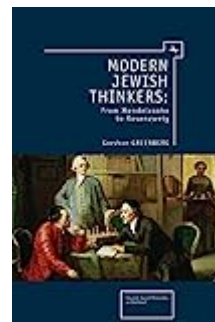


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Gershon Greenberg. *Modern Jewish Thinkers: From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig.* Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2011. 496 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-936235-31-5; \$33.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-936235-46-9.



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Published on H-Judaic (February, 2012)

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Anthology for the Cognoscenti

In his *Modern Jewish Thinkers: From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig*, Gershon Greenberg performs yeoman service on a number of fronts. He makes available, for the first time, a wide variety of philosophical texts from the western European Jewish tradition previously available only to advanced students and scholars. He provides much longer selections of about fifteen Jewish thinkers who are available elsewhere, but only in snippets and in out-of-print volumes. He provides translations of a number of thinkers, who, to the best of my knowledge, are available only in their original languages (Hebrew and German). He translates a number of thinkers whose major works may be known, but whose range of thought is greater than usually supposed. Finally, and I do not recall another anthology that hits upon this practice, Greenberg concisely summarizes the relevant parts of most works when he has not provided a complete translation, obviating a perennial problem of anthologies: presenting a part for the whole that does not yield a sense of the overall work. (Take, for example, pp. 91-92, which offers a superb chapter-by-chapter précis of

Nachman Krochmal's *Guide to the Perplexed of Our Time* [Hebrew, 1851].)

Along with his own translations (Greenberg sensibly includes standard translations of Mendelssohn and Rosenzweig by Allan Arkush and Barbara Galli, respectively) he provides useful and accurate descriptions of each thinker, as well as thinkers whose works are readily available in English and therefore not reproduced here. (Greenberg might have made that procedure more explicit—as one goes through five main divisions, the reader must thumb forward to see which figures' writings actually get included and which only get introduced.) *Modern Jewish Thinkers* deserves special praise for including a range of Italian thinkers (e.g., Isaac Reggio, Elia Benamozegh, Shimon David Luzzato) who surely deserve more credit than they have received in the modernization project of European Jewry. His notes to the secondary literature are copious, up to date, and consistently well chosen.

The structure of the five major chapters of *Mod-*

ern Jewish Thinkers follows philosophical categories that Greenberg considers central to intellectual developments in this era: 1) Dialectical truth, 2) Intellection and developing consciousness, 3) Heteronomous revelation, 4) History and 5) Universal morality. Each of these categories is explained and capably defended. Greenberg knows the scholarship very well, characterizes it fairly, and possesses a flair for helpful summary, as the following thumbnail sketch indicates:

There were three salient historical approaches taken by scholars. That of Isaak Marcus Jost focused on positive interrelations between respective national surrounding in order to justify present governmental openness to Jews living under emancipation, and that represented by Abraham Geiger focused on the inner history of Israel's unique religious genius, which needed to be preserved amid current changes. The existence of this quality meant that no particular phase of Israel's religious development was binding on any other—such that Israel was naturally open to the new stage of emancipation. The third, that represented by Heinrich Graetz, brought these two approaches together. Considered from without Israel's history of interrelations was one of suffering. Considered from within, the national soul had developed a rich religious culture. Taken together, the meant that Israel's national self-identity was demonstrably strong enough to persist amid the great transition of the present. (p. 19)

Within each category, Greenberg proceeds chronologically, with due attention to selections made elsewhere in the volume. For instance, his decision to translate Samuel David Luzzatto's critique of Spinoza works well since Greenberg introduced Spinoza earlier. One cannot say that about Luzzatto's *Criticism of Maimonides*, this, however, is a prime example of the sort of text that Greenberg correctly claims is often referred to but rarely read (p. 11). The same might be said of Hermann Cohen's lengthy critique of Moritz Lazarus, a worthy inclusion that also helps restore Lazarus, a now largely forgotten figure for those outside the field of German Jewry. Greenberg's selections reflect a preference for polemical texts (e.g., Saul Ascher, *Eisenmenger the Second* [German, 1794]) and purely philosophical texts (e.g., Samuel Hirsch, *The Systems of Religious Perceptions of Jews* [German, 1842]) over what might be called exegetical, liturgical, or spiritual writings. German-Jewish authors retain their centrality in Greenberg's canon, with Samuel Hirsch, Salomon Formstecher, and Salomon Steinheim occupying considerable space in the overall collection. Presumably, Greenberg allowed philosophi-

cal acuity rather than long-term impact to guide his decisions regarding inclusion and exclusion. Successful anthologizing is partly a matter of having a good eye for illuminating passages—Greenberg possesses this quality, as in his rendering of the following selection from Ascher's *Leviathan* (German, 1792): "Maimonides was inclined to find all of Aristotelian philosophy ion Judaism. Spinoza wanted to upset all revealed religion through Judaism, and Mendelssohn sought to weaken the obtrusiveness of an opponent.... I do not know what good genius encouraged a Maimonides to bring Judaism back to its pure principles. I do not know what evil genius let Spinoza fall away, to the point of transforming Judaism into a nothing. I do not know what indifferent genius led a Mendelssohn to want to overcome his opponent but in fact let himself be overcome" (pp. 303-304).

Occasionally, though notably not in Ascher's case, where Ascher's debt to Immanuel Kant is acknowledged (p. 304), Greenberg tends to make these Jewish thinkers seem more insular than they were: he has chosen works that highlight responses to Christian antisemitism and agreements and disagreements with Jewish predecessors. Perhaps this tendency comes from Greenberg's endorsement of Eliezer Schweid's view that "Jewish thought was struggle with problems which were first raised by Spinoza.... Schweid de-emphasized Kant, Hegel and Schelling and was less interested in abstract theological views than in reflections upon Jewish existence" (p. 28). But a figure such as Moses Hess (and one could add other secular-tending thinkers who do not appear in this volume) seems more influenced by non-Jewish than Jewish intellectual sources, and Heinrich Graetz, though famously antagonistic to fellow historian Heinrich von Treitschke (a sentiment that was reciprocated), deeply imbibed the nationalist historiography of his era, as Greenberg is no doubt aware. Given the book's nearly five hundred pages, it seems churlish to ask for more, yet these thinkers did not develop in either a purely Jewish intellectual milieu (or an anti-antisemitic one) and that fact might have been stressed more forcefully.

Whether teachers of modern Jewish philosophy and thought will prefer this thorough and admirable anthology to the many other anthologies and overviews available, is not for me to say, especially as I have authored one of them (*An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers*, 2nd ed., 2006). I am not too confident regarding any of these works, because the university world currently seems to be in a very presentist mode, privileging immediate relevancy, and in a sometimes very unthinking manner—what is recent is worthwhile, what is not,

is nowhere. Greenberg offers an unapologetic alternative to this approach and the volume might better have borne the title *European Jewish Philosophy in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, though the subtitle, *From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig*, is accurate. Chapter 6, which brings the discussion from Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) to the present in twenty-five pages appears largely as an afterthought, and Greenberg's equation "Toward the Future: Eliezer Schweid" (pp. 485-486) will seem too

narrow for today's temperament. Hasidic thinkers, feminists, Scriptural Reasoners, postmodernists like Levinas have surely entered the discussion for those interested in modern Jewish thought. Greenberg may be disappointed in his aspiration to "reshape the way in which Jewish thinkers of the modern era have been studied in the English-speaking world" (p. 11), but he will reap the sincere thanks of many colleagues for what he has accomplished, present company included.

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Citation: Alan T. Levenson. Review of Greenberg, Gershon, *Modern Jewish Thinkers: From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. February, 2012.

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