



Levinas and Medieval Literature: The "Difficult Reading" of English and Rabbinic Texts

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This collection of essays puts into dialogue the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas with a variety of English and rabbinic writings from the Middle Ages, when literature was regarded as ethical discourse, and reading itself, when rightly performed, was seen as a moral act.

Levinas and Medieval Literature takes the unique approach of connecting Christian allegory, talmudic hermeneutics, and Levinasian interpretation. Levinas's philosophy illuminates what it means to classify medieval texts as profoundly ethical; and the medieval works, in their aurality, fragmentation, and layered narrative structures, provide a crucial context for understanding Levinas's "difficult reading" and his underappreciated aesthetics.

These discussions draw inspiration from Levinas who, as a philosopher and talmudic commentator, continues premodern traditions in a postmodern key. In their view, Levinas's "postmodern" method of reading, his ethical sensibilities, his very language, appear anachronistically medieval. At the same time, they discover that Levinas hyperbolically amplifies the themes with which medieval writings resonate: hospitality, onto(theo)logy, infinity, theodicy, Creation, eros, the maternal, the Face, substitution, and pardon. They find in medieval interpretive practices the very concerns with ethical reading that powerfully engaged Levinas.

Encountered dialogically, these mutual themes and concerns of the medievals and Levinas inform and transform our sense of intellectual history.

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