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To McBride and Isaac's credit, while both take sides, each, in his own way, makes cautionary remarks against declaring a winner. McBride reveals that as his philosophical sensibilities have evolved he has come to have more sympathy for the spirit, if not the letter, of Camus. In words well-worth heeding, McBride explains, "it is increasingly difficult for me to imagine, despite Marxian and Sartrean optimism, a conjunction of philosophical theory with political practice that will not result in debased, politicized philosophy instead of the hoped-for philosophical praxis" (Sprintzen 245). And at the very end of his essay he leaves the reader hanging with the question as to whether the end of Communism and Cold War politics validates the spirit of Camus. On the other hand, Isaac concludes that declaring Camus the winner would itself be contrary to the spirit of Camus. Besides, "such judgments are really beside the point" (Sprintzen 267). Rather than declaring winners and losers, we on the fractured 'left' have our work cut out and do better to learn from history's mistakes, which, in this case, includes the warning not to let our ideological commitments blind us to what we really value. In the end, anyone with a general interest in the history of the left or a particular interest in Sartre and Camus would do well read both of these works.

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Oona Ajzenstat (Eisenstadt), *Driven Back to the Text: The Premodern Sources of Levinas's Postmodernism* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 388+ix pages.

Oona Eisenstadt's book addresses programmatically, authoritatively, and perceptively how Levinas's philosophical thought is informed at almost every turn by Jewish practices of discourse. Among readings of Levinas, such as those by Robert Gibbs and Richard A. Cohen, that have relied upon Jewish sources, particularly from the Rabbinic tradition, Eisenstadt's book is noteworthy for the comprehensiveness and clarity with which she sets out the question

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of Levinas's Jewish underpinnings. As her title suggests, Eisenstadt follows in the footsteps of Levinas himself, who, even as he moves forward into a postmodern critique of enlightenment rationalism and the cultures it has inspired, does so only as he turns back to read and reread the texts of his own religious tradition. In marking out this contrapuntal movement, the author first offers her account of the basic themes at issue in Levinas and then takes up in succeeding chapters how Levinas's reading of prophetic, Kabbalistic, and Rabbinic texts conditions not only his engagement with discrete philosophical questions but also the very sense of what it means to question philosophically. A final chapter considers how the Shoah or Holocaust provides a decisive scene, in which the ethical, the most crucial philosophical category for Levinas, finds its most exacting measure.

Eisenstadt rightly notes that the question of Levinas's Judaism, and particularly that of its place in his philosophical thought, has not been without controversy. Many readers of Levinas, in their attentiveness to the universality of his philosophical themes, would just as soon ignore the "particularity" of his religious background. But Eisenstadt directs her reader to the complexity of the term 'Judaism' as it is used by Levinas—of how it evokes both a particular religious tradition and a "fundamental insight into plurality, diversity, alterity, infinity . . . in short . . . a mode—or at times *the* mode—of relation or ethics" (76). Further, Levinas finds in Judaism a mode of thinking and speaking that is particularly sensitive to the significance of the particular, or what Levinas would call the singular, *l'unique*, in an account of the universal. The sensitivity of the Judaic universal to the particular, to what Eisenstadt terms the "universal *each*," as opposed to the "universal *all*" (244) allows Judaism (at least for Levinas and Eisenstadt) to play an exemplary role in his attempt to articulate an ethics that would take seriously the *singularity* of the other to whom I am responsible, as well as the *singularity* of my responsibility to others.

Whether other traditions can function similarly remains an open question. Certainly Levinas refers to non-Jewish writers such as Shakespeare, Plato, or Dostoyevsky as expressing the ethical in his sense of the term. And his long involvement with explicitly Christian thinkers, even at times in the context of the *Colloques des intellectuels juifs de langue française*, suggests that 'Bible', in Levinas's use of the term, means something more inclusive than simply the

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Tanach, the biblical text of his own religious tradition. In any event, Eisenstadt's careful analysis of the manner in which Levinas draws upon Jewish sources in writing his philosophy reveals the blindness at work in any approach to this thinker that would simply dismiss his Judaism as being *in toto* irrelevant to his philosophy. The issue of Levinas's Judaism, now fully out of the closet thanks to Eisenstadt's careful exposition, deserves renewed consideration.

To "prevent speech" (7), which is to say, the speech of others, has become an all too common practice in our age, in which we find ourselves so confident of the clarity of our reasons, the goodness of our intentions, and the greatness of our actions. Eisenstadt's treatment of Levinas makes clear how this modern confidence is undermined once we take seriously that the significance of ethics, its proto-meaning, is announced in my responsiveness to the other who approaches me. Because ethics begins for Levinas in my inescapable obedience to being addressed by the other, ethics from the very first involves me in discourse, in the task of reading responsibly the expression, whether it be in writing or speech or in a mute approach, of the other. Thus, the manner in which Levinas himself reads others, whether they be philosophers, religious authorities, victims of oppression, or even victimizers, becomes exemplary in regard to his very thesis about ethical responsibility. Further, these modes of reading are to be contrasted, according to Eisenstadt, to "reductivist" practices of discourse prevalent in our time, three of which she explicitly identifies as troubling to Levinas: "Hegelianism, totalitarianism and modern progressivist liberalism" (8).

At issue in the critique of these practices is the very meaning of concreteness. For Levinas, Eisenstadt argues, the concrete is not registered by means of specifying it as an event in a history or a place in a hierarchy but rather by undergoing it as "a clash and a breaking, a constant questioning, a reversal in the psyche in which what 'I' come into contact with is constantly being revealed as devastatingly new and higher" (8). In opposition to the devastation of the concrete elicited by Levinasian discourse, is the reification or sacralization of the concrete instituted by discourses of totality, which is to say, discourses ultimately viewing and ordering reality through a "single unifying lens" (9). Such discourses inevitably reduce all alterity, all the expressions of the other, to the same. The persuasiveness of Levinas's "broken language" (98), for Eisenstadt,

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does not lie in its ordering of all aspects of experience into some magnificent and subtle whole, but in its ceaselessly registering a disruption of that whole.

And yet, Levinas understands the inevitability of totalities, of arguments for systems, even as he undermines them. An important point to be made here is how all philosophical discourse, as well as its political, social, historical, scientific, and religious counterparts, ultimately engages in a “necessary betrayal” of the ethical relation. For simply to express a truth is already in some sense to involve oneself in the expression of an interlocking system of arguments, and so in a totality. In Levinasian parlance, one’s *saying* of the truth inevitably becomes a *said*. But Eisenstadt would have her reader distinguish between this necessary, albeit provisional, totality that Levinas would accept and the, in Eisenstadt’s words, “avoidable totality” (11) that would substitute a “second reality” (8) constructed of words disconnected from singular others for the much more disconcerting and devastating reality of our contact in discourse with these others.

In turning to prophetic, Kabbalistic, and Rabbinic writings as distinct categories, Eisenstadt helps Levinas’s reader understand that Judaism itself is articulated in a plurality of discourses, each of which in its own fashion resists the collapse of concreteness and the institution of the second reality characteristic of reductive discourses of totality. Although, like Gibbs and Cohen, Eisenstadt foregrounds the Rabbinic tradition in her analysis, her attention to prophetic and Kabbalistic writings is also invaluable. Her discussion is both informed and wide-ranging, and includes a consideration of Levinas’s background within the Mitnagdic tradition, as well as an outline to Lurianic and Abulafian approaches to the Kabbalah. But most importantly, Eisenstadt ably shows how each tradition suggests solutions to questions arising as Levinas works out the full implications—both theological and philosophical—of his reorientation of ethics. For instance, Eisenstadt traces out and helpfully expands upon how the prophetic announcement of G-d in the Bible, as well as the midrash addressing that announcement in the Talmud, allows Levinas to construct a hermeneutics focused on human relations, with a tripartite structure of abusive, poetic or prophetic, and then skeptical discourse (98ff.).

Eisenstadt argues that Levinas’s formulation of this final category, skeptical discourse, is guided by the hermeneutical

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practices of the Rabbinic tradition, for which “no set of principles” can be given “by which all cases [of halakhah or Law] are measured symmetrically or equally; instead we find the constant subordination of the general rule to the particular case” (55). For Levinas, the skepticism of Talmudic thought pointedly refuses sacralization or reification by undoing closed dialectical oppositions and so fostering “dynamism, . . . real rupture” (215). Levinas’s turn to Talmudic thought, Eisenstadt argues, is particularly directed toward resisting that Hegelian notion of history, in which events may be on the move but are so only insofar as they contribute to a universal result, the edifice of spirit as it is finally elaborated by and in history. Theodicy, in which the suffering of others is justified through its outcome in history, is, in Levinas’s mind, the most unbearable of thoughts. Eisenstadt’s careful reading in her final chapter, “Night Spaces,” of how the suffering of the victims of the Shoah figures within Levinas’s philosophical exploration of the significance of ethics provides, along with Robert Gibbs’s *Why Ethics?*, perhaps the most nuanced and careful working-out to date of what Rabbinic discourse might bring to the writing of philosophy.

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Leonard Lawlor, *Thinking through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), xvi+212 pages.

In *Thinking through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, Leonard Lawlor brings together the philosophies of three of the most important thinkers of 1960s France, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze. The book relates these thinkers to each other and to their predecessors in the French and German contexts (Merleau-Ponty, Hyppolite, Husserl, and Heidegger) in ways that are not only novel but designed to open up new avenues of thinking. The book is composed of an introduction, eight essays, and a conclusion, as well as two appendices. Seven of the eight essays have appeared elsewhere and were revised for the volume, while the introduction, first chapter, and conclusion were written