

David Newheiser, "Derrida, Jacques. I. Derrida and Jewishness," *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception, Volume 6*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013.

Although Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) maintained careful distance from what he calls "the religions of the book," he frequently discusses biblical texts, often at length. As he explains in the autobiographical asides that pepper his later work, the central concerns of his work were shaped by his experience as a French boy born to Jewish parents in Algeria - in his own words, "a little black and very Arab Jew" (1993: 58)

The complexity of this heritage is characteristic of what Derrida calls "deconstruction," a term he uses to refer both to the tensions internal to texts and institutions, which entail that they remain open to multiple meanings, and to practices of interpretation that attend to this instability. Reflecting upon his own circumcision, Derrida suggests that it exemplifies the condition of being marked by a unchosen heritage which therefore cannot be relinquished; it represents, he says, "the exemplary counterscar that we have to learn to read without seeing" (1993: 120). In place of polemic, this approach works within particular texts in order to show the space they afford a range of readings.

This pattern is apparent in the interpretation of hope that informs the ethical thrust of his work. Derrida draws upon Abrahamic messianism to describe a form of hospitality to difference which takes the form of "a waiting without horizon of expectation" (2006: 211); and yet, since religious traditions specify what is to come, he insists that that "asceticism strips the messianic hope of all biblical forms" (ibid. 211). Because his ethics aims at undetermined openness, Derrida resists the ultimacy frequently claimed by religious traditions, and yet he suggests, using a biblical trope, that this apparent disavowal may represent a form of fidelity: "Our faith is not assured, because faith can never be....We share with Abraham what cannot be shared, a secret we know nothing about, neither him nor us" (1995: 80).

J. Derrida, "Circumfession" in *Jacques Derrida* (G. Bennington/J. Derrida; Chicago 1993) 3-316; trans. of id., "Circonfession" in *Jacques Derrida* (G. Bennington/J. Derrida; Paris 1991).

Id., *The Gift of Death* (Chicago 1995); trans. of id., *Donner la mort*, (Paris 1993).

Id., *Specters of Marx* (New York 2006); trans. of id., *Spectres de Marx* (Paris 1993).