Chapter 4 contains a detailed analysis and a graphic representation of the evidence provided in chapters 2 and 3. It also includes a discussion of the distribution of archives and libraries and a description of their owners. An index of personal names, professions, modern equivalents of professions, ancient city names, and modern site names has been provided. There is no bibliography, but extensive footnotes throughout the work provide all necessary bibliographical references.

Despite the problems, Pedersén's work represents an invaluable response to the need for the consolidation of archaeological evidence for textual collections in the Ancient Near East. Moreover, this work will prove a vital tool of reference for any research on the development of Ancient Near Eastern writing, education, literacy, and intellectual life. But most of all, Pedersén provides future researchers with the impetus for much needed comparative work between different textual collections within the Ancient Near East.

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Past Imperatives: Studies in the History and Theory of Jewish Ethics. **By Louis E. Newman. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998. ISBN 0-7914-3867-8. Pp. 238.**

As Louis E. Newman himself remarks in his study *Past Imperatives: Studies in the History and Theory of Jewish Ethics*, the burgeoning interest in and proliferation of constructive works of Jewish ethics and morality has created a bewildering diversity of material whose "implications have generally not been fully appreciated" (3). Newman offers his own guide to this sea of data, suggesting that he is not writing a Jewish ethic himself, but is writing *about* it. This critical and analytic stance supports the often insightful and usually informative contributions that he makes to this subject. Newman's distinction between applied ethics (which looks at specific moral decisions) and metaethical questions (which focus on such issues as the relationship of Jewish law or Jewish theology to Jewish ethics) is a helpful one. While Jewish law, *halakha*, is central in any Jewish ethical system, differences between any two thinkers may have two very different sources: on the one hand, two moralists may agree on the function of a Jewish legal principle but disagree on its application; on the other hand, they may agree, perhaps, on a particular moral choice, but do so because of very different evaluations of Jewish law.

Newman focuses on both types of concerns. He points to differences in specific choices in connection with questions of euthanasia (161–83) and in bioethics (185–203). In these cases he looks at how major Jewish thinkers from Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform positions come to their moral decisions. He recognizes that general principles such as "respect for life" and "noninterference" in the natural world tend to be vague and uneasily open to diverse

interpretations. He provides social and historical information to help readers understand the reasoning by which different Jewish thinkers make their choices. He shows a keen sense of historical motivations at play in ethical reflections when he remarks that the responses of Orthodox Jewish moralists reflect and anxiety "to maintain the moral authority and comprehensiveness of the *halakha*" and that those of liberals are based on a desire "to show that there are extra-*halakhic* moral standards" (42).

Newman also focuses on metaethical issues such as the relationship between law and ethics or theology and ethics. His most extended discussions centre on the concept of covenant, an idea rooted in the Hebrew Bible, but which, as he notes, is far more complex than most biblical theologians suggest (79). The concept comes into play when looking at whether Jewish ethics affirms or rejects an idea of natural law. Newman recognizes that theologians on both sides of this issue have some evidence to support them. He opts, instead, for a more cautious stance by conceding "that God's revelation to Israel and the covenant that it establishes are, indeed, the primary locus of moral/legal norms in Judaism without granting the extreme position" that would exclude any natural law outside of that particular covenant (123). He usefully suggests three distinctive ways of understanding Jewish ethics as covenant reflecting different visions of Jewish morality (139–58). This typology offers a helpful set of categories by which to understand the controversies between Jewish moral thinkers.

These strengths derive from the analytical distance Newman cultivates in his approach. The book's weakest points are those at which he abandons this perspective and writes as an insider. He announces that he hopes not merely to offer an analysis of Jewish ethics, but to provide an indication of how Jewish ethicists might appropriate their ethical/religious tradition "more critically" (1). This substantive aim leads him to appear rather defensive when arguing for the place of mercy in "the Judaic tradition" (99) despite realizing, in other places, that there is no such thing as *the* Judaic tradition (183). At times he even slips into a confessional mode to announce such claims as the following: "As liberal Jews, our moral vision can only be as certain as our experience of God" (158). Because, as he admits, that experience is tentative, so too, he suggests, moral choices must be held with a sense of modesty and diffidence. This is certainly a laudable approach, but it is more that of a participant in the ongoing discussion of Jewish ethics than that of the impartial observer.

The most problematic aspect of this tendency comes in his implicit identification of Jewish moral texts with rabbinic *halakhic* texts. Even when citing medieval Jewish philosophers, Newman places them within the context of explicating a *halakhic* norm. The book draws very little upon the vast reservoir of moral reflection found in medieval pietism, in the later Lurianic Kabbalah (mysticism), and in the self-styled moral teachings of the Musar Movement begun by the nineteenth-century teacher Israel Salanter. This lack reveals a methodological problem. Newman takes great pains to analyze what is meant by "ethics"; he takes less time to analyze the modifying adjective "Jewish." He implies, probably correctly, that the term must be understood textually: an

ethic is Jewish if it makes references to basic Jewish texts. Yet by restricting those texts to one subgenre, that of rabbinic *halakha*, Newman is perpetuating a narrowness of view that his book often deplores. A Jewish ethic might well be understood more broadly as any moral system that identifies its principles and conclusions with texts honoured in the Jewish past or present. A Jewish system of moral reflection based on pietistic writings would, thus, be as much inalienably Jewish as one based on the classic Jewish legal works of the Talmud and the writings of medieval rabbis. As I have suggested in several of my own writings (*A New Jewish Ethic*, 1983; *Covenant and Community in Modern Judaism*, 1989; and *Toward a Jewish (M)Orality*, 1998), none of which Newman cites, a contemporary Jewish ethical system may use the techniques of the tradition to create an entirely new edifice.

Despite this assumption of some inherently fundamental Judaic morality, Newman's book shows a clear and accurate understanding of the current state of Jewish moral reflection, particularly in North America. His work should be a point of departure for those who seek an academic, rather than parochial, vision of the significance of the recent flurry of ethical writing by Jewish thinkers and scholars.

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The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide. **By Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. ISBN 0-8006-3123-4. Pp. 642.**

Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz's *The Historical Jesus* (*Der historische Jesus. Ein Lehrbuch*, 1996) fully justifies its English subtitle. It is comprehensive in its clear, intelligent treatment of every important source, topic, and interpretive option in modern Historical Jesus Research (HJR). It is, moreover, a guide that will be useful to many classes of reader. For those of us who teach HJR, the book is not only a marvellous resource, it is also a deliberate challenge to more varied and appropriate pedagogies. For advanced students, the work is not only an ideal syllabus (e.g., for comprehensive examinations), it is also constantly and candidly suggestive (e.g., for seminar or even dissertation topics) without ever appearing opinionated.

The purpose of the work is to inform readers of the content of HJR and to initiate them into the scholarly process. The senior author, Gerd Theissen (Professor of New Testament at the University of Heidelberg), is easily the German New Testament scholar who is best known and most influential in North America today. Readers acquainted with his prior work will discern his interests and voice—there is no pretence of Olympian detachment—but will also recognize the restraint and balance of an author who knows his personal views are well represented elsewhere. We are told that "Annette Merz wrote