



Michah Gottlieb, Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought
Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought by Gottlieb, Michah
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The final section explores the pursuit of human perfection in ancient Judaism and the connection between this pursuit and authority. Najman opens with an essay on Philo's typological understanding of the character traits of Cain and Abel (chap. 11). The next chapter addresses exemplary figures and paths to perfection in Philo and 4 Ezra (chap. 12). In the following essay (chap. 13), Najman argues that the authorial self-effacement in pseudepigraphy should not be regarded as an obstacle to discerning the context of its composition. Rather, the ways in which later authors craft exemplary figures from the past into models for emulation and imitation potentially offer incredible insight into the intellectual and spiritual world of the later writers. The final essay (chap. 14) continues this line of investigation by exploring the intertwined nature of exemplary figures and authoritative texts in Philo in the broader setting of Philo's attempts to frame Judaism in the context of Hellenistic culture.

My brief summaries of the essays in this volume only begin to explore the richness of each individual essay and the impact of the volume as a whole. These essays reflect the work of a creative thinker at the forefront of repositioning long-standing scholarly conversations and disciplinary boundaries. Najman demonstrates an exemplary ability to move from philology to philosophy in ways that enrich her study of the relevant texts. Her nuanced and judicious placement of Philo in the broader setting of Second Temple Judaism alongside such works as Jubilees and 4 Ezra is especially welcome.

The collection of these essays in a single volume has its benefits and drawbacks. Most importantly, this volume brings together for readers a set of thoughtful essays that track Najman's thinking and rethinking of many critical issues in the study of ancient Judaism. There is, unfortunately, a significant amount of repetition (in some cases verbatim) that could have been reduced to make the volume cohere better. Moreover, some of the earlier essays could be enriched by references to relevant discussions in Najman's later publications. Similarly, bibliographic references in early publications are in need of updating (e.g., on "rewritten Bible" [67 n. 53; cf. 189 n. 1], the fluidity of the scriptural text [73 n. 1], and authoritative scripture in the Dead Sea Scrolls [127 n. 17]). These minor drawbacks should not detract from the overall worth of this volume. I have enjoyed reading and rereading these essays, and I similarly recommend the book to all students and scholars of ancient Judaism.

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GOTTLIEB, MICHAH. *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. xi+209 pp. \$55.00 (cloth).

Moses Mendelssohn is a figure of unparalleled importance for understanding modern Judaism. He is indeed the godfather of what should rightly be called "Jewish Protestantism." During his lifetime, Mendelssohn was already the icon of the Jewish Enlightenment. His translation of the Bible was reproduced in numerous editions in the nineteenth century, and it became *the* essential text in the library of so-called liberal Jews. According to an apparently true anecdote, after his migration from Germany to Baltimore, the prominent mid-nineteenth-century reform Rabbi David Einhorn (1809–79) objected to changing the language of prayer in Reform American temples from German to English, claiming that without proper knowledge of German, American-Jewish children "will not have access to the most precious Jewish works" (223), meaning, they would not have access to Mendelssohn's translation (Heinz Mosche Graupe, *Die Entstehung des modernen Judentums: Geistesgeschichte der deutschen Juden, 1650–1942* [Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 1977], chap. 15). It seems that, for Einhorn, the translation of Moses (Mendelssohn) was even more important than the original Hebrew Book of Moses.

The Journal of Religion

Unsurprisingly, the fate and evaluation of Mendelssohn's personality and work have been closely tied with the fate and evaluation of Protestant Judaism. For his followers, he was nothing short of a Second Moses (or perhaps, Third Moses, if Maimonides is to be counted as well), yet many of his contemporary observant Jews considered him a collaborator with the oppression and marginalization of Jews by the German authorities and society. This charge is not groundless, because Mendelssohn as a genuine *Aufklärer* believed in the hierarchy of cultures and on numerous occasions, especially in his apologies for the Jews, disclosed a sense of shame and inferiority resulting from internalization of common European racist stereotypes.

Mendelssohn, to my mind, was a tragic hero, and I believe that in all likelihood he would have seen himself as such, had he had the opportunity to gaze into the future. Michah Gottlieb, the author of the current book, has a far more charitable attitude toward Mendelssohn, and one can easily see his identification with Mendelssohn's views and cultural politics. Gottlieb's book is clear, engaging, systematic, and sophisticated. His grounding in both Jewish learning and modern philosophy is deep, and the result is an outstanding analysis of Mendelssohn's philosophical and political thought. The four chapters of the book discuss, in the following sequence: Mendelssohn's upbringing and early engagement with Spinoza's philosophy (chap. 1), Mendelssohn's philosophy of Judaism (chap. 2), the outburst of the *Pantheismusstreit* in the 1780s and Jacobi's critique of Mendelssohn's enlightened religion (chap. 3), and, finally, Mendelssohn's response to what he considered Jacobi's irrationalism (chap. 4).

A central theme of the book is scrutiny of Mendelssohn's attitude toward Spinoza and, to a lesser extent, Maimonides. Gottlieb portrays a nuanced and, to my mind, precise picture of Mendelssohn's approach toward these two key figures. Yet, in spite of my agreement with all the book's factual claims, I diverge from the author on certain key value judgments, and in regard to the motivation for Mendelssohn's position. Where Gottlieb suggests that Mendelssohn's critique of Spinoza's (and Maimonides's) antihumanism is grounded in an alleged general *Jewish* perception of humanity as the "crowning purpose of creation" (17), I contend that on this issue Mendelssohn imposes Protestant Christian humanism, since Rabbinic tradition has been sharply divided on the question of the value of humanity. Gottlieb considers Mendelssohn's critique of Maimonides's (and Spinoza's) naturalism regarding afterlife and miracles an attempt to defend traditional Jewish perceptions (19), but I suspect that Mendelssohn was far more motivated by an attempt to generate a decent bourgeois Jewish Protestant religion that would help "cleanse" the Jews of both heresy and superstition. I will leave it to the reader to decide whether there is such a space—cleansed of both heresy and superstition—but let me just note that superstition does not cease to be superstition even if it is wholeheartedly accepted by the "enlightened" bourgeoisie.

One of the important achievements of Gottlieb's book is its success in clarifying the political dimensions of the *Pantheismusstreit*, and especially in elucidating Mendelssohn's rationalist motivation for defending Frederick the Great's enlightened despotism (83–84). Gottlieb masterfully points out the subtleties of Mendelssohn's thinking on this issue in a manner that is both nuanced and lucid. Indeed, on the back cover of the book, Warren Zev Harvey aptly observes that, following Gottlieb's monograph, "Mendelssohn emerges as an original and significant theo-political philosopher." Gottlieb is careful in avoiding reading the present into the past, yet both his preface and conclusion stress the timeliness of his book. The questions of the cultural and religious identity of Europe have intensified significantly over the past decade, and there are striking analogies between current European Islamophobia and late eighteenth-century discourse about the entry of Jews into European

society, but this sensitive nerve deserves a far more extensive discussion that cannot be carried out here.

Another impressive aspect of the book is its treatment of Mendelssohn's and Jacobi's philosophies as important chapters in the history of modern philosophy. In the third and fourth chapters, Gottlieb carefully examines the views of each figure, attempts to motivate their positions, and points out mutual lacunae and blind spots. These chapters are written as classical pieces of history of philosophy.

Gottlieb's excellent book is an important scholarly achievement that should justly claim an honorary place in the scholarship of modern Jewish and European philosophy.

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BONTAS, ALIN. *Franz Rosenzweig's Rational Subjective System: The Redemptive Turning Point in Philosophy and Theology*. New York: Peter Lang, 2011. xviii+324 pp. \$88.95 (cloth).

Reading and understanding Alin Bontas's *Franz Rosenzweig's Rational Subjective System* is not an easy task even for someone used to reading Rosenzweig and Rosenzweig commentaries. As is appropriate to a book that professes to explain the entire system inherent in *The Star of Redemption* (*Der Stern der Erlösung* [Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976]), Bontas discusses all of Rosenzweig's literary sources, and Bontas's "all" is more inclusive than the books of anyone else I have read about *The Star*, including a wide variety of publications in both Europe and North America. The data for analysis minimally must include every author whom Rosenzweig cites in *The Star*, notably (in Jewish philosophy and theology) Hermann Cohen and Benedict Spinoza, as well as (in German philosophy) Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and Karl Leonhard, as well as (in German Christian theology) Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, and Arthur Schopenhauer. But the list of influences is clearly broader than the transparent sources. Moses Maimonides and Judah Halevi are both clearly major influences on Rosenzweig's Jewish thinking. Furthermore, an adequate appraisal of *The Star* for its own time period and beyond in western European culture should include at least some consideration of both Martin Heidegger in Germany, Emmanuel Levinas in France, and (last but not least) Rosenzweig's colleague in German-Jewish theology-philosophy, Martin Buber.

What is distinctive about Bontas's reading is the emphasis he places on seeing *The Star* first and foremost as system construction in a German tradition of thinking about system that goes back through Hegel and Schelling to Kant and beyond Kant to Plato and Aristotle. In this respect, there is at least one other work whose task is similar to that of Bontas. That is Benjamin Pollock's, and it is surprising in a study as thorough as Bontas's that he missed Pollack. However, Pollack's discussion of system is historically limited almost exclusively to the influence of Schelling, and in this respect at least, Bontas's study of Rosenzweig's system is richer, or at least it seems to be to me. I say "seems to be" because I think I understood what Pollack was saying, but I have frighteningly little idea of what Bontas's thesis is, which brings me back to my opening remark about the difficulty of this book.

Not only does Bontas use all of the above sources, but he assumes specific interpretations of many of them, and in most cases he explains neither the contemporary commentators that he used to interpret Rosenzweig's sources nor Rosenzweig's sources themselves. This is particularly the case with Kant scholarship. Bontas's book is primarily a close reading of the entire *Star* that follows the literary structure in