

ROMANS THROUGH HISTORY AND CULTURES SERIES

READING ROMANS
WITH CONTEMPORARY
PHILOSOPHERS
AND
THEOLOGIANS

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— SEVEN —

Reading Romans

"in the Face of the Other"

Levinas, the Jewish Philosopher,
Meets Paul, the Jewish Apostle¹

Kathy Ehrensperger

I. Introduction

Before I start this daring project a few issues need to be clarified:

1. This is not an article about Emmanuel Levinas. As I am neither a philosopher nor a specialist in Levinas's philosophical approach, that would be a pretentious venture.
2. Levinas himself has interpreted neither Romans nor any other of the Pauline letters. He has referred only occasionally to the apostle, and when he has he has commented on traditional Christian perceptions of Paul.
3. This contribution is thus not an analysis of a Levinasian interpretation of Romans but a reading of Romans that takes seriously into account aspects of Levinas's emphasis on the primacy of ethics and the responsibility for the other.
4. In thus reading Paul's letter to the Romans "in the Face of Emmanuel Levinas" there are themes and issues resonating in both men's writings that could have stimulated a fascinating conversation between the two (and their co-workers) if they could have met overcoming the gap of space and time. With a little help, not from Derrida (Ehrensperger 2002) but from our imagination,¹ I would like to bring aspects of both men's writings into a virtual conversation of learning, debate,

knowledge to apprehend it. Knowing, then, is the coalescence of my thinking/reasoning with the form of being—or as Hegel has formulated, “Erkenntnis ist die Übereinstimmung des Geistes mit sich selbst” (the process of knowing is the movement of being itself) (Levinas, 1998, 101). Knowing is thus a process of identification. The “I” ends up identifying that which is different/the other with myself or with something already known. Thus whatever exists in the world, even though not yet known by me, could become part of my knowledge of the world, could be integrated by me, could become my possession.⁵ H Knowing is a self-centered process, an *egologie*. Levinas describes this process not merely in negative terms. To live life in this world is to live from something. To live means to be in need of something—breathing and nourishment. H To live means to depend on that which we are not. Levinas perceives this dependency not as an enslavement or as lacking something but as the source of enjoyment. He states:

The life that is life *from* something is happiness. Life is affectivity and sentiment; to live is to enjoy life. To despair of life makes sense only because originally life is happiness. Suffering is a failing of happiness; it is not correct to say that happiness is an absence of suffering. Happiness is made up not of an absence of needs, whose tyranny and imposed character one denounces, but of the satisfaction of all needs (Levinas 1992, 115).

Levinas even states that “... one becomes a subject of being... in enjoying happiness, by the interiorization of enjoyment...” (Levinas 1992, 119). The “I” only crystallizes in enjoyment, in enjoying living by living from the world and thus being at home with oneself. However crucial this “living from something,” this process in which aspects of “the world” are integrated into “my world” is, it is not the same as life itself (Levinas 1992, 122).

This egocentric enjoyment, and being at home with oneself, is the presupposition for the relation to the other. To relate to the other means to confront him/her out of myself, to proceed from myself rather than to compare him/her with myself (Levinas 1992,

H Knowing is according to Levinas a self-centered process of identification.
H For Levinas to live means to be in need of something, to depend on that which we are not.

62, 121). But if this notion of egocentric enjoyment and living from the world by assimilating it to me is turned into the driving force in relation to the other (human being), it becomes the source of dehumanizing violence—that is, when it is universalized and made into the general principle of relating and knowing. To recognize and respect the other and his/her needs on the basis of the analogy that he/she is the same as I am, is based on the assumption of cognition. Knowing the other on the presupposition that he/she is similar to me means, according to Levinas, to grasp him/her, reducing him/her to the same. To integrate the other into my life means to assimilate him/her to myself, into my world. This, according to Levinas, is a form of violence against the other not in teaching violence but in trying to “know”/understand the other in assimilating him/her to the same, to the already known, to myself. To know something means to grasp it totally, that is, to assimilate it to the already known. The alterity of the other is assimilated into the same, and thereby rendered identical. For Levinas the process of knowing as a process of identification is enclosing the other into the totality of the same, and as such the source of violence.⁶ He states:

H Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being. This primacy of the same was Socrates’ teaching: to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside—to receive nothing, or to be free.... Cognition is the deployment of this identity: it is freedom. That reason in the last analysis would be the manifestation of a freedom, neutralizing the other and encompassing him, can come as no surprise once it is laid down that sovereign reason knows only itself, that nothing other limits it. The neutralization of the other who becomes a theme, an object—appearing, that is, taking its place in the light—is precisely his reduction to the same.... To know amounts to grasping being out of nothing or

H For Levinas the identification of a middle and neutral term which ensures the comprehension of being is an interposition which reduces the other to nothing.

reducing it to nothing, removing from it its alterity (Levinas 1992, 43).

H This implies that the other is not seen or encountered as the other in his/her alterity but reduced and assimilated into my world and made the same. Reducing the other to sameness is a means of adapting difference and particularity to concepts of universal meaning. Universalism is achieved by suppressing diversity. Ontology, according to Levinas, is a philosophy of power and injustice (Levinas 1992, 46).

2.2. Levinas and the Other

HA Over against the totalizing tendency of universalizing ontology Levinas formulates his emphasis of the radical alterity of the other—an alterity he perceives as so radical that he uses the term “metaphysics” for it. Nothing links me to the other, he/she is the stranger who interrupts my life, “disturbs my being at home with myself” (Levinas 1992, 39). H But the face of the other is nevertheless the radical call to responsibility. The relation to the other cannot consist in grasping or knowing. To know the other is to enter into a relationship; to encounter the other is prior and beyond any knowing. To relate to the other always already implies to be called, to be called into responsibility for the other, for the other’s life. Thus ethics is prior to anything else. H Ethics is the first philosophy.⁷ This responsibility has nothing to do with assimilating the other to myself; but to enter a relationship to absolute alterity, the other transcends myself in this encounter. H He/she is always more than I can expect, can encompass. Richard A. Cohen notes:

For Levinas the breakthrough of the other into the self is so fundamentally and so essentially out of order that it is “otherwise than being or beyond essence.” The other is always

H The other is reduced and assimilated.

HA Levinas conceives universalizing ontology as a totalizing tendency against which he formalizes metaphysics which emphasizes the radical alterity of the other.

H The face of the other is the radical call to responsibility beyond grasping or knowing.

H Ethics is first philosophy.

more than the self bargains for, more than the self wants, more than what the self can handle (Cohen, 194).

H The other is delimiting my limitations. She/he encounters myself in a way which exceeds “the idea of the other in me” (Levinas 1992, 50). Any images or analogies that are already formed in me are destroyed at the moment of immediate encounter. The face of the other overflows any image—it *expresses itself* (Levinas 1992, 51). The other is breaking into the totality of a world I can encompass via knowledge, it renders totality in fact impossible as in its alterity it refers to the idea of infinity: “... the existent breaks through all the envelopings and generalities of Being to spread out in its ‘form’ the totality of its ‘content,’ finally abolishing the distinction between form and content” (Levinas 1992, 51). To encounter the other implies to receive something from outside, from beyond myself. This disturbs and uproots myself in any totality of knowledge or experience. I have nothing that comes merely from within and of myself.

In rendering the idea of totality impossible the emphasis of the radical alterity of the other also questions the notion of universalism. *Radical alterity implies particularity*. To meet the other face to face can only mean to meet her/him in her/his particularity. There is no general “other” in this earthly existence; there is in fact nothing “general” or “universal” existing in this sensible world. I can meet the other only as a particular human being at a specific moment in time in a particular place. Thus history cannot be “the privileged plane where Being disengaged from the particularism of points of view... is manifested” (Levinas 1992, 52). To integrate everyone into universal concepts (e.g., a universal spirit unfolding itself in the course of human history) actually means to ignore the alterity of the other, that is the other him/herself. Integration into a general universal humanity is, according to Levinas, an act of cruelty and injustice.⁸

2.3. Levinas and Communicating with the Other

The relation with the other, the encounter face to face, is not only a disruption of my being at home with myself, it is a call and as

H All images or analogies already formed are destroyed in an immediate encounter of a particular other.

such it is already discourse (Levinas 1992, 66).⁹ The face of the other calls me. I am chosen to respond, into responsibility. I am inescapably responsible for the other, not because he/she is of the same genus as I am but precisely because he/she is precisely different. **H** As such "the face of the neighbour signifies for me an unexceptionable responsibility, preceding my consent, every pact, every contract" (Levinas 1981, 87). **H** As the face of the other calls me and I am called to respond, a discourse is established.

Inasmuch as the other is not assimilated to me in relating to me, language establishes and transcends the difference between me and the other. **H** Language does not presuppose sameness or generality but rather presupposes difference, presupposes the interlocutors which are and remain different, it presupposes the separation of terms; that is, language presupposes plurality (Levinas 1992, 73). A discourse is interaction between others constituting community rather than presupposing it. **H** It is the experience of something unknown or, as Levinas formulates, *traumatism of astonishment*. It is the means via which I can respond to the call of the other, by which I can give to the other. In speaking, I and the other create a common world (Levinas 1992, 76).

This "perception" of humans and human society derives not exclusively but primarily from the Jewish traditions Levinas sees himself rooted in (Levinas 1994, 101-15). For Levinas, as Cohen has expressed it, "... each human being, regardless of differences ... is 'created' in 'the image and likeness of God.' Humanity would be constituted not by the embrace of a unitary idea or hidden substructure, but across encounter—face-to-face. Though it may be incomprehensible, the trace of transcendence passes here through the very heart of humanity" (Cohen 219). As Jewish traditions are first of all scriptural traditions, the necessity of interpretation is a given. **H** Interpretation is not to be equated with explanation. Explanation is an objectifying approach to life,

H The face of the other, precisely because she/he is different, signifies a responsibility preceding my consent, and every pact or contract.

H Communication is established in response to being called by the face of the other.

H Language presupposes plurality rather than sameness.

H The creation of a common world of discourse is occasioned by the traumatism of astonishment in the experience of the other.

H Interpretation is not explanation.

appropriate in a scientific perception, whereas understanding aims at self-understanding, a focus that humanities and religion share. Far from advocating a literalist or fundamentalist reading of the Scriptures, Levinas does not reject rational critical approaches in interpretation but emphasizes that these cannot be exhaustive.¹⁰ (Levinas even sees a similar naïveté in both fundamentalist and literalist as well as in critical readings of the Scriptures (Levinas 1999, 95).) Distinguishing between pure criticism and exegesis, Levinas perceives Jewish spirituality as exegetical. There is no Judaism without Scriptures and vice versa. **A** But it is never Scriptures pure that is encountered, always Scriptures interpreted. Reading Scriptures is a continual process of interpretation and reinterpretation of multiple readers and readings, a process of negotiation and renegotiating meaning in life.¹¹

2.4. Levinas and Universalization in Pauline Interpretation

These emphases in Levinas's philosophizing stand in stark contrast to an image of Paul that perceives him as the champion of hegemonial universalism. It is an image that attributes to him the role of the first Christian theologian, who freed Christianity from the particularism of Judaism and its reliance on "good works" and thereby enabled it to attain its true self-understanding as the religion of the pure, universal spirit.¹² If Paul actually is the founder of universalism¹³ in that sense, the encounter between Levinas and Paul would probably take on the form of confrontation rather than conversation.

HA This image of Paul, though criticized in the last three decades from various commentaries that may be summarized under the heading of the "New Perspective,"¹⁴ is still having significant impact in Pauline interpretation and has experienced a revival in recent scholarship that is reacting against approaches in the vein of the New Perspective. Scholars such as Stephen Westerholm (Westerholm) and John M. G. Barclay (Barclay 1993-1996) contend that the emphasis on ethics, on the doing of the will of God in

A Reading scripture is an ongoing process of interpretation by means of multiple readers and readings.

HA The image of Paul as the founder of universalism which supercedes the particularism of Judaism has been called into question by studies identified as the new perspective.

Judaism, actually stands in irreconcilable contrast to Paul's emphasis on salvation by grace, which can only be accessed by faith in Christ irrespective of works of the law. Jewish identity is thus an obstacle to being in Christ and has to be given up. In Christ the particularities of specific identities are overcome and thus should be obliterated. Christ is the model to be imitated,¹⁵ a model perceived as something absolutely new that has no relation to anything known, being exclusively determined by the revelation of God. To be one in Christ implies that all have to become the same in Christ. Moreover, faith in Christ is perceived as something that has to be believed in—a system or doctrine one has to believe in in order to be saved. Ethics is an outcome of this affirmation or knowing and accepting of doctrines of faith. HA In perspectives such as Westerholm's and Barclay's, then, as in Bornkamm, the letter to the Romans comes close to being perceived—despite being a real letter—as “Paul's last will and testament” (Bornkamm 2–14) an outline of his almost “systematic theology.” There could hardly be a stronger contrast to Levinas's philosophizing than this depiction of Paul.¹⁶

HA The perception of Paul as the champion of universalism at the expense of particularity, and as the theologian for whom ethics is an appendix to true faith, needs Judaism as a negative foil in order to formulate the new faith in Christ positively. Paul is viewed as having separated or having been in the process of separating himself from his ancestral faith and practice in his interpretation of the Christ event. The Christ event and first century Judaism are perceived as being in an opposition to each other that is mutually exclusive. For Paul, in this perception, there is only room for one and the same way of faith and life in relation to the one God; that is through Christ, which implies at the expense of historic Israel. There is no room for difference, no room for the other. H The alterity of the other is deplored as a defect that has to be extinguished because it threatens the openness of being in Christ and the universal truth of Christ. Perceived in this way it is difficult if not impossible to read Paul, and his letter

HA Romans is assessed as an outline of Paul's systematic theology.

HA More traditional interpretations of Paul assess that he champions universalism at the expense of particularity (Judaism) and the assent of systematic or doctrinal statements over ethics.

H Alterity threatens the body of Christ and the universal claims of salvation.

to the Romans in particular, in the face of the other without violent implications. It is difficult to start a conversation with the other when his/her alterity and thus integrity is not respected. A conversation necessarily fails when there is only the option of either me or the other. This applies not only to the relationship of Christ believers and Jews: the relationship between Jews and gentiles in Christ and between Christ believers and non-Christian believing Jews in the first century has a paradigmatic character for a Christ-defined identity. It is also of great significance for what was later to become “Christian” identity and its relation to the other who remains and wants to remain different. This relationship is the test case for the openness of Christianity—not only to first, Jews, but to other “others,” to alterity that cannot be integrated into the same, and into the totality of any system. Paul's letters, and Romans in particular, pertinently address the issue of this relationship. Romans is actually of crucial significance for Christian self-definition/understanding, since it is the only place where Jews as Jews (and not merely as Christ believers) are seriously discussed in relation to the gospel.

A But as scholars of and beyond the New Perspective have demonstrated, the universalistic and thus exclusivist reading is not the only possible reading of the Pauline letters, including Romans.¹⁷ There is ample historical and sociological as well as theological indication to argue that faith in Christ and being rooted in his ancestral faith and culture were not perceived as being incompatible by Paul. There is also sound reason to argue that Paul strongly emphasized the inherent necessity of the relatedness of faith in Christ to Judaism and its Scriptures.¹⁸ This may even be viewed as being the main issue in his argumentation in Romans. Paul is seen as being deeply rooted in first-century Judaism, his life, thoughts, and activity as interwoven with the traditions and practices of his ancestors and contemporaries, which were based on the Scriptures.¹⁹ The perception of Paul's life and activity as being rooted entirely within the symbolic universe of first-century Judaism (which, in its diversity, encompassed differing groups even though the term pluralism might not be quite appropriate), and thus as not using Judaism or the “other” as

A Traditional readings which propose a monologue of universalism and thus exclusivist readings of Paul are not unchallenged by scholars of and beyond the New Perspective.

a negative foil for "faith in Christ," opens up the option of reading Paul/Romans in the face of the other. If perceived as being rooted within the same symbolic universe, Levinas the Jewish philosopher and Paul the Jewish Apostle could actually be related in a conversation over their shared tradition as "others," who are and remain different but nevertheless related via this tradition.

III.

Romans and Scriptural Reasoning

Read from this perspective, a number of themes and issues of Levinas's approach resonate with Romans. Not all can be addressed within a contribution of this length; I will focus on some aspects I consider relevant, without claiming to address even these exhaustively. If we take Levinas seriously, this claim is neither an aim worth trying to achieve nor is it actually possible to achieve, since he emphasized that to encounter the other means to respond, to be responsible to the other rather than trying to understand him/her in the categories of my own experience or thinking. To discuss a theme or issue exhaustively would imply the enclosure within a closed system, the closed system of my own thought and experience, thus not respecting the alterity of the other but assimilating it to the already known.²⁰ A virtual encounter between Paul and Levinas cannot claim to deal with the issues addressed exhaustively. This conversation will hopefully answer some questions and at the same time raise new ones that keep the conversation open and lively.

The first issue I will address is the issue of communication between "others." A second will be the reasoning or conversation over shared Scriptural tradition in relation to contemporary problems and questions. A third issue will be the priority of ethics.

3.1. Letter Writing as a Process of Mutual Communication

AC The fact that Paul is writing letters to his communities demonstrates that he is involved in an ongoing process of communication with them. This communication usually began in a face-to-face encounter, when Paul and future Christ-believers first

met. The relationship thus established and the communication thus initiated continued and was nurtured through the means of letter writing. This was the main function of Paul's letters, as Eva-Maria Becker recently has emphasized: "So the letter serves primarily as a substitute for an oral communication, that is, for a conversation and thus claims no apostolic authority but has above all a communicative that is an inter-communicative function."²¹ The letters are thus perceived as being part of oral communication, serving the purpose of maintaining the relationship. Literary products²² only insofar as they were the only ways and means by which the oral communication could be maintained, they could be described as "long distance oral communication."²³ Paul presupposes that his letters on reception are presented to the group of Christ believers orally. His letters thus address the recipients directly on the issues discussed, not in the style of an abstract or more distanced essay. He is involved and wants to involve the recipients in the conversation. He does not elaborate about something from an objective perspective, but he is engaged in a discussion with them concerning issues that really matter between them. Paul is addressing real people in a specific historical context and communicating with them about issues arising from that relationship (Stirwalt 108). Although communication through letters cannot have the same directness and mutuality as immediate oral communication, letter writing nevertheless is the only written form of communication that allows for dialogue and mutuality.²⁴ Letter writing is not a one way process but allows for real interaction in both directions, especially since the letter bearer could elaborate on the contents of the letter and report back to the sender.²⁵

Although a number of suggestions have been made regarding the character of Paul's letter to Rome, it has been demonstrated convincingly, in my view, that Romans is a real letter.²⁶ The aspects of letters as means of "long distance communication" thus also apply. The difference from the other letters consists only in the fact that Paul has not yet been able to meet the Christ-believing groups in Rome personally. This does not render the relationship a literary construction or merely virtual. Despite the geographical distance between the interlocutors, a real relationship and a real process of communication are established here; Paul indicates strongly that he intends to meet the addressees face to face. It has been argued that the issues addressed in Romans

AC Paul's letters address an assumed audience in a specific community, addressing particular issues.

emerged not from some theoretical doctrinal, but from actual, problems within the Christ-believing groups in Rome and their situation; some links already exist between these groups and Paul, as the list in Rom 16:1ff. indicates. Romans, as the other letters, can be perceived as a written example of an interactive, dialogical, and mutual process of communication between groups of Christ believers and Paul. The diatribe style of Romans supplements this perspective (Stowers 75ff). **AH** It is not a proof text for a one-way communication or an outline of the main doctrines of Christianity, nor is it Paul's last will and testament, but rather another example of the interactive process within which early Christ believers tried to work out and negotiate what to live in Christ meant and implied in their actual lives.

CH Paul's letters including Romans are indications of a concrete, historical communication process. In Levinasian terms this implies that those involved in this process had established real relationships within which the other was not assimilated to the same but the alterity of the other was maintained and respected—otherwise, it would be no relationship at all. To meet the other without assimilating him/her to the same means being already in conversation (Levinas 1992, 76–81). As noted above, Levinas perceives the face-to-face encounter as already establishing a discourse, since the other as a face already speaks to me. He tries to show that “the relation between the same and the other . . . is language. For language accomplishes a relation the terms of which are not limitrophe within this relation, such that the other, despite the relationship with the same, remains transcendent to the same. The relation between the same and the other . . . is primarily enacted as conversation. . . .” (Levinas 1992, 39). **H** The specific function of Paul's letters as part of a vivid process of communication indicates that those communicating with each other did so as people who met the other as other without trying to assimilate them to themselves. Levinas states, “The fact that the face maintains a relation with me by discourse does not range

AH Romans is an interactive communication.

CH Ehrensperger assumes that an actual community process is historically situated and therefore “real” as opposed to a text which is (assumed to be) apparently less interactive.

H Ehrensperger assesses that Paul's interactive letters fulfill Levinas' conceptions of a discourse which does not seek to reduce the other.

him in the same; he remains absolute within the relation” (Levinas 1992, 195). In such a discourse true encounter can happen, an encounter in which truth “Truth arises where a being separated from the other is not engulfed in him, but speaks to him” (Levinas 1992, 62). The letters of Paul, including Romans, are indicative of such a process of true encounter between the apostle and his addressees.

C To perceive Paul's letter writing as indicative of a face-to-face conversation within a network of Christ believers (in this case Paul, his co-workers, and Christ believers in Rome) has significant implications for a reading of these letters, Romans in particular. With this goes the implication that insights of faith do not emerge in a system of theological thought imposed on others but in the face-to-face encounter within a particular conversation. Thus, a contemporary reading that is trying to uncover a theological system of thought from Romans seems anachronistic. It is rather by trying to listen in to the conversation, in the fragmentary form it has been transmitted, that glimpses of truth might be revealed to us in our contemporary conversations. Moreover, to view Paul as only one, certainly significant, partner in a conversation has implications for the perception of authority and power that he exercised and that is attributed to him. I cannot elaborate on these implications here, but such a reading suggests that domination and control were not what Paul was aiming at when he engaged in these conversations with other Christ believers.²⁷

3.2. The Hermeneutics of Negotiating Meaning in Romans

HA To conceive truth as emerging in true encounter between “the same and the o/Other” has consequences for the way in which Scriptures are read. Levinas's practice of interpretation—or, as others have called it, his practice of scriptural reasoning²⁸—emerges from his focus on the pluralism of human society, which he perceives as constitutive of interpretation. Community and society do not presuppose sameness but rather presuppose difference, the respect for and safeguarding of the integrity of the

C Insights of faith in the “network” of Christ believers occur in the face to face encounter through conversation (letters) rather than in a theological system.

HA Truth conceived as occurring in or from an encounter as proposed by Levinas has consequences for reading and assessing scriptural interpretations.

other in his/her alterity.²⁹ H Pluralism is not only constitutive of society but, as we have seen above, of discourse as well.³⁰ As interlocutors necessarily have to be and remain different, any discourse presupposes plurality. A discourse over scriptural tradition thus cannot but reflect this pluralism. Multiple readings, expressions, commentaries then are not mere or unfortunate ambiguities but the necessary "manner" and way of interpretation (Cohen 248).

A The letter to Rome could adequately be described as a discourse over scriptural tradition. In none of Paul's letters do we find as many obvious allusions to Scriptural tradition as here. We are listening in to a conversation that reveals glimpses of the process of the search for meaning that was unfolding in the early Christ movement in the aftermath of the Christ event. In this process the Scriptures apparently played a vital part. The discourse unfolds entirely within the symbolic universe of the Scriptures of Israel and in close relation to others living within this same symbolic universe, that is, Jews (who were not part of the Christ movement), Jewish Christ believers as well as Christ believers from among the nations.

Paul's reasoning is not only rooted in the Scriptures but is developed in association with, and in the context of, contemporary Jewish thinking and exegesis. Paul moves within the biblical thought world and uses its idiom and language, but he did not receive his Bible in a vacuum. Paul encountered the challenge of Scriptures through a Jewish filter. His thinking was directly influenced by the Scriptures but it was also influenced by his familiarity with contemporary Jewish reasoning. As B. Rosner notes, "The significance of many portions of the Pauline paraenesis can only be appreciated by taking full account of Old Testament background *as well as* the conceptual development of Old Testament ideas in early Jewish paraenesis" (Rosner 181). In my view this applies not only to the paraenetical sections of Paul's letters but to his theologizing as such. This means that we must acknowledge and take into account the fact that Paul shares common ground with fellow Jewish exegetes, despite other

H Societies and discourses, dependent upon the presumptions of alterity, are thoroughly pluralistic.

A Romans is an encounter with scripture in which Paul's reasoning is pluralistic.

differences from them. Gone then is the image of Paul, the isolated exegete using the Old Testament for his own gospel purposes in a manner that, whilst emphasizing his rootedness in Scriptures, simultaneously suggests that his gospel hermeneutics radically distances him from all contemporary Judaism. C To acknowledge Paul's relation to contemporary Jewish thinking is merely to put Paul in his social and theological context, to recognize the sociality of his reading and reasoning.³¹ The gospel Paul proclaimed was the actualization of Jewish hopes as expressed in their Scriptures and traditions, which he and the early Christ movement believed to be confirmed in the Christ event. This gospel thus could only be formulated in the context of these hopes. Since in Romans Paul is *not addressing* Jews as such, it is clear that the Jewish scriptures and Jewish traditions also have fundamental importance for gentiles in Christ.

Moreover, the hermeneutical significance of the fact that Paul devotes substantial space in Romans to non-Christ-believing Jews cannot be underestimated.³² Here is a superb example of Paul taking the alterity of the other seriously into account. What is significant is not merely the details of his opinions but rather the fact that he addresses the theme at all. This is a clear indication that he shared and lived in the symbolic universe, the "cultural-linguistic system" of first-century Judaism.³³ CA It seems inconceivable that he could have envisaged, let alone that he could have promoted actions in directions that moved beyond the "cultural-linguistic system" of first-century Judaism.³⁴ He is tied in with the future of his own people and their identity even though they disagree concerning the Christ.

As the letter with numerous scriptural citations and allusions, Romans particularly demonstrates Paul's entrenchedness within his ancestral tradition. That is not something he merely refers to or deals with—he is rather living entirely in it, in his interpretation of the Christ event.

Moreover, he apparently presupposes his addressees to be familiar with the Jewish Scriptures (cf. Rom 1:2 ὁ προσηγγελιστο

C Paul's formulation of the Gospel is developed in the context of hopes expressed in Jewish scriptures and traditions, and confirmed in the Christian movement.

CA The complexity and pluralism of the symbolic world of first-century Judaism are not superseded by Paul's letter to the Romans.

static decrees or eternal dogmas but one that unfolds in interaction and conversation with people in particular circumstances, thus being part of the process of negotiating meaning in conversation with and over the Scriptures—in the case of the Christ believers, in the light of the Christ event.

This is by no means to imply that Paul's approach is identical with Levinas's reading of Scriptures, which he describes as a reading of a reading in interpreting extracts from the Talmud. H It is "Exegesis of the exegesis, a privileged text, even if it does not exclude insights into the same subject. This is in keeping with the characteristic pluralism of rabbinical thought, which paradoxically aspires to be compatible with the unity of Revelation . . ."⁴⁰ Whether or not such a pluralism can be found in Paul's way of reasoning, he is not doing "exegesis of exegesis" but interpreting the biblical tradition in light of the Christ event. In that he clearly does something that distinguishes his reading from Levinas, but both nevertheless can be seen as engaging in a process of negotiating meaning in conversation with and about Scriptural tradition.

H To perceive Paul's way of reasoning as a form of scriptural reasoning has considerable consequences for the interpretation of Romans. This is particularly obvious in passages where a high density of Scriptural allusions and/or citations are found. We will thus look in more detail at Rom 3:9ff. and then later proceed to a discussion of Rom 9:24ff.

3.3.1. Scriptural Reasoning in Romans 3:9ff.

Most interpreters read the sequence of scriptural verses in Rom 3:10ff as being introduced by Paul here to prove the accusation with which all are charged in 1:18–3:8, that gentiles (1:18–32) as well as Jews (2:1–29) are all "under sin" (3:9).⁴¹ The verb *προετιτύχοντο* in that case is read as referring back in a sequential sense to what Paul has stated previously. But as some scholars have pointed out, this does not really fit Paul's prior

H Ehrensperger contends that Paul differs with Levinas's exegesis of the exegesis because Paul assesses that the Christ event is not also an exegesis of the exegesis.

H Nevertheless, Paul is negotiating meaning in conversation with and about scriptural traditions.

διὰ τῶν προφητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν γραφαῖς; and 7:1 "Ἡ ἀγνοεῖτε, ἀδελφοί, γινώσκουσιν γὰρ νόμον λαλῶ, ὅτι ὁ νόμος κυριεύει τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐφ' ὅσον χρόνον ζῇ;" (Thorsteinsson 2003, 36) even though he explicitly addresses only gentiles in this letter.⁴⁵ He sees no need to explain to them why he is referring to the Jewish Scriptures as this apparently is self-evident to both. From this I conclude that the incoming of the gentiles through Christ implied necessarily the rooting of them in this scriptural symbolic universe. Paul takes for granted that the authority of Scripture extends to his gentile Christ communities and that it should play a significant role for the formation of their identity in Christ. As Stanley perceives this, it is beyond doubt that "Paul regarded the words of Scripture as having absolute authority for his predominantly Gentile congregations" (Stanley 338). Paul expects gentiles who live in Christ to enter the symbolic universe of the Scriptures. More to the point, however, and even when he differed from his Jewish contemporaries, Paul's reliance on the authority of Scripture is something he shares with, and that is wholly in line with, contemporary Jewish practice.⁴⁶ H Sameness or uniformity are not ideals of early Jewish interpretation nor of later rabbinic interpretation.⁴⁷ That Paul and contemporary Jews disagreed over certain issues is not yet reason enough for a parting of the ways but part of their common tradition of Scriptural reasoning.⁴⁸

3.3. Negotiating Meaning through Scriptural Reasoning in Romans

To say that Paul lived in and with the Scriptures of Israel indicates that these are not merely "used" to prove or add more authority to a previous argument. HC This perspective rather views the apostle as living, thinking, and acting from within this specific symbolic universe whilst working out the implications of life in Christ for his gentile communities. The authority of the Scriptures as that which shapes his perception of the world is thus presupposed in this perception of Paul's way of reasoning and theologizing.⁴⁹ It is an authority that does not impose itself in

H Like the tradition of Jewish scriptural interpretation, Paul employs scriptural reasoning without idealizing uniformity.

HC Paul's scriptural interpretation seeks to work out the implications of life in Christ which includes gentile communities.

there is no doubt that Paul perceives the power of sin as universal and thus affecting both Jews and gentiles, I cannot find any sound reason or indication in the text of the letter why the primary expression of the Psalms referred to should be twisted into its contrary by Paul. Such an interpretation of the Psalm references may seem logical and necessary in the light of Dunn's reading, which emphasizes that chapter 2-3:8 primarily serves to prove the "misconceived Jewish claim to distinctiveness" and which argues that "the main thrust of his [Paul's] attack is still to expose the falseness of the typical Jewish presumption of distinctiveness as far as righteousness/unrighteousness is concerned" (Dunn 147). But in such a reading Paul once again is viewed as rendering the Jew the paradigm of the universal human sinner!

Conversely, a reading in the vein of scriptural reasoning takes seriously into account the resonating of the (literary and supposedly some historical) context of the Psalm verses (which, by the way, means also to take the text as other—in its alterity—seriously as a partner in conversation). **AHC** To read the Psalm verses in the first instance as lamentations of Israel about their situation as deprived of life in abundance by violent powers draws our attention to the situation of those who are victims of those powers. To be victims does not render them righteous or without sin. They, too, as well as the agents of violent power are "under sin." The domination of violence/sin can be escaped neither by the oppressor nor by their victims. But to state that sin affects all is not identical with saying that it affects all in the same way. To say that those "under sin" are not righteous, do not understand, do not do good deeds is not the same as to state that they use their tongues to deceive, that they are shedding blood, are pursuing ways of destruction and misery, and do not know the ways of peace (despite claims to the contrary).⁴³ Paul describes in Rom 3:9-16 different effects of being "under sin" that do not apply to all in the same way. The agents of "sin"—those exercising domination, oppression and violence—are inherently accused by these lamentations but, with the literary context resonating with these verses of the Psalms, they are as much cries of the victims for

AHC The meaning(s) of Psalm 2-3:8 explained by Paul in Romans 3:9-16 plays upon the interactions of complex contextual situations which in turn influence the analogical relations in the text.

argumentation (Bassler 1984). It certainly seems strange that Paul would have to introduce such a long and heavy scriptural "proof" for something he himself had already elaborated on at such length just before. In his study on Rom 2 Runnar Thorsteinsson demonstrates, in my view convincingly, that *προηγουμένως* is more likely to be referring to the literary sequence following in 3:10f, reading the *pro-* in a temporal sense thus meaning "what has been demonstrated at an earlier period in time." It introduces a new sequence in the text rather than being the conclusion or summary of what immediately precedes 1:18-2:29 or 3:8 (Thorsteinsson, 235-36). Paul then is not summarizing a previous argument which accuses all of being sinners; **CH** rather, he is aware that from a scriptural perspective the contemporary time they are living in is a time dominated by sin—forcing them all, gentiles and Jews, to live "under sin." To live under Roman rule, contrary to its claim of establishing peace and well-being for all, for many means to live under a regime of apparent and structural violence and oppressive power (Elliott 2000). This is not proved but demonstrated by the verses of Scriptures Paul refers to.⁴² The term *προηγουμένως* here indicates that there is clear scriptural evidence in Paul's view for what he is saying rather than his setting out a charge in a juridical sense.

Read from this perspective, the scriptural references are describing the effects of "sin" on the life of people who have no option but to live under its rule. The references should not be taken as citations Paul arbitrarily picked up to prove his case. Referring to these verses implied that the literary as well as some supposed historical context would resonate with these. It is significant, then, to take into account that the verses referred to are lamentations of oppressed Israel crying to God for help and vindication. This is also acknowledged by Dunn in his commentary, but rather than continuing to think along that line he argues that "Far from being a ground of complaint against Israel's oppressors which the righteous can hold before themselves in pleading before God . . . the scriptural catena functions as an indictment of both Jew and Gentile. . . . Paul is probably deliberately attacking the sort of attitude . . . which found expression in the Psalms cited by Paul" (Dunn 148). Whilst I think

CH For Paul, living under Roman law is to live "under sin," that is, under a regime of structural violence and oppressive power.

deliverance. **CH** Paul thus does not make a universal indictment against sinners but describes the terrible effects of "sin" and the tragic but inescapable circumstances under which both Jews and gentiles are forced to live.

Here Paul is possibly arguing against a gentile misconception that by becoming Jews they could escape from this domination of sin. Paul is demonstrating to them that there is no escape from this domination, not even through doing the works of Torah. (This also might be a gentile misconception of Judaism rather than a Jewish misunderstanding!) But now for these gentiles to find a way out of this tragedy is not in becoming Jews and taking on the Torah as Jews but through Christ.⁴⁴ If we presuppose that Paul here is addressing gentiles, then he is opening their eyes to the inescapable tragedy they live in. The Torah cannot be a way out of this, but it is the means via which one can come to the recognition of sin. **CH** The Torah reveals the true nature of the rulers of this kosmos, the all-pervasive power of sin (3:20b).

We have here an example of Paul's dealing with Scriptures that moves beyond a mere use of Scripture as proof text or addition to something already said or as proof that what he says is in accordance with the authoritative source of faith. He is thus not proving previously made accusations against all humanity. Instead of simply accumulating a list of varied proof texts as additional support for previous arguments, Paul is rather elaborating for his gentile audience the tragedy of living under sin. This, then, refers to the rule of the Pax Romana and the function of the Torah in revealing the true nature of this system of violence contrary to its own claims for universal peace. **AC** In parallel to Levinas we see Paul arguing from within and with Scriptures,⁴⁵ closely relating them to contemporary constraints and vice versa, thus illuminating both. In distinction from Levinas, one could say that in a way Paul is teaching gentiles in Christ scriptural reasoning in the light of the Christ event.

CH "Under sin" is not a universalizing indictment but a description of the terrible effects of domination, oppression and violence which are tragically inescapable.

CH The Torah reveals the all-pervasive power of sin under the domination of the rules of the kosmos (the Pax Roma).

AC Levinas and Paul employ scripture to provide critical insight of contemporary constraints and allow contemporary constraints to provide the context in which scripture is illuminated.

3.3.2. Scriptural Reasoning in Romans 9:24ff.

The second example of scriptural reasoning we will consider is Rom 9:24ff. In this passage, Paul demonstrates with a string of scriptural citations the mercy of God on those whom he has called, not only from the Jews but also from the gentiles. Paul begins by citing Hosea 2:25: καλέσω τὸν οὐ λαόν μου καὶ τὴν οὐκ ἠγαπήμεν-ην ἠγαπήμεν. **AH** Because this citation seems designed to support an argument for the inclusion of gentiles as well as Jews, scholars have claimed that Paul now applies Scriptures that originally referred to Israel to believing gentiles. The "not my people" are seen as the gentiles and Paul thus seems to adjust scriptural meanings to suit his own purposes. Dodd voices the sentiments of many commentators when he states, "It is rather strange that Paul has not observed that this prophecy referred to Israel, rejected for its sins, but destined to be restored—strange because it would have fitted so admirably the doctrine of the restoration of Israel which he is to expound in ch. 11."⁴⁶ **H** Again we find a scholar describing what could be a reading of the citation from within its literary context and which is coherent with Paul's reasoning here, but rejecting this reading because for theological reasons this cannot be what the apostle of the law-free gospel, the champion of universalism could possibly mean! Apart from such particular theological presuppositions I cannot see any reason why this scriptural reference should not be read according to its literary context and coherent with Paul's reasoning in this chapter.

As noted also by Dodd, Paul's primary concern in Rom 9–11 is with the historic people of God and their apparent lack of faith in Christ rather than the inclusion of gentiles, which at this point is brought in more as an aside. (The inclusion of gentiles has already been established in Rom 3–4.) When we consider the context more carefully we note that the citation in Hosea 2:25 is followed by two others that clearly can refer only to Israel. It seems strange that Paul would include a rather arbitrary reference to gentiles in such

AH Erhensperger argues that Paul's use of Hosea 2:25 in Romans 9:24ff should be read according to its literary context and coherent with Paul's reasoning.

H Erhensperger assesses that Dodd's negative assessment of Paul's use of Hosea 2:25 is based on Dodd's theological commitments.

a grouping. A better explanation of Paul's pattern of citation is that all three citations retain their primary reference to Israel and that the first citation referring to the "not my people," whilst retaining its reference to Israel, can by analogy be extended to include gentiles who in a more distinct sense are "not my people." Such an emphasis is much more in keeping with the Hosea context, where the mercy of God is the dominant theme. It would seem strange that in a passage where the prophet refers to God's merciful dealings with Israel that in Paul's version of the same passage Israel is simply left under judgment and the "not people"—the gentiles—take her place. This is all the more surprising since Paul's theme in Rom 9 is demonstrated to be divine compassion. In Rom 9:15 Paul sets up a scriptural text to serve as it were as a major heading for the next section of his argument: *Ἐλεῖσω ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ καὶ οὐκ ἐπιθήσω ὅν ἔν οὐκ ἐρίπω*. This is followed by other scriptural citations; but the pattern of scriptural reasoning Paul uses here is one in which major scriptural citations dominate later scriptural citations that are subsidiary to the main heading. A Thus subsidiary citations do not nullify the major thesis previously stated but stand under and serve to clarify the primary purpose of emphasizing divine mercy.

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Most likely, therefore, Paul does not primarily "use" or twist the Hosea citation to refer to gentiles. There is no reason to read it other than in accordance with its primary reference to Israel. AH What Paul thus is claiming is that rejected Israel, like the northern tribes in Hosea's prophecy, will be restored and, along with another "non people," the gentiles, will also be blessed. In this reading Paul is seen as applying the Hosea citation in a secondary sense typologically to gentiles, but only after it has served his primary purpose to argue for the restoration of Israel (Campbell, 2000, 198ff).

A Erbensperger argues that on a closer reading, Paul's scriptural reasoning with Hosea in which major scriptural citations dominate later subsidiary citations. Subsidiary citations provide clarification of the thesis.

AH Paul's use of Hosea serves by analogy first to claim that rejected Israel will be restored, and second, by a subsidiary typological move, bless both Israel and the gentiles.

In both exemplary passages, Rom 3:9ff. and 9:24ff., we have seen Paul at work in his scriptural world. HC He moves within innumerable citations to illuminate and develop his argument step by step with major and minor scriptural premises; he uses these creatively not in opposition to their primary content and context, but in the first example, in joining the victims in their lament over the tragic situation they live in, and in the second primarily to refer to Israel, and only then by extension to gentiles. At this point in particular, because he dialogues so intensely with Scripture, a comparison could be drawn between Paul's nuanced use of his Jewish scriptural heritage and the activity of jazz musicians. As Elsa B. Brown describes this, multiple rhythms are played simultaneously and in dialogue with each other—each member of the group has to listen to the others so as to respond and at the same time concentrate on his/her own improvisation.⁴⁸ In parallel to this we might maintain that Paul plays with the multiple rhythms of Scripture with some improvisation and ingenuity (Ford, 2002, 259).

IV.

The Epiphany of the other/Other and the Primacy of Ethics

It could be argued that the primacy of ethics is the starting point and the issue that permeates all of Levinas's philosophy. H I will argue that it is also of primary significance in Paul, and in Romans in particular. It cannot be dealt with substantially in this article, so I will only give some brief sketch as to where a more detailed consideration of this aspect would lead to.

The respect for the alterity of the other and thus the primacy of ethics for Levinas are constitutive of human life and community. These do not follow from insights or cognition about some universal human condition but from the encounter with the other face to face. Hand summarizes Levinas' position as follows, "... responsibility for the other pre-exists any self-consciousness, so that from the beginning of any face to face, the question of being

HC Paul's scriptural reasoning employs the primary content and context of Hosea with improvisation and ingenuity to exegete the situation of the victims of Judea in their lament, and to extend the blessing of Israel to the gentiles.

H Erbensperger argues that the primacy of ethics permeates all of Levinas's philosophy, and is of primary significance in Paul's letters, particularly Romans.

involves the right to be. . . . I do not grasp the other in order to dominate, I respond instead to the face's epiphany" (Hand 1989, 76). Inherent to this epiphany of the other's face, Levinas perceives a transcendent dimension. In this epiphany and the response to the call transcendence breaks in, the Other per se. The primacy of ethics and transcendence are not separate dimensions but go hand in hand.⁴⁹

The fact that Paul's letter to Rome ends neither with chapter 8 nor with chapter 11 is of utmost significance. Rather than being mere paraenetical additions to the central theological arguments advocated in the main body of the letter, chapters 12-15/16 are inherently part or even more the focus of the arguments previously made. William S. Campbell has strongly argued for the inherent relation of these chapters particularly with the end of Rom 11:30-32.⁵⁰ The close relation between these and the previous chapters are indicative for what I would call the primacy of ethics in Romans.

In chapters 9-11 Paul tries to understand and come to terms with God's dealing and ways with the other, that is, his fellow Jews who are not "in Christ." He finds some viable explanation in his reading of Hosea as well as in his olive tree metaphor. In both he strongly emphasizes the faithfulness of God and his promises towards Israel which encompass Christ believing as well non-Christian-believing Jews. There is no doubt that Paul hopes all Israel will be saved. From the flow of his argument the direction can be guessed where Paul might like to proceed in this: an inclusive tendency in Romans that has a potential to erase the alterity of the other in one redeemed people. But significantly, Paul does not proceed along that route and also does not elaborate on how God will achieve the desired outcome. In good prophetic fashion, Paul leaves the future of his people Israel open to God. In citing the wisdom of Job he moves beyond his own comprehension of the divine purpose whilst acknowledging his full confidence in the faithfulness of God. But there is no closure on this vital issue. In this openness Paul and Levinas have much in common. Hoping for the salvation of all Israel, Paul is working through his own tradition in an effort to explore and correlate, in the light of the Christ event, seemingly contradictory realities such as the incoming of the gentiles, the coming to faith of some, and the

hardening (in Paul's perception) of other Jews. **AH** It is clear that Paul is primarily disposed to hold to a hopeful outcome for his own people because of divine faithfulness and in the face of contemporary evidence to the contrary; yet despite this hopeful optimism, he stops short of claiming salvation exclusively in Christ for his own people and instead entrusts them to the divine mercy. In this he follows the prophets of Israel. In entrusting the outcome to the One who is wholly Other he safeguards both the integrity and alterity of the other and the transcendence of God (Rom 11:26 and 11:33ff.). Here Paul reveals to us a unique and remarkable glimpse of the perception of the other outside the Christ-believing group. In this reading Levinas would resonate.

To continue, as Paul does at this point in Romans, with explicitly ethical issues indicates that for Paul to respond to the other and to the transcendent Other cannot be separated. **H** To encounter the other/Other means to be responsible. Ethical living is thus not an addition to being in Christ but inherent in and integral to the call to respond in discipleship. Here we find a primacy of ethics that, though not identical, is still similar to Levinas's perception.⁵¹ Thus the sequence of Paul's argument in the transition from 11:36 to 12:1ff. is not coincidental but necessitated by the reference to the mercy of God which continues the theme of chapters 9-11, introduced in 9:15. To trust in the mercy of God and to entrust the other to the divine mercy does not free us from the obligation to respond to the other but is in fact the basis of this responsibility.⁵² Paul begins to elaborate on this for the Christ believers in Rome in chapters 12-15. In these chapters the broad outline of living in relation to the other is set out.⁵³ It is most likely that Paul has issues of living together within Christ-believing groups rather than with those outside in mind, but even for them he does not advocate sameness in Christ but emphasizes the necessity of mutually appreciating differences amongst them. We note especially 12:10 "give pride of place to one another in esteem" (*NEB*) where the other literally has priority and is

AH Ehrensperger argues that in Romans Paul does not propose an inclusive unethical tendency such as claiming salvation exclusively in Christ, thereby safeguarding both the integrity and alterity of the other and the transcendence of God.

H For Paul, ethical living is not an addition to being in Christ, but is inherent in and integral to such gathering.

esteemed in his/her alterity. Likewise in 14:1ff. the weak, though they remain different, must not be violated either by judging or causing to stumble but are to be welcomed and respected not despite, but with their convictions (Rom 14:5b, 13–15) (Ehrensperger 2002, 53–73).

Conclusion—Sharing Traditions in Difference

The flow of Paul's scriptural reasoning in Romans thus can be described as being driven by the responsibility for the other/Other, that is, by ethics. HC In this primacy of ethics—and thus in his advocating for respect for the alterity and integrity of the other—Paul is in keeping with the traditions of his ancestors, which are also basic for Levinas's philosophical approach. This does not render Paul the Jewish Apostle and Levinas the Jewish philosopher the same. Paul's scriptural reasoning and prioritizing of ethics differs from Levinas not only but basically in the fact that Paul does so in the light of the Christ event. But both are rooted in the same scriptural tradition; both are engaged in a vivid and open and pluralistic process of interpretation is driven by the primacy of ethics. Thus both can be perceived as participating in the process of negotiating meaning for their respective time and situation from within a tradition they share in difference. They contribute to an "exegetical pluralism [that] is a product of and tribute to the pluralism constitutive of human society [and] thus it is a reflection of lived ethics, the pluralism of the face-to-face" (Cohen 248).

HC Paul's scriptural reasoning in Romans is a vivid, open, and pluralistic process of interpretation driven by the primacy of ethics in a specific time and situation.

Notes

1. See my article "Let Everyone Be Convinced in His/Her Own Mind: Derrida and the Deconstruction of Paulinism" in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 53–73.
2. On the function of informed imagination or "depth historiography," see Peter Ochs's foreword to *Revelation Restored: Divine Writ and Critical Responses*, by David Weiss Halivni (London: SCM Press, 2001), xvi ff.
3. On this see Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged: Feminism and the New Perspective in Pauline Studies* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 4–42. See also Richard A. Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis, and Philosophy: Interpretation after Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 248ff.
4. Cf. an interview with Christian Deschamps in *Entretiens avec le Monde*, Paris 1984, 142.
5. Cf. the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, "... Violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance ..." and "the visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy" (Levinas 1992, 21).
6. "But in knowledge there also appears the notion of an intellectual activity or of a reasoning will—a way of doing something which consists precisely of thinking through knowing, of seizing something and making it one's own, of reducing to presence and representing the difference of being, an activity which appropriates and grasps the otherness of the known. . . . Knowledge as perception, concept, comprehension refers back to an act of grasping." "Ethics As First Philosophy" in Sean Hand, ed., *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 75–87, 76.
7. Cf. also Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2002), 97–192.
8. Cf. e.g. *Totality and Infinity*, "Ethics and the Face," 194–219 and his "Ethics as First Philosophy" in Hand, *Levinas Reader*, 76–87.
9. He states that "Totalization is accomplished only in history—the history of the historiographers, that is among survivors. It rests on the affirmation and the conviction that the chronological

order of the history of the historians outlines the plot of being in itself, analogous to nature. The time of universal history remains as the ontological ground in which particular existences are lost," *Totality and Infinity*, 55.

10. "The face is a living presence, it is expression. . . . The face speaks. The manifestation is already discourse." He also states that "The banal fact of conversation, in one sense, quits the order of violence" in "Ethics and Spirit," in Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, ed. Sean Hand (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 7.

11. Levinas is influenced by Rosenzweig here; cf. Levinas, "The State of Israel and the Religion of Israel" in Sean Hand, ed., *The Levinas Reader*, 263, and Nahum N. Glatzer, ed., *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 245.

12. I am indebted to Richard A. Cohen's excellent analysis of Levinas's approach to reading Scriptures, cf. especially chapter 7, "Humanism and the Right of Exegesis" in his *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy*, 216–65.

13. Many aspects of this image were developed by F. C. Baur in the first half of the nineteenth century in his attempt to free New Testament studies from doctrinal church constraints through the application of historical-critical methodology to the New Testament. In the process theological anti-Judaism was transformed into historical anti-Judaism read back into the origins of the early Christ movement. Cf. also "Jesus and the Myth of the West: Tübingen and the Construction of Early Christianity," in Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 64–88.

14. See the differentiated analysis of Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: Founder of Universalism*, ed. Ray Brassier (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003).

15. The term is now applied to a number of distinct approaches that emerged after E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1977). They are diverse, and amongst them there are also critical differentiations and developments since Sanders', so it is not always self-evident what the term actually encompasses. The New Perspective cannot be described as one homogenic school or system of thought about Paul but must be seen as a movement of interpretation. For an overview and critical evaluation see W. S.

Campbell, "Significant Nuances in Pauline Interpretation," in Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged*, 123–60.

16. On this see Ehrensperger, "Be Imitators of Me as I am of Christ: A Hidden Discourse of Power and Domination in Paul?" *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 38 (2003): 241–61.

17. *Vier Talmud-Lesungen* (Frankfurt a. Verlag Neue Kritik, 1993), 154.

18. Cf the overview in Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged*, 123–60.

19. See W. S. Campbell, "The Contribution of Traditions to Paul's Theology," in David M. Hay, ed., *Pauline Theology: Vol. II, 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993), 234–54. See also Mark D. Nanos, "The Jewish Context of the Gentle Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans," in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (April 1999); Neil Elliott, "The Apostle's Self-Presentation as Anti-Imperial Performance" in Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2004), 67–88, and "Paul and the Politics of the Empire" in Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation, Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 17–39.

20. See Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged*, 142ff. and "Scriptural Reasoning—the Dynamic that Informed Paul's Theologizing," *Irish Biblical Studies* 26 (2004): 32–52 (now also *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 5 [2005], <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/>).

21. As Levinas has formulated, "Knowledge as a perception, concept, comprehension refers back to an act of grasping. . . . Knowledge is re-presentation, a return to presence, and nothing may remain *other* to it." "Ethics As First Philosophy" now in Hand, ed., *The Levinas Reader*, 76–77.

22. My translation of the German "So dient der Brief zunächst als Ersatz für eine mündliche Kommunikation, d.h. für ein Gespräch, und beansprucht keine apostolische Autorität, sondern hat primär eine kommunikative bzw. interkommunikative Funktion" in *Schreiben und Verstehen: Paulinische Briefhermeneutik im Zweiten Koimtherbrief-Tübingen* (Basel: Francke Verlag, 2002), 271.

23. As such they also show certain signs of literary construction, which in a secondary sense have to be taken into account. I am concentrating here on the oral dimension. For more on both aspects see Becker, *Schreiben und Verstehen*, 132ff.; Carolyn Osiek,

"The Oral World of Early Christianity in Rome: The Case of Hermas," in Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson, eds., *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 161–72; and J. Dewey, "Textuality, in an Oral Culture: A Survey of the Pauline Traditions," *Semeia* 65 (1994): 37–65.

24. Cf. Bernhard Oestreich, "Leseanweisungen in Briefen als Mittel der Gestaltung von Beziehungen (1 Thessalonians 5:27)" in *NTS* 50:224–45.

25. In an era prior to e-mail communication.

26. Cf. *Briefe* stellen indirekte, medial bzw. schriftlich vermittelte kommunikative Prozesse dar, denen die Unmittelbarkeit und Wechelseitigkeit mündlicher Kommunikation fehlt. Dennoch ist die briefliche Kommunikation die einzige schriftliche Kommunikationsform, in der ein Richtungswechsel und damit eine dialogische Kommunikation ohne Schwierigkeiten möglich ist" in Becker, *Schreiben und Verstehen*, 121.

27. Cf. e.g. W. S. Campbell, Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context, Jew and Gentile in the Letter to the Romans (Berlin, Bern, Frankfurt, and Main: Peter Lang, 1992), and Neil Elliott, *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue with Judaism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

28. On the issue of power see Ehrensperger, *Paul between Power, Force and Domination* (New York: T&T Clark International, forthcoming 2007). Cf. also *Totality and Infinity*, 171ff.

29. The term "Scriptural Reasoning" has come to prominence in postcritical theologies as expressed in the Radical Traditions: Theology in a Postcritical Key series, ed. Peter Ochs and Stanley Hauweras. What is being proposed is a return to scriptural traditions, "with the hope of retrieving resources long ignored, depreciated, and in many cases ideologically suppressed by modern habits of thought." It is in the first instance a movement that began as an offshoot of the study of Judaism, but parallel to this movement of Jewish thinkers there has now developed a movement that invites Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theologians back to the texts of their respective traditions, recovering and rearticulating modes of "scriptural reasoning." The movement is driven by questions concerning the place of theology and, more specifically, of scriptural faith in contemporary life. Significantly, the participants of this discourse locate themselves at home both

within their respective faith communities and in Western universities. The move toward Scriptures does not imply a naïve return to some "original" pure text or original truth, nor is it an uncritical application of so-called "rational" forms of thinking and reasoning in the Western philosophical tradition. The movement finds significant affinities between Jewish forms of reading and reasoning and post-modern thought. It challenges the notion of there being just one single discourse of reasoning and rationality, that is, that of Western science and logic, as the valid model for the "right" way of thinking. Cf. Peter Ochs and Nancy Levene, eds., *Textual Reasonings: Jewish Philosophy and Text Study at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003). See also Peter Ochs, "The Rules of Scriptural Reasoning," *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 2 (May 2002): etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr.

30. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Zwischen uns: Versuche über das Denken an den Anderen* (München: Hanser Verlag, 1995), 258ff; German translation of *Entre nous: Essais sur le penser-a-l'autre* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1991); and Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1998), 143ff.

31. See section 2.3 above.

32. Cf. David Ford, "Responding to Textual Reasoning: What Might Christians Learn?" in *Textual Reasonings: Jewish Philosophy and Text Study at the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Ochs and Nancy Levene (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 259–68, 265ff. Cf. J. H. Charlesworth on the diversity of Judaism, "The contradicting ideas should not be explained away or forced into an artificial system. Such ideas in the pseudepigrapha witness to the fact that early Judaism was not a speculative philosophical movement or theological system, even though the Jews demonstrated impressive speculative fecundity. The pseudepigrapha mirror a living religion in which the attempt was made to come to terms with the dynamic phenomena of history and experience." "Pseudepigrapha," *Anchor Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 5, 537–40.

33. Particularly Rom 9–11.

34. I am aware that this paradigm is only partly adequate to describe a religious tradition. It presupposes a static view of culture and religion, taking rules, terms, symbols, and narratives as set. It does not account sufficiently for the fact that traditions

are living networks that are constantly negotiated in continuous conversations. Cf. Havlini, *Reasoning after Revelation*, 26ff.

35. Although for Paul being in Christ transforms his Jewish thought world, it did not obliterate it.

36. I cannot elaborate on the problem of the composition of the Christ-believing groups in Rome. To me it is most likely that Paul addresses gentiles without excluding the presence of Jewish Christ believers in Rome. But they did not belong to Paul's mission field and thus were not directly "meant" by his letter. Cf. Mark Nanos, "The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (April 1999): 283-304, and Thorsteinsson, *Paul's Interlocutor in Rom* 2, 91ff.

37. Cf. Nanos, who sees Paul's discussions about the status and conduct of his gentile congregations as part of the Jewish debates about the relationship of gentiles with Jews. *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 42ff.

38. Cf. Daniel Patte, "In other words what is essential is not a correct (orthodox) theological doctrine but an openness to Scripture, a 'listening to Scripture' in the context of actual life. This in fact results in 'a multiplicity of theological conceptions' not necessarily fitting with each other...." *Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 22, (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975), 75.

39. On the issue of the parting of the ways see also Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2004), esp. 17-26.

40. This resonates with Levinas's interpretation of scriptural tradition as Annette Aronowicz has stated, "It is quite obvious that Levinas has already decided... that a meaning existed, a meaning for us... This decision made before the act of interpreting itself, lies at the heart of Levinas's hermeneutic. It is the most basic embodiment of its responsibility." "The Little Man with the Burned Thighs: Levinas's Biblical Hermeneutic," in Tamara Cohn Eskenazi et al. eds., *Levinas and Biblical Studies*, Semeia 43 (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 33-48, 41-42.

41. "On the Jewish Reading of Scriptures," in *Levinas and Biblical Studies*, ed. Eskenazi, 17-31.

42. So among many James D. G. Dunn, *Commentary on Romans 1-8* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1988), 148.

43. I am following Thorsteinsson's view that the first person plural here indicates a reference to the scriptural tradition rather than to a group or individual, *Paul's Interlocutor*, 236.

44. Discussions with Ian E. Rock contributed to a clearer perception of these distinctions. Cf. his *The Implication of Roman Imperial Ideology for an Exegesis of Paul's Letter to the Romans: An Ideological Literary Analysis of the Exordium, Rom. 1:1-17* (PhD thesis, University of Wales Lampeter, 2005).

45. This is not implying that there were Judaizers in the Roman context but rather that gentiles previously having turned to Judaism might be in doubt as to how to continue this relation. Cf. W. S. Campbell, "The Rule of Faith in Romans 12:1-15:13: The Obligation of Humble Obedience as the Only Adequate Response to the Mercies of God," in David M. Hay and Elizabeth E. Johnson, eds., *Pauline Theology: Vol. III, Romans* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995), 259-86.

46. The parallel with Levinas is that he distinguishes between Talmudic reasoning and using Scripture as proof text. See his *Vier Talmud-Lesungen* (Frankfurt: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1993), "Den Talmudgelehrten liegen scholastische Übungen fern, obwohl sie stets den Eindruck erwecken, als wollten sie sich Zitate und den Kopf werfen oder sich in Haarspaltereien ergen. Verse werden nicht angeführt, um deren Autorität in die Waagschale zu werfen... sondern um einen Kontext zu zitieren, der die Debatte auf ein höheres Niveau heben kann und die tatsächliche Tragweite der Grundgedanken, aus denen er seinen Sinn bezieht, erkennen lässt," 41.

47. C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1932), 160.

48. An analysis of the Scriptural references 9:15ff. and the relation of God's sovereignty and mercy from a scriptural reasoning perspective would be exceedingly interesting but is beyond the scope of this contribution.

49. Elsa B. Brown, "What Has Happened Here," in Linda Nicholson, ed., *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 275.

50. "Ethics is not a corollary of the vision of God, it is that very vision. Ethics is an optic, such that everything I know of God and everything I can hear of His word and reasonably say of Him must find an ethical expression" (Levinas 1990, 17).

51. Campbell claims "In 11:13f. Paul after a long discussion begun in 9:1, addresses himself pointedly to the Gentile Christians and specifically warns them not to boast over the fate of the unbelieving Jews. . . . This is no hypothetical situation and the dialogue style gives no warrant for the belief that Paul does not address himself to a real situation in Rome where current anti-Judaism was threatening the unity of the church. Paul's carefully constructed conclusion in 11:30-32, his exhortations in 12:1f and in 14-15 support this interpretation of ch 11. An even clearer indication in support of the above is the concluding scripturally substantiated imperative in 15:7f. . . . In view of the direct connection of 15:7f with 14:1f, it is clear that the division between the weak and the strong is one along Jew-Gentile lines and it is then easy to read back via 12:3 and to relate 9-11 with 4:16f and 6:11f to a particular set of circumstances in the Christian community in Rome." "Romans III as a Key to the Structure and Thought of the Letter," first published in *Novum Testamentum* 23 (1981): 22-40, now in his *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 25-42. Cf. also Ehrensperger, *That We May Be Mutually Encouraged*, 181ff.

52. It is worth noting here that whereas in Levinas to encounter the other has a transcendent dimension open to the wholly Other, in Paul this transcendent dimension is found in the encounter with Christ. This is a difference between Levinas the Jewish philosopher and Paul the Jewish Apostle, which nevertheless does not set them in contradiction to each other as e.g. Mt 25:31ff. demonstrates.

53. As Martin Buber has formulated, "... event and word are definitively located among the people, in history, in the world. What transpires does not transpire in a separate space between God and the individual; through the latter the word passes to the people, who are to hear and translate it into reality. . . ." "Toward a New German Translation of the Scriptures" now in *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation*, ed. Peter Ochs (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 334-57.

54. Cf. W. S. Campbell, "The Rule of Faith in Romans 12:1-15:13," *Pauline Theology: Vol. III, Romans*, ed. Hay and Johnson, 259-86.

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