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to his legacy—"The Legacy of Martin Buber," in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 22, no. 1 (November 1966): 3–17. As a brief look at the index of *Renewing* will show, Buber continues to influence the more mature Borowitz throughout his more recent work. Other substantive discussions of Buber occur in "The Autonomous Self and the Commanding Community," 45–48, and in *A Layman's Introduction to Religious Existentialism* (chapter 7).

6. Borowitz, *Renewing*, 273.
7. David Novak, "Is the Covenant a Bilateral Relationship? A Response to Eugene Borowitz' *Renewing the Covenant*," in *Reviewing the Covenant: Eugene B. Borowitz and the Postmodern Renewal of Jewish Theology*, ed. Peter Ochs (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 82.
8. Borowitz, *Renewing*, 273

Naaseh V'Nishma:
For Rabbi Eugene B. Borowitz

Jonathan Crane

President Ellenson, Distinguished Faculty, Amazing Staff, my future colleagues, and, of course, my highly esteemed teacher Rabbi Borowitz:

I am humbled and privileged to participate in this celebration for Rabbi Borowitz. When asked if I would speak, I jumped at the opportunity. When I began to think about what this might entail, intimidation and trepidation crept in. This fear soon dissipated when I remembered that this was for Rabbi Borowitz—the mensch who pulled me aside one day when I was feeling especially blue and, in his masterful Buberian way, helped me recognize my own Thou and regain composure. He is the theologian who showed no offense when I interpreted his covenantal theology in class through cartoons from *Calvin and Hobbes*. He is the scholar who advised my rabbinic thesis and helped me to understand the rabbinic rationales

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mipnei darchei shalom and *mipnei eivah* as more complex than mere humanistic universalism in Hebrew guise. And like for so many other students of his, he is the consummate teacher who has kept tabs on my whereabouts through the years and never forgets to prod me with a provocative question that awakens me to new insights about Judaism and modern Jewry.

This fete is for you, Rabbi Borowitz, who for more than half a century have encouraged Jews to revisit our theologies. You have challenged old ways of understanding this thing called God and our relationships with God. And, it can be said that your historic contribution is the call for a renewed covenantal theology. It was a call that brought new energy to modern theological discourse and has shaped two if not three generations of Jewish leaders and communities.

You are humble enough to acknowledge that your call for covenantal theology is not a radical one. Your work reveals an intimate knowledge of and care for the evolution and digressions of Jewish theology. Even the title of your masterpiece, *Renewing the Covenant*, suggests that covenantal theology is different from previous and contemporary Jewish theologies only by degree and not by kind. Ever the rabbis' rabbi, you rightfully situate yourself in a long line of Jewish thinkers contemplating the contours of b'rit. Theology, you say, is nothing to be afraid of. Everyone should embrace it, wrestle with it, and understand themselves ever engaged with it no matter how ungodly one might feel oneself to be in a particular moment. For you, theology is no mere contemplative matter; it is a way of being.

Inspired and encouraged by you, I turned to further academic studies at the University of Toronto. There I explored modern Jewish thought and ethics under the careful tutelage of David Novak and Robert Gibbs. For them I produced a dissertation in which I examine the rhetoric of modern Jewish ethical arguments. My project develops a new methodology combining theology and discourse analysis to understand how and why Jewish ethicists argue as they do. These two dimensions enable the student of Jewish ethics to predict how a Jewish ethicist will construct an actual argument on a practical subject and explain why this is so.

Briefly put, discourse analysis, drawing from Aristotle and modern scholars of rhetoric such as Chaim Perelman, Jurgen Habermas, Stephen Toulmin, and Paul Ricouer, focuses on three elements

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found in most every moment of communication: a speaker, a content spoken, and an audience. My focus on normative speech—specifically ethics—sees behind these elements claims of authority, reason, and autonomy—claims that mingle in all ethical discourse and need to be teased apart.

I then dissect theories of covenant as they are found throughout the Judaic textual tradition, from the multiple versions in the Tanach through the rabbis and medievalists to the early moderns through to Emmanuel Levinas. In each historical layer, I demonstrate that Jews have long wrestled with this notion of *b'rit*, and at no time has there been consensus about who is the rightful authority in this relationship, what are proper modes of reasoning to communicate this relationship's duties, and what this relationship's boundaries of autonomy are. That said, modern Jewish ethicists, I argue, each work with a conceptualization of covenant that draws on these prior theories. And moreover, these modern scholars' conceptualizations of covenant articulate their understanding of rightful authority, proper reasoning, and preferred autonomy when it comes to wrestling with the messiness of contemporary moral dilemmas. By tracing a scholar's theory of covenant I then can accurately map out how and why that scholar will argue a practical ethical issue.

Rabbi Borowitz's work sits most prominently in the chapter that applies this twofold methodology to three prominent Jewish ethicists. Alongside Elliot Dorff and J. David Bleich, I analyze Borowitz's theory of covenant so as to produce a map that anticipates how he will argue a particular ethical issue. I then examine his actual arguments on this particular issue. For purposes of comparison, I chose something that all three ethicists have written on, which is the issue of care for the end of life, specifically euthanasia.

To illustrate, according to my discourse-analysis reading, Borowitz's theory of covenant situates the historicized Jewish self as the rightful speaker of the covenantal relationship with God, and the content of this relationship boils down to self-discipline, and the audience—the rest of the Jewish community—is present though not particularly overbearing. This focus on the individual human speaker of the covenant orients him to be concerned about personal decision-making, truthfulness, and integrity. From this it is possible to anticipate his normative language will be expressed

primarily in first-person narratives walking us through his moral deliberations.

Thankfully for my project, there is a strong correlation between the anticipated arguments I derive from the scholars' theories of covenant and their actual arguments. Focusing on theories of covenant thus enables me to juxtapose scholars who otherwise would not be found conversing about Jewish norms; that is, I show that the discipline of Jewish ethics is broader than some might assume. By using discourse analysis on their theories of covenant, I uncover why an ethicist will say what he says. And by using discourse analysis on their actual arguments, I demonstrate how an ethicist goes about making his argument. In sum, my project shows both how and why Jewish ethicists argue as they do.

I suppose this project demonstrates Borowitz's claim that we postmoderns and post-postmoderns need not be so afraid of theology. Borowitz, alongside Jeffrey Stout and other theorists of religious ethics, asserts that our theologies may in fact provide more solid grounding for our ethical impulses and arguments than we would have liked to acknowledge. This observation is as true for our private lives as for our public ones.

So this leads me to my question for my beloved teacher, Rabbi Borowitz. You spent several decades exploring and developing method, specifically theological methodology. No doubt your contributions to this field can be felt throughout modern Jewry and even among many Christian theologians. Your focus on method has kept you aloft in the arena of meta-ethics, and for this we are all beneficiaries of your clear and provocative thinking.

Curiously, you have rarely offered concrete ethical guidance on pressing practical issues. This may be because you seldom consider yourself a political activist per se. You have long encouraged those of us who have been politically active to be Jewishly sophisticated in our method, thinking, and acting. On the other hand, when you have written about ethics, on the whole you have focused less on actual ethical duties and more on the virtues of ethicality, such as *menschlichkeit*, *tzimtzum*, and *azut panim*. Indeed, you've published several volumes on the virtues. It is this curious distance from clarifying actual duties that surprises me, especially as you have long championed the call for modern liberal Jews to go about the business of elucidating Jewishly informed duties—that is, the

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real things we should and should not do. Maybe this reticence is because your postmodernist perspective views the task of making practical norms as too akin to rendering halachic decisions, which would undermine the individualism you desire.

Or perhaps this tendency toward the virtues is because of your concern about and fascination with integrity. A central aspect of integrity is being true to one's self-conceptualization and communicating this self-understanding with honesty. Such truthfulness requires *being* virtuous, I agree. But does it not also require doing the virtuous? You offer much scholarship on the former, less on the latter.

Among the many things the phrase *naaseh v'nishma*—a phrase we read in this week's *parashah*¹—means, it could mean that adhering to the covenant requires both hearkening to it—that is, thinking about it—as well as enacting it. Both action and thought are necessary to fulfill the *b'rit* Moses presents to the people. Both theory and practice are ineluctable for this relationship to exist and thrive. The question is: are both equally necessary? One could argue that according to last week's and this week's *parashiyot*, action is primary since the people repeat *naaseh* but not *nishma* when acceding to the covenant.²

If this is so, how might you explain your relative preference for *nishma*, for hearing and contemplating this covenantal relationship? Is it reasonable to focus more on one covenantal dimension, say the vertical one between Jews and God, without simultaneously spending as much energy on the other, horizontal dimension of actual interactions among Jews, gentiles, and the world generally? Can one rightfully conceive of a theology without simultaneously enacting practical ethics, and vice versa? And, finally, where might the virtues be found in *naaseh v'nishma*?

These questions are not to put you on the spot or to ask for apologetics. Rather, I would like to learn more from you about how to understand the critical interrelationship between theology and practical ethics, between theory and action, between hearing and doing.

Notes

1. Exod. 24:7.
2. Exod. 24:3.