The Philosopher, the Rabbi, and the Rhetorician

Susan Handelman

The question is the following: to receive what one has not merited—that is hell. The verse says: "The righteous hate gifts" (Proverbs 15:27). Do you know why? It's because they have to give them back. In most religions, by contrast, the gift of existence is a grace received. But the fact of having received without having merited—that is hell. It is what one calls a union of repulsion: the one who receives returns it, refuses, until the back-and-forth of the light makes the vessel sufficiently refined to be capable of receiving. I would like to tell you how this is taught on the level of the Talmud: the one who receives, gives more to the one who gives, than the one who gives to the one who receives. In what's happening right now, when I am speaking, I am the subject and you are the object; and when you listen, I am the object and you are the subject. It's necessary that something reciprocal occurs, a restoration of the dignity of the other, as Kant said. You have to receive in such a way that restores my dignity as the giver, but I have to give in such a way that restores your dignity as receiver. Otherwise, there is refusal. For that reason, from time to time, I make you laugh.

—Rabbi Yéhouda Léon Askenazi (Manitou), "Le 'cercle' et la 'droite'" (159)[1]

I'm grateful for the chance to write on "Jewish rhetoric" for this special issue of *College English*, but I confess my initial perplexity about how to approach the topic. Defining either of those terms—*Jewish* or *rhetoric*—is difficult enough, let alone when they are conjoined. Harold Bloom once impishly described the term "Jewish-American Culture" as similar to "Holy Roman Empire": it was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire (108).

Susan Handelman is professor of English at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, where she moved in fall 2000. Before that, she taught for twenty years in the English department at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is the author of *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (1982); *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas* (1991); and the forthcoming *"Make Yourself a Teacher": Rabbinic Tales of Mentors and Disciples*. She has edited collections on psychoanalysis and religion, contemporary Jewish education, and women's interpretations of classical Jewish texts. She has also written many essays in the areas of literary theory, pedagogy, and Jewish thought.

College English, Volume 72, Number 6, July 2010

Copyright © 2010 by the National Council of Teachers of English. All rights reserved.

So I have chosen to define rhetoric here in its broadest sense, following Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*, published in 2004, a year before he died. Rhetoric, writes Booth, is

> *the entire range of resources that human beings share for producing effects on one another:* effects ethical (including everything about character), practical (including political), emotional (including aesthetic), and intellectual including every academic field. It is the entire range of our use of "signs" for communicating effectively or sloppily, ethically or immorally. At its worst, it is our most harmful miseducator—except for violence. But at its best—when we learn to listen to the "other," and listen to ourselves and thus manage to respond in a way that produces genuine dialogue—it is our primary resource for *avoiding* violence and building community. (xi, xii)

As to *Jewish* rhetoric, I've decided not to address the question here through any historical survey, or by examining specific Jewish rhetorical practices, as important as those approaches are. Rather, I want to look at it in terms of Booth's definition and focus on the ethical relation to "the other." That relation, of course, has also been a central preoccupation of postmodern thought. In current academic discourse, the phrase *the other* has just about attained the rhetorical status of a Burkean *God-term*—a term that represents an ultimate value, organizing and stabilizing a community and its ideology through its invocation.

Kenneth Burke's own work is filled with awareness of the theological, and his *Rhetoric of Religion* (1961) was a turning point in his thinking. Booth himself came from a Mormon background, and the final chapter of *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric* tries to establish the commonplaces between rhetoric and religion. Both Booth's and Burke's notions of religion, though, are rooted in Western-Christian cultural and religious discourse. How would Jewish ethical-religious discourse contribute to rhetorical theory? To explore that question, I have chosen the long quotation by Rabbi Yéhouda Léon Askenazi as the epigraph to this essay. It encapsulates much of what I want to say here about rhetoric, Judaism, philosophy, critical theory, and current thinking about *the other*. And, in particular, problems with the influential idea put forth by Emmanuel Levinas that the founding moment of epistemology and ethics is the "priority of the other." Needless to say, how we think about the other has profound implications not only for rhetorical theory, but for our politics and pedagogy as we struggle with the dilemmas of this new millennium.

"You Create the Books and I'll Create the Readers"

First, some background. Although Levinas is far better known and more influential in the English-speaking world, Askenazi is just now being translated from French to Hebrew (and soon into English). He is also better known by the totem nickname Manitou he was given as a young man in the French-Jewish scouting movement

(Éclaireurs Israélites de France). This is a Native American word meaning "spirit." It stuck to him for the rest of his life, and is the name by which he is still commonly known, so I'll use it in this essay.[2] During the Nazi period, both Levinas and Manitou underwent major personal and intellectual traumas that profoundly affected the rest of their lives. Each spent the remainder of his career addressing the cultural and moral collapse of Europe in World War II, rebuilding the Jewish community in France, and intellectually restructuring the relations among Judaism, philosophy, and ethics.

Levinas, born in 1906, came from an intellectual Russian-Jewish family to study philosophy in Germany and France with Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger in the 1920s and 1930s. Manitou, born sixteen years later, came from French-Colonial Oran in Algeria, and from a long line of rabbis and kabbalists. Both suffered under German occupation and fought in the French army during the war. Directly afterward, each spent many years teaching in and directing Jewish schools for youth in Paris. They were colleagues and prominent speakers at the annual Colloquium of French-Jewish Intellectuals, delivering lectures on biblical and rabbinic topics in light of contemporary issues. Along with André Neher and Éliane Amado Lévi-Valensi, they constituted the Parisian School of Jewish Thought (L'École juive de Paris) in the 1950s. It was a remarkable moment in modern Jewish intellectual history.

Levinas entered the French academy in 1961 as a philosophy professor (he was then fifty-five years old), while Manitou purposely chose not to have a university career. In responding once to Neher's urging him to write a book, Manitou answered, "Let's make a deal: You create the books and I'll create the readers" (qtd. in Aviner 24). He remained an educator and institution builder in France until his emigration to Israel in 1968, where he continued his work. He was known as a consummate teacher and master of oral discourse. But there are also many volumes of his collected essays and lectures, running to thousands of pages. These two luminaries—Levinas and Manitou—died within a year of each other, in 1995 and 1996.

In the rest of this essay, I will return to the quotation of Manitou that I use as the epigraph to elicit a notion of *Jewish* rhetoric. In the concluding section, I'll bring to the discussion another great French-speaking Jewish intellectual of the same generation, one whose work was also deeply affected by the Nazi period: Chaim Perelman (1912–84). Perelman was a Jew from Poland who became a Belgian citizen, and was the youngest person to become a professor at the University of Brussels. His "turn to rhetoric" after the war, culminating in his influential masterwork *The New Rhetoric* (with coauthor Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca), was part of his own intense search for an answer to the problem of values, and the violence in Western thought. His endeavors, though, were not only intellectual: forced to resign his position at the university due to the Nuremberg laws, and to hide his own young daughter to save her life, he became a leader in the Belgian resistance movement along with his wife Fela. Together they saved thousands of Jews at great personal risk, and retained strong ties to Israel to the end of their lives.[3]

In their own ways, the "philosopher" Levinas, the "rabbi" Manitou, and the "rhetorician" Perelman partook of all three of those identities. Each came to view ethics as prior to philosophy, and understood that position as fundamentally Jewish. Levinas and Manitou, though, differed radically in defining the ethical relation to the other, and of Judaism to philosophy. Before going further, a caveat: extracting these thinkers' ideas from their own rich rhetorical context inevitably does them an injustice. Given my limited space here, I can touch on the complex issues only in very general and reductive terms.

As to rhetoric, Levinas speaks little of it directly, but retains the classical philosopher's suspicion of rhetoric as sophistic manipulation. One could see why. If rhetoric involves an attempt to persuade or influence the other, then the *other* is still being treated as a means, and rhetoric is enmeshed in the cycle of adversarial power relationships Levinas wants to uproot from the foundations of philosophy in order to find a way out of the violence plaguing Western thought.[4] So the Levinasian *other* is an entirely "other / otherwise than being" that disrupts the narcissistic enclosure of Being and self. The relation to the other, for him, must be asymmetrical: subjectivity is defined and constructed through being "subject to," "hostage" to the other (in Levinas's later terms), and bears absolute responsibility for the other, even for the faults of the other.

Manitou maintains that the asymmetrical relationship does not solve the problem of violence. Because now violence is being done to the self, the "subject," which has to sacrifice entirely for the other. Instead, the main problem of religion, ethics, and philosophy is finding a solution where the other is neither placed *higher*, made utterly absolute or transcendent (or a God-term), nor placed *lower*. Both positions involve domination. The solution to violence can be found only in reciprocity, a kind of "equation of fraternity," as Manitou terms it. This is not a formal or mathematical equation, but an equilibrium, a balance, a particular way of *giving and receiving* that maintains the dignity of each. One is not hostage to the other. For Manitou, achieving that fraternity is also the heart of Jewish teaching about the nature of Creation, and is the purpose of history. From the first stories of the Book of Genesis to the last pages of Chronicles, the biblical narrative details the "conflict of siblings" (brothers, sisters, families, tribes, and nations) and the ongoing generations' attempts to resolve it. This is an unfinished historical process in which we are still embroiled.

Like Levinas, Manitou does not write much about rhetoric directly, but there is an extraordinary moment of Jewish rhetorical consciousness in the quotation I have chosen for the epigraph. It comes at a special moment in a long lecture Manitou is giving to a general audience, in which he is introducing complex kabbalistic ideas about Creation. At a certain moment, he interrupts his talk and requests that someone ask a question "so we can breathe a little" (158). A question is asked, which Manitou then clarifies by defining his own rhetorical situation in speaking to the audience attending the lecture. This situation, and his reflections on it, not only

illustrate but also enact the very kabbalistic idea he is trying to convey. It's also a pedagogical moment par excellence. More poignantly, it comes from one of the very last lectures Manitou gave in 1996, even as he was quite ill. He was in the middle of editing it when he died.

The structure of the quotation also enacts his larger religious, philosophical, and educational project: he cites a verse from Hebrew scripture, "translates it" psychologically and philosophically into Western categories, then "retranslates it" into specifically Jewish categories of thought from the Jewish legal and mystical traditions, Talmud and Kabbalah. At the same time, the retranslation critiques the limits of the Western philosophical categories and supersedes them. And, characteristic of Manitou's personal style, it is framed with humor at the beginning and the end. There is a simultaneous coalescence of the several levels, even as he expresses complex ideas in seemingly simple terms.[5] Were I to try to unravel all those different levels with the background each requires, I would need several times the length I'm allotted here. So I will focus on these questions: How does Manitou's rhetorical situation as a speaker in front of an audience parallel the kabbalistic cosmological process, and at the same time coincide with fundamental principles of ethics in relation to the other? Where do these initial "dualisms" of self and other, subject and object, speaker and audience, and the tensions between them come from? How are they resolved? My method of proceeding is itself a classically Jewish rhetorical one: a kind of nonlinear midrashic exegesis where I am line-by-line glossing, explaining, commenting, and elaborating on a passage whose every word or phrase is assumed to have many levels of meaning. I, too, will be the philosopher, the rabbi, and the rhetorician.

Cosmology and Ethics: The Self/Other, Subject/Object Problem

One of the great insights of kabbalistic tradition is that Creation occurs not through expansion or "revelation," but through God's *contraction* and concealment (*tzimtzum*) of his "infinite presence" or "light " in order to "make space" for a finite world. Otherwise, there would be no room for an *other*, nothing but God. To create and make space for an other, "to give birth" to something other than self, is the fundamental moral act, as Manitou and Levinas both stress. But for Manitou, that is only part of it. To really make a place for the other also means a reciprocity, to allow the other to *give back*, to *share* in the work of creation, and to *merit* the gift of existence. Otherwise what "place" does the other really have—aside from passive recipient?

Though it might sound abstract, this cosmological process is embodied in the simple juxtaposition of the very first verse of the Bible with the second one (Gen. 1:1, 2). We are so familiar with the story, Manitou notes, that we don't ask an obvious question: why, immediately after, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and

the earth," is everything suddenly "waste and void and darkness" in the second verse? In the narrative, God is not creating *ex nihilo*, something out of nothing, but the reverse: out of something, God is making nothing! In other words, the contraction and concealing of God's light to create the "empty space," the "place" for the world to exist, also create a world of darkness, waste, and wild; an unfinished world, a mix of good and evil that needs fixing ("Parachat" 12–13). All this occurs long *before* the story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. God's making that empty space, and not finishing it, intentionally allows for this "chaos" in order to "give a place" to human beings, a moral place, to share in the process of creation. This act engenders history with all its turbulence, but also with its goal and purpose: the human spiritual and ethical mending of the world to reach the messianic goal. So history, despite its upheavals, violence, and darkness is "a drama, but not a tragedy," as Manitou eloquently puts it ("Le couple" 209). We are not in the fated, deterministic world of the Greeks. The word for history in Hebrew is *toladot*, which means "generations," and history as conceived in the Bible is not a succession of anonymous events, but the ongoing history or "engenderment" of human identities.

Now, I have just condensed some highly complex ideas into a few paragraphs and left out immense realms of thought. And it's taken me days to do it, though you have read it in a few seconds. As writers, we're all in the position of the Creator in the Kabbalah: we have to condense the vast array of our thoughts in order for our audience to be able to receive. There is a constant back-and-forth, expansion and contraction, as we try both to create our "implied reader" and adjust to the real reader's ability to absorb and make the ideas her or his own. Otherwise what we say will be rejected. The same is true, of course, of all effective pedagogical and rhetorical acts.[6] But what is the ethic of this relation? When is it manipulation? What is the cost of the diminution? When is there a mutuality of respect? And how can it allow for the other to be a participant and creator as well?

In the kabbalistic schema, from the point of view of created beings, a profound existential problem results. To be created, to exist, one has to be other than God. But not being equivalent to God is to be "diminished." And that also means existing in a world where there is a gap between the current difficult realities of existence—the "waste and void and darkness" we all live in daily and historically—and the ultimate messianic goal of a perfected creation and peace we're laboring to bring about. It also means that every self/other or subject/object "pair" or "couple" is imbalanced, as it were: from the male/female pair, to the individual/society pair, to my society/ the other society, to "sibling" couples—brother/brother, sister/sister.

To put it another way, imagine the shape of a triangle. At the top of the triangle is God, who freely bestows life, and at each bottom corner of the triangle is a creature, a subjectivity, a self. On the one hand, each creature desires a full subjectivity, to fully *be*, but this also creates inevitable competition between the two to receive all the goodness from above.

Four Solutions to the Problem of Self and Other

Manitou was an avid student of anthropology as well as philosophy in Paris, and we can see this combination in his mapping of the four solutions given in human culture to this essential problem of self and other.

1. Subject/Object. I prefer to be the subject and make you my object. This is the solution of totalitarian cultures, and the torment of Hegel's master/slave dialectic. Biblically, it is Cain's murder of Abel—the paradigm for this position at the beginning of history, and history's continuing central problem. Cain and Abel, in Manitou's reading, are two "modes of being human," ("Le couple" 214–15) and each has a *different* moral problem. Cain is the first born of the first couple. His name comes from the verb to acquire (*kanah)* and indicates his existence is already acquired, given, natural.

   The text continues, "and in addition she gave birth to his brother, to Abel" (Gen. 4:1–2). Cain is now faced with the task of making space for this "addition," this other, this sibling, to make him feel at home, to not see him as dispensable surplus. Abel, for his part, is born as an addition, as the other; so he already has the consciousness of being a brother, and does not need to make an effort to become one. His task? To educate Cain to be capable of being "someone's brother" in reciprocity. But he fails, does not know how to protect himself from Cain, and is killed. In Hebrew, the name for Abel—*Hevel*—designates what is "fleeting," like a breath. Cain and Abel, in Manitou's interpretation, are "two distinct anthropologies, two kinds of moralities, two radically different theologies [. . .] two fundamentally different perceptions of the world" ("Le couple" 214–16).
2. Object/Subject. One reaction to this barbarism is to reverse the terms: I will choose instead to be the object, and you will be the subject. In Hegel's dialectic, I will be the slave and you the master. Manitou notes that theoretically, this is the solution chosen by Christianity: sacrifice of oneself for the other. *Theoretically*—for while many Christian saints indeed have lived by that ethic, and monasteries aspired to it, the historical and political structure of Christian cultures has reverted back to option number one.
3. Object/Object. The third option would be the temptation of mysticism and spirituality of the East Asia. To avoid the suffering and evil of the subject/object relation, the solution is this: stop history. We will both be objects. Calm and relief of suffering will be attained by ceasing desire and action; peace comes through contemplation. This is the greatness of Buddhism, notes Manitou, but also its unreality, because inevitably it also can live only within the boundaries of history. Buddhist monasteries find themselves within larger social-political structures that function according to the first solution.
4. Subject/Subject. Both have the honor and dignity of being subjects in mutuality; both are masters, and both are thereby saved. Without mutuality there is failure. This solution, Manitou argues, is the one advocated by Jewish teaching, the Torah, and "opposed to the current of contemporary French-Jewish thought tending towards the second position": recognition of the other as a subject without reciprocity (qtd. in Aviner 32). This is his argument with Levinas, for whom the solution to violence is not the "equation of fraternity" but the "asymmetry of the other." The other is placed at the top of the triangle for Levinas, and only insofar as I am the "other of the other" is there any possible reciprocity, or protection of the self.

"You Shall Love Your Neighbor as Yourself"?

Needless to say, Manitou's fourfold schema consists of very broad generalizations, and he recognizes many exceptions. His tendency to schematize, he notes, arises from his desire to reach the essential issues underlying the large problems ("Parachat" 8). It's also a pedagogical-rhetorical move adapted to his varied audiences.[7] So let's move from macro to micro, and look at how this schema applies to the key biblical verse often translated as "and you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). What kind of love is this? How far does it extend? How does it fit into this schema?

As Manitou often emphasized, one cannot separate the language one uses from the conceptuality that the language and its grammar entail. (That is also part of what I would call a "rhetorical" approach.) One needs to "return to Hebrew" to understand the meaning of the text. Interestingly, in the case of this most famous verse, there is a major grammatical kink. In the usual English translation, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself," the word *neighbor* is the direct object of the verb *love*. But not so in Hebrew. The grammatically correct, although awkward, literal translation would be "you should love *to* your neighbor like yourself." The Hebrew preposition used is *leh*, meaning "to." If *neighbor* were the direct object, the sentence would have had a different preposition: *et*, which always marks a definite direct object in Hebrew. Because English does not have such a particle, the distinction is lost in the translation. But this seemingly minor difference is critical; it also marks the philosophical difference between Manitou and Levinas.

How so? Manitou argues—with Levinas again as an implicit target—that the grammatical difference signifies that the neighbor, the other, is not a direct object—not an absolute. *Leh* here means "to," or "through," or "for the sake of." The end of the verse, often not quoted, is "I am God." So the neighbor is a kind of medium. Through the neighbor, by one's behavior and recognition, by making a place for her or him, one can direct love to God, who has created both equally and desired the neighbor to exist as much as me. In speaking of the love one should have for God, the preposition *et* indeed is used (Deut. 6:5), for only God is the absolute (*Sod ha-Ivri* 118–24).

If the sentence is mistranslated, the other—one's fellow creature—is turned into a direct object, an absolute. Psychologically, as Manitou notes, we're familiar with this phenomenon. A parent can make a child the absolute focus of his or her existence, and thereby destroy the child's ability to be independent. Romantic obsession can do the same to its object, and so forth. So it's indeed very difficult to maintain this "equation" or "equilibrium" with the other. In fact, he adds, it's harder to love the real neighbor—the noisy next-door tenant, one's irritating in-law, the rude clerk—than the distant ideal or exotic *other*, the one farther away. The very closeness brings the rivalry. So "you should love your neighbor *like yourself*" means to exert yourself to

love the *near one*, that is, the one "like yourself," not the distant *other*. To sum up, the problem is not the *other*, but the *brother*, nor is it the oedipal struggle of father and son, as in Greek myth.

Philosophically, there is a parallel tendency to make God so completely transcendental and Other, that the mutual relationship between the divine and human is lost. "God" becomes so impersonal that there is no connection to the world. Or, the human takes the place of God. Also note well: equation or equilibrium means that the other *must reciprocate* by returning the love and respect—another argument against the asymmetry of the relation in Levinas. When we abandon the subject/subject position for the subject/object or object/subject position, we ultimately run the risk of Cain's murder of Abel.

Haunted by their personal experiences of the collapse of Europe and the slaughter of tens of millions in World War II, Levinas, Manitou, and Perelman hold the Cain/Abel problem central. Does one solve the problem by attempting to rupture the self-enclosed narcissistic self, the impersonal philosophy of Being and Identity as in Levinas (and Jacques Derrida, who was inspired by him)? Where does openness to the other end, and protection of the self begin, asks Manitou. How can one reason about values and institute justice, asks Perelman. How does one balance the relation of justice and mercy, or overcome the dualism between them, ask Manitou and Perelman. In short, how does one combat violence, what are the roots of evil, how is a just and peaceful society constructed, and what are the limits of love?

In a lecture on the relation of truth and reality, and the roots of good and evil in kabbalistic cosmology, Manitou notes,

> One of my own great teachers, Jacob Gordin, said to us (it was forty-five years ago): "What is a modern atheist? It is not someone who does not believe in God (because he really doesn't know what he is talking about). A modern atheist is someone who does not believe in evil, who does not believe evil is evil. Of such a person, one needs to be very wary." ("Parachat" 12)

Gordin (1896–1947) was a brilliant Russian-Jewish refugee philosopher, Jewish studies scholar, and key influence on the Parisian School of Jewish Thought. The Russian Revolution and Civil War caused his displacement in the 1920s from Russia to Berlin. With the rise of Nazism in the 1930s, Gordin had to flee to Paris. When the Germans occupied France, he again escaped, this time from Paris to the French underground. There he encountered the French-Jewish Scouts, who had become part of the underground, and became their teacher. He helped them with operations, and with sheltering and teaching children. Both Levinas, who knew him in Paris, and Manitou, who met him through the scouts, were deeply affected by Gordin. He was the teacher of those who after the war would become the teachers of the next generation of French Jews.[8]

Today, as then, the term *evil* has fallen out of favor, or has been translated into more secular terms—*oppression*, *racism*, *fascism*, *injustice*, *imperialism*, and so forth. But for thinkers with the personal experiences and philosophical depth of Gordin and Manitou, evil was real, and pressing. One could not be content with purely intellectual constructions of the world, or utopian ideologies. A poignant story is told by another of Gordin's French students, Emmanuel Raïs, who writes not only of Gordin's brilliance, but of the force of his personality. In a discussion about a certain matter, "I suddenly found myself before a terrible simplicity. He said: 'If you think that way, it is because you have not cried enough […]' and this was one of the greatest illuminations of my life" (320).

Giver and Receiver: Beyond Dualism to Holy Rhetoric

All those who are merciful to the cruel in the end will be cruel to the merciful.
—*Midrash Kohelet Rabbah* (7:16); *Tanchuma "Metzora"* (1)

To sacrifice to one value is to sacrifice all the others.
—Manitou, "Le sens humain" (538)

Just as one can't make the other absolute, one can't make any one value an exclusive absolute; that itself is a root of evil. Values also need to be in a harmony of reciprocal interaction, united in a way that the classical, ontological dualisms of Western thought make virtually impossible. "One value isolated from the unification of values can become evil," Manitou observes ("Langage" 14).[9] For example, absolute kindness or mercy or openness alone, unbalanced by judgment and discrimination, risk inverting into their opposite, as the rabbinic statement from the Midrash above so trenchantly expresses. The very rhetorical figure used in this saying, *chiasmus*, (technically "antimetabole") is a perfect match of form and content: chiasmus is the parallel and reversal of terms. On an epistemological level, one indeed can only express such an idea "rhetorically," not in terms of syllogistic logic. (That inability to reason about values and overcome dualisms using the methods of logical positivism and empiricism led Perelman to break with philosophy, rediscover and return to rhetoric.)

As a rhetorical structure, chiasmus involves a "crossing over" of opposite terms, like the χ shape of the Greek letter *chi*, after which it is named. In the midrash about mercy and cruelty, the opposites cross over, interact, and "unite." Chiasmus also occurs in the rabbinic statement included in the Manitou quotation used as the epigraph to this essay: "[T]he one who receives, gives more to the one who gives, than the one who gives to the one who receives."[10] He then applies it to the rhetorical situation,

reformulating and breaking down the opposition of subject/object and speaker/audience to make it a dual reciprocity between the two terms *giver* and *receiver*:

> In what's happening right now, when I am speaking, I am the subject and you are the object; and when you listen, I am the object and you are the subject. It's necessary that something reciprocal occurs, a restoration of the dignity of the other, as Kant said. You have to receive in such a way that restores my dignity as the giver, but I have to give in such a way that restores your dignity as receiver.

This "unification" of speaker and audience occurs not through the one-sided type of persuasion of classical rhetoric (the speaker gives forth, and the audience receives or is persuaded), but neither is it a Burkean "identification" of rhetor and audience. Burke's definition of *identification* partly entails his notion of *consubstantiation*, a term borrowed from Latin Christian Christology to describe the ontological relations of the persons of the Trinity (19–28, 55). In Judaism, no such consubstantiality exists in the relation between God and the world, or the ethics of interhuman relation; instead, there is a reciprocal interchange.

Manitou adds the following new sentence after the final one of our epigraph:

> In Jewish thought, this is analyzed in relation to "the desire to receive" (*ratzon lekabel*) and the "desire to bestow" (*ratzon lehashpia*) in distinguishing four situations: receive in order to receive, receive in order to give, give in order to give, give in order to receive. ("Le 'cercle' et la 'droite'" 159)

He now moves the discourse to another level, using a fourfold schema of giver/receiver relations from the modern kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (1885–1954), whose thought strongly influenced him. Something new also happens when the terms are converted into this Jewish discourse: the receiver can give more to the giver than the giver does to the receiver, a dualism is overcome, and a "unity of values" is achieved.

Each one of these four positions occurs on many levels—as types of relationship between God and the world, self and other, stages in human development, philosophies of life. It's worth noting here, by the way, that the word *kabbalah* itself comes from the Hebrew verb "to receive" (*kibel*). Usually, kabbalah has the sense of "received wisdom" or a tradition of "prophetic revelation" passed on orally from teacher to student. But on another level, I prefer the definition I once heard from a teacher of mine in Jerusalem: Kabbalah is itself the "wisdom of how to receive"—for despite appearances, really knowing how to receive is much harder than knowing how to give.

I have no space to discuss these ideas in much detail, but one-sided receiving—to "receive in order to receive"—is the position of the child or the egoist, or a philosophy of self-enclosed, self-identical Being. To "give in order to receive" is familiar, conventional morality (or a rhetoric of persuasion where a speaker tries

to influence the audience for the speaker's own benefit). The surprise is that the highest stage in Ashlag's schema is not to "give in order to give." (That would also parallel the second position in Manitou's object/subject schema—I sacrifice myself to give all). Although the desire to negate receiving has a positive motive, Manitou sees it as a kind of adolescent idealism through which we all eventually need to pass. For the need to receive should not be negated; it is also essential for existence. If we did not eat, breathe, or draw a salary, for example, we would die. One who claims to entirely negate the need to receive is either dishonest, or is committing suicide.

Nevertheless, for a mature, honest person to receive what is not merited causes shame. How, then, is to "receive in order to give" the highest level? Think of the common situation of arguing with a friend over who will pay for lunch. One could follow any of the four positions: (1) simply accept the friend's offer selfishly; (2) say, "This time I will pay, but next time you pay"; (3) keep refusing, and insist on paying; or (4) finally agree to let the friend pay because that will give her or him pleasure. In this fourth option, the receiver becomes giver: that is, the motive for receiving now comes from altruism rather than egoism, and the contradiction between those two psychological tendencies is resolved.

So in the best rhetorical moment, the speaker not only has to "give" in such a way as to restore dignity to the audience, but the audience has to "receive" in such a way as to restore dignity to the speaker. Receiver and giver interchange. Pedagogically, this double dynamic also lies behind the famous talmudic saying, "Much have I learned from my teacher, more from my fellow-students, but from my disciples most of all" (Babylonian Talmud, *Makkot* 10a).

Of course, teacher and student, rhetor and audience can take up any of the other positions, including those that foster domination, abuse, and violence. I have used the word *best* here to mean the rhetorical situation or moment where the most ethical and effective communication takes place. Perhaps the word *climactic* could serve as well, because at its best and most ethical, or most "holy," the sexual act embodies this deep double reciprocity of giver and receiver. Indeed, this moving beyond dualism, this unity of values, this attempt at reconciling what seems irreconcilable is Manitou's definition of *holiness*. But it is something beyond philosophical systems of dualistic reason, and attainable through Jewish categories given in the Torah. Perhaps, then, we could call it a Jewish "holy rhetoric."

The New Rhetoric and Jewish Rhetoric

Perelman stated that he did not believe in any definitive divine revelations or mystical intuitions (*New Rhetoric* 510). Nor was he well educated in Jewish sources, as were Levinas or Manitou. But he was a strongly identified cultural Jew and Zionist who,

later in life, came to see in talmudic forms of reasoning the modes of argument and values he had sought to construct (Frank, "Jewish Countermodel" 178). I have space here to add only a few comments in light of my earlier discussion.

What Perelman calls "a third way" beyond the dualisms of philosophy parallels Manitou's "unification of values."[11] For Perelman, the third way is enabled by rhetoric. Though he would not use the word *holy*, written on Perelman's gravestone is a quotation from the Bible: "Justice, justice you shall pursue" (Deut. 16:20). The urgency of that pursuit had pressed him from the beginning of his career as a philosopher of law, ethics, logic, and metaphysics to his work in the Belgian underground, and on to composition of *The New Rhetoric*. The question was, how could one draw an "ought" from an "is"? In his search to breach the gap, Perelman rediscovered Cicero, and Aristotle's *dialectical*, that is, informal, persuasive, practical reasoning: rhetoric. The first page of *The New Rhetoric* announces Perelman's aim: "to *break with the concept of reason and reasoning due to Descartes*, which has set its mark on Western philosophy for the last three decades" (emphasis in original). Formal, deductive, or Cartesian reason was unable to solve the ambiguous and practical problems of value judgments in morality, religion, and politics. Without a solution, these essential spheres risk abandonment to "irrational forces, instincts, suggestion, or even violence" (3). In rhetoric, Perelman found the middle way, or third way, to combat the

> uncompromising and irreducible philosophical oppositions presented by all kinds of absolutism: dualisms of reason and imagination, of knowledge and opinion, of irrefutable self-evidence and deceptive will, of a universally accepted objectivity and an communicable subjectivity, of a reality binding on everybody and values that are purely individual. (510)

Here we return to the issue I have focused on throughout: rhetoric for Perelman is that form of discourse dependent *upon a relation to an other*, adapted and addressed to an audience. Its aim is "to act effectively on minds" and solicit non-coercive assent or "adherence," which is given by a free, responsible decision of the listener (7). Cartesian reason, by contrast, is based on solipsistic, self-evident truths with no need for deliberation, or relation to *others*, or any possibility of withholding one's assent. So Perelman's rhetoric also involves what he calls a "meeting of minds," a mutuality that creates a "bond" of community (*Realm* 9, 11).

This third way, between the compulsions of formal autonomous reason and the coercions of violence, is also a middle path between skepticism and fanaticism. In a stunning insight, Perelman shows these are not opposites, but flip sides of each other. The fanatic "adheres to a disputable thesis for which no unquestionable proof can be furnished," refusing to submit it to any kind of free discussion or argument. But isn't the skeptic, then, the guardian against such violence? So much of the epistemological skepticism in postmodern thought rests on that ethical self-justification.

But as Perelman points out, skepticism, like fanaticism,"equates adherence to a thesis with recognition of its absolute truth" (*New Rhetoric* 62). In other words, the skeptic thinks it is impossible to attain absolute truth; the fanatic claims she or he has it. Neither is willing to allow for that middle way, a *critical rationalism* where—in the absence of criteria or proof of absolute truth—adherence to a thesis involves a mutual relation of respect, commitment, responsibility, and dignity via rhetorical forms of argument and persuasion.

Though their discourses might seem far apart, both Perelman and Manitou critique and move beyond classical philosophy, each using its own terms to undo it differently. Each wrote out of an intense Jewish ethical sensibility and awareness of the need for moral action. While writing this piece, I wondered, what would have happened if Perleman and Manitou had ever personally met? Through one of Manitou's very close students who has transcripts of many unpublished oral lectures, I found that they actually did. Manitou relates,

> I remember that just after the war, the Brussels community asked me to come from Paris to participate in a symposium to "counterbalance" Perelman. I did it in a room packed with students, a terrible heat. [. . .] In two hours, I was able to turn the room around [change their minds]. [. . .] Perelman then came to thank me and said, "I did not know there were still any *prêtres gaulois* ["French priests"—a humourous compliment] left in France [. . .]." Then we discussed Judaism for two hours. Perelman was one of the last great logicians.

In another talk, Manitou refers to a colloquium he attended with Perelman, who spoke about Spinoza. This must have been the same event: "I remember this man very well, who was a very great thinker, completely atheist, completely secular, very Jewish. [. . .] but one wonders how."[12]

Conclusion: Laughter

> *For that reason, from time to time, I make you laugh.*
> *A Rabbi who does not laugh, is not a serious Rabbi.*
> —Manitou (qtd. in Aviner 15)

So the rabbi and the philosopher-rhetorican indeed did meet. They were not quite sure what to make of each other, but their exchange embodies the principles of the epigraph with which I began this essay: they mutually honored each other, and did so with humor.[13] Which leads me finally to the last line of the epigraph: "For that reason, from time to time, I make you laugh." What does laughter have to do with all these deep philosophical discussions?

This has been a very serious essay—perhaps, as Manitou once put it, "too serious to be serious" ("Parachat" 28). As he explains, with a typical French love of wordplay,

> I believe that Jewish humor is what has enabled us to endure through history. And Jewish humor is not to take oneself too seriously. Because when one takes [*se* ***prendre***] one's self too seriously, it prevents taking values seriously. For one takes one's *self* [***se*** *prendre*] too seriously. ("Parachat" 28; emphasis added)

On one level, when a certain kind of shared laughter occurs between a speaker and audience, it is indeed a "meeting of minds," a mutual reciprocity, a bonding. Laughter is a mutual pleasure where the giver and receiver become intermingled and interchange positions, a moment of friendship. Laughter also comes from the humility of our not knowing the all, not being able to have absolute knowledge. Each tractate of the Talmud starts on page number two, not page one. A familiar Jewish saying interprets this as teaching us that we can never master the whole, and we're always just beginning to understand.

Behind much of the seemingly serious and intense discussion of the rabbis in the Jewish legal texts and biblical narrative, Manitou often senses a wink. On another level, the laughter comes from his Jewish sense of history as "a drama but not a tragedy" ("Le couple" 209). Despite the vicissitudes and pain, history through the generations has a meaning and God-given purpose toward which it moves. Humans are tasked with pursuing justice, as Perelman so passionately did, or—in Manitou's terms—with creating a humanity capable of being a brother or sister to each other . . . and to God, as it were. When that messianic goal is accomplished, history does not end, but living really begins. So we could perhaps say that shared laughter is a *messianic* moment, right in the here and now.

Punning again in French, Manitou also once said that commentary, *commentaire*, is "*comment*"- "*taire*": *comment* "how to" + *taire* "be silent" (qtd. in Koginsky 135). I have taxed my reader with a very long and serious commentary on the epigraph with which I began this essay. I've used it as a Jewish commentary on rhetoric and a rhetorical commentary on Judaism. There's so much more to say, but now it's time for me to be silent.

Notes

1. All translations from the French and Hebrew in this essay are mine. Although I quote from only a few of the lectures and essays of Askénazi here, these ideas are developed across his many works, especially in the two large volumes, *La Parole et L'Écrit*.

2. The word *Manitou* comes from the Anishnaabe language. It was customary in the French scouting movement to give a "totem" name to those who had reached a certain stage in the movement—usually an animal or sometimes a Walt Disney character. (Manitou's wife, for example, was given the name Bambi.) This name was meant to express the character of the person as experienced by the peer group. For those who decided to give him this name at the initiation ceremony, it signified "the Great Chief"—which is still its meaning in French professional slang. It is highly unlikely that they knew which Native American language it came from, or its origin. In French, to be a "grand Manitou" in any field means to be *the* specialist, the one who knows and therefore leads. The scouts saw in him, even at a young age, the qualities

of a spiritual leader, a Great Spirit. The full name given to him was actually Manitou Romantique: he was "romantic" in having a passionate dream and intensely living it, as well as being a writer of poetry and songs. I thank Elyakim Simsovic and Marcel Goldmann, his veteran students and editors, for this information

3. David Frank has written several outstanding essays on Perelman's *The New Rhetoric* in relation to his Jewish background. See his "Arguing with God," "The Jewish Countermodel," and "The New Rhetoric."

4. Mostly negative comments about rhetoric are scattered throughout Levinas's philosophical works. I have written extensively about his thought in my book *Fragments of Redemption*, to which I refer the reader. In one of his specifically Jewish writings—which he always tried to carefully separate from his philosophical writings—Levinas discusses Greek rhetoric and its relation to Judaism. "Rhetoric is all that is said too beautifully to leave us with what is true" ("Model" 27), a "weapon of ruse and domination." But he hints at the end of the essay to an alternative rhetoric, which he calls a "divine allurement." That is the Torah itself, he suggests, "a personal relation to the universal [. . .] where you draw near to him who speaks to you personally. [. . .] It involves an element of seduction without deception, a rhetoric which is holy opposed to the human rhetoric of pure humanism" (31–32). Levinas often said that his goal was to "translate Jewish wisdom into Greek." Manitou's implicit critique is that the Jewish element becomes lost in the translation, Hellenized. See especially Manitou's essays "Y a-t-il une philosophie juive?" and "Les nostalgies de Dieu" in *La Parole et L' Écrit*, vol. 1 (29–40) and (41–54).

5. That multidimensional coalescence is characteristic of traditional rabbinic (and Christian) interpretation of scripture. The idea of the "fourfold meaning of scripture" is shared by both Jewish and Christian hermeneutic traditions. The four levels may be defined roughly as the simple plain meaning, the homiletic meaning, the allegorical meaning, and the mystical meaning. I have discussed this extensively in my books *The Slayers of Moses* and *Fragments of Redemption*.

6. Coming from the Quaker spiritual tradition, the educational theorist Parker Palmer writes that "to teach is to create a space." This is a kind of "silence" or "desert" as he describes it, but also an act of hospitality toward the student wherein one does not initially fill the space with the teacher's own words and self (69). Kabbalistic ideas of *tzimtzum* involve many other intricate processes, further contractions, concealments, and "emptying out" of God's presence or light. There are also various levels and worlds, "traces" and "lights" that are created and emanated after the contractions, and varying relations of the "lights" to their containing "vessels," and so forth. The main points for our purposes are (1) that *tzimtzum* allows for God to create something "other," while at the same time overcoming irreconcilable philosophical dualisms; and (2) cosmology coincides with ethics—to make space for the other not only as free gift, but also for the other to share in building creation through mending and completing it. I've applied these ideas to the question of Jewish pedagogy in my essay "Knowledge Has a Face" (132–39).

7. The function of the teacher as transmitter of Torah in Jewish tradition also connects to the relation between what is called Oral Torah and Written Torah: words transmitted "orally" and not written down, and those written down (the Bible being an example of the latter). Roughly speaking, the former is the ongoing interpretation and innovation through time. But Oral Torah also requires intense personal contact between teacher and student—a living "discipleship" as it were; it is not just a matter of "reading texts." Or as Manitou puts it, "In the talmudic definition, a Teacher is not someone who has students, but someone who has had a Teacher" ("Morale" 10). And "[t]he secret of the pedagogy of the Torah is that greatest has to teach the smallest. This is the opposite of what happens in the university [. . .] for, finally, the entire process of teaching Torah consists in being able to transform through wisdom those who have the greatest need of it, and not those who have the least need" ("Morale" 21–22). So the fact that much of Manitou's work was oral teaching, and that the quote I am analyzing here is taken from a written version of an oral lecture is highly significant on these other levels. I further address the nature of this teacher-student relation in Jewish tradition in my forthcoming book, *Make Yourself a Teacher: Rabbinic Tales of Mentors and Disciples*.

8. Manitou's emphasis on a necessary "return to Hebrew" was a key part of the philosophical method he learned from Jacob Gordin. This meant the "rehabiliation of the immediate intuitions of Jewish conciousness as a coherence of thought" ("Jacob Gordin" 14). That is, not placing the epistemology

or philosophical-cultural heritage of Western thought as the higher criteria by which to then judge or interpret Judaism, but to retain Jewish thought as primary, and then filter Western thought and other cultures through it. Manitou also took the idea of history as *engendrement* from Gordin, who called it "historiosophy" or the meaning of history according to the Hebrew prophets ("Jacob Gordin" 15–16).

9. Here one can begin to distinguish the kind of reciprocal relation with the other that Manitou is proposing from Martin Buber's I-Thou dialogue, which is based on a contentless, isolated, nontemporal moment of absolute kindness. Manitou's idea of the unification of values is a principle I have no space to explain in depth; it is based on various sources and ideas, among them classic kabbalistic descriptions of creation as patterned through the interactions of the ten *sefirot*, or divine attributes/emanations/values. It is an inter-inclusivity, but not a dialectic. He views Kabbalah and its non-ontological cosmology as one answer to the problems Greek philosophy poses. Hebrew monotheism is also for him a religion of unity, not just in terms of belief in the One God, but also because its mission is this unification of values. That indeed is the human task of mending the creation.

10. Two sources in the rabbinic midrash are found for this statement, both commenting on the verse in Leviticus 25:25, "If your brother be waxen poor." *Midrash Rabbah Leviticus* 38:4: "R. Yehoshua taught: 'More than the master of the house does for the poor person, the poor person does for the master of the house.'" The same chiastic saying is also found in the midrash on Ruth, *Ruth Rabbah* 5:9.

11. Perelman's idea of the *dissociation of concepts* is also a brilliant rhetorical way of understanding how those dualisms are generated in the first place (*New Rhetoric* 411–59). Manitou also calls the "unification of values" a "third way" beyond dualisms ("L'Unité des valuers" 50).

12. I thank Elyakim Simsovic for finding these references for me in his archives of unpublished transcripts of Manitou's talks. The first quotation is from an undated course on the biblical chapters Numbers: 30–32 (*Parshat Matot*), and the second from an undated seminar on "Abraham's Family." In the latter, he refers to Perelman as "now deceased," so the date must be after 1984 (email message to the author, 3 Nov. 2009).

13. I am grateful to Janice Fernheimer for this insight.

Works Cited

Askenazi, Yéhouda Léon [Manitou]. "Le 'cercle' et la 'droite': Transcendance et immanence, cours de Cabale." *Pardès* 23 (1997): 149–64. Print.

———. "Le couple, créateur de l'histoire." *La Parole et l'écrit: Penser la tradition juive aujourd'hui* (Vol. 1) 206–26.

———. "Jacob Gordin, mon maître." *Jacob Gordin, Écrits: Le renouveau de la pensée juive en France.* Ed. Marcel Goldmann. Paris: Albin Michel, 1995. 9–18. Print.

———. "Langage et sainteté: Ivrit et lachone haqodèche." *Mayanot: cours transcrits du Rav Léon Askénazi—Manitou.* No. 10. Jerusalem: Foundation Manitou, 2002. Print.

———. "Morale et sainteté etude des Pirké-Avot—Ch. 1 Michna 1." *Mayanot: Cours transcrits du Rav Léon Askénazi–(Manitou).* No. 5. Jerusalem: Foundation Manitou, 1994. Print.

———. "Parachat Béréchit." *Mayanot: Cours transcrits du Rav Léon Askénazi.* Jerusalem: Foundation Manitou, 1993. Print.

———. *La Parole et l'écrit: Penser la tradition juive aujourd'hui.* Vol I. Paris: Albin Michel, 1999. Print.

———. *La Parole et l'écrit: Penser la vie juive aujourd' hui.* Vol II. Paris: Albin Michel, 2005. Print.

———. "Le sens humain de la durée selon le Midrash." *Targoum* 6 (1955): 535–43. Print.

———. *Sod ha-Ivri: Yesodot ha-Emunah L'Ohr Pesukei ha-Torah*. Vol. I. Trans. and Ed. Gavriela ben Shmuel and Israel Pibko. Jerusalem: Chava Bet El, 2004. Print.

———. "L'Unité des valuers." *La Parole et l'écrit: Penser la tradition juive aujourd'hui* (Vol. 1) 50–53.

Aviner, Shlomo. *Pirurum me-Shulkhan Gavoah: me-Torato Shel ha-Rav Yéhouda Léon Askénazi Manitou*. Beit El: Israel, 1991. Print.

Bloom, Harold. "The Pragmatics of Contemporary Jewish Culture." *Post-Analytic Philosophy*. Ed. John Rajchman and Cornel West. New York: Columbia UP, 1985. 108–23. Print.

Booth, Wayne. *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication*. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. Print.

Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1969. Print.

Frank, David A. "Arguing with God, Talmudic Discourse, and the Jewish Countermodel: Implications for the Study of Argumentation." *Argumentation and Advocacy* 41.2 (2004): 71–86. Print.

———. "The Jewish Countermodel: Talmudic Argumentation, the New Rhetoric Project, and the Classical Tradition of Rhetoric." *Journal of Communication and Religion* 26.2 (2003): 163–194. Print.

———. "The New Rhetoric, Judaism, and Post-Enlightenment Thought: The Cultural Origins of Perelmanian Philosophy." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83.3 (1997): 311–31. Print.

———. Rev. of *Chaim Perelman* by Alan R. Gross and Ray D. Dearin. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89.3 (2003): 253–66. Print.

———. "A Traumatic Reading of Twentieth-Century Rhetorical Theory: The Belgian Holocaust, Malines, Perelman, and de Man." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93.3 (2007): 308–343. Print.

Handelman, Susan A. *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991. Print.

———."Knowledge Has a Face: The Jewish, the Personal, and the Pedagogical." *Personal Effects: The Social Character of Scholarly Writing*. Ed. Deborah H. Holdstein and David Bleich. Logan: Utah State UP, 2001. 121–44. Print.

———. *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1982. Print.

Koginsky, Michael, ed. *Un Hébreu d'origine juive, hommage au Rav Yéhouda Léon Askénazi Manitou.* Jerusalem: Éditions Ormaya, 1998. Print.

Levinas, Emmanuel. "Model of the West." *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*. Trans. Gary D. Mole. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. 13–33. Print.

Midrash Rabbah. Ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon. Trans. Freedman, et al. New York: Soncino Press, 1983. Print.

Palmer, Parker J. *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Harper, 1983. Print.

Perelman, Chaim. *The Realm of Rhetoric*. Trans. W. Kluback. 1977. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1982. Print.

Perelman, Chaim, and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver. 1958. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1969. Print.

Raïs, Emmanuel. "Monsieur Gordin." *Jacob Gordin, écrits: Le renouveau de la pensée juive en France.* Ed. Marcel Goldmann. Paris: Albin Michel, 1995. 315–28. Print.

Tanchuma. Vol. 2. Ed. Solomon Buber. New York: Sefer, 1946.