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Chapter Ten

Intersubjectivity Meets Maternity

Buber, Levinas, and the Eclipsed Relation

Mara H. Benjamin

Parental caregiving is rich with existential meaning.¹ But critical reflection on childrearing—in particular, on the daily activities of adults engaged in raising children, most of whom have been women—has been quite absent in the dominant forms of Western philosophy and religious thought.² This has begun to change recently as a small but significant number of Christian theologians have examined some of the implications of the scholarly literature on maternal experience for religious thought.³

Modern Jewish thought and ethics, by contrast, have thus far remained quite oblivious to the theological potential latent in critical reflection on childrearing. Yet critical reflection on the activities associated with childrearing in the modern West offers great potential to help explore uncharted terrain in contemporary Jewish theology and ethics. Critical reflection on the daily labor of caring for young children can shed light on some of the liveliest questions in modern Jewish thought: questions of affectivity and performance; the burdens of obligation and freedom; and the significance of intersubjectivity. Furthermore, taking up these questions can draw Jewish thought more directly into the realm of culture, for childrearing forms a crucial site for a contemporary discourse of relationality. In this essay, I initiate precisely such a conversation, demonstrating what is to be gained when we allow the cultural practice of childrearing in contemporary American life to interrogate theology.

My project begins by noting the paradoxical occlusion of parental caregiving in precisely the quarters one would most expect to find it: the critical work on intersubjectivity that became the hallmark of twentieth-century Central European Jewish philosophy. Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, Franz Ro-

senzweig, and Emmanuel Levinas all aimed to chart the theological and ethical significance of human relationality. They were particularly concerned with dyadic, affective relationships, and with questions of reciprocity and asymmetry within this dyadic structure. Yet where we might expect to find the most available model of such relationships—the one between parent and child—we find a conspicuous absence. In other words, twentieth-century Jewish philosophers were most interested in precisely those kinds of interpersonal relationships that characterize many post-industrial, bourgeois Western relationships that mothers have (and are enjoined to have) with their children—yet we find few traces of mothers or children, and certainly no satisfying traces of them in this body of literature.⁴ Scour *I and Thou* or *The Star of Redemption* as we might, we will not find any sophisticated consideration of such relationships, or of the inherently “relational” processes by which selves—selves capable of mature relationships—are formed.⁵

My interest is not to take these twentieth-century Jewish thinkers to task for eliding or misrepresenting this critical type of relationship (although I will point out some of these elisions and problematic representations below). Rather, this essay begins by rereading twentieth-century Jewish thinkers with the following question in mind: what would happen if we made maternal caregiving, and parent/child relationships generally, central, rather than marginal, to an account of intersubjectivity and relationship?⁶ In embarking on this constructive inquiry, I borrow and expand on the approach set forth in Arnold Eisen’s *Rethinking Modern Judaism*. Eisen’s synthetic treatment of key issues and themes in modern Jewish thought contests the long-established practice of focusing on “great men” and “great ideas,” asserting instead that practice “has almost always remained way ‘out in front’ of theological beliefs.”⁷ In more recent decades, cultural historians and anthropologists have developed and applied this core insight by highlighting the question of power in the analysis of Jewish normativity and contesting the scholarly myopia that privileges texts over “the material, embodied, and visual manifestations of Jewish tradition.”⁸ In the context of this essay, which attends closely to a specific modern Jewish textual tradition of European philosophy, this observation suggests the necessity of allowing cultural practices—in this case, a ubiquitous cultural practice that is marginalized in the canonical works of modern Jewish thought—to interrogate the texts at hand. In what follows, I ask Jewish theology to confront childrearing, and to consider it a site of religious meaning. This endeavor entails not so much a critical analysis of childrearing as a set of cultural practices but rather the forging of a conversation between two realms of discourse that have been estranged in the production and the content of Jewish thought.

In this essay I focus on an aspect of intersubjective relationships that is particularly salient for parent/child interactions: the role of power differentials or lack thereof in dyadic relationships. First, I consider two modern

Jewish thinkers' treatment of power asymmetries in the intersubjective encounter: I begin with Buber's conception of I-Thou dialogue as a dialogue between equals in *I and Thou*, and then turn to Levinas' critique of Buber's "egalitarianism" in *Totality and Infinity*. Levinas' corrective pivots on the fundamental asymmetry in the relationship to the Other. I focus on this issue in order to identify and retrieve what will be useful and instructive from this dialogue for my consideration of parenting. I then identify core concerns regarding power differentials and asymmetry in mother/child relationships, when viewed from the standpoint of feminist philosophers. I will argue that reading these tensions in Jewish thought *alongside* the tensions that emerge from critical reflection on mothering can open up new and useful questions for how we think about relationality in general. In the conclusion, I will suggest ways in which Buber and Levinas can help plumb the theological and existential dimensions of feminist literature on mother/child relationships. My aim is to demonstrate that drawing Jewish theology into the cultural practice of childrearing will re-energize both culture and theology.

BUBER AND LEVINAS: RECIPROCITY AND ASYMMETRY IN INTERSUBJECTIVE ENCOUNTER

In his most famous work, *I and Thou*, Martin Buber (1878-1965) begins by asserting the fundamental duality of human experience in the world: "The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude."⁹ The "basic word-pairs" that describe these two possibilities for how the world is known or encountered are the I-Thou and I-It.¹⁰ The I-Thou relation, as Buber conceives it, is the locus of reciprocity; indeed, it defines reciprocity and constitutes the locus of intersubjectivity proper. Hence I will discuss the I-Thou relation in some detail.

A famous passage in *I and Thou* establishes Buber's contention that "I-Thou relation" is the privileged, originary model of relationship:

In the beginning is the relation—as the category of being, as readiness, as a form that reaches out to be filled, as a model of the soul; the *a priori* of relation, the *innate Thou*. In the relationships through which we live, the innate Thou is realized in the Thou we encounter.¹¹

This inborn drive to relation leads individuals to relate not only to other humans, but also to animals, to objects in nature or works of art, as a Thou. The I-It relation occurs as a falling-away from this original relationality; the detachment of the 'I' from its involvement with a Thou creates the I-It relation, which Buber describes as one of "experience" and "knowledge" rather than "relation."¹²

I want to dwell on several elements of the I-Thou relation that will be especially important for my later discussion. The first of these concerns the issue of particularity. For Buber, the I-Thou model of “relation” consists in an immediate grasp of the whole of the Thou. In Buber’s words, “What, then, does one experience of the Thou?—Nothing at all. For one does not experience it.—What, then, does one know of the Thou?—Only everything. For one no longer knows particulars.”¹³ Buber argues that the I-Thou relation is unmediated: we relate *directly* to the Thou, unencumbered by “prior knowledge,” “imagination,” and even “memory.”¹⁴ It is the relation in which “particularity” disappears, so that we come in contact with the “wholeness” of the other and of ourselves. In the I-It relation, by contrast, the person to whom I might potentially *relate* becomes the person I merely *experience*. The Thou becomes “a He or She, an aggregate of qualities, a quantum with a shape,” in whom I experience merely an aggregate of particular qualities, such as “the color of his hair . . . his speech . . . his graciousness.”¹⁵

For Buber, the I-Thou relationship, the privileged relationship that reveals the core attribute of relationality, dissolves not only visible externalities but also those qualities of being that make us particular individuals. Consequently, in I-Thou encounters, “measure and comparison have fled” and the ‘I’ detaches from the attributes it associates with itself.¹⁶ Later in the text, Buber elaborates by introducing the terms “person” and “ego” to refer, respectively, to the ‘I’ of the ‘I-Thou’ dyad and the ‘I’ of the ‘I-It’ dyad. The key difference here concerns the mutability or steadfastness of the individual-in-relation: “The ego . . . wallows in his being-that-way,” while the “person” is led to “self-destruction—or rebirth” in the encounter with the other.¹⁷ The self, Buber suggests, is malleable, open to being fundamentally altered as a consequence of its encounter with another, and it is key to his claim that “[r]elation is reciprocity.”¹⁸ The central point here is that “reciprocity” for Buber not only indicates the power of the Thou to affect and even constitute the I, but it also suggests how a type of encounter in which particularity, “comparison” or asymmetry will evaporate.¹⁹

For one of Buber’s key readers, the French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), attributing “reciprocity” to the encounter with the Other was deeply problematic.²⁰ Levinas’ critique of reciprocity is found in his important 1961 work *Totality and Infinity*, widely considered a watershed in his phenomenological corpus. For our purposes, its central contribution is the reformulation and radicalization of a claim he had implied in *Time and the Other* (1947) that the recognition of ethical “bondage” or obligation to the other constitutes the achievement of an already preexistent self. By contrast, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas describes the face-to-face encounter with the other as a kind of ethical bondage that is *constitutive* of the self.²¹ Ethical relation precedes all being, and thus the relationship that demands something *from* or imposes something *on* me is the one that thereby calls me into being.

This encounter does not reveal the wholeness of the other to me; indeed, the other remains “opaque” and radically other.²²

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas argues forcefully that a fundamental asymmetry characterizes this privileged intersubjective moment, which he calls the encounter with the face of the Other. In this encounter, one member of the dyad is overwhelmed and impinged upon by the other; the former challenges, perhaps even shatters, the latter’s illusion of self-contained, autonomous agency. The intersubjective encounter, then, must contain a degree of the individual’s ceding of his or her will, desires, even selfhood so that the other’s self may occupy that space. This capacity of the other to interrupt and make demands on the individual becomes the *sine qua non* for an authentic intersubjective encounter. Thus Levinas argues that the moment of ethical encounter is defined by the defenseless need of the other. The face of the other “imposes itself . . . precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity—its hunger—without my being able to be deaf to that appeal.” The other *solicits* me.²³

Significantly, the “other” for Levinas is situated simultaneously at two diametrically opposed positions. The Other is *ethically* “high” in comparison to the Same: the face of the other commands, and the Same receives the command. Yet the other is *socially* (or perhaps existentially) low, needy, even destitute (Levinas borrows the biblical phrase ‘stranger, widow, and orphan’ in this context).²⁴ In both scenarios, height and lowliness, the relationship to the Other is radically asymmetrical. Only thus, Levinas implies, can the Other command, solicit, or interrupt me. Buber’s “reciprocity,” by contrast, suggested to Levinas the “reversibility” of the I-Thou, “so that it is indifferent whether it is read from left to right or right to left.”²⁵ Buber’s model moves on a horizontal axis whereas Levinas’ encounter with the face of the Other moves on a vertical axis.²⁶

This difference between Buber and Levinas is a crucial one, but it should not obscure a point that both thinkers assume: the *primary*, perhaps even *normative* encounter between two humans is the encounter between two adult male subjects. Neither Buber nor Levinas discuss parent-child relationships in the texts under consideration. Yet each thinker briefly discusses gestation and the infant/parent relationship as a *counterpoint* to his understanding of intersubjectivity proper. These apparently marginal passages in fact throw into relief the assumption of adult male normativity that guides the body of the text. Deeper appreciation of these passages reveal how serious engagement with the dyadic pair *mother/child* would alter, challenge, and potentially enrich Buber’s and Levinas’ dialogue on asymmetry.

Buber, for instance, illustrates his claim that the capacity for I-Thou relationships is inborn by looking to gestation. His lyrical, neo-Romantic discussion of the origin of the human capacity for the I-Thou relation builds on a fantasy of the original state of human beings. Buber locates this original

human condition in the mind of the “primitive” and in the fetus in utero, writing of the latter,

The prenatal life of the child is a pure natural association, a flowing toward each other, a bodily reciprocity; and the life horizon of the developing being appears uniquely inscribed, and yet also not inscribed, in that of the being that carries it; for the womb in which it dwells is not solely that of the human mother. . . . Every developing human child rests, like all developing beings, in the womb of the great mother. From this it detaches itself to enter a personal life, and it is only in dark hours when we slip out of this again (as happens even to the healthy, night after night) that we are close to her again. . . . What is to surround the finished human being as an object, has to be acquired and wooed strenuously by him while he is still developing.²⁷

A feminist critique of this passage practically writes itself: the woman who carries the fetus is only named negatively (“the womb in which [the fetus] dwells is not solely that of the human mother”), and the pregnant woman is relevant only insofar as she possesses a uterus in which a fetus grows. This woman lacks subjectivity; even the particularity of her body quickly collapses into a mythical archetype: “Every developing human child rests, like all developing beings, in the womb of the great mother.”²⁸ This single description of pregnancy in Buber’s philosophy of dialogue underscores the complete absence of actual mothers (or, for that matter, fathers) and children engaged in ongoing, worldly relationships.²⁹ Moreover, for Buber, the relations in the normative I-Thou relation are imagined as potentially *returning to* or re-experiencing the originary state in which the fetus and the “primitive mind” perpetually dwell. This suggests that the normative account *excludes* the maternal and the juvenile ‘I’, the ‘I’ that is in some sense unformed as a separate being. Buber’s I-Thou, then, obtains chiefly, or normatively, for fully realized adult selves.

Judith Plaskow’s brief consideration of this remarkably problematic passage in *I and Thou* goes to the heart of the issue that concerns us here. She observes,

The child [i.e., fetus] is not characteristically an object to the mother—as in the I-It mode—but neither does she [the mother] necessarily experience a perpetual reciprocity of relation. Her experience of care and connection even when mutually absent may constitute a third sort of relation insufficiently accounted for in Buber’s theology.³⁰

The perspective of the gestating woman vis-à-vis the fetus, Plaskow suggests, can be accommodated neither by a model of pure relation (the I-Thou) nor by a model of detached objectivity (the I-It). Women’s experiences of pregnancy embrace every imaginable configuration within and beyond the two opposing possibilities of “relation” to a Thou and “experience” of an

It.³¹ Reciprocity, however, is hardly an adjective that captures the subtleties of what occurs between the developing embryo or fetus and the pregnant woman, at least as the latter experiences it. And thus, Plaskow suggests, Buber's categories cannot allow for a relationship in which authentic regard is present but mutuality, or reciprocity, is absent.³²

Buber's 1957 afterword to *I and Thou* highlights the limitations in his work for comprehending maternal/child relations. In this afterword, he addresses questions concerning mutuality and reciprocity that had arisen for his interlocutors in response to the first edition of the book. Here Buber specifically addresses the issue of asymmetry by raising the question, "People ask: what about the I-Thou relationship between men? Is this always entirely reciprocal?" Here, then, we might hope to find some tools for conceiving of parent/child relations. Instead, Buber's choice of asymmetrical pairs in his answer dramatically underscores my point:

There are many I-Thou relationships that by their very nature may never unfold into complete mutuality if they are to remain faithful to their nature. Elsewhere I have characterized the relationship of a genuine educator to his pupil as being of this type. . . . Another, no less instructive example of the normative limits of mutuality may be found in the relationship between a genuine psychotherapist and his patient. . . . The most striking example of the normative limits of mutuality could probably be found in the work of those charged with the spiritual well-being of their congregation.³³

Teacher/student, therapist/patient, clergyperson/congregant: these—*not* parent/child—constitute the socially asymmetrical pairs Buber imagines in which the I-Thou can flourish despite the inequality of the two individuals.

Likewise, Levinas' insistence on the asymmetry and irreversibility of the encounter with the Other reveals an assumption that both self (or what Levinas calls the 'same') and Other are two adult male subjects.³⁴ I offer here a brief reading of the key passages on this point in *Totality and Infinity* and then suggest what I see as the limitations of Levinas' account for my constructive effort.

In *Totality and Infinity*, the figure of the gestating body appears in the last part of the text. The pregnant body represents the generativity and "fecundity" of the encounter with the face of the Other. Yet pregnancy here is entirely metaphorical; Levinas excludes or marginalizes actual parent and child, even as he insists on the capacity of the vulnerable Other to command: "The poor one, the stranger, presents himself as an equal . . . the Other who dominates me in his transcendence is thus the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated."³⁵ Levinas' introduction of erotic, and then familial, language later on points (as it did in Buber) to the fact that the "poor one," the "stranger" and even the metaphorical "widow" and "orphan"—not the mother and child—describe the normative Other.

The section of *Totality and Infinity* called “Fecundity” further attests to the marginality of actual mothers and children in favor of their utility as symbols for the encounter between two adult male subjects. In this section, the appearance of the figure of the child grows out of Levinas’ treatment of erotic love. Levinas, in other words, builds on the inevitably heteronormative plot in which the erotic physical relationship between (masculine) subject and (feminine) Other produces a child.³⁶ In Levinas’ extended metaphor, the figure of the “son” and the concept of “paternity” serve to represent the radical unpredictability and otherness of what arises from the relation between the same and the Other. Fecundity “does not denote all that I can grasp—my possibilities; it denotes my future, which is not a future of the same. . . . The relation with the child—that is, the relation with the other that is not a power, but fecundity—establishes relationship with the absolute future, or infinite time.”³⁷ The child, in other words, represents an *idea*—the idea of the spilling over of the same/Other relationship into the as-yet unimaginable possibilities to which this encounter with radical alterity will lead. Non-metaphorical children are neither seen nor heard here.

What would happen to Buber’s and Levinas’ accounts of intersubjectivity if we contended with children and the real individuals who care for them? To begin to answer this question, I turn now to a few key treatments of both volition and asymmetry in the context of maternal practice.

MATERNAL CARE AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

In her groundbreaking, now classic study, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich pithily observed, “Those who speak of the human condition are usually those most exempt from its oppressions.”³⁸ Her book is nothing if not an attempt to correct this divide. To investigate maternal experience, she demonstrates, is to inquire into the human condition:

To have borne and reared a child is to have done that thing which patriarchy joins with physiology to render into the definition of femaleness. But also, it can mean the experiencing of one’s own body and emotions in a powerful way. We experience not only physical, fleshly changes but the feeling of a change in character. We learn, often through painful self-discipline and self-cauterization, those qualities which are supposed to be ‘innate’ in us: patience, self-sacrifice, the willingness to repeat endlessly the small, routine chores of socializing a human being. We are also, often to our amazement, flooded with feelings both of love and violence intenser and fiercer than any we had ever known.³⁹

Following Rich, I ask: what might it mean to launch an inquiry into intersubjectivity with the daily activities, encounters, and relationships between par-

ents and children? How would our assessment of intersubjectivity change if we apprehended the cultural practices of childrearing with a nuanced and dynamic understanding of these relationships as sites in which the political, existential, social, spiritual, affective, embodied and ethical intersect? This is not to say that childrearing comprises a single phenomenon or set of practices; to the contrary, it constitutes a highly variable site for difference along many axes. Thus any constructive enterprise will require careful consideration of social and cultural variability. Nonetheless, in investigating some characteristic elements of parental/child intersubjectivity and relationships, we can begin to develop a lexicon for comprehending the diversity of parent/child interactions. In what follows, I suggest a framework for a parent-centered model of intersubjectivity by considering, first, the role of maternal volition, and second, reciprocity and asymmetry.

The daily caregiving of young children constitutes a radically diverse set of practices, and any account of it must of necessity be limited in scope. Here, I build most explicitly on the framework Sara Ruddick provides in her *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1989), a volume that examines the philosophical meaning of the ubiquitous (but heretofore philosophically invisible) activities of mothering. Ruddick's central claim is that the work of mothering encourages or even necessitates the development of a specific, positive cognitive and moral consciousness. As a result, she argues, maternal care does not belong in the realm of pure affectivity or biological determinism implied in crude or essentialist notions of "mother love" or "maternal instinct," but within a realm fit for philosophical and moral reflection. Her text opens up to view a realm of experience that has been invisible or marginal to philosophy. Over two decades after its publication, the volume remains among the definitive critical treatments of mothering.

Ruddick focused on three activities that form the core of "mothering work": protecting the child, nurturing and fostering the child's growth, and training the child to be socially acceptable within his or her culture. Here, I will focus on the first of these activities. In my view, attention to this most basic task of childcaring, especially but not only in Ruddick's treatment, raises with special acuity the issues of volition and choice in the maternal actor and the significance of the power differential between mother and child.

The work of protecting one's child from harm inarguably constitutes one of the primary activities of childrearing. Yet this apparently obvious assertion, when focused on mothers, typically leads thinkers unreflectively into the complex and politically charged terrain of "maternal instinct." In the contemporary popular imagination, this notion conjures a primal, animal instinct that releases a surge of fierce power in a mother when her child is in danger. Like the gendered dualism that informs so much of Western thought,

women's activity here is animalistic, guided by instinct rather than by moral reasoning.

Clearly, any feminist account of this component of childcaring must address maternal activity with much greater nuance, and indeed, Ruddick demonstrates a persuasive method of doing so by highlighting the ever-present possibility of refusing to meet the needs of the other—what might be called, in Levinasian terms, a turning away from the face of the other. Ruddick begins her description of protecting the child, which she also calls the activities of “preservative love,” with an anecdote in which a mother's need to protect her child involves the conscious and willed exercise of restraint. In this story, an exhausted, frustrated mother fantasizes about hurtling her colicky baby out of the second-floor window.⁴⁰ The mother, fearful she might act on her violent fantasy, barricades the baby inside the nursery room. Later in the night, the mother tries a different strategy: she takes the baby from her crib, boards the city bus with her, and rides it all night long. The mother, sensing that eyes of the other riders are on them, is reassured: the presence of strangers will protect the two of them from her own violent impulses. Preservative maternal love, in this account, is comprehended through a scene of potential violence resourcefully averted. For Ruddick, preservative love can involve a deliberate, reasoned decision to act *against* one's impulse or “instinct.” The capacity for choice and reflection—the fact that the mother relied on her cognitive and reflective powers so as *not* to fulfill her fantasy or her (at least momentary) desire—establishes this love as one not defined by raw, unmediated instinct, but rather by *mediated reflection* on feelings. Protective love, in this view, must be measured by its practical results rather than by a purported inward state. The activity of protecting a child always involves a complex and dense set of feelings including not only love but also ambivalence, resentment, despair, frustration, and rage. It is the complexity and intensity of the feelings that inextricably accompany maternal caregiving that necessitate a concept of maternal activity as *reflection* on feeling; as Ruddick argues, “Rather than separating reason from feeling, mothering makes reflective feeling one of the most difficult attainments of reason. In protective work, feeling, thinking, and action are conceptually linked.”⁴¹ Immediacy is ruled out.

Ruddick's account, which emphasizes the constant demand to commit to protect one's child, suggests that the mother must also constantly face the possibility of withholding care:

In any culture, maternal commitment is far more voluntary than people like to believe . . . both maternal work and the thinking that is provoked by it are decisively shaped by the possibility that any mother may refuse to see creatures as children or to respond to them as complicated, fragile, and needy.⁴²

This emphasis on maternal choice, as an explicit rejection of simplistic notions of “maternal instinct,” is echoed in other feminist philosophical considerations of mothering as well.⁴³ For Ruddick, all “mothers” are “adoptive” in that they choose to care for particular children (often, but not always, their biological children) rather than to flee from or abuse them: “Even the most passionately loving birthgiver engages in a social, adoptive act when she commits herself to sustain an infant in the world.”⁴⁴ The choice to respond to children *indifferently* or in a way that *does not address* their needs is the key factor, for Ruddick and others, in establishing maternal activity as moral and reflective activity.⁴⁵

The power differential between mother and child underscores the stakes of this power to respond or to withhold response; the care of at least one “mother,” in the most expansive sense of the term, is critical to the basic survival of an infant and necessary to its flourishing. Because children are “complicated, fragile, and needy”—because they have no viable option but to rely on an adult for their most basic needs—the ethical stakes of this activity are high.⁴⁶

And yet the radical asymmetry in which the parent/infant relationship begins is, indeed, only the beginning. What comes next, of course, varies enormously by culture. In the post-industrial West, parents generally strive to raise children who are socially, economically, and in other respects independent; “mutuality” and “reciprocity” (let alone “reversibility”) are not usually thought of as ideals for the eventual relationship between parent and child, at least not in any simple sense.⁴⁷ Rather, parents often strive for their children to be able to show their own partners, children, and others the sense of care and responsibility that they themselves were shown as children. A critical piece of the parent’s task is that of welcoming and encouraging the development of a child’s capacity for mutuality in relationship, knowing that the relationship with one’s child will never be directly “reversible” or “reciprocal.”⁴⁸ A nuanced understanding of the subtle interplay between reciprocity and asymmetry will acknowledge this complexity.

Such an understanding must also grapple with the potentially transformative effect that living with children and providing for their daily needs has on the caregiver, for this too is an important but complex element of reciprocity. This is the labor of which Rich wrote so incisively: “We learn, often through painful self-discipline and self-cauterization, those qualities which are supposed to be ‘innate’ in us: patience, self-sacrifice, the willingness to repeat endlessly the small, routine chores of socializing a human being.”⁴⁹ Surely, we do not all learn the same qualities; neither is the process of learning one that can be described as “disciplining” or “cauterizing” the self. But here, the critical factor is the extent to which this relationship works with particular potency and relentlessness on the adult self:

Most of the literature of infant care and psychology has assumed that the process toward individuation is essentially the *child's* drama, played out against and with a parent or parents who are, for better or worse, givens. Nothing could have prepared me for the realization that I was a mother, one of those givens, when I knew I was still in a state of uncreation myself.⁵⁰

An adequate conceptualization of intersubjectivity in parent/child relationships must grapple with the fact of parental subjectivity. Alongside children's immersion in dynamic growth and receptivity, a more subtle but no less potent kind of transformation can work on parents when they respond—and when they fail to respond—to their children.

In considering the question of maternal choice and volition in relationships with children, I have asserted that parents immersed in the daily work of childcaring must constantly grapple with the possibility that they may refuse to respond to their children's needs, or may relegate these needs to a position of limited urgency. *At times*, a child can act as the Other who calls one forth into responsibility, following Levinas.⁵¹ *At times*, I may encounter my child as a Thou and relate to her with the wholeness of her being and mine, as Buber suggests. But neither of these portraits is adequate for any fully imagined experience of parental caregiving.

An account of intersubjectivity that honors the dynamism and the contingency of the parent/child relationship and its many forms of encounter will force us to contest what Buber and Levinas present as “authentic” I-Thou or same/Other encounters. Moments of feeding, caring for, cleaning, and soothing children are *philosophically and existentially significant* moments, no less than are the moments of deep reciprocity or extreme obligation. To dismiss (with Buber) the manifold ordinary, quotidian encounters that occur in the course of caring for a child as partaking only in the I-It relation, or to suggest (with Levinas) that the only ethical relation with the Other is one in which I cede my autonomy to the other, is to exclude the lion's share of childcaring from the conversation. It consigns the bulk of these relationships to theological and ethical irrelevance and hinders theological conversation from attending to a significant cultural practice.

Likewise, reciprocity and asymmetry must be accounted for in all their complexity. To map the mother/child relationship onto any single portrait of power within intersubjective encounters is to distort or fail to account for major parts of it. Mother/child relationships cannot be wholly comprehended by treating them as only spiritually asymmetrical, reciprocal, reversible, or as equal. Any account of the encounter or relationship between mother and child that privileges one of these elements while failing to recognize the others will fall short.

To put it positively: an account of intersubjectivity that arises from reflection on maternal caregiving must include significant attention to the *complex-*

ities, *contingencies*, and the *dynamism* of the asymmetries between parent and child. Children participate actively (although with less power and a different *kind* of power than their caregivers) in making known their needs and soliciting help or attention. Nonetheless, parents have the ability to ignore or refuse these demands (and in many cases, they cannot meet their children's demands). Each day brings countless opportunities for parents and children to confront their differing desires, wills, and abilities (and the varying social circumstances in which these needs and abilities can be articulated). Consequently, parents and children will necessarily negotiate, interpret, and routinize moments of meeting and failure to meet; they will negotiate, as well, moments of radical difference and moments of harmony.

Moreover, the asymmetry of the relationship between parents and children changes in momentous ways over the course of months and years—not necessarily moving progressively in the direction of “equality” or simple reciprocity but rather undergoing periodic tectonic shifts and realignments. An account of intersubjectivity in which mothers and children are central must necessarily grapple with social and existential dimensions of asymmetry in all their diversities and continual oscillations. Neither Buber's nor Levinas' model can account for the dynamic quality of ethical encounters as they develop over the course of the months and years, as is routinely the case with childrearing.

CONCLUSION

In this last section, I return to Buber and Levinas to explore the possibilities that emerge from their work for reflecting on the ethical and theological meaning of a fully imagined parent/child relationship. The caveats I raised in the first section above primarily concern the marginal or merely metaphorical role of parents and children in the two principal works I have considered. Now, however, I move into a mode of retrieval. I believe Buber's and Levinas' contributions to the discourse of intersubjectivity hold great potential for reengaging Jewish theology with culture.

Before doing so, however, it bears noting that the kind of retrieval I have in mind goes against the grain of the feminist writers I have considered. Many feminist ethicists and philosophers of mothering and, more broadly, care ethics, display an allergic reaction to religion and theology.⁵² They tend to avoid or even forestall conversation between their own projects and traditions of religious ethics. Virginia Held argues that it is unwise for proponents of the ethics of care to use religious terminology or to look to religious analogues of their work.⁵³ Nel Noddings is thoroughly skeptical, even pessimistic, in her assessment of religion and its utility for women, largely forestalling conversation between care and religious ethics.⁵⁴ Ruddick, while not

as antagonistic to religious thought as some of the later feminists who built on her work, nonetheless finds very few points of contact between her approach and that of a “religious” attitude, and her remarks on religion are quite limited.⁵⁵

There are, indeed, good reasons to be cautious when seeking out points of correlation or contact between feminist and various kinds of religious discourses. Yet in spite of, and alongside, the problems endemic to twentieth-century Jewish religious thought, thinkers like Buber and Levinas make for compelling interlocutors for feminists interested not only in the existential, cultural, philosophical, and ethical implications of maternal activity, but in the theological implications as well.⁵⁶ The most reflective *philosophical* and *ethical* engagements with mothering can and should become the raw data from which Jewish thinkers develop new and fuller accounts of intersubjectivity. Doing so will enliven Jewish thought by drawing it into public discourse about widespread cultural practices. Let me suggest, by way of conclusion, several paths that could be explored in this pursuit.

One route for exploring the possibilities in Levinas and Buber for theorizing childcaring has already begun. For instance, Roger Burggraeve builds on the concept, in *Totality and Infinity*, of the command issued by the face of the Other. Burggraeve regards the crying infant as the best illustration of this ethical phenomenon: the infant overwhelms the carer’s illusions of self-sufficiency; she interrupts the self-containedness of the parent.⁵⁷ Indeed, many parents involved in caring for young children might go further and agree with Levinas’ later formulation that this particular Other holds me hostage!⁵⁸

Yet as recent developments in the field of childhood studies have made clear, the moral agency of children, and their active participation in the relationships through which they are constituted, require a model in which they are not primarily viewed as the opaque Other who calls the adult out of his or her self-containment.⁵⁹ Furthermore, feminist thinking demands a greater interest in the agency and subjectivity of the mother and in her capacity to refuse to admit the claim of this particular other, which as we said above, is critical for a nuanced portrait of mothering.

A more promising route lies in pushing feminist engagement with maternal care beyond its generally secular comfort zone. I find Buber and Levinas instructive in showing how we might move from adamantly secular accounts of maternal activity, such as Ruddick’s, toward the development of a theological account of maternal activity, and one which might foreground Jewish theological frameworks in particular.⁶⁰ Both Buber and Levinas offer accounts of intersubjectivity that hover in the liminal space between the secular and the theological, or that paradoxically include both of these possibilities at once. For instance, Levinas argues explicitly that the “ethical relation . . . cuts across every relation one could call mystical. . . . [T]he face . . . remains commensurate with him who welcomes; it remains terrestrial.”⁶¹ And yet, at

the same time, for Levinas the intersubjective plane and the daily encounters that take place upon it open up “infinity” and “transcendence.” These terms, certainly, cannot be simply identified with “God.” But arguably, the infinite—“a genuine relation with what is other than ourselves”—holds the place of the divine in Levinas.⁶² Levinas’ inquiry into the “infinity” that lies within intersubjective relationships provides a framework for thinking about the theological meaning of mothering. The same could be said of Buber’s account of the Eternal Thou in whom all lines of relationship “intersect.”⁶³

Such conceptions of the relationship between the immanent and the transcendent suggest, at the very least, a nuanced and potent framework for dialogue between religious thought and feminist analysis of maternal care. Imagining the transcendent as located within and through the terrestrial is precisely at the heart of some critical avenues for feminist theology since the 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁴ Likewise, investigations into Jewish women’s own reported experience of childbirth and childrearing have grappled with birthgivers’ own attempts to put into language the connection they see between the remote God of their tradition and the intimate experience of caring for particular others, including their children.⁶⁵ A critical but constructive reading of Buber and Levinas can help develop a language for an ethic and theology of caring for children in which the terrestrial, mundane, and quotidian is understood to have transcendent implications.

Although Buber, Levinas, and the other great Central European Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century had little (and little of use) to say regarding women and gender, we would do well to return to the discourse of intersubjectivity they developed. The project I have undertaken, of foregrounding the theological and philosophical meaning of maternal practice and the daily care of young children, is one these men could have scarcely imagined. Yet questions of agency, power, volition, and reciprocity are absolutely central to the work of parental caregiving. My inquiry demonstrates that the most important twentieth-century Jewish thinkers, in spite of their own limitations, can provide a lexicon with which those engaged in the daily work of childrearing can forge a new language; with it, we may articulate the unique forms of intersubjectivity that occur between parents and their children.

NOTES

1. This essay is dedicated to my teacher Arnie Eisen. I thank Ken Koltun-Fromm, Claire Sufirin, and Diane Tracht for their insightful comments on drafts of this essay, and Bonnie Miller-McLemore for her response to a version of this paper delivered at Vanderbilt University in April, 2013. Special thanks also to Riv-Ellen Prell for her encouragement during the early stages of formulating this paper.

2. Two general observations can be made about how childrearing appears in the Western philosophical tradition. First, to the extent that childrearing is the subject of reflection, thinkers in the Western tradition regard it primarily as a means of reproducing culture, not a daily

practice or activity. Second, literature about childrearing consistently exhibits an unquestioned identification with the child. On this point, Susan Suleiman's comments regarding psychoanalytic writing could just as easily apply to philosophy and religious thought: "Mothers don't write, they are written. . . . This is the underlying assumption of most psychoanalytic theorist about writing and artistic creation in general." See Susan R. Suleiman, "Writing and Motherhood," in *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood*, ed. Moyra Davey (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1985), 113-37, especially page 117.

3. See Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, "Agape in Feminist Ethics," in *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Lois K. Daly and Margaret A. Farley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 146-59; Marcia Bunge, *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Christine E. Gudorf, "Parenting, Mutual Love, and Sacrifice," in *Women's Consciousness and Women's Conscience: A Reader in Feminist Ethics*, ed. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine E. Gudorf, and Mary D. Pellauer (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 175-91; Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); Cristina L. H. Traina, *Erotic Attunement: Parenthood and the Ethics of Sensuality between Unequals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and John Wall, "Animals and Innocents: Theological Reflections on the Meaning and Purpose of Child-Rearing," *Theology Today* 59/4 (2003), 559-82.

4. The premise of mothering as an essentially dyadic enterprise has sustained intense criticism in broader feminist circles. The criticism comes from diverse quarters: from social historians, who point to the notion of the mother/child dyad as a recent construct of late-capitalist bourgeois societies; from women of color, who have pointed out the ways in which this construction renders invisible both the network of caregivers who play a prominent role in African-American lives and the conditions of racism and oppression under which African-American communities continue to struggle; and from those who argue that the dyadic structure is politically ineffectual. For examples of each of these criticisms, see Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Patricia Hill Collins, "Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood," in *Representations of Motherhood*, ed. Donna Bas-sin, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 56-74; and Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

5. A very few scholarly endeavors have investigated possible crossovers between modern Jewish philosophers and childrearing. The bulk of those projects have been concerned with educational philosophy; one exception, which focuses specifically on feminist philosophical corollaries to Jewish existentialism, is Leora Batnitzky, "Dependence and Vulnerability: Jewish and Existentialist Constructions of the Human," in *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 127-52.

6. I believe the gender-specific terms *mother* and *mothering*, as opposed to the gender-neutral terms *parent* and *parenting*, serve an important function: in the words of Sara Ruddick, upon whose work I build, the choice to use the feminine term "recognize[s] and honor[s] the fact that even now, and certainly through most of history, women have been the mothers." In her influential work, Ruddick defined a "mother" simply as "a person who takes on responsibility for her children's lives and for whom providing child care is a significant part of her or his working life." Such an approach would use the term "mother" for a male or female person. See Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 40. For other arguments against the gender-neutral term, see Virginia Held, "The Obligations of Mothers and Fathers," in *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, ed. Joyce Trebilcot (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984), 7-20; Onora O'Neill and William Ruddick, *Having Children: Philosophical and Legal Reflections on Parenthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Susan Rae Peterson, "Against 'Parenting,'" in *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, ed. Joyce Trebilcot (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1984), 62-69. However, using the gendered term "mother" exclusively has its disadvantages. Changes in familial divisions of labor in recent decades, limited though they are, have resulted in a small but significant

increase in the numbers of men who take responsibility for the daily, physical care of their children. Language that reflects this fact is particularly important in this essay, which focuses on the activities of *childrearing* (which is performed by individuals of any gender who are non-biologically as well as biologically related to their children) rather than *childbearing*. Thus I will speak below of “mothering” (which I will do especially when a specifically gendered context demands it) as well as of “childrearing” and occasionally of “parenting.” In addition, I will occasionally use the gender-neutral neologism “childcaring” to refer specifically to the daily, often mundane, activities of tending to children’s needs.

7. Arnold M. Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism: Ritual, Commandment, Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 4.

8. Ra’anan S. Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow, “Anthropology, History, and the Remaking of Jewish Studies,” in *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition*, ed. Ra’anan S. Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 18.

9. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), 53. On the development of *I and Thou*, see Rivka Horwitz, *Buber’s Way to “I and Thou”*: *The Development of Martin Buber’s Thought and His “Religion as Presence” Lectures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988). Recent contributions to the already sizeable literature on Buber’s volume include Martin Kavka, “Verification (*Bewährung*) in Martin Buber,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 20/1 (2012), 71-98; Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, *Martin Buber: A Contemporary Perspective* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002).

10. For clarity, I will break from Kaufmann’s translation of *Du* as ‘You,’ using ‘Thou’ instead. I have otherwise refrained from altering his translation.

11. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 78.

12. *Ibid.*, 73.

13. *Ibid.*, 61.

14. *Ibid.*, 62.

15. *Ibid.*, 69.

16. *Ibid.*, 83.

17. *Ibid.*, 113-16.

18. *Ibid.*, 67.

19. That having been said, Buber insists that the dissolution of asymmetry does *not* result in the dissolution of identity. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 135.

20. Levinas implies that his critique is (in some part) directed at Buber, a point Derrida noted in “Violence and Metaphysics,” in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). On the substance of this critique, see Robert Bernasconi, “‘Failure of Communication’ as a Surplus: Dialogue and Lack of Dialogue between Buber and Levinas,” in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (New York: Routledge, 1988), 100-35. On the relationship between the two thinkers, see the articles in Peter Atterton, Matthew Calarco, and Maurice S. Friedman, *Levinas & Buber: Dialogue & Difference* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004). On the tension between Buber and Levinas on this point, see also Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), chapter 8.

21. I am indebted here to the formulation in Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 240.

22. One of Moyn’s most important claims in his book is that Levinas borrowed but then transposed the concept of the “totally other” from Rosenzweig, Karl Barth, and other Weimar theologians. ‘Alterity’ went from describing God to describing the *human* other (Moyn, *Origins of the Other*, chapter 4). In what follows, I draw only on *Totality and Infinity*, leaving aside the complex turn to somatic metaphors, including and especially the metaphor of pregnancy, in *Otherwise than Being*. For discussions of the pregnancy metaphor in *Otherwise than Being*, see many of the discussions in Tina Chanter, *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001) and Lisa Guenther, *The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

23. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 200.

24. I am grateful to Michael Gottsegen for sharing his insight on this point with me; Gottsegen builds on this observation in his forthcoming book, *Emmanuel Levinas: From Ethical Piety to Prophetic Politics*. See also Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 68. On Levinas' inexact use of the biblical "orphan," see also Claire Elise Katz, "Reinhabiting the House of Ruth: Exceeding the Limits of the Feminine in Levinas," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Tina Chanter (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 145-70, especially page 149.

25. Levinas here is quoted in Bernasconi, "'Failure of Communication' as a Surplus," 110. Note that Buber seems to exclude asymmetry in the I-Thou relation in his statement that "wishing to understand the pure relationship as dependence means wishing to deactualize one partner of the relationship and thus the relationship itself." See Buber, *I and Thou*, 131.

26. I am grateful to Claire Sufrin for her felicitous formulation.

27. Buber, *I and Thou*, 76-77.

28. Judith Plaskow, citing the work of Lauren Granite, has observed this as well: "Here Buber focuses on the experience of the child without ever naming the mother as the one with whom the child is in relation or looking at the mother-child relationship from the mother's side." See Judith Plaskow, "Jewish Theology in Feminist Perspective," in *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*, ed. Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 62-84, especially page 68.

29. This claim must be qualified by a small but telling exception. Buber makes brief mention of the effect of the child on the adult: "Relation is reciprocity. My Thou acts on me as I act on it. Our students teach us. our works form us. The 'wicked' become a revelation when they are touched by the sacred basic word. How we are educated by children, by animals! Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity" (Buber, *I and Thou*, 67). Buber gestures to a motley set of figures to illustrate how the person or object that acts as my Thou can affect my I: students, objects we produce, 'wicked' people, children, and animals. The very brevity with which Buber catalogues these suggests that my normative Thou is essentially like my I and thus operates within "the economy of the same."

30. Plaskow, "Jewish Theology in Feminist Perspective," 68.

31. Biologically speaking, the fetus both *is* and *is not* part of the gestating woman's body, and the fetus' capacity for physical individuation and separation from the woman's womb is part of the ongoing work of gestation.

32. Buber's model is just as inadequate when attempting to comprehend *childrearing* as it is when it attempts to conceive of gestation.

33. Buber, *I and Thou*, 178. Note the description of the 'pupil' in the text is neither explicitly nor necessarily imagined as a juvenile; indeed, the pupil is referred to as the "partner" of the educator in the I-Thou relation that the latter "awakens" in the student.

34. The insight that, for Levinas, the Same is male and "alterity" is "accomplished in the feminine" was first pointed out by Simone de Beauvoir, and has been amply demonstrated in the voluminous feminist criticism of Levinas in the intervening years. See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953), xix.

35. "Equality" should not, however, be confused with the idea of assimilating the "absolute foreignness" of the Other. Levinas uses the counterintuitive metaphor of "paternity" to capture this idea: "Paternity is not a causality, but the establishment of a unicity with which the unicity of the father does and does not coincide." See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 214.

36. Many of the articles collected in Chanter's volume comment on the feminine and/as Other; see Chanter, *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*. See also Catherine Chalker, "Ethics and the Feminine," in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 119-29; Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Re-Writing of the Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and Guenther, *The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction*.

37. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 268. On the metaphorical status of these comments, see Sandra Sandford, "Masculine Mothers? Maternity in Levinas and Plato," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*. 180-202, especially page 189.

38. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Norton, 1986), 33.

39. *Ibid.*, 37.

40. Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, 65-67.

41. *Ibid.*, 70.

42. *Ibid.*, 22. The work of a number of recent evolutionary biologists has affirmed this insight with data drawn from a broad swath of physical and neurological sources: see especially the feminist primatologist and evolutionary biologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy on the contingency of maternal investment in offspring (Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 378). In general, the diversity of ways in which birthgivers act toward the children they bear has not been fully incorporated into some, perhaps most, feminist formulations. Ruddick's formulation is the exception here: her decoupling of birthing labor and mothering labor is consistent with the enormously diverse historical and cultural variety in mothering practices. Infanticide, abandonment, and child abuse may be culturally non-normative practices in the modern West, but they are hardly aberrant. Rather, these practices must be considered part of the spectrum of maternal response to children in their care. Regarding infanticide and child abandonment in historical and cross-cultural perspective, see Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 169-83; John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); ChaeRan Y. Freeze, "Lilith's Midwives: Jewish Newborn Child Murder in Nineteenth-Century Vilna." *Jewish Social Studies*, n.s. 16/ 2 (2010), 1-27; Glenn Hausfater and Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Infanticide: Comparative and Evolutionary Perspectives* (New Brunswick: AldineTransaction, 2008), Section IV: Hrdy, *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection*. 18 and 22; Julia E. Hanigberg and Sara Ruddick, *Mother Troubles: Rethinking Contemporary Maternal Dilemmas* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). On ethics and maternal violence, see Laurie Zoloth, "Into the Woods: Killer Mothers, Feminist Ethics, and the Problem of Evil," in *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*, 204-33.

43. See the article by Virginia Held, "Birth and Death," *Ethics* 99 (January 1989), 362-88, especially page 364.

44. Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, 50.

45. My own view is that the language of "choice" (vs. "instinct") is not subtle enough to adequately capture the often opaque processes by which individuals come to their decisions. Here is where recent literature on agency in cultural and religious life can be particularly useful. See, for instance, Elizabeth Bucar, "Dianomy: Understanding Religious Women's Moral Agency as Creative Conformity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78/3 (2010), 662-86; Judith Butler, "Sexual Consent: Some Thoughts on Psychoanalysis and Law." *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law* 21/2 (2011), 405-29; and Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

46. This is not to say that the child has no agency: as psychologists and biologists have noted, human infants are actively involved in soliciting care from their caregivers. On children's participation and agency in soliciting their adults, see Hrdy, *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection* and Cristina L. H. Traina, "Children and Moral Agency," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 29/2 (2009), 19-37.

47. See Christine Gudorf's critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's treatment of agape: "With our own children we realized very clearly that though much of the early giving seemed to be solely ours, this was not disinterested, because the children were considered extensions of us, such that our efforts for them rebounded to our credit. Failure to provide for them would have discredited us. And we had expectations that the giving would become mutual. This led to the most revealing lesson the children taught us: that complete agape as either intention or result is

impossible. . . . All love both involves sacrifice and aims at mutuality” (Gudorf, “Parenting, Mutual Love, and Sacrifice,” 181-82).

48. This is, of course, a value not only in the post-industrial West; recall Glikl of Hameln’s invocation of the fable of the birds at the beginning of her autobiography, told to illustrate the point that wise parents do not strive to recoup any direct return on the investment of childrearing. See Glikl. *The Life of Glückel of Hameln, 1646-1724*, edited by Beth-Zion Abrahams (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962), 8-9. That having been said, the expectation of children to provide—directly or indirectly—for elderly parents is a topic important both in classical religious texts and in contemporary considerations of filial responsibility. For an example of each in a Jewish context, see BT Qiddushin 30b-32a and Gerald J. Blidstein, *Honor Thy Father and Mother: Filial Responsibility in Jewish Law and Ethics* (New York: Ktav, 1975), 60-74.

49. Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 34.

50. *Ibid.*, 17.

51. Roger Burggraeve, “The Ethical Voice of the Child: Plea for a Chiastic Responsibility in the Footsteps of Levinas,” in *Children’s Voices: Children’s Perspectives in Ethics, Theology, and Religious Education*, eds. Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 267-91. I comment briefly on Burggraeve’s essay below.

52. Both Noddings and Held were instrumental in expanding on Ruddick’s ideas and to the development of the emergent, free-standing field of care ethics. The ethics of care, the subfield of moral theory that largely grew out of specifically feminist origins, has been one important locus for the development of sustained philosophical reflections on the relational self. Important early contributions to this literature include Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); and Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). More recent important scholarship in the field includes Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Nel Noddings, *The Maternal Factor: Two Paths to Morality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); and Michael A. Slotte, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

53. Held maintains that the ethics of care needs to be developed independently of religious vocabularies; “when a morality depends on a given religion, it has little persuasiveness for those who do not share that faith. Moralities based on reason”—which Held believes the ethics of care is and should remain—“can succeed in gaining support around the world and across cultures” (Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, 21).

54. See especially Noddings, *The Maternal Factor: Two Paths to Morality*, 141-42.

55. For instance, Ruddick writes that a variety of “religious, mystical, and secular attitudes are compatible with mothering. However, there is nothing in maternal practice itself that demands a religious of mystical response to nature and, whatever the solace and inspiration of faith, most mothers cannot will themselves to believe.” See Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, 78.

56. Interestingly, Nel Noddings does draw on Buber at some important junctures in her work. On this topic, see Richard L. Johannesen, “Nel Noddings’s Uses of Martin Buber’s Philosophy of Dialogue,” *The Southern Communication Journal* 65/2-3 (2000), 151-60. A more general exploration of Buber in connection with feminist thought is James W. Walters, *Martin Buber & Feminist Ethics: The Priority of the Personal* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

57. Burggraeve, “The Ethical Voice of the Child.”

58. Derrida explores the meaning of the language of “hostage” (in Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*) in Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas, Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 56-63.

59. See, for example, Traina, “Children and Moral Agency”; and John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

60. Christian feminist theologians have done much more work on this topic than have Jewish thinkers. See, for example, the work of Bonnie Miller-McLemore, especially *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); *In the*

Midst of Chaos: Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006); and "Feminism, Children, and Mothering: Three Books and Three Children Later." *Journal of Childhood and Religion* 2/1 (2011), 1-32.

61. Levinas. *Totality and Infinity*. 202-03. This passage ostensibly aims to distinguish Levinas' own "non-mystical" concept of ethics from Hegelian thought (in which the other exists only in relationship and indeed as a kind of negation of the self). But this argument simultaneously accomplishes something else as well: a secularization of ethical and religious thought. Sam Moyn has persuasively argued that the secularizing project was central to Levinas' endeavor in his early writings: Levinas, deeply influenced by the Weimar theologians, radically secularizes them, transforming the "totally other" from divine into human. See Moyn. *Origins of the Other*, 227-8.

62. As Edith Wyschogrod writes, for Levinas, "the relation with the other which is preceded by neither representation nor comprehension can be termed 'invocation' or 'prayer.' The essence of such invocation is *religio*, but *religio* of a very special order, for it arises, as in the case of Kant, *within the framework of ethical relations*" (italics mine). See Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 92.

63. Buber. *I and Thou*, 123. On the concept of the Eternal Thou, see Steven Katz, "Martin Buber's Epistemology: A Critical Appraisal," in *Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: NYU Press, 1983), 1-51; and Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, "Martin Buber's Conception of God," in *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 237-82. A recent consideration of the question has been put forth in Kavka, "Verification (*Bewährung*) in Martin Buber."

64. See, for example, Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). For an important development of this theme, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992). Many feminist Jewish theologians have themselves identified Buber and Levinas as particularly rich dialogue partners for moving beyond patriarchal monotheism, in spite of these thinkers' omission or problematic representations of women or "the feminine." See Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998); and Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).

65. Susan Starr Sered. "Childbirth as a Religious Experience? Voices from an Israeli Hospital." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7/2 (1991), 7-18.

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Chapter Eleven

Authenticity, Vision, Culture

Michael Wyschogrod's The Body of Faith

Ken Koltun-Fromm

In the preface to the second edition of his *The Body of Faith*, Michael Wyschogrod notes the change in subtitles from the first to this more recent edition. Where he had once appended *Judaism as Corporeal Election* to the title (first edition, 1983), the reissued second edition now defined *The Body of Faith as God in the People of Israel* (1989).¹ The implications of this change for American Jewish culture is profound. Where the first edition subtitle focused on Judaism and chosenness (*Judaism as Corporeal Election*), the second edition emphasized God's presence in a particular nation (*God in the People of Israel*). With Judaism as corporeal election (the first edition), the word "body" in the title (*The Body of Faith*) defers to a theological statement about belief. "Body" reads more as metaphor, such that corporeal election becomes the "body" of faith. The point here seems to be that chosenness is Judaism's central theological principle, and this implies that Jewish culture protects a people apart, one chosen and committed to divine instruction. If Judaism is the body of faith, then American Jewish culture ought to enrich and preserve that faith

But with the second edition phrasing—God in the People Israel—the word "body" is less referent to a theological claim and far more a descriptive statement about the physical indwelling of God's presence. And that presence resides in the people Israel—really, truly, in *that* body. Judaism is neither some kind of chosen religion, nor a theological construct. Indeed, God displaces Judaism altogether in the subtitle and chooses to dwell "in" a particular national group.

The body of faith is a real, material, and visual body in which we can see God's presence. This is a claim about visual and cultural authenticity in a