

## Book Reviews

small example of Unger's many anachronisms. This lack of explanation is not limited to hasidic personalities, but also extends to figures from the non-Jewish world. Thus, one "priest Staszic" (85), probably a mysterious figure to the majority of the readers, is a well-known personality in the history of Polish Enlightenment and Polish-Jewish relations of the early nineteenth century.

It seems to me that the editor was also too restrained in explaining and correcting Unger's historical errors. For example, the son of Berek Joselewicz was not Yosef Joselowicz (139), but Józef Berkowicz; a story about a Jew caught in his tallit and tefillin, accused of collaborating with the enemy army, and executed by Polish soldiers (146) reads like the well-known execution of R. Shapiro in Płock in 1920, and not in Piaseczno in 1831; the Bible Society is confused with the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews (165), etc. Some of Unger's errors are exacerbated by the translation, with confusing results. A slipup produced collectively by Unger and Boyarin is the date of the death of Ya'akov Yizhak of Przysucha (6), which Unger gave as "Sukkot 5574 (1814)" and Boyarin translates as "Sukkot 1814," instead of 1813. The most puzzling mistake is possibly the translation of the Yiddish word *kirhshe* (lit. imperial) as "Austro-Hungarian" (4, 11, 17, etc.). In fact, Austro-Hungary was created forty-six years after the time of the story, so this is a clear anachronism. Another problem with the geography is that many eastern European place names are given inconsistently, either in their Polish version, a transliteration from the Yiddish, or sometimes neither (e.g. Duerenport instead of Dyhernfurth).

Still, my expectation to find a critical, scholarly edition for a mainly academic audience is possibly misdirected. Even if at times the historical context will remain a mystery for many readers, or some historical events get confused, Menashe Unger's book in Jonathan Boyarin's beautiful translation is certainly a fascinating, well-narrated story that will provide a pleasurable read for a wide public of academic and lay readers alike. And perhaps, it should not be treated as anything but a modern, post-Holocaust novel in historical hasidic garb.

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Sven-Erik Rose. *Jewish Philosophical Politics in Germany, 1789–1848*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2014. 381 pp.  
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Kant and Hegel have traditionally had starkly different reputations in Jewish thought. Despite Kant's denigration of Judaism as a "political" religion defined by an external and irrational law, Jewish intellectuals celebrated his image as a hero of German Enlightenment and often appropriated Kantian epistemology and ethics for their philosophies of Judaism. These thinkers tended to view Hegel's historicist philosophy more warily, thanks to its depiction of Judaism as archaic and devoid of any reason to exist. It would not be a stretch to say that the contrast between the

“good” Kant and the “bad” Hegel became one of the implicit, structuring oppositions of modern Jewish philosophy.

The upending of this conventional wisdom is one of several fresh arguments to be found in Sven-Erik Rose’s *Jewish Philosophical Politics in Germany: 1789–1848*. According to Rose, previous scholarship has largely overlooked the extent to which Jewish engagement with philosophy in Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century was driven by political aspirations and concerns. The immense confidence the dominant Idealist philosophy invested in the power of thought, coupled with the reactionary political environment that closed off “more tangible possibilities for political engagement in these years,” led to the flourishing of a “philosophical politics” in pre-1848 Germany. Rose alleges that this distinctly German entwining of politics and speculative thought had a “Jewish variation.” In six chapters, he examines how the Jewish Kantian Lazarus Bendavid, the Jewish Hegelians of the early *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement, the converted Jew and erstwhile Young Hegelian Karl Marx, and the Jewish Spinozists Berthold Auerbach and Moses Hess exploited “the conceptual tools of German philosophy to think through and intervene in the situation of Jews in political modernity.”

In entering the sphere of philosophical politics, these writers had to grapple with an “explicit cultural discourse” that “figured [Jews] as the embodiment of deficient and socially corrosive subjectivity.” German Idealism, as Frederick Beiser has argued, was characterized by a “struggle against subjectivism,” which it faulted for failing to guide the egocentric self toward an internalization of universal norms. While Kant, Hegel, and the Young Hegelians construed the problem of subjectivity somewhat differently, they concurred in identifying Jewishness as everything from its source to its symptom. Yet, Rose criticizes the tendency of much of the recent scholarship on German Idealism’s Jewish problem to view the movement as constitutively anti-Jewish. Similarly, he denies that Jewish engagement with German philosophy was necessarily subversive. “Heroicizing narratives that pit intellectual Davids against the Goliath of the German intellectual tradition,” he writes, “are apt to miss crucial questions that certain Jewish thinkers pose ... by trying to think, as Jews, not only against but also with some of the most powerful currents in the German philosophical tradition.”

Rose’s opening chapter concerns Lazarus Bendavid, an important German Jewish thinker in the age after Mendelssohn, who played an influential role in popularizing Kant’s thought. In particular, it focuses on a troubling passage in his major work, *Etwas zur Charakteristick der Juden* (On Jewish characteristics, 1793), describing Judaism as “the hydra, all of whose heads must be cut off at once if two are not to grow back in place of every one severed.” This strikingly echoes Fichte’s notorious claim, also in 1793, that the only way to emancipate the Jews would be “to cut off all their heads and replace them with others containing not a single Jewish idea.” Rose traces both of these gruesome images to the influence of Kant’s philosophy. In addition to explicitly disparaging the “slavish” nature of Jewish obedience to the “ceremonial law,” Kant could conceive no path from subservient to autonomous selfhood short of radical transcendence and re-creation. The fantasy of Jewish decapitation, Rose argues, dramatizes the

“violence that inaugurates the Kantian ethical subject,” even as it also suggests that destroying Judaism’s collective character is a *sine qua non* of emancipation. Rose notes the different motivations of the two thinkers; while Fichte wrote to deny Jews civil rights, Bendavid ultimately called for their full inclusion in the state, albeit at the cost of “a total abolition of Jewish ceremonial practice.” This may be true, though the extremity of the price of emancipation renders Rose’s assertion that Bendavid was mobilizing Kant in support of a “Jewish (not merely an anti-Jewish) Kantian politics” somewhat tenuous.

The remaining chapters address the early Jewish reception of Hegel and Spinoza, the illumination of which I consider the main contribution of Rose’s book. Rose examines the former in two eye-opening chapters (chapters 2 and 3) on the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* (Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews). Founded by a group of young, mostly university-educated German Jewish intellectuals in 1819, the *Verein* has traditionally been regarded as the origin of modern Jewish studies. Rose challenges this perception, arguing, convincingly, that the *Verein*’s chief concern was not philology or the historical-critical method, but the creation of a “Hegelian Judaism” that “would enable Jews, as Jews, to become fully integrated into the modern state.” Rose emphasizes what made “Hegelian theory” such a “heady and seductive discourse” for the *Vereinler*. Above all, they discovered in Hegel something missing in Kant—the possibility of locating a rational essence in Judaism that would bind it to the “broader ethical unity” of Hegel’s state (such is the power of thought in Hegel), without entirely sacrificing the “collective aspect of Jewishness” in the process. Rose’s chapters on the Spinozist Jews Berthold Auerbach (chapter 5) and Moses Hess (chapter 6) are similarly strong. Most work to date on the pioneering appropriations of Spinoza by the staunch liberal Auerbach and the communist-turned-nationalist Hess has focused on their fashioning of the Amsterdam heretic into an icon for freethinking Jews. Rose’s is the best study I have read of the philosophical depth and import, as well as fractiousness, of this early stage in Spinoza’s German Jewish reception.

Rose has written an analytically rigorous and illuminating, if somewhat loosely bound-together book. My main quibble is with the idea of “Jewish philosophical politics” as the thread that connects these Jewish interventions in German thought. To start, Rose never makes entirely clear how his chapter (chapter 4) on Marx’s path to regarding the proletariat as the revolutionary class—a path, Rose argues, that crucially detoured through Marx’s notorious essay “On the Jewish Question”—fits this schema. Is Rose claiming that Marx’s early writings are an *example* of “Jewish philosophical politics,” in part because of Marx’s own ancestry? Or, does Rose include them here simply because they shine a light on this phenomenon? Leaving the question of what makes this discourse “Jewish” aside, just the notion that “philosophical politics” constitutes the signature theme of German Jewish thought in this era is underdeveloped. Part of this may have to do with Rose’s ambivalence toward historical analysis. Early on, he states that his book is “not meant to be a history,” yet one encounters historical arguments throughout, some persuasive (to wit, his thesis about the sources and ramifications of the *Verein*’s Hegelianism), others less so. Disappointingly, Rose provides little in

the way of a conclusion that might help to knit together the different set pieces. While the chapters, for all their substance, can be long winded, his conclusion tops out at a little over two pages.

If the book as a whole could be better integrated, the individual parts are quite formidable. Rose's rethinking of the intellectual origins and legacy of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and his sympathetic and incisive elucidation of early nineteenth-century German Jewish Kantianism, Hegelianism, and Spinozism, deserve only praise.

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Jonathan Skolnik. *Jewish Pasts, German Fictions: History, Memory, and Minority Culture in Germany, 1824–1955*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014. 280 pp.  
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German Jews have long been recognized for their devotion to *Bildung* and classical high culture, such as the prominent role they played in establishing Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's cult status in German literature. More recent academic studies have added nuance to our understanding of the German Jewish educated middle class (*Bildungsbürgertum*) by exploring the construction of a specifically German Jewish identity through popular or middlebrow literature. Jonathan Skolnik's study of German Jewish historical fiction makes four notable contributions to this ongoing discussion.

First, in his theoretical discussion, Skolnik advocates the use of the term "dissimilation" as an alternative to assimilation or acculturation. Although not exactly defined, dissimilation refers to a movement away from the majority culture and towards minority self-identification. Acknowledging the disparate ways that both Franz Rosenzweig and National Socialist propaganda used the term, Skolnik makes a case for dissimilation as "the crystallization of a new form of Jewish identity and distinctiveness that occurs as part of the dynamic of acculturation and alongside the phenomenon of assimilation" (2). Dissimilation thus serves as a productive means of analyzing the way writers created a space for themselves as Jews within German literature at specific historical moments. It also serves as a useful organizing principle that could interest scholars far beyond the field of German Jewish studies.

Secondly, Skolnik's study goes from 1824 until 1955, which takes the reader from Romanticism and the revolutionary *Vormärz* period to the postwar era. While the broad timeframe necessitates looking at the eleven primary literary texts as representative vignettes, the long trajectory helps Skolnik tie together different periods that are frequently examined separately in studies of German Jewish popular culture. For instance, the first chapter of Jonathan M. Hess's *Middlebrow*