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A Journal of Jewish Ethics

The story of this journal begins in January 2002, at the annual meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics (SCE) in Pittsburgh. A small group of scholars interested in Jewish ethics attended that conference, as we had been doing for some years. Ron Green called us together to discuss how we might further the work of Jewish ethics in collaboration with the SCE and prompted us to think about creating a sister society. By the time that meeting ended, we had resolved to launch the Society of Jewish Ethics. Louis became its first president—undoubtedly because he was the only person in our small group who did not absolutely refuse! Laurie Zoloth was our first vice president, and Ron himself agreed to be the secretary-treasurer. Our first formal meeting one year later featured a paper by Jonathan K. Crane,

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then a young rabbinical student, and a keynote address by Eugene B. Borowitz entitled, "Our Shifting/Stable Task: From 'Choosing a Sex Ethic' to Today."

How far we have come in a little over a decade! Today the Society of Jewish Ethics (SJE) has become the primary venue for presenting scholarly work in the field. Alongside the SCE and the more recently established Society for the Study of Muslim Ethics, the SJE offers opportunities for ongoing, active dialogue with colleagues who study the ethics of these religious traditions. We hold joint sessions, respond to one another's papers, and collaborate in the programming of our annual meetings. Dozens of graduate students have attended our annual conferences, presented their work, and been mentored by more established scholars in the field. For many of us, the SJE has become our primary academic home, where we explore new ways of thinking about ethics, engage in vigorous intellectual debate, study texts together, and deepen our bonds of collegiality and friendship. During the same period, graduate programs in Jewish ethics have been launched and major works, most notably the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Jewish Ethics and Morality*, have appeared. We could hardly have imagined back in 2002 just how much intellectual vitality would be generated in and through the SJE.

Yet, at its root, the society's purpose today remains much as it was in those early years. In a letter of invitation to our first formal meeting, sent to colleagues in the fall of 2002, Louis wrote:

In recent years, work in Jewish ethics has expanded dramatically, and in many directions. This includes Jewish discussions of biomedical issues, especially of cutting-edge work in genetic engineering and stem cell research; contributions to Jewish ethical theory that draw on continental and post-modern thought, especially that of Levinas; historical studies probing the relationship between Jewish ethics and both law and theology; explorations of the place of Jewish ethical discourse in public policy debates, especially in issues of health care policy; and critical reflections on methodological issues in Jewish ethics.¹

Until now, however, there has never been a single academic society within which these various scholarly endeavors could find a common home and benefit from dialogue and cross-fertilization.

The Society of Jewish Ethics is intended to provide a context in which we can pursue these various and intersecting scholarly projects, learn from one another, and share our work with a wider audience.

This journal, then, represents the fruit of many years of collective work. As the official organ of the SJE, it will be the natural venue for publishing papers given at the society's annual meeting. But our hope is that it will extend the scope of Jewish ethics well beyond the roster of SJE members. Our goal is not merely to showcase the work of our colleagues, important as that is. It is also to increase the quantity and enhance the quality of that work through a rigorous process of peer review. Even as the number of scholars working on both theoretical and applied issues in Jewish ethics has multiplied over the past ten to fifteen years, we believe that there is still significant potential for exciting new work to emerge and for that work to reach a broader audience beyond the SJE's membership.

Moreover, as the field of Jewish ethics continues to be in dialogue with work that draws on other religious and philosophical traditions, we expect that the pages of this journal will reflect this diversity of voices and perspectives. It is our hope, then, that the academic study of Jewish ethics, which only recently has begun to come into its own, will take its place alongside the work of Jewish historians, literary scholars, sociologists, and others as an integral part of the landscape of Jewish studies.

For all these reasons, we believe that the time is right for Jewish ethics to have its own dedicated journal. Such ventures, of course, are risky, and success is never guaranteed. But then so too was the decision twelve years ago to create a Society of Jewish Ethics. We launch this journal with the hope and expectation that it, likewise, will become a forum (both in print and digitally) where current work is shared, conversations are facilitated, and new work is fostered. We wish for this publication to be *the* place where scholars will find the most cutting-edge work on Jewish ethics, as well as articles and reviews that illuminate the context for that work. Most of all, we are committed to creating a space where scholars and practitioners, Jews and non-Jews, people of every religious and political persuasion and with the widest range of methodological orientations, meet and engage in lively discourse. Jewish thought is famously hospitable to divergent and even contradictory perspectives on foundational questions; this journal will reflect—and hopefully extend—that legacy of vigorous intellectual debate.

We invite you, our readers, to make it so, through your contributions and your active engagement with the articles that will appear in these pages.

It is surely most appropriate that this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Jewish Ethics* is dedicated to a critical appreciation of the work of Eugene B. Borowitz, who has been a teacher and inspiration to many of us and whose keynote remarks at that first meeting of the SJE set a high bar for all of us who have followed in his footsteps. We hope that in the years to come this enterprise will be a fitting tribute to his creativity, methodological sophistication, and devotion to the work of Jewish ethicists everywhere.

NOTE

1. Were I writing today, I would certainly include work in business ethics, environmental ethics, animal rights, and political ethics, especially in the State of Israel.