



Steven E. Aschheim. *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. xi + 194 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-12223-6.

Eugene R. Sheppard. *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher*. Lebanon: Brandeis University Press, 2007. xi + 191 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-58465-600-5.

Reviewed by Thomas Pegelow Kaplan (Department of History, Davidson College)
Published on H-German (November, 2007)

Reexamining the Role of Exile in the Work and Politics of German-Jewish

For all the intense controversies over Weimar German Jewry's alleged failures, German-Jewish émigré scholars have made a salient impact on a variety of academic disciplines and intellectual cultures in the United States and western Europe. In fact, these scholars' works continue to be crucial reference points in much of today's academic production and debate. A series of new publications and conferences on Hannah Arendt has, for example, marked a veritable "Arendt Renaissance." Left-leaning proponents of Anglo-American cultural studies have readily embraced Max Horkheimer's and Theodor Adorno's projects. In addition, neoconservative figures in the United States such as William Kristol and Antonin Scalia have claimed Leo Strauss's legacy and identified themselves as "Straussians." The German Metzler Verlag is also in the process of publishing an extensive edition of Strauss's writings.[1]

Following comprehensive studies of German-Jewish émigré scholars by authors such as Lewis Coser and Martin Jay, intellectual and cultural historians have started to reexamine these scholars' works and legacy.[2] In an important new contribution, Steven E. Aschheim analyzes the role of German-speaking Zionist intellectuals in Palestine, the remaking of German cultural history by German-Jewish historians in exile, and the canonization of key émigré scholars in Western intellectual culture. Aschheim aims at determining the "dynamics, interconnections, continuities, transformations and problematic sides" of German-Jewish émigré scholars and their works in "greater detail." The author seeks to demonstrate how these émigré scholars' hyphenated identities and experiences shaped their contributions and decisions to take on problems such as the "German-Jewish' dialogue" and the conflicts between Palestinian and Jewish settlers that still occupy us today. The goals of Eugene E. Sheppard's

work on Leo Strauss are, by comparison, more limited. Sheppard seeks to trace Strauss's emergence and development as a political philosopher by relating Strauss's writings to their changing historical and biographical contexts. Sheppard aims at restoring the Jewish facets of Strauss's thought that previously received little scholarly attention. He particularly emphasizes the philosopher's lasting grappling with the problem of *galut* (diaspora), which he deems crucial for any understanding of Strauss's larger oeuvre (pp. 4-6).

The scope and organization of the two studies is directly shaped by the genres in which they first appeared. Aschheim's work is based on three lectures he gave at the University of California, Berkeley, in October 2004. The three interconnected case studies that form the book's chapters closely mirror these lectures. Sheppard's study, in contrast, derives from his dissertation. Underscoring the contextual bend of his study, Sheppard opens with a brief chapter on Jewish orthodoxy in rural Hesse, Zionism, political anti-Semitism, and Hermann Cohn's neo-Kantianism. The subsequent three chapters are devoted to Strauss's career and thought in the Weimar Republic, his European exile until 1937, and his following work in New York.

Sheppard presents the Weimar-era Strauss as a young intellectual deeply concerned with the problems of modern Jewish existence. In his reflections, Strauss turned increasingly to the condition of *galut* both as a lasting feature of a "general state of insecurity" and "intractable and essential for any genuine account of Jewish existence" (p. 18). His refusal to negate exile eventually doomed Strauss's Weimar-era exploration of political Zionism with its inherent rejection of *galut* consciousness. Sheppard locates Strauss among the thinkers of the "renaissance" of German Jewry akin to Franz Rosenzweig, with

whom he shared the inclination to challenge normative assumptions. Strauss's embrace of "political realism" and "intellectual probity" exhibited also a staunchly illiberal orientation that went beyond the critique of Jewish liberal culture by a larger cohort of German-Jewish intellectuals. Sheppard particularly traces the impact of Martin Heidegger's and Carl Schmitt's critique of liberalism on the young Strauss. In his own radical rereading of Thomas Hobbes, Strauss even went as far as faulting the Nazi supporter Schmitt for offering an appraisal of the English thinker that was still too constrained and limited by the "horizon of liberalism" (p. 47).

The rise of Nazism and his mid-1932 departure from Germany had a profound impact on Strauss's scholarly work and politics, but did not prompt him to reassess his anti-liberalism. As Sheppard argues, he remained a critic of Weimar and proposed to critique Nazism "on the basis of principles of the right," including fascism itself (pp. 60-61). Strauss engaged, meanwhile, in a "radical examination of exile and its forgotten virtues" (p. 54). Thinking through medieval Islamic and Jewish Platonic philosophy, Strauss stipulated a lasting homelessness and absence of perfect societies that necessitated an "accommodation" of one's action, speech, and writing. In so doing, he projected conditions of alienation and exile from European Jewry to philosophers. Sheppard describes Strauss's European exile as a transitional period that came to its full fruition during his teaching at New York's New School beginning in 1938. Drawing on premodern thought and stylistic approaches, Strauss engaged in a project that moved from a multilevel writing to a rather cryptic prose of "revealing" the one universal truth "while concealing." In one of the book's strongest passages, Sheppard identifies Strauss's "writing between the lines" as an elitist practice and act of dissent. Accordingly, Strauss sought to introduce "intellectual virtues" of premodern and "illiberal societies" into American academic culture and advocate a "need for circumspection" (p. 81).

Steven Aschheim's exploration of the legacy of German-Jewish scholars also turns to Strauss. Aschheim's Strauss shares salient similarities with a larger community of Weimar Jewish intellectuals and émigrés. Along with eminent thinkers such as Adorno, Arendt, and Walter Benjamin, Strauss was, as Aschheim argues, noticeably extreme, idiosyncratic, and heterodox. Partially due to their Weimar and exile experiences, they continued to engage in projects that highlighted issues of displacement and sought to "remap the cognitive frontiers" (p. 92). It is in this notion of displacement, of being physically and intellectually "beyond the border," that the

author locates a key component in these émigré scholars' ongoing attractiveness for Western intellectual culture. Aschheim acknowledges the profound critique of liberalism and the Enlightenment waged not just by Strauss but various other émigré scholars such as Adorno. Yet, he readily stresses that many of these projects should indeed be seen as attempts to rescue and restore parts of the Enlightenment. In the end, then, the author encourages his readers to keep with the "critical, searching, and humanizing sensibility" of these canonized émigrés (p. 118).

Aschheim sees a similar positive contribution in the writings and activism of German-speaking Zionists in Palestine and German-Jewish émigré historians in the Anglo-American university system. He shows how intellectuals such as Hans Kohn, Martin Buber, and Robert Weltsch, who immigrated to Palestine before the Holocaust, advocated a binational solution to the Arab-Jewish conflict steeped in German-Jewish humanism. For all their confusion, elitism, and naiveté, their "critical and humanizing impulse" as well as "counterconception of nationalism" provides a positive legacy still of use today (p. 43). Thus, Aschheim downplays more recent revisionist interpretations that tie the origins of binationalist thought to "negative" local models and situations in Palestine and question the linear importation of European humanism. In his discussion of the works of émigré historians Peter Gay, Walter Laqueur, George Mosse, and Fritz Stern, Aschheim too detects the "admirable or positive" impact of German *Bildung*, Enlightenment, and humanizing cultural sensibilities (pp. x, 76). In the strongest section of his book, Aschheim shows how this group of scholars remade German cultural and intellectual history in the 1960s in ways shaped by their cultural backgrounds and experiences of exile. With a keen eye on "lived experience" and explicit moral concern, they explored the "role of the irrational" and established a "social history of ideas" that left room for agency (pp. 67, 69). Aschheim brings their work into sharper focus by contrasting it with the rise of a new history of society introduced by German-Gentile historians of the so-called Bielefeld School. Despite apparent overlaps in relying on *Sonderweg* models and critiques of historicist traditions, Aschheim notes a striking lack of dialogue between these two "schools," a non-communication rooted in conflicting epistemologies, group perceptions, and memories. In contrast to canonized émigrés such as Strauss and Arendt, these German-Jewish cultural historians remained marginalized in Germany and again in the rise of the new cultural history in the United States of the 1980s.

Turning to sources, Sheppard's study mainly draws on Strauss's published scholarly texts and correspondences, for instance, with fellow émigrés such as Karl Löwith. In addition to drawing on material in the new collected works edition, Sheppard particularly highlights the importance of lesser-known texts in Weimar-era Jewish publications in which Strauss developed his idiosyncratic Zionist stances. Sheppard was also able to examine the Leo Strauss Papers at the University of Chicago without, however, receiving access to those sections that still remain closed to the scholarly public. Aschheim, by contrast, draws almost exclusively on published material. His book integrates a remarkable selection of texts by German-Jewish émigré scholars and assesses their ongoing reception. Aschheim's use of memoirs by German-Jewish émigré historians that appeared in the last ten years is particularly noteworthy and sheds light on these historians' remaking of German cultural history.[3]

Both studies present an impressive wealth of insights. Yet, in the absence of a conclusion, Aschheim's readers are left to their own devices to systematize and bring together the author's points on the "dynamics, interconnections, continuities, transformations and problematic sides" of the examined German-Jewish legacy (p. 1). I am also left wondering to what extent the author overemphasizes commonalities, for example, in bringing together defenders of the Enlightenment project like Peter Gay and its sharpest critics, such as Leo Strauss, and in so doing, deprives his intriguing work of further complexity. In his study of Strauss, Sheppard develops a strikingly sympathetic position towards the philosopher's hermeneutic strategies, coded writing style, and practices of accommodation. Sheppard goes as far as to detect prominent parallels with conservative writers in Nazi Germany such as Ernst Jünger, who claimed to have engaged in practices of "inner immigration." While there are no simple dividing lines, it is also critical not to overemphasize these non-Jewish authors' sense of alien-

ation and alleged subversion and continue to take their early support for Nazism and ongoing overlap in outlooks on heroism and nationalism into consideration. Finally, Sheppard offers a fascinating alternative reading of the Straussian project. Sheppard maintains that Strauss's exilic politics can also point to social imperfection and address injustices and fragmentation brought about by modern governments. In this sense, Strauss's thinking could evolve into a restored utopian and progressive project. In doing so, Sheppard is in danger of reading current political endeavors into Strauss's works, which the author so skillfully analyzes in their historical contexts. These remarks aside, the two studies offer new ways to ponder the German-Jewish legacy and concepts of exile. Both works further enrich our understanding of these complex cultural and intellectual histories and deserve a broad readership and reception.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); and Heinrich Meyer, ed., *Leo Strauss. Gesammelte Schriften*, 6 vols. (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1996-).

[2]. Lewis A. Coser, *Refugee Scholars in America: Their Impact and Their Experiences* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Martin Jay, *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Heinrich Meyer, *Das theologisch-politische Problem. Zum Thema von Leo Strauss* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2003); and Yfaat Weiss, "Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Bi-Nationalism," *Jewish Social Studies* 11 (1994): 93-117.

[3]. See, for instance, Peter Gay, *My German Question: Growing Up in Nazi Berlin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and George L. Mosse, *Confronting History: A Memoir* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

Citation: Thomas Pegelow Kaplan. Review of Aschheim, Steven E., *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* and Sheppard, Eugene R., *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. November, 2007.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13925>

Copyright © 2007 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.