacity to generate a sets of rules that predict our future experiences of the world we live in, and its capacity to advise us how to act according to these predictions.

The objective nature of the process of knowledge is of interest to Peirce's scholars until this day. If we have no intuition of an external reality, and the notion of truth is some ideal but unrealized agreement between actual inquirers in some point in the future, what lends objectivity to our rules? Isn't the improvement of prediction and control of future experiences too subjective to be called "truth"? This is not the place to enter this debate; however, it is clear that for Peirce the answer has to lie within experience. Some scholars find agreement within the community of inquirers to be enough to generate all the objectivity we need in a communal conversation about our world and experiences.[47] Stronger demands of the notion of truth place objectivity at the experience of encounter, providing that we are truly able to share publicly our experience of "surprises" and the wish and effort of controlling them.[48] Objectivity could also be claimed by the corrective power of the scientific method, and especially the inductive method and the mathematical operations contained in it.[49]

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[46] Ibid., 5.438.

[47] Richard Rorty, "Truth without Mirrors," in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 295-305.

[48] Murray G. Murphey, *The Development of Peirce's Philosophy* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 170.

[49] For instance, in "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God," in Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 2.769; see also "A Letter to Calderoni," in Ibid., 8.209.

VI. Freedom and Religious Communities

The complexity of freedom and religious communal affiliation can be addressed by conjoining Levinas' and Peirce's phenomenologies of human encounter with externality and their power to generate rational discourse. In Levinas' terms, it is the force of the encounter with the human Other that gives birth to an ethical self. This encounter generates a discourse of justice that constitutes the humanistic aspect of reason. In Peircean terms, it is the force of "brute act" and its involvement in a community's quest of knowledge that lends the elements of truth and objectivity to what we call thought. This encounter is what Levinas calls "Otherness," and this is Peirce's "secondness." We can never describe this encounter in neutral terms because everything we can say or think about it is already an operation of our discursive reason upon this fact. Both Peirce and Levinas use violent expressions to intimate the force of this experience, its intrusive factor, and the urgent need to make sense of it. Peirce calls it "brute" and imagines a judge that has to harness it. But this is no criminal; it is the sheriff that compels me to make some adjustments to my cozy, alas untrue, set of ideas about the world. Levinas goes much further, especially in his "Otherwise than Being" and later works, and he expresses the tension between the inability to incorporate the forceful yet elusive presence of the Other within my vision and the urge to contain this shock of externality.[50] He uses words like "evasion," "eruption," "rupture," and "interruption" in order to express the inability to contain it within ones existing subjectivity and the beginning of some kind of new phase of the self.[51] Both use the term *ego* and its negation, *non-ego*, in order to set the stage for the impact that the external element has upon me. As argued above, the ego does not relinquish his or her autonomy as a lawmaker in consequence of allowing the force of the encounter to come home. Quite to the contrary, the responsiveness to the brutality of the *non-*

[50] Waldenfels, "Levinas and the Face of the Other," in *Critchley and Bernasconi*, 63; 72-73.

[51] Xavier Tilliette; see note 28.

ego is what defines the ego's separateness and calls it to embark upon an adventurous course of reasoning towards self-governance.

The analogy between a commitment to a religious community and these thinkers' notions of a disturbed self lies in the connection between the experience of exteriority and *thought* in response to it. For Peirce thought is the response that functions to make sense of it and incorporate it within one's world of meaning and action. For Levinas the response to exteriority is the ethical responsibility of the newfound ethical self, a stance that generates the rational thought that conjures rules of justice, and the ability to choose between good (responding positively to my responsibility) and evil (neglecting it). *It is a consciousness of an exterior element that generates a logic, a rationality that is the response to that experience.* This paper is not the place for the philosophical debate concerning the range between the most basic, transcendental notion of self, and the self that is the center of actual mental qualities and rational thought. I maintain nonetheless that the religious self, or more particularly in Borowitz's terms the "Jewish Self" comes somewhere within that range, that it has an important part in shaping the fundamentals of reason and that it generates rational discourse. In theological terms, this means that the heteronomous element in the religious stance is the point of departure for a discourse that constitutes religious law. The discourse can develop only within a particular social context as an interpretive movement between experiences and existing conceptual systems. In this case, the religious self is not more or less free from a secular self that operates within a scientific community. Both respond, as do Levinas' I and Peirce's Reasoner, to mental urgencies that generate a search for new laws that allow them to harmonize their experiences.

Relying upon Peircean Pragmatism to claim the validity of particularism in religious discourse is the path taken by the philosophical-theological work of Peter Ochs. In his interpretive work, Ochs spells out Peirce's philosophy of knowledge as inquiry and his developing logic of

signs as a series of reading and re-reading of modern philosophy.[52] Ochs sees the unique contribution of Peirce less in the content of his rejection of Cartesian and Kantian understanding of knowledge and more in his method of diagramming and correcting the philosophical texts his inquiry responds to. This corrective method consists of an interpretational rereading of philosophical texts, including his own earlier formulations of Pragmatism. The rereading *diagrams* and then *corrects* the text in question by analyzing its logic, clarifying vague statements, and pointing to the indubitable beliefs it relies on. There are a number of important elements of this reading of Peirce for our concern. The first is the acknowledgement that each reasoning occurs within a community of readers, such as philosophers writing in the Cartesian and Kantian philosophic tradition or philosophers belonging to the Judeo-Christian scriptural tradition of thought. The second element is that each such community of readers works within a context of indubitable beliefs without which there is no set of assumptions to start reasoning with. And lastly, Ochs follows Peirce in emphasizing that the corrective process of gaining inquiry induced by doubt is a continuous and relative endeavor that does not draw to an end as long as there are human thinkers and a reality to contend with. Ochs refers to this corrective approach to knowledge as "redemptive." By "redemptive" Ochs means to capture both the pragmatist and the religious senses of the word. Thus, as a redemptive act, rereading captures the reliance on indubitable beliefs, which are a specific community's "scriptural" sacred traditional texts, that define it as a community. On the other hand, it captures the pragmatic motivation of repairing the ailments that cause the suffering of individuals and communities within their social reality. Ochs refers us to the teachings of the biblical prophets as the source for this redemptive effort: the divine instruction to take responsibility for the suffering of fellow human beings in our communities.[53]

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[52] Peter Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[53] Ibid., 286-290.

This Peircean notion of the logic of scripture is the basis for Ochs' important contribution to theological discourse since the 1990s. In Ochs's theological work, he calls to read scripture in this corrective and redemptive manner. But Ochs goes further to claim that the logic of rereading and its redemptive effect is the basic logic of the rabbinic project and of the method of midrash. Accordingly, he understands rabbinic work in general and the method of midrash in particular as the rabbis' corrective reading of the Torah. In fact, Ochs has institutionalized this type of reading by establishing Jewish, and later interfaith, groups that read and reread scripture in this manner. In this, Ochs established what he terms "after-modern scriptural theology." In spelling out this project, Ochs distinguishes between Jewish anti-modernism and Jewish postmodernism. Anti-modernism moves from disillusionment with the Enlightenment project to projects of secular criticism or religious neo-traditionalism.[54] In contrast, postmodern Jewish philosophers incorporate into their work traditional elements rejected by modern Jewish thinkers and elements of modernism that anti-modernists reject. In view of their awareness of the limits of modernism they incorporate in their thinking the practice of textual reasoning that Ochs describes in his Peircean interpretive work.[55]

How does the "religious self" that I have described above, as having God at the center of her or his gravitation, fare according to this description? The sharp line I draw between a person as a religious self and a person as a scientific self, even when they coincide in the same person, may be seen as an Anti-modernist move according to Ochs' description. I insist upon the centrality of the transcendent image of the traditional narrative in dictating the type of reason that the thinking self-engages in. I question the ability of an open-ended discourse that the modern stance promotes to keep the particular religious subject, the "Jewish Self" retain communal selfhood. In effect I expect the reasoning self to be placed

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[54] Ochs, "The Emergence of Postmodern Jewish Theology and Philosophy," in *Reviewing the Covenant*, 27.

[55] Ibid., 29.

exclusively, at least regarding certain behavioral responses to the universe, either in the traditional or in the modern community of inquirers. While claiming that after-modern Jewish thought works to correct modern discourse for readers of religious Scriptures, Ochs insists that Jewish thinkers accept modernity as their own, chosen community of discourse. Ochs presents textual reasoning as an intellectual practice that enhances Jewish thought today, but he also endorses textual reasoning as a communal affair that can repair the thinning of the Jewish experience cause by modernity.[56] Can this indeed work? It seems to me that the question is whether or not the intellectual practice termed "textual reasoning" does justice to the experience of being committed to a religious community. As with the notion of a "Jewish self" developed by Borowitz, I wonder if the practice of reading tradition while negotiating in an open-ended manner various sets of values can provide the commanding force expected in a religious community. Consequently, while I affirm that textual reasoning contributes immensely to the intellectual religious discourse, other religious institutions, equally essential to the continuation of this very same discourse, may suffer from the resignation of tradition's authoritative voice.

I would like to suggest a notion that uses an engagement in the type of textual reasoning suggested by Ochs while strengthening a commitment to a religious community of practice and discourse. I suggest that the identity and integrity of a religious self is dependent upon a specific conceptualization of transcendence. That is to say that a certain concept of what is beyond my being and my reason is necessary for a specific type of reasoning within a given intellectual space. The religious person, the one I described above, as having God at the center of her or his gravitation, is a person who lives with a strong experience of exteriority. Within the faith of Israel and of other monotheistic religions, the exterior element is also *personal*. This means that the experience of

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[56] See Ochs, "Borowitz and the Postmodern Renewal of Theology," in Ibid., 111-144. An interesting attempt in this direction emerges from Steven Kepnes in *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).

encounter with it is intimate, but not necessarily personally intuited. As with Peirce's "brute" encounter, it is inaccessible to us directly. But as with Levinas' shock, it somehow has a face. All experience of it is already mediated by icons and symbols that we inherit as part of the specific "community of reasoning" that we belong to. In this respect, every religion constitutes a separate community in the Peircean manner Ochs describes. Some of these elements are commonly shared because of historical facts of their emergence and the intermingling of their communities. The crucial point for the commanding authority of a religious communal discourse is that the set of symbols that constitutes an intellectual space for a community creates a totality. This totality consists of a full picture of reality that enfolds the self and determines the self's existential experience. Only a total picture of reality, referring to the given concept of transcendence as the source for its unified world of experience can generate continual religious existence. Only this totality generates a strong enough core to create both the continuous communal reasoning through time, while at the same time providing the necessary gravitational force to hold together a cohesive self.

Does this idea, of a totality generated from a concept of externality or transcendence, coupled with a strong religious self-negate the ideals of individual autonomy and freedom that Borowitz and Ochs insists to retain? The fact is that religious communities are not the only ones that relate themselves to conceptualized exteriority or a concept of transcendence. A heteronomous exteriority is also what stands behind stances that we call "scientific," "rational" or "secular." As described by Peirce in his phenomenology of knowledge, there is no quest of knowledge, and hence no discourse of reason without a set of symbols that we already operate in. There is no quest of knowledge without encounters that interrupt the equilibrium between the symbols and our experience. So those who don't relate in their reasoning to a heteronomous God, still relate to a concept of transcendence. For them the exteriority they experience is heteronomous too, but instead of operating under a set of symbols that connects them with God their communal reasoning relates to *nature*, and the search is for the laws that *nature* "dictates." This does

not have to amount to realism, an explicit ontological claim that there is a unified nature behind our experiences. But this *nature* is a necessary postulation behind our scientific quests. If, according to Pragmatist approach, interruptions in my experience generate my quest for better rules, then I believe that these rules will help me control my future experiences. If I believe in better control, it means that I operate under the assumption that there is a unified universe behind my experiences that I need to understand better and qualify my reaction to. In this case, as for the religious self, the "scientific selves" also have a sense of a center of gravitation they cannot afford to lose. Losing it means living without a notion of a unified reality behind experiences, and this can lead the self to lose its interest in reason, and to life no longer making any *sense*.

According to this idea the distinction between committing to a religious community and holding a modern, naturalistic position, is not between reason and faith, it is between two alternative faiths within two alternative communities. Both religious faith and scientific faith generate discourses of reason: science is the reason generated by operating under a unified nature that conceptualizes my brute experiences, and religion is, in the case of monotheism, the reason generated by faith in the sweeping will of a personal God. Levinas' priority of ethics is also a "faith." For him the encounter with the human Other is a generative moment of the ego, and therefore I cannot afford to lose it. It is the decisive factor in my stance towards a particular Other, the community, and the human universe. Under this description, being a Jewish self, or a religious Jewish textual reasoner is not like being a modernistic self, because these two selves move in two different worlds. These two worlds are different by virtue of what lays beyond them and by virtue of the reason that determines the causational chains that emerge from, and work to carry out, the fundamental values of these two worlds.

It is clear why I claim that an experience of exteriority that determines the self does not oppose individual autonomy: Equipped with a sense of transcendence and our communal set of symbols, we are all lawmakers, we are all reasoners, and we are all autonomous, as Jewish selves, scientific selves, or ethical selves. The crucial point is that being part of a

communal discourse is a condition for our ability to exercise thought and therefore freedom, not a hindrance to it. But I am also interested in the question of individual freedom within the community of faith, and hence relate in an important manner with modernity. What modernity afforded us is not an autonomous self we didn't have before, an autonomy that is endangered by those who are seeking a return to some religious form of life. Instead, Modernity's gift is affording us the ability to stand within more than one set of symbols, to belong to more than one community. In contrast to Maimonides who attempted, at least in his *Book of Knowledge*, to incorporate the scientific stance he knew into his religion stance, today we don't need to synthesize, we can stand in parallel worlds, and in this respect we have multiple selves. Different individuals and different communities have different strategies of harmonizing these worlds in cases of contradiction. The meaning of our freedom of thought is the fact that we are able to live in different worlds and operate according to different sets of rules without being executed, excommunicated or experience dissolution of our "self." In case of life threatening illness we can go to a medical specialist in the morning and gather the community for a special prayer in the evening without feeling any logical dissonance. We stand as selves at once in two faiths that dictate two different sets of rules and we are autonomous participants in a community of inquirers in both. What Borowitz is urging his fellow Jews to do is to place their Jewish self in a higher priority in their lives. In contrast, Jewish Orthodoxy expects that the Jewish self and its lawmaking will encompass a wider range of experiences. If there is a boundary that Orthodoxy seems to place upon the freedom of individuals it is not the autonomy to make laws. Jewish traditional reason and its modern versions are highly methodical, responsive, as well as innovative and creative. It is also not necessarily a demand to forfeit individuality for communal loyalty. The limit set on freedom by Orthodox communities, is the relative limitation that the community sets upon the individual of "traveling" between different "selves of reason" both in theoretical thinking and in practical application. When Modern thinkers reject religious affiliation in the name of freedom this is the point that they should acknowledge. When Borowitz insists to

search for the boundaries of a *non-Orthodox* Jewish Self in the name of an autonomous self he should acknowledge what the traditional community is challenging. The test of personal freedom within a given community is not the content of the community's "faith," but the hold that the community has upon the individual's actual choices. This entails a distinction between questions of freedom as autonomous individuals in the act of reasoning and specific communities' tendencies to curtail individual freedom as a means of survival. In this regard too there is no essential difference between different types of communities of discourse. Any scientific community can be subject, at least temporarily and locally, to the authority's curtailment of personal freedom because of funding, internal political structure, or other interests despite its dependence on ideas of rationality and autonomy. The challenge for religious thought and religious communities on the one hand, and for individuals with spiritual aspirations on the other is to avoid confusing one with the other. A community that does not provide religious meaning to the totality of human experience may not present a strong enough pull for modern individuals and therefore lose the battle to secularization and assimilation. On the other hand a religious community whose structure of authority aims at preventing individuals from exercising personal freedom and determining their own boundaries is cutting itself away from participation in the modern world.