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VCU Menorah Review

*For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought*

Summer/Fall 2011 no. 75

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## Books in Brief: New and Notable

### **A Covenant of Creatures: Levinas's Philosophy of Judaism by Michael Fagenblat**

Stanford University Press

"I am not a particularly Jewish thinker," said Emmanuel Levinas, "I am just a thinker." This book argues against the idea, affirmed by Levinas himself, that *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* separate philosophy from Judaism. By reading Levinas's philosophical works through the prism of Judaic texts and ideas, Fagenblat contends that what Levinas called "ethics" is as much a hermeneutical product wrought from the Judaic heritage as a series of phenomenological observations. Decoding Levinas's philosophy of Judaism within a Heideggerian and Pauline framework, Fagenblat uses biblical, rabbinic, and Maimonidean texts to provide sustained interpretations of the philosopher's work. Ultimately, he calls for a reconsideration of the relation between tradition and philosophy and of the meaning of faith without the foundations of epistemology.

### **Fighting Back: British Jewry's Military Contribution in the Second World War by Martin Sugarman**

Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell

This book is a response to the oft-perpetrated myths of British Jewry's alleged lack of fighting spirit and its failure to participate in the Second World War. British Jewry has never formed more than about one half of one percent of the population, yet the figures show that their contribution to the armed forces has always been out of proportion to their numbers.

Sugarman's book provides a snapshot of the British Jewish contribution to the Allied victory over the Nazi and Japanese threat. It also highlights the role of the Jews in the Spanish Civil War and the Korean War. Its wide-ranging approach to the contributions of Jews investi-

gates, among other things: the Paratroopers at the Battle of Arnhem; the much neglected and almost forgotten Auxiliary Services of the Civil Defense, in this case the Fire Service; the Jews at Bletchley from the memory of those who are the keepers of the British war remembrance memorials, and is never included in the British tributes to the Commonwealth/Empire forces who served, even though many other ethnic groups are well represented.

British Jewry, together with Jews from Israel, may thus be deeply and justly proud of this history of fighting back, fighting for democracy and peace.

**Pirke Avot: Timeless Wisdom for Modern Life by William Berkson**

Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society

In this new edition of the beloved Jewish classic, Berkson helps us see that *Pirke Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) is more than just a fundamental religious text. It is also a compelling contemporary ethical guide. Berkson looks at the individual sayings, or “mishnayot,” through the interpretations of the great Jewish commentators and also within the broader context of Western thought—through views found in the Bible, the ancient Greeks, the Enlightenment, Buddhism, Confucianism, and American culture.

**The Visual Culture of Chabad by Maya Balakirsky Katz**

New York: Cambridge University Press

This book presents the first full—length study of a vast and complex visual tradition produced, revered, preserved, banned, and destroyed by the Hasidic movement of Chabad. This rich repository of visual artifacts provides the archaeological data for an analysis of how the movement consolidated its influence during a period of political and economic transformation and survived its immigration to America in the wake of the Holocaust. Chabad is one of the most self—documented and media—preserved modern Jewish movements, and its

rich material culture—including the hand-held portrait, the “rebbishe” space, the printer's mark, and the public menorah—affords scholars a wider range of interpretive strategies for understanding the movement and the role of the visual experience in religion.

### **The Lost Minyan by David M. Gitlitz**

Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press

An intricately woven tapestry of historical fiction, Gitlitz profiles ten Crypto—Jewish families coping with the trauma of living between worlds, neither wholly Catholic nor wholly Jewish. Struggling to hide their secrets from neighbors, servants, children, and even spouses, they try to resolve the tension between their need for and fear of community. Attempting to navigate the mandates of the Church and their own idiosyncratic version of Jewish customs, they wonder on which law to peg their hopes of eternal salvation; and they wonder how to safely pass their Crypto—Jewish identity on to the next generation. While the details and conversations of these lives are fictional, they draw from historical fact as documented in eyewitness accounts, contemporary chronicles, and the dossiers of Inquisition trials in the archives of Spain and Mexico.

### **Through a Narrow Window: Friedl Dicker—Brandeis and Her Terezin Students by Linney Wix**

Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press

Not long after the end of World War II, two suitcases from Terezin, the so-called model ghetto designed by the Nazi propaganda machine to showcase creative endeavors, were delivered to members of what remained of the Jewish community of Prague. The contents of the suitcases included children's drawings, paintings, and collages made at Terezin. Rediscovered in the 1950s, the pictures, by then housed at the Jewish Museum in Prague, were exhibited, and over time some were published. Friedl Dicker—Brandeis was the remarkable woman who taught art to many of Terezin's children before she was killed at

Auschwitz. While she has been valorized for her heroic efforts as a teacher, her approach to teaching art has remained unexamined.

This book and the accompanying exhibition offer a closer look at the methods and philosophy of Dicker—Brandeis's teaching, the history behind it, and its possible psychological effects on the children interned at Terezin. Besides discussing aesthetic empathy as the basis of her teaching philosophy and practice, the book includes biographical and art historical information on Dicker—Brandeis, who trained at the Weimar Bauhaus, and restores her to her rightful place as an artist, teacher and heroine behind Nazi lines in the Second World War.

**Gender and American Jews: Patterns in Work, Education, and Family in Contemporary Life by Harriet Hartman and Moshe Hartman**

Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press

The Hartmans interpret the results of the two most recent National Jewish Population Surveys. Building on their critical work of 1996, and drawing on relevant sociological work on gender, religion, and secular achievement, this new book brings their analysis of gendered patterns in contemporary Jewish life right to the present moment.

The first part of the book examines the distinctiveness of American Jews in terms of family behavior, labor—force patterns, and educational and occupational attainment. The second investigates the interrelationships between “Jewishness” and religious, economic, and family behavior, including intermarriage. Deploying an engaging assortment of charts and graphs and a rigorous grasp of statistics, the authors provide a multifaceted portrait of a multidimensional population.

**Levirate Marriage and the Family in Ancient Judaism by Dvora E. Weisberg**

Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press

The author uses levirate marriage (an institution involving the union of

a man and the widow of his childless brother) as described in biblical law and explicated in rabbinic Judaism as a lens to examine the status of women and attitudes toward marriage, sexuality, and reproduction in early Jewish society. While marriage generally marks the beginning of a new family unit, levirate comes into play when a family's life is cut short. As such, it offers an opportunity to study the family at a moment of breakdown and restructuring. With her discussion rooted in rabbinic sources and commentary, Weisberg explores kinship structure and descent, the relationship between a family unit created through levirate marriage and the extended family, and the roles of individuals within the family. She also considers the position of women, asking whether it is through marriage or the bearing of children that a woman becomes part of her husband's family, and to what degree a married woman remains part of her natal family. Weisberg argues that rabbinic responses to levirate suggest that a family is an evolving entity, one that can preserve itself through realignment and redefinition.

**Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza by Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole**

New York: Schocken Books and Nextbook

One May day in 1896, in Cambridge, England, a meeting took place between a Romanian—born maverick Jewish Intellectual and twin learned Presbyterian Scotswomen, who had assembled to inspect several pieces of rag paper and parchment. It was the unlikely start of a remarkable saga. The authors tell the story of the retrieval from an Egyptian geniza, or repository for worn—out texts, of the most important cache of Jewish manuscripts ever discovered. Weaving together unforgettable portraits of the scholar—heroes of his drama with explorations of the medieval documents themselves, Hoffman and Cole present a panoramic view of 900 years of vibrant Mediterranean Judaism. Part biography and part meditation on the supreme value the Jewish people has long placed on the written word, this is above all a gripping tale of adventure and redemption.



**Not in the Heavens: The Tradition of Jewish Secular Thought by David Biale**

Princeton University Press

This book traces the rise of Jewish secularism through the visionary writers and thinkers who led its development. Spanning the rich history of Judaism from the Bible to today, Biale shows how the secular tradition these visionaries created is a uniquely Jewish one, and how the emergence of Jewish secularism was not merely a response to modernity but arose from forces long at play within Judaism itself. He explores how ancient Hebrew books like *Job*, *Song of Song*, and *Esther* downplay or even exclude God altogether, and how Spinoza, inspired by medieval Jewish philosophy, recast the biblical God in the role of nature and stripped the Torah of its revelatory status to instead read scripture as a historical and cultural text. Biale examines the influential Jewish thinkers who followed Spinoza's secularizing footsteps, such as Salomon Maimon, Heinrich Heine, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein. He tells the stories of those who also took their cues from medieval Jewish mysticism in their revolts against tradition, including Hayim Nahman Bialik, Gershom Scholem, and Franz Kafka. And he looks at Zionists like David Ben-Gurion and other secular political thinkers who recast Israel and the Bible in modern terms of race, nationalism and the state.

**Foreplay: Hannah Arendt, the Two Adornos, and Walter Benjamin by Carl Djerassi**

Madison: University of Wisconsin Press

Arendt, Benjamin, Theodor and Gretel Adorno were intellectual giants of the first half of the 20th century. This dramatic play explores their deeply human and psychologically intriguing private lives, focusing on professional and personal jealousies, and the border between erotica and pornography. Djerassi's extensive biographical research brings to light many fascinating details revealed in the dialogues among the characters, including Adorno's obsession with his dreams. Benjamin's

admiration for Franz Kafka, and the intimate correspondence between Gretel Adorno and Benjamin. The introduction of a fictitious character, "Fraulein X," intensifies the complex interplay among the four lead protagonists and allows for a comparison of Adorno's philandering and the similar behavior of Martin Heidegger whose affair with Hannah Arendt is well known. The play brims with intrigue and the friction created when strong personalities clash.

### **The Synagogue in America: A Short History by Marc Lee Raphael**

New York University Press

In 1789, when George Washington was elected the first president of the United States, laymen from all six Jewish congregations in the new nation sent him congratulatory letters. He replied to all six. Thus, after more than a century of Jewish life in colonial America the small communities of Jews present at the birth of the nation proudly announced their religious institutions to the country and were recognized by its new leader. By this time, the synagogue had become the most significant institution of American Jewish life, a dominance that was not challenged until the twentieth century, when other institutions such as Jewish community centers or Jewish philanthropic organizations claimed to be the hearts of their Jewish communities.

Concise yet comprehensive, *The Synagogue in America* is the first history of this all-important structure, illuminating its changing role within the American Jewish community over the course of three centuries. From Atlanta and Des Moines to Los Angeles and New Orleans, Marc Lee Raphael moves beyond the New York metropolitan area to examine Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist synagogue life everywhere. Using the records of approximately 125 Jewish congregations, he traces the emergence of the synagogue in the United States from its first instances in the colonial period, when each of the half dozen initial Jewish communities had just one synagogue each, to its proliferation as the nation and the American Jewish com-

munity grew and diversified.

Encompassing architecture, forms of worship, rabbinic life, fundraising, creative liturgies, and feminism, *The Synagogue in America* is the go-to history for understanding the synagogue's significance in American Jewish life.

## Hasidic Women: Boundaries and Empowerment

A review essay by Shulamit S. Magnus

***Mitzvah Girls: Bringing up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn.* Princeton University Press.**

Ayala Fader's award winning *Mitzvah Girls*, based on her doctoral dissertation, is an ethnography of girls and women in the Bobover Hasidic community of Boro Park, Brooklyn and the ways that they are socialized and socialize others, to construct Hasidic society. It is a fascinating book whose purpose, Fader says, is to exemplify one major case of an "alternative modernity," since as she shows, Bobov Hasidism seeks messianic redemption yet depends, in highly specific ways, on participation in and knowledge of secular modernity. Fader places her work in a school of literature contesting the notion of a "singular Western modernity against which non-Western others in postcolonial contexts react"—a construct its critics, including Fader, say essentializes Western modernity.

Fader's research certainly contests and complicates any such simple dualism and brings the culture of Hasidic girls and women into the discourse about "parallel" or "alternative" modernities, major accomplishments. It also sheds important new light on contemporary Hasidism through its focus on female social organization and culture and the pivotal role that women play in constructing the gendered, hierarchical roles that underlie Hasidism, without which it could not function. Fader gives important comparative information about girls and women in other Hasidic groups to the right and left of Bobov, and about unaffiliated Hasidim (yes, all these exist), as well as about non-Hasidic Orthodox women who intersect with the Bobovers in their schools, as teachers (if nothing else, the book is an excellent primer in the heterogeneity of Hasidism, and Orthodoxy as a whole). Thus, we see Bobov society on a continuum of Hasidic and Orthodox attitudes and practices, which allows more nuanced appreciation of their particular approach to Hasidic world production and maintenance, to borrow

Peter Berger.

Fader turns to advantage her disbarment as a woman from an ethnographic study of Hasidic men and the male rituals, texts, institutions, and authorities that are the more common stuff of studies of Hasidism, shifting the focus to everyday life in women's domains: at home, on the playground, the street, and in particular, in girls' schools, where women shape values, identity, and culture, and themselves. Fader spent years as a participant-observer in these settings, learning the languages (plural) needed to gain trust and a nuanced understanding of what Bobover women were doing, with what methods and understanding, as they seek to fulfill what they see as a divinely ordained mandate, mediated to them through the authority of their husbands, rabbis, and ultimately, that of the Bobover rebbe, to raise "the next generation of Hasidic Jews"—the only true Jews, they believe, whose Judaism can, or should, endure.

As a result, her book is also a significant contribution to the study of women and religion, in particular, to seeing how women are made dynamic agents in a patriarchal, utterly androcentric religious system, against common stereotypes of them as simply dominated and oppressed there. It is from the perspective of someone particularly interested in this last area that I come to this review.

Among the many strengths of this book is its methodological transparency. Ms. Fader opens with an excursus about Yiddish, since knowing variants of this language is crucial to her ability to carry out her work, and having some sense of it is crucial to her readers' ability to understand what they are "hearing." Throughout the book, Fader presents transliterated and translated conversation and other exchanges in Yiddish and Yiddish-inflected English recorded during her field work. Thus, readers are not asked to accept Fader's interpretations or assertions based on these data, shortcomings of more anecdotal books about Hasidic society (and its dropouts), but see for themselves what her subjects said, and what Ms. Fader is making of it, why, and how.

As part of her methodological honesty in doing “ethical anthropology,” Fader reveals her own positioning as a researcher: she is Jewish, secular, urban, of a certain generation, and of course, a highly educated, professional woman. She becomes engaged and is married while doing her fieldwork, which includes a focus on these life stages among the Bobover, information she shares not only with readers, but with her informants. Fader considers the role that her identities and emotions (she becomes close to some of her informants, inviting one to her wedding), play in her field work, and in how she writes this book: what she chooses to engage, and to leave unengaged, particularly “political and religious convictions” of her informants that she says, without elaboration, are “troubling” to her. The larger implications of her subjects’ worldview and behavior for Judaism or Jewish life as a whole, and for the place of Jews in the larger world, fall outside the purview of this book, though they are certainly worthy of, indeed, call for consideration.

In her Introduction, Fader raises the seemingly counter-intuitive possibility that the Bobover women’s commitment “to civilize the secular world through Jewish practice has the potential to create an alternative religious *modernity*” (my emphasis). Indeed, the book is a substantial argument against simplistic, popular dismissals of Hasidism as throw-back, as pre-modern, or even as traditional. Instead, Fader, citing other scholars of religion, calls the Hasidim “nonliberal” (rejecting the more popular term, “fundamentalist”), a function of their rejection of self-realization and individual autonomy *as ends in themselves*; how these values are adopted and made part of Hasidic worldview is a major focus of the book. The Bobover’s religious and political stance requires women—but not men—not to reject the modern, secular world, but quite the contrary, to engage with it—in order to enable male preoccupation with the sacred, a male-specific religious mandate and the apex of Hasidic values. In this gendered and hierarchical division of labor, women are made scouts, as it were, probes of the modern and the secular since these, or at least aspects of these, are indispensable to the group’s economic viability, for which women are made heavily

responsible. Women are also made responsible for other vital functions, such as interaction with doctors, social service agencies, utility companies, that require a broader worldliness, and knowledge of English, than men are permitted. Thus girls (education is sex-segregated from the start), are taught more, and better, English, more and better math and other secular studies, than boys. As teenagers and in the post high school women's teachers' seminary that is common in Bobov (relatively moderate) Hasidism (but not in stricter, e.g., Satmar, variants; college is not an option for either sex in any Hasidic sect), they are made aware of new findings in child psychology and pedagogical methods and incorporate these, selectively and adaptively, into child rearing and teaching practices that are at stark variance with those of pre-modern Jewish society (on which, cf. Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, though Fader's book provides many examples of mothers and teachers remarking on the variance between methods they practice and those of their parents and teachers, with theirs avowedly marked superior—hardly uninterrogated “traditionalism”). Compared to the extremely, even extravagantly distinctive clothing of boys and men, Hasidic girls and women wear “relatively unmarked” (secular) clothing (p.2), to facilitate their ability to interface with the outside world, Fader says. (I would note, however, that the lack of sacralized clothing for women—there is no women's equivalent for men's long black, or in some sects, gold brocade caftans; sacramental fur hats, flowing prayer shawls—is but a Hasidic variant of the lack of sacralization of women's bodies altogether in traditional Judaism, in stark contrast to the sacralization of male bodies). [1]To readers familiar with pre-war Eastern European Jewish society, this arrangement will appear as merely the continuation of women of the shtetl running the shops so men could “learn” (a stereotype much in need of revision but useful for our purposes here). [2] However, in the surprisingly robust world of post-World War II American Hasidism, women's outside engagement is not just economic and pragmatic but cultural, thus fundamentally different, more significant, and more interesting, than the pre-war variant.

Mandating engagement with the outside culture for half the population, particularly that charged with “raising the next generation of Hasidic Jews,” would seem profoundly counterproductive to the separatism and xenophobia that underlie most sects of Hasidism. This engagement, indeed, is recognized as a potentially subversive element requiring strong counter measures in the early and ongoing socialization of girls and women and the vigilance of the community. The interface with secular modernity, occurring in liminal space between Hasidic society and what Hasidim call “the goyishe” (Gentile) world—which, it must be emphasized, includes secular and even Modern Orthodox Jews—becomes a substrate, a fertile medium producing an elaborate, articulated system of sifting what is borrowed, or more precisely, adapted from the outside, and what is rejected. And it produces a Hasidic ideology that is the particular domain of women.

The interface with secular culture makes the Hasidic cultural position of girls and women inherently unstable. Since the outside culture is in constant flux—secular culture recognizes and valorizes constant change and “improvement,” while Hasidism valorizes what it claims is continuation of allegedly timeless belief and practice—the female Hasidic response to secular modernity is not fixed and definitive but dynamic, constantly changing in response to changing fashions in dress, music, in technological innovations both serious and seemingly frivolous (x boxes, other techno-toys). Thus, Hasidic female culture is in constant dialogue with secular modernity—the distinction typically assigned to modern Orthodoxy. Engagement with the outside, the ongoing creation of both sieve holes and boundary lines, and the ideology to justify both, mark female Hasidism in stark, though symbiotic contrast to male Hasidism.

Women’s Hasidism, Fader argues, is not about rejecting modernity but changing its meaning. Core modern values like freedom, progress, and self-actualization, are not rejected but redefined. Harnessed to the higher ideal of Hasidic religious practice, girls are taught that these values can and should be achieved; when “the religious and the secular, the material and the spiritual, the body and the soul are made



complementary and not oppositional," girls are told, they will find true personal fulfillment as well as divine reward, and even a role in bringing about the final redemption (p. 3). The fact that women are entrusted with these critical functions creates agency and limited yet significant authority, endowing this most patriarchal of societies with a robust if distinctly subordinate female sector. This reality, too, complicates depictions of contemporary Hasidism as simply misogynistic and its women simply as dominated, and helps explain, in part at least, the hold of this culture on natives as well as its attraction to those who choose to join it, a phenomenon which evidence brought in this book makes clear, not limited to the outreach-oriented Lubavitch Hasidim.

The bulk of Fader's inquiry is devoted to illustrating the mechanisms by which women's role is constructed and conveyed to girls, who as adults become the teachers, mothers, and homemakers who enact its ideology and practice, molding Hasidic society. Fader surveys structures beginning with female infancy to normative late-teenage, arranged marriage, "to understand how Hasidic women teach girls to discipline their desires and their bodies as they redeem Jewish meaning from North American secular and Gentile life." (p. 31). Her early chapters do a close reading of psychological and linguistic techniques to socialize girls to conform to Hasidic norms for them; to fear becoming "like Gentiles;" and to direct their curiosity in approved channels. The didactic techniques are unapologetically heavy handed. Approved behavior is conspicuously rewarded with fulsome praise, verbal and written: "mitsve-tsetlekh" (mitzvah notes) written by mothers and sent to (even pre-nursery age) children's teachers for such behaviors as a two-year old boy going to morning prayers with his father; marks on charts and prizes for children (of both sexes) for sharing toys or giving up a treat to others; designating girls who exhibit approved behaviors (devotion in prayer, speaking respectfully, helping others, not complaining), "girl of the month," in school assemblies; chastising less than ideal (withholding toys; tale bearing) or forbidden behavior (talking back to a parent or teacher), as "goyish," the product of Satan (sutn) and the ever-threatening "evil inclination" (yayster-hure).

Appropriate behavior for the respective sexes is encouraged in ways that construct gender from the outset: groups of three-year old boys praised as they bless their tsitsis (ritual undergarment) in the morning; preschool girls praised for neatness, for coloring inside the lines of pictures of religious scenes (organization, neatness, and compliance being crucial traits for girls, particularly as they reach marriage-age, they are inculcated in them as early as childhood consciousness is attained, around the age of two and certainly by three). As Fader notes, praise is a post-war Hasidic child-rearing and pedagogic innovation; previously, wrong behavior was punished, but good behavior, expected, would not be noted.

Considering the primacy of compliance to the rule of authority (that of parents, teachers, rabbis, the Rebbe, God), Fader rightly considers how her informants handle defiance, or even asking questions outside the bounds of acceptable thinking (God made the world, but who made God?). She shows how certain forms of curiosity, but not others, are cultivated: "good" questions receive full answers and praise; "bad" ones are simply not answered, and if repeated, are chastised with the threatened disapproval of parents, other revered family members and teachers, or the community as a whole, with the threat of ultimate social excommunication the worst possibility. As one of her informants explained, a child who does not think becomes "an idiot," certainly, Fader paraphrases, "nothing to strive toward." But "given the choice between a child becoming an idiot or a heretic, any Hasidic parent would choose the idiot." (p. 67)

"What" questions are acceptable (what is shatnes?—the Biblically forbidden mixing of wool and linen); "why" questions (why this rule?) are suspect or out of bounds (a radical restriction, we note, of the range of inquiry in classical rabbinical thinking expressed in even such relatively popular sources as Biblical commentary, never mind Jewish philosophical works). As a (Northeastern Yiddish-speaking) inspirational speaker brought in to address a girls' school put it, "ma mame hot nit gefregt ken kashes. Emune iz simkhe"—"My mother did not ask hard questions. Faith is happiness." A firm, "we don't do that,"

and a refusal to discuss further are used to squelch unwanted inquiries in the population Fader studies (she does not consider drop outs from this society—those who leave Hasidism, Boro Park, even observance altogether).

Hasidic girls who challenge authority threaten the very structure of their society, which rests ultimately on acceptance of divine authority. Gender first and, within it, age govern rules of respect and deference. Those who accept this “natural” order resemble the “wise” child of the Passover haggadah, whose intricate but informational question earns acclaim. Those who do not resemble the “wicked” child whose challenge–question earns excision. Gentiles, children are taught, ask “selfish” questions and do not respect authority; Jews who do (and not all do), deserve their special status as God’s People: following the well-known midrash about the giving of the Torah, Fader’s informants stress that it was the Jews’ blind acceptance of God’s offer of the Torah, alone among the nations, that earned them “chosenness.” Accordingly, defiant children who do not respond to warnings and epithets (khitspedik; mekhitsef— troublemaker); to leading and rhetorical questions (“can we say no to a teacher, a mother, a father?”); to the parachute suggestion that their behavior was a “mistake;” to incentives to make parents or teachers proud, or not cause them to be “sad” and disappointed, are chastised as “goyim,” or “goyish,” one of the worst epithets and an implicit threat that continued such behavior will result in actual ejection to the “goyish” world. Peers are enlisted to help bring about compliance. While tattling to humiliate people or out of pettiness is labeled a sin, “telling on them in order to help them be better Jews is fulfillment of a commandment. Children are taught to be one another’s ‘policemen,’; helping them do the right thing.” (p. 77) Fader documents a tremendous level of social intimidation, a very effective tool of achieving compliance with group norms in totalitarian cultures, with which one might well class ultra-Orthodoxy.

Yet compliance, we would note, is not the only value Fader’s Hasidim impart, since they also inculcate and, indeed, exist only because of defiance: Hasidim, after all, resolutely and flagrantly reject the values

of the majority culture, as well as other variants of Judaism, including Modern Orthodoxy. In the US, they use the quintessentially modern, liberal rhetoric of personal choice and autonomy to reject liberal modernity. Here, too, we see a far more complicated picture than the common stereotype of Hasidism as fundamentalist throwback. Further reflection on the meaning of boundaries of simultaneous defiance and compliance, on both of which Hasidic society is founded and functions, would be welcome.

Perhaps the most fascinating sections of the book are Fader's chapters on the languages the Hasidim create and use, and the extreme ways that gender inflects speech and speech marks gender, as clear a delineation between women and men as their dress.

Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn have two spoken vernaculars: Hasidic English and Hasidic Yiddish, as well as "loshn-koydesh"—the Hebrew (and Aramaic) of sacred study and prayer. Language, of course, is one of the primary markers of group identity; with history, one of the basic components of separate national or in this case, minority group, identity. Fader shows that Hasidic linguistic syncretism—their blurring of boundaries between Yiddish and English—creates distinctively Hasidic ways of talking that "produce[s] essentialized differences between Jews and Gentiles" (p.88) (as well as between Hasidic and most other Jews, the vast majority of whom do not know Yiddish). She shows, however, that Hasidic syncretic languages are also used to produce essentialized differences between Hasidic men and women: upon reaching school age, girls are taught to use Hasidic English among themselves, while boys are taught to use predominantly Hasidic Yiddish (as opposed to secular Yiddish—that of "Yiddishists": scholars of Jewish Eastern Europe, the socialist Workmen's Circle). For both females and males, the mode of communication is Jewish, marking Hasidic separatism. But their respective Jewish languages mark the genders as distinct and different, creating a sense of mutual, radical otherness between them, a difference experienced as natural and inherent. With sophisticated linguistic analysis, Fader provides numerous examples of syncretic Yiddish English: *me ken jumpn* (you can jump); *zol ikh fixn de hur?* (should I fix

your hair?); far vus men all of a sudden redn zayer shprakh? (why do we all of a sudden speak their language?); so far vus redn azoy? (so why are you talking like that?); ikh bin azoy proud fin Rukhy! (I am so proud of Rukhy!) When Fader asks her informants if the sentence, “ikh hob eym gezeyn fin across de street” (I saw him from across the street), is Yiddish or English, they answer that it is Yiddish, because the English words are Yiddishized in pronunciation: the ‘r’ of street is flapped; the ‘ee’ is shortened (“strit”); ‘the’ is made ‘de.’ Thus, what could be expressed readily in pure Yiddish—fin iber de gas—is made English Yiddish.

The use of Yiddishized English is not just strategic; that is, serving the obvious function of separatism. Fader shows that it flows from a broader religious ideology (derived ultimately from kabbalistic categories that infuse Hasidism), of “raising” the holiness of ostensibly secular, or neutral, or even negative phenomena. By bringing Yiddish to English, the latter is made holy; even pronouncing English words with a Yiddish accent (“vire,” for “wire;” a Yiddishized pronunciation of the Hasidic neighborhoods, “Bora Park” and “Vilyamsboorg”)—achieves this purpose, making the profane—“the language of the Gentiles”—“faryidish”—judaized. One of her informants even tells Fader that what Jews did for German (bringing Yiddish into it), they are now doing for English. Hasidic use of English has given certain words specifically Hasidic meaning; e.g., “funny” (when written, transliterated in Hebrew letters), means “interesting” in a derogatory way, that is, someone who is not “normal,” especially someone who does not conform. Thus, English words are not simply imported into Yiddish but are given changed content to convey Hasidic ideas. As a result, the Yiddish of Brooklyn Hasidim is so different than that of Israeli Hasidim, whose Yiddish contains much contemporary Hebrew, that speakers of each cannot understand one another, requiring the use of Hasidic English as a better, if limited, alternative.

Hasidic English is the creation and language-base of female Hasidic society. Hasidic Yiddish is used to communicate to all Hasidic babies until the age of three, when gender distinction is introduced with boys’

first hair cut (the upshern) in the pattern that marks ultra-Orthodox men—closely shorn heads except for sidelocks—and boys are masculinized. Gender marking of boys means that girls too, are endowed with gender. The universal use of Hasidic Yiddish for babies means that girls, raised with it themselves and expected to use it with younger siblings and eventually, their own children, are fluent in it. Once in school, however, they learn other syncretic Hasidic languages: “loshn-koydesh” and Hasidic English, as well Hasidic Yiddish, with questions about proper boundary lines between the languages ongoing : is there a Yiddish word for the color “peach,” for use in first-grade coloring, or is the English word acceptable?—a question referred all the way to the principal. After the age of three, mothers address sons in Hasidic Yiddish but daughters in Hasidic English, a pattern girls replicate as they mature, adapting their speech depending on the age and gender of their interlocutors, while men (it is reported to Fader), speak Hasidic Yiddish to sons and daughters alike. Boys speak Hasidic Yiddish only, at least until a marriage or job requiring Hasidic English, which is then acquired (Fader does not say how). In the home, boys often function as language police, urging mothers to speak more, or only Yiddish, effectively, we would note, a challenge to the gendered arrangement that makes women engage more with the language of the secular world, or at the very least, a behavior that makes them feel guilty, less properly Jewish, for doing so, even as they are charged and socialized to do just this (guilt inducement is also a powerful method of social control in totalitarian cultures). Girls’ teachers, by contrast, do not demand that mothers speak Yiddish exclusively to their daughters.

Dividing lines against the outside, general ones and ones specific to gender, are elaborate. Hasidic society produces its own, highly didactic board games for children (in a version of the game of Old Maid—whose name is retained—the card to be avoided belongs to the yeitzer hora—the evil inclination—who is gendered male (!), is ugly and deformed, wears punk-style clothing and hair, carries weapons—and a computer—forbidden to Hasidim without special permission and supervision, since it is a portal to pornography and other inappropriate content and

connections. There is a whole children's literature in Hasidic Yiddish, from earliest reading through teenage girls' tales, explicitly intended to provide an alternative to teenage girls' series in the secular world (which educators and publishers are well aware of, as they are of the ability of Hasidic girls to get hold of them). These books inculcate values such as selflessness, as opposed to independence and self-realization. Thus is an all-encompassing culture created.

Despite all this, the lure of English is strong for the younger generation and Fader shows girls' mothers and grandmothers, many of whom were not raised with Yiddish, tacitly supporting that link by speaking Hasidic English at home. Rather than this expressing resistance to religious stringency and cultural separatism, however, Fader finds that it is linked to female awareness that women must be fluent in the language of the secular world in order to discharge their Hasidic mandate there. Ironically, then, "girls' participation in the heightened religiosity that defines Hasidic continuity today" is enacted through loss of Yiddish fluency as they mature. "For males, however, Hasidic masculinity carries religious authority buttressed by fluency in Yiddish and a prestigious limited competence in English, both of which are linked to men's immersion in Torah study." Thus, in a marked departure from pre-war realities, Yiddish—"mame-loshn" (mother's tongue)—has been made "definitive of Hasidic masculinity." This gendering of Yiddish "represents a significant shift from pre-war Eastern Europe, where Yiddish was especially associated with women and 'uneducated' men who did not know loshn-koydesh (pp.120-121)"—further indication that post war American Hasidism is no mere carryover from a previous era or from Europe, whatever Hasidim or outsiders with limited knowledge about them, may claim.

Yiddish, which in pre-war Eastern Europe united millions of Jews across a wide ideological spectrum, now separates Hasidic from the vast majority of other Jews, as well as women from men. It also situates women on a spectrum of more and less stringently Hasidic practice: those who use only Yiddish (Satmar and other more extreme Hasidic sects), and those who use Hasidic English, differences that

also correlate to styles of dress and types of education among the sects. The largely Bobover women Fader studied are critical both of Satmar women to the right of them who do not know sufficient English to navigate successfully in the outside world, whom they call “backward” and “primitive,” and those to their left, whom they consider “too modern,” too much “like Gentiles,” because their English is not sufficiently inflected with Yiddish. The balance the Bobover women seek is expressed in their rejection of being “modern,” but in a simultaneous desire to be what they term, “with it.” (They thus adopt an approach to those to the right of them, we would note, similar to that with which Modern Orthodox Jews regard Hasidim.) In the process, they produce a “distinctive Hasidic femininity that is increasingly stringent,” yet simultaneously, increasingly fluent in the secular world. This seemingly counterintuitive rejection of overly Yiddishized behavior, in speech but also in unfashionable hairstyles and dress (called “nebbly” and “neb”—a takeoff from the Yiddish “nebekh”—pathetic, inspiring pity)—is as significant as their rejection of “modern” expressions. Satmar hyper-Yiddishism, we might call it, is even seen as *religiously* detrimental since, according to Fader’s informants, the Satmarer girl’s and women’s minimal education and exposure makes them especially susceptible to materialism and shallowness. Bobover “shtottiness,” by contrast (from “shtot”—town), their cosmopolitan behavior, strikes the correct balance, not “modern,” but “with it.” Much of the model for “shtottiness” Bobov society obtains from the Orthodox but non-Hasidic women teachers they hire to teach secular subjects in girls’ schools. Yet a variety of family and communal messages convey that that model—shorter, tighter skirts; longer wigs; Master’s degrees in Education—is not itself acceptable. Thus, Bobov girls and women negotiate an elaborate, ongoing dialectic between influences to the right and the left of them, producing a highly dynamic discourse about their choices and developing traditions.

Fader concludes her book with chapters about Bobov attitudes to physicality, modesty, marriage, and sex. Controls in these areas are particularly crucial, since physical desires and expression, irrational by



definition, have the power to explode social limits. Since women are defined in this most androcentric of cultures as sex objects to men (presumed to be heterosexual), it is crucial that girls learn to discipline their bodies, voices, minds, and desires. It is for girls and women to restrain their physical manifestation in the world, not for boys and men to restrain themselves because, they are taught, males are less capable of self-control than females. Education to this end begins almost from infancy. "Modesty" is a virtue for both genders (hence the black and white sameness of male dress, the long sleeves and pants even in hot weather, though arguably, ostentatious silk brocade caftans and fur hats on Sabbath, holidays, and special occasions are anything but modest), but it is an obsession for and about girls and women. No hiking up dresses too high in jump rope (this is "crazy! Crazy!" one teacher cries when she witnesses her charges doing this—in all-female company, of course); no sheer stockings, violation of which is grounds for expulsion from school. Contrary to what outsiders might expect, "modesty" does not mean cultivating shyness or diffidence; Hasidic society, after all, depends on women's assertiveness. Nor does it preclude being fashionable or attractive, in approved ways; high heeled shoes, lace, taffeta (albeit muted colors and in moderation), are "in" and allowed at weddings.

Fader asks how Hasidic women's culture succeeds in inculcating the desire in girls to hew to the rules of modesty and finds, once again that it is through negative characterization of Others who violate these rules: Gentiles, but also other Orthodox women. Hasidic women are not taught to deny all desire to look good, adorn themselves, attract the right kind of attention; and modesty standards are recognized as open to interpretation—which colors, fabrics (denim is "goyish"); what skirt and sleeve length; which and how much makeup; what kind of head covering for married women (to mark them as sexually exclusive to their husbands, a requirement not imposed on husbands, for whom only sex with another man's wife is a cardinal sin): wig (and if so, what kind, what length); kerchief; hat; turban; wig and hat? But like their intellects and other desires, physical drives must be properly chan-

neled and used to ennoble the self and to serve higher, religious ends. In an extraordinary interpretive license that, one might think, would earn anathematization, one woman analogized women's adherence to modesty to men's study of Torah (the latter, mandated in the Torah, the highest degree of commandment): for them, it was a route to divine reward just as sacred study is this route for men.

The rebbe as the pinnacle of male authority decrees modesty standards whose particulars are decreed on street posts and in schools and vary by sect. "Tsnies" (modesty) is the focus of an elaborate ideology asserting women's allegedly superior ability to control their desires, which is portrayed as proof of women's innate spiritual superiority (in which case, one wonders why it is not women who are charged with community leadership and the Torah study that is a prerequisite for it, an explosive question that Fader, perhaps understandably but lamentably, all the same, does not pose to her informants). It is for women to restrain themselves so as not to distract (combustible) men; for them to cross the street (one informant tells Fader that the streets, like the synagogue, "belong to the men"), so as not to distract a passing Torah scholar (even a youth), by so much as the clack of her heels on the pavement. This self-effacement, too, is women's contribution to the furtherance of Torah study. It is simultaneously empowerment—one's heels clacking can cause a Torah scholar to lose control?—and monumental suppression/oppression. It is also an expression of the hypersexualization in this world (and we would note, other cultures of extreme religion—Taliban, Iran under the mullahs, Saudi Arabia), where the sheer manifestation of a woman's physical being is deemed enough to incite men's (uncontrollable) lust. Whatever this culture makes of women, its image of men is none too flattering either, although the implications of the perceived weakness of men is hardly reflected in the culture's ultimate power structures.

Such attitudes necessarily carry over to girls' feelings about their physicality. Learning to repress themselves is marked as a sign of maturity; Hasidic women defined becoming a "big girl" as having an increasingly autonomous desire to conform to the family's modesty

conventions, which include not only dress but language, comportment, and exposure to secular knowledge. Girls who expressed a desire to participate in these forms earned fulsome praise; those who did not were scolded and labeled as deviant (“crazy”). Thus, a first grader who proudly told her teacher that she had volunteered to wear tights in the summer rather than the knee socks her family’s conventions permitted until girls reached second grade, won not only her mother’s praise, but that of her teacher and the principal. Learning modest behavior is a process, Fader shows, with training similar to that which girls receive in other areas of religious practice. “From a very young age, mothers pull their daughters dresses over their knees when they sit down, teachers remind girls not to sit too [sprawled out] at their desks, and older girls constantly remind their sisters not to let their skirts ride up as they relax saying reprovably, “Tsnies!”

There is much rote in this training, which begins around the age of three, but also, Fader shows, an ideology to elaborate for Hasidic girls “how Jews are different from Gentiles, creating the desire to be a Jewish woman and the fear of resembling an *uncontrolled Gentile*.” (p.158; my emphasis). The role of the Gentile—people and culture—is enormous in this world. “Gentiles and the fear they inspire, particularly in children,” Fader writes, “can be a powerful way to socialize the desire to be different.” This fear is evoked is just about every setting, but perhaps above all about modesty. “Observing, imagining, and theorizing about what defines Gentile bodies and comportment by comparison defines modest Jewish behavior for girls,” and so “with their immodest ways,” Fader says, “goyim” sustain “Hasidic women’s claims to superiority and truth.”

Extremely binary thinking about Jews and Gentiles, Fader notes, extends to outright racism, with beliefs about a hierarchy of peoples and a distinctive Jewish “soul,” which children expect to see embodied in Jewish faces, as well as behaviors: if one of Fader’s informants sees a girl behaving “nicely,” she wonders if she has Jewish relatives, though she does also consider that the girl simply might be one of the “good goyim”—admitting that such exist. But wild behavior typifies “goyim,”

while "eydl" (noble) behavior typifies Jews, seen prototypically in the Biblical brothers, Jacob and Esau, the model types of Jew and Gentile, respectively, the one enacting the desired traits of piety and love of Torah; the other, greed, impatience, and wild submission to crass physical needs. "Eydl" behavior, however, while linked to a "Jewish" soul, is not necessary and inevitable but the product of the larger disciplines of the culture as well as self-discipline. "Self-control and a consciousness of being a "ben-meylekh"—son of a king— the chosen nation. We're better than the goyim You're more aristocratic. It's about decency. It's about being a mentsh more than the goyim," as one of her informants puts it (p.160).

"Goyim," Hasidic women teach girls, are incapable of controlling immodest desires, their "evil inclination" (yaytser hure)—a typification that sounds remarkably similar to what is taught about Jewish men, a point Fader, unfortunately, does not explore with readers or, what would have been most interesting, with her informants. Gentiles—real ones live on the borders of Boro Park and interspersed among Jews in Williamsburg, and are often visible and audible on the streets, across back yards— are the ever-present warning against the consequences of failure to control wills and "cultivate Jewish souls," with the help of Torah, which Jews after all, but not Gentiles, have, the ultimate distinction between them. Fader cites the anthropologist, Jerome Mintz, who describes a Hasidic man threatening his son that unless he follows ritual norms, he will be a goy. "That's the worst thing in the world," the man says. "His worst fear is he's going to be a goy." (p.161) For girls, modesty is the greatest demarcation between female Jewishness and Gentileness; Gentile girls flout their bodies shamelessly, have no behavioral boundaries, are "wild" (promiscuous, indiscriminate). Modest Jewish girls by contrast, are literally, "noble": Fader sees kindergarden girls constructing paper crowns emblazoned with the words, "tsnies iz man kroyn" (modesty is my crown), told by their teacher that their modest Jewish souls make them royal, and to always walk as if they had real crowns on their head, to remind the world that they are the real princesses. If this reference is also a contrast to the anti-Jewish

stereotype of the vulgar, materialistic “Jewish American Princess,” that is, not just to “goyim” but to Jews who do not uphold pious standards of behavior, we do not know. Goyish behavior, as noted, is not restricted to Gentiles.

Nor is modest behavior confined to dress; it governs speech too, both volume and content. Expletives defile the tongue; screaming violates Jewish “nobility” and weakens, as alternatively, good speech and intonation strengthen, the Jewish soul. Very young children are taught to discipline their speech: *me redt nisht azoy, di kenst es zugn in a shayne veyg?* (we don’t talk like that. Can you say it in a nice way?) While of course, parents in other cultures intervene similarly in their children’s speech, in this culture, the intervention is religiously mandated and infused and linked to the whole complex of behaviors, thinking, and institutional structures that construct the Hasidic world. To this world, “goyim” form the ever-present worst alternative. Thus, a young boy is overheard using the “f” word and when asked by a shocked mother where he learned it (the boy had no idea what it meant, thinking it just meant stupid or silly), responded that he had heard it in a game of *shaygetz* (!) (young Gentile male), from a friend (a Hasidic boy, of course). The game is a version of cops and robbers but here, the iconic bad guy is the Gentile; the scenario, Gentile-versus-Jew. The boy’s mother remarked that the friend must live on the outskirts of Boro Park and have heard this word on streets dominated by Gentiles. Just as Jews need to guard what they put in their mouths (by the rules of *kashrut*), she tells her son, so they must guard what comes out of them, in speech, raising this behavior to the level of Biblically ordained mandate, on a par with the ritual diet, perhaps the most fundamental demarcator of Jewish life from non-Jewish and Jews from Gentiles. Similarly, Jewish girls are taught to contrast their “fine” makeup, jewelry, dress, to the “crassness” of those of Gentile girls. All this Fader notes, coexists with a fixation on jewelry and clothes, particularly in the pre-marriage set (Boro Park has become an Orthodox shopping mecca), but for married women, as well, who one of Fader’s informants told her, exceed women in Manhattan for elegance

(despite—in her view, because of—their wigs and hats). Modesty then, Fader points out in one of this book's most important insights, is not simply about self-deprivation or control of women. Hasidic girls and women "use the disciplines of modesty to affect their everyday lives by enjoying, in culturally and religiously appropriate ways, the pleasures of secular consumption, bodily adornment, and literacy. "They legitimize their taste for fashion and finery with the rhetoric of Jewish "nobility." With its orientation of the self toward an outside agent, discipline, Fader argues, citing Webb Keane, becomes an important alternative to liberal models of agency. For the women of Bobov Hasidism, who navigate between secular manifestations and their Jewish, Hasidic base (unlike "nebbly" Hasidic women), the discipline of modesty becomes a way to collapse distinctions portrayed as oppositional, in this case, the demands of piety and the desire to look good according to reigning secular standards. In their practice, "these desires complement each other, challenging the liberal belief that the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the material, the body and the soul, need be oppositions at all." (p.178)

Girls particularly engage the lures and dangers of the "goyish" world because of their mandate to enter and navigate that world. Concerted attention, therefore, is given to countering the subversive effects of this contact, by labeling, e.g., the same English-language (heavily censored) fiction that girls are allowed, even required, to read in school as deficient, compared to the religiously-themed, Jewish literature that Hasidic presses turn out. Schools work to limit girls' leisure time reading choices, forbidding, for instance, visits to public libraries—a ban, Fader notes without comment, that many families ignored (defiance whose meaning and dimensions merit further investigation). She notes, moreover, that girls independently obtain books they know are contraband, setting off book bag searches at schools.

But the outside world imposes unavoidably. Even if they refrain from using headsets on airplanes, images of immodest dress, of male-female romance, loom on the screens of others. Ads on the sides of buses convey images of beautiful men and women in underwear, in

embrace. Hence, the imperative of evoking autonomously directed self-discipline in the younger generation and of instituting self-regulating peer mechanisms of social control: girls are taught not only to challenge friends who may be violating norms, but to do so effectively (without humiliating them, which is not only a sin but counterproductive). Desire, however, also comes from within: girls at (of course, all-girl) summer camp who defy rules and do not cover up with robes and stockings (!) as soon as they leave the swimming pool, because they want a whole-body tan.

Actual or even contemplated defiance meets a potent counterforce in late adolescence, when girls reach marriageable age and face the rigors of scrutiny in the arranged marriage market: modesty is *sine qua non* for a good match. Enhanced modesty betters one's prospects so girls and even the rest of their families often move up a modesty notch in their dress to attract a desirable match, or agree in premarital negotiations between the families for the girl to adopt a more stringent type of dress or head covering than is her family's custom, in order to seal a desirable deal. This enhancement of Hasidic behavior can also better the marriage prospects of younger siblings, all of which necessarily filters "down" to educate girls about the benefits of compliance and "autonomous" adoption of stringent norms, and the equally significant consequences of defying them. Because, next to expulsion to the "goyish" world, the worst that can happen to a girl is failure to land a good match, life alone, without family and the manifold social placements that come from having a husband and children and re-creating in one's own life the norms one has been raised to perpetuate.

Marriage is a critical, make-or-break, event not only in the lives of the partners but their families, with major social and economic implications. Not marrying is an immeasurable tragedy and disruption of communal rhythms. Even delaying marriage raises doubts about and seriously harms an individual's marriageability: past a certain age, there is no approved social category of single people; by age 25, a single person is considered damaged goods and will have difficulty getting a match, considered "material" only for someone similarly

“damaged,” whether by age or illness, physical and/or mental (“he’s a little funny and she’s a little slow—perfect match,” says one of Fader’s informants).

Accordingly, by the end of high school, girls move into the marriage market, under pressure to nail a good match in a small window of time when the best prospects are most plentiful, before they have been snatched by others, and the circumstances (their own youth and freshness on the market) are most advantageous. Each person is understood to have a “bashert,” one intended for her or him, but finding the “bashert” takes expert mediation, usually by professional matchmakers, that takes into account many variables that give candidates a ranking and eligibility rating in the highly competitive marriage market. Not just obvious things, like whether there is rabbinic ancestry, are considered, but whether there is disease in the family, especially, mental illness, or divorce. Even the death of a candidate’s parent marks one a notch down. The analogy with royalty, clearly, is more than metaphorical.

Some lines of investigation are gender differentiated, with girls investigated for looks, type of education, choice of friends, personality (quiet? gregarious—but not inappropriately so?), modesty, household skills and efficiency. Investigation of a candidate’s background and behavior is rigorous, with teachers, neighbors, even in one case Fader cites, the family butcher, consulted about character and behavior, and both sets of parents must first assign a high grade for a (chaperoned) introduction to occur. Hasidic society is extremely status conscious, with complex hierarchies based on family background (yikhes, or lack thereof), wealth, and occupation that decide an individual’s market value, about which Fader provides detailed analysis and an informative Table (“Categories of Hasidic Families”).

However secular or modern Orthodox readers may view these patterns, Hasidim have an equal critique of marriage (or caricatures of marriage) in Gentile or secular families, in line with their larger critiques of those worlds: secular marriage is about selfish indulgence



of passion; individuals and their limited personal horizons rather than families and community; fleeting present rather than past and future; personal gratification rather than commitment to larger purposes. Here too, as in the other ways that this fundamental difference between contemporary Hasidism and the larger culture is expressed, Hasidism levels a moral challenge to secular modernity that is not easily dismissed. Even the system of vetting prospective partners would in essence if not in all particulars, seem a cogent alternative to the rash partnering and unpartnering that marks secular society. As one of Fader's informants notes, anyone can be on good behavior on a date. Why would parents not care enough to check into whom their children are marrying, contributing to this most crucial decision from their greater life experience and perspective?

Hasidic brides take formal classes in which they not only learn the rules of "family purity" (which require that during menstruation and for a week after, not just sexual abstinence but the cessation of any physical contact or even endearing words between wife and husband, lest these lead to sex). They are lectured about the meaning of Jewish marriage and sexuality as vehicles for elevation of desire to holiness. In this arena too, Hasidic culture appropriates the discourse of secular culture but molds it to Hasidic purposes. Hasidic brides are taught that adherence to "family purity" will yield them not just the romantic love, but friendship and intimacy with husbands unknown and unknowable in the secular/ "goyish" world. Here too, then, religious discipline is said to come not at the *expense* of personal fulfillment, but alongside and, indeed, activating and actualizing it. Secular values are not denied; they are claimed and refashioned, using moral and psychological values upheld in the secular world.

Given the emphasis on modesty to the point even of valorizing distancing from one's own body—Fader overheard Bobov girls proudly telling their mothers that they had learned to don clothing underneath their nightgowns, avoiding the sight of their own nakedness—and the absence of all physical contact between the couple, who may meet once or twice before becoming engaged, the transition to marriage

and sexual activity is sudden and radical. Brides attend weeks of “kale” (bride) classes (and men, “khusn,” groom, classes, the latter, usually short-duration, one-on-one sessions with a rabbi), in which some learn about sex for the first time, with some, of both sexes, fainting at the news of what they are expected to do, in general, and with total strangers when they have spent their lives hiding from the sight of even their own nakedness (albeit, not the camp girls who want a whole body tan), and avoiding even eye contact with others of the opposite sex. Why teach such things before they are of practical use, the reasoning goes, when it would only serve as a harmful distraction, an invitation, even, to forbidden behavior? Fader herself was a bride during part of her field work and was able to attend a “kale” class (albeit only for the more moderate Hasidic elements, and in more modern Flabush, not Boro Park; parents in the latter did not consent to her presence, as a non-initiate, in “kale” classes), and speak with brides-to-be and their teachers. This provided an invaluable perspective that likely yielded richer, fuller information about this sensitive area than would likely have been the case had she and her informants not shared this status—or had Fader not shared this information about herself with her informants, with some of whom, mutual friendships developed.

In this critical area, too, perhaps especially, we see Hasidic society responding to awareness of secular models: the Torah way held up as a route to holiness and personal satisfaction. Blind obedience of the rules of “family purity,” as in other areas, was not the message; “elevation” of ideals upheld in the modern, secular world—intimacy, desire, pleasure—was (though bottom-line, we would note, conformity to the rules is required, whether or not one agrees with the rationalization given them, something Fader’s informants know very well). Torah practices became a “civilizing discourse that disrupted the liberal oppositions of nature and culture, the primitive and the civilized” (p.203), teaching the practice of both romantic and platonic love in marriage (see p.204 for the especially creative, indeed, brilliant metaphor that Fader’s teacher presented her students—some of whom did ask pressing questions about the “cold and depressing” strictures of family

purity—indicating that they anticipate enjoying both physical and emotional intimacy).

Along with reference to the ideals of love and intimacy shared with secular culture was the ubiquitous derogatory comparison with “Gentile” norms—the “warped” absence of modesty; sexuality and lust flaunted on the streets and in coarse, explicit language; behavior empty of meaning and eventually, even of passion. On the other Gentile extreme, the Christian (actually, as Fader notes, just the Catholic) norm, was castigated for treating sex as dirty, with the highest ideal (exemplified by priests), being abstinence and celibacy. Jewish practice, by contrast, *kales* were taught, recognizes sexual needs as natural, legitimate, and potentially holy—with the ability to make it holy largely in their hands. That practice, paradoxically or not, we would note, also vastly expands the realm of the erotic by eroticizing seemingly insignificant, mundane acts, like a wife pouring juice for her husband, not likely to be a signifier in any other context but in this lifestyle, a message that she is “pure” and sexually available after her time of separation. Even the lack of attractiveness is eroticized in this system: a woman who returns from the ritual bath which ends her time of sexual withdrawal is without makeup or fine hair adornment (wet hair is bad for wigs), yet precisely these looks signal sexual availability to husbands, who respond accordingly.

This area more than any other in Hasidic life (and observant Jewish practice altogether), depends on autonomous compliance of women, since as Fader’s *kale* teacher pointed out to her students, “no one checks on you. This is between you and God.” The cycles of sexual access and withdrawal are in women’s hands and at their discretion: it is the wife who tells the husband when she is or is not “pure” (though in case of doubt—blood spot or not?—the wife is to take her underwear or the cloth used to swab internally for blood before going to the mikve for judgment by a rabbi who specializes in menstrual blood, a practice that would seem to violate modesty most outrageously, and which anecdotal evidence the *kale* teacher herself cites, is sometimes—? often?— defied). Here too, reality confounds simplistic depictions of

women as mere pawns in the control of men. For, we would note, it is the male system—not just Hasidic, much less only the variant Fader studies, but rabbinic, going back to the earliest law codes—that empowers women this way, putting them, not men, in control of sexual access, a feature of this patriarchal system that profoundly perplexes this reviewer).

Fader sets out to make a significant case using an innovative focus and conceptual apparatus and succeeds, contributing to several significant areas of scholarship and yielding many fascinating insights. Her findings have complicated and troubling cultural and societal implications. While secular or even Modern Orthodox readers might find much of what Fader depicts objectionable—surely the racism and the proto-racism, however modified, contradictory, and inconsistent these (mercifully) may be—no group identity is possible without distinct behaviors and line drawing against other collective behaviors, and such distinctions are not possible or at least, not tenable in the long term, without some hierarchical value system that deems the group's behaviors superior. The Bobov variant of this may seem extreme to those outside of their society, but it is a question of where on the continuum one falls. The critique of mindless materialism and consumerism, of hedonistic indulgence, in the name of higher, more enduring values and the sacredness of intimacy is one that others share, and like the Bobover, can make meaningful only through the enactment of very different norms for consumption and partnering than those in much of contemporary Western society. Those with liberal (or conservative) political values, who espouse vegetarianism or the environment, or oppose abortion rights—also fall on a continuum of demonizing those who do not share their commitments and of extolling their choices and lifestyle as superior, and tend to choose the society of others who share their views. While one might well argue for alternatives other than both those of the "secular" culture (an enormous generalization that Fader does not deconstruct) and those of Bobov (these are after all not the only alternatives available, a polarity the Bobovers erect but which hardly represents the range of social reality in New York,

the U.S.—never mind the world), the need to establish and defend the superiority of chosen lines necessarily creates some of the same dynamics that critics of Fader’s informants might articulate.

Drafting women to carry the burden of constructing this society’s boundaries and its internal meaning and messages is a very complicated phenomenon. Women in this society are simultaneously subordinated and derogated—colonized—and empowered, given roles of great value and astonishing latitude to elaborate and enact systems of meaning. Clearly, despite my curiosity, expressed above, posing this and related questions to her informants in this project would have compromised Fader’s ethnographical methods. Perhaps her future work will probe some of these paradoxes and complications.

1. On this, see my “Ritual,” in *Jewish Women in America, An Historical Encyclopedia*, Paula E. Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1997), II:1150–1155.

2. See my Introduction to Pauline Wengeroff, *Memoirs of a Grandmother, Scenes from the Cultural History of the Jews of Russia in the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 52–61.

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## Jews in the Shaping of Modern Capitalism

A review essay by Steven Windmueller

### ***Capitalism and the Jews* by Jerry Z. Muller. Princeton University Press**

In a relatively compact book, the reader is introduced to the story of Jews and capitalism by economic historian Jerry Muller.

Professor Muller posits that “to understand modern European and Jewish history” one needs to appreciate the historical relationship between capitalism and Jews. Unfortunately, this book simply does not achieve this outcome. This text can best be described as a brief overview of some of the core themes that might define this connection. Beyond this point, this work is disappointing in its lack of depth and content. Surprisingly, his endnotes are often more informative and useful than the body of his material.

The author sets out to explore how both the world of religion (namely Christianity) and of governments reacted to the role of Jews within the economic order. Where Jews were accepted in more liberal nation-state systems, they flourished within the capitalistic model. Where and when they were rejected, Jews sought to embrace alternative economic ideologies, including socialism and communism. An additional response involved the notion that unless Jews had their own nation-state, they would remain “the other”; thus, the Zionist enterprise was seen as another expression of their status in the world. But in none of these arenas, does Muller do justice to the historical, economic or political issues associated with these respective categories.

What Muller does capture are elements of the relationship between some of the core ideas that have shaped modern capitalism and the impact of these principles on Jewish economic behavior. He specifically accomplishes elements of his goal in two specific areas. His historic overview on the theme of usury is useful and informative. In this context Professor Muller’s analysis of church policy and early philosophical

thinking about monetary notions are particularly illuminating.

Secondly, his background analysis on the works of Georg Simmel and Werner Sombart represents one of the stronger elements to this manuscript. Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* and Sombart's two primary contributions, *Modern Capitalism* and *The Jews and Economic Life* shed some fascinating and useful insights on the theoretical principles aligning Jews with the capitalist enterprise. Correspondingly, Mueller's analysis of John Maynard Keynes' contributions to this discourse along with his brief references to the writings of Frederick Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* and *The Constitution of Liberty* offer some important insights into the engagement of Jews with capitalism.

Hayek's notions about capitalism, as interpreted by Muller, suggests the following: "The economic vibrancy created a social and cultural dynamic, demanding the adaptation of old ways of thinking and behaving." For Hayek, Jews portrayed the necessary cultural characteristics that were seen as essential for "competitive capitalism".

As Muller seeks to point out that the enemies of capitalism attempted over time whether under Nazism or Communism to identify Jews with the evils and failings of the capitalist system. Citing Osama Bin Laden's "Letter to America" in 2002, the author notes how even radical Islam seeks to align Jews with the capitalistic system: "the Jews have taken control of your economy, through which they have then taken control of your media, and now control all aspects of your life making you their servants and achieving their aims at your expense."

In some measure, Jerry Muller's focus on Jewish involvement with the world of Communism and the former Soviet Union seems to take away from his core thesis and focus on the engagement of Jews with capitalism. His attention to the 20th century, and more directly the American experience, is totally absent from these pages. In light of the contributions made by American Jews to this nation's economic enterprise, this book falls far short in capturing that significant and essential story. Further and somewhat surprising, this writer ignores the past and

recent events involving ponzi schemes and other indiscretions, where Jews have been specifically identified.

The subject matter is simply too complex to be condensed into a 200 page volume. Had the author elected to identify this work as focusing on some of the core issues associated with Jews and capitalism than such a volume would garner greater credibility. In its present form, the author simply fails to achieve what the title and his introduction seek to project.

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## Moreshet: From The Classics

### ***A Theological–Political Treatise, Chapter 3 — By Baruch Spinoza***

That [the Jewish people] have been preserved in great measure by Gentile hatred, experience demonstrates. When the king of Spain formerly compelled the Jews to embrace the State religion or exile, a large number of Jews accepted Catholicism.

Now, as these renegades were admitted to all the native privileges of Spaniards, and deemed worthy of filling all honorable offices, it came to pass that they straightway became so intermingled with the Spaniards as to leave of themselves no relic or remembrance. But exactly the opposite happened to those whom the king of Portugal compelled to become Christians, for they always, though converted, lived apart, inasmuch as they were considered unworthy of any civic honors.

The sign of circumcision is, as I think, so important, that I could persuade myself that it alone would preserve the nation forever. Nay, I would go so far as to believe that if the foundations of their religion have not emasculated their minds they may even, if occasion offers, so changeable are human affairs, raise up their empire afresh, and that God may a second time elect them.

Of such a possibility we have a very famous example in the Chinese. They, too, have some distinctive mark on their heads which they most scrupulously observe, and by which they keep themselves apart from everyone else, and have thus kept themselves during so many thousand years that they far surpass all other nations in antiquity. They have not always retained empire, but they have recovered it when lost, and doubtless will do so again after the spirit of the Tartars becomes relaxed through the luxury of riches and pride.

Lastly, if any one wishes to maintain that the Jews, from this or from any other cause, have been chosen by God for ever, I will not gainsay him if he will admit that this choice, whether temporary or eternal, has no regard, in so far as it is peculiar to the Jews, to aught but do-

minion and physical advantages (for by such alone can one nation be distinguished from another), whereas in regard to intellect and true virtue, every nation is on a par with the rest, and God has not in these respects chosen one people rather than another.

## New Approaches to Gender and Feminism: Jewish Philosophical Perspectives

A review essay by Rochelle L. Millen

***Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, Indiana University Press.**

Culled from presentations made at a 2001 conference held at Arizona State University, the essays in this volume explore significant facets of the intersection of Jewish and feminist philosophy. In her introduction, the conference organizer and editor, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, relates how the conversation regarding the confluence of these disciplines began with a 1986 essay by Heidi Ravven titled "Creating a Jewish Feminist Philosophy." But the feminism that has indeed transformed contemporary Judaism since the 1970s has focused upon the theological and hermeneutical rather than the more narrowly philosophical. Authors such as Judith Plaskow, Rachel Adler, Judith Romney-Wegner, Rochelle L. Millen, and Judith Hauptman, among others, reframe issues in rabbinic texts, examining their content and context through a feminist lens. Without analyzing the counterpoint of rabbinic texts and Jewish philosophy, one might claim that Tamar Ross in her analysis of the impact of R. Kook's philosophy of history upon Jewish feminism is among the few thinkers who assess the issues from a more strictly philosophical framework.

The essays in this volume continue the conversation between Jewish philosophy and feminism begun by Ravven in 1986 and extended by Tirosh-Samuelson in her 1994 article, "Dare to Know: Feminism and the Discipline of Jewish Philosophy." They cover a broad range of philosophical themes and while of high quality, vary in their precision of analysis. A positive aspect to the work is its lack of consensus, its exploration of nuance and complexity. Some contributors articulate discomfort with feminist philosophy, while others see Jewish philosophy as a possible enriching corrective to feminist philosophy. Undergirding this diversity of viewpoints are various ways of construing just what

feminist philosophy and Jewish philosophy are, questions of definition that continue to invite discussion. The interested reader will find much to ponder and will gain from the presentation of new perspectives. In order to convey this diversity and nuance, I have chosen to comment in detail on five of the twelve essays, briefly mention the others, and conclude with some general remarks.

Sarah Pessin's "Loss, Presence, and Gabirol's Desire: Medieval Jewish Philosophy and the Possibility of a Feminist Ground" opens Part I, "Re-reading Jewish Philosophers." Trained in medieval Jewish philosophy, Pessin affirms the well-known conception in classical Greek philosophy, that "the feminine" indicates passivity, loss, and the negation of goodness. From the pre-Socratics through Plato and Aristotle, "the feminine", although acknowledged as nurturer, is consistently defined as weak, obedient, and mired in matter rather than characterized by rationality. Pessin sets as her task the attempt to redeem "the feminine" from its negative connotations in medieval Jewish philosophy through an examination of the thought of Solomon Ibn Gabirol.

Ibn Gabirol's philosophy of matter serves as the means for his transvaluation of "the feminine." Pessin demonstrates that Gabirol praises the material, pairing it with Divine essence and therefore giving positive value to the heretofore passive realm of the material. From its earlier low status, materiality becomes the very focus of Divine Essence itself. For Gabirol (feminine) receptivity, clothed in *eros* replaces (masculine) power "in the estimation of the highest existential possibility of human being" (Pessin, 28). The feminine thus comes to represent not loss, but presence, both of the human and the Divine.

Pessin makes clear that "finding a feminist ground" in Gabirol's metaphysics does not make him a feminist. She discusses neither women nor misogynistic assumptions. Rather, Pessin claims that Gabirol's analysis "signals a rupture" (Pessin 29) in medieval philosophical thinking by reconfiguring "the feminine" as presence rather than loss. While Gabirol, in the tradition of Plato, Pythagoras, Aristotle and Philo does articulate "the feminine" as privation, Neoplatonism leads to his

developing the notion of a higher level of matter, a sublime kind of materiality. It is this conception of the highest grade of matter that offers the opportunity to prioritize and privilege the passivity of the material, and thus of “the feminine.”

In Gabirol’s gradations of matter, materiality is the means through which God connects to God’s essence. Thus, as Pessin notes “Gabirol creates a conceptual space in which matter trumps form” (Pessin 39). From the usual identification of matter with negation, passivity, and evil, matter here becomes the very correlation of the Divine Essence. It is fascinating that Gabirol voices this in language later incorporated into Kabbalah. The material in the Divine is “hidden,” as both matter and God are hidden aspects of reality. God’s nature, that is, is revealed through its concealment, just as the nature of matter is concealed in its being revealed.

Gabirol’s privileging of the material—its receptivity and *eros*—create a novel axiology, one in which masculine desire-for-power-over is less significant than the passive feminine yearning for presence and becoming. Desire-for-completion trumps desire-for power, leading to a “willingness to engage the self through an engagement with the other” (Pessin 40) His philosophy creates a new and different hierarchy, one in which Aristotle’s view of matter as negation and the source of evil is transformed. Through its potential for receptivity, matter, as the source of *eros*, is the center of human engagement and culture. From “the feminine” sprouts the totality of life, the most fundamental and deepest human truths.

Idit Dobbs-Weinstein’s “Thinking Desire in Gersonides and Spinoza” continues Pessin’s reassessment of the status of matter in the history of philosophy, although with a sharper bite. Weinstein argues that feminist philosophy generally accepts the mind/body dualism, which results in a devaluing of the physical. Through examining the thought of Gersonides and Spinoza, Weinstein claims that “feminist philosophy can be transformed from an abstract critique of dualism, or anti-dualism, to a concrete mode of a-dualist philosophizing” (Weinstein 56).

Weinstein asserts a blindness at the core of feminist philosophies, one which accepts “the canonical authority which they question and the fathers whose recognition they seek” (Weinstein 59) and gives examples of what she terms “reticent” feminist readings of the canon. In this category she includes Luce Irigaray’s reading of Plato’s *Symposium*, Judith Butler on Spinoza, and Cathy Carruth on Freud.

For Spinoza, “the mind is nothing but the idea of the body” (Weinstein 70), and prejudices, which hold powerful affects, form obstacles which even rational demonstrations cannot weaken... The qualities attributed to God, for instance—despite contradictory experience, are maintained by elaborate human mythologies and explanations. The issue of what Weinstein terms “prejudice,” for Spinoza, is political, since religion is central to the rule of law.

Weinstein considers questions regarding the use of gender categories as “anachronistic” (Weinstein 74), wishing instead to explore how—and if—Jewish philosophy encourages thinking about the philosophical canon “against the grain.” The brief consideration of Gersonides and Spinoza exemplifies her claim that religion and politics are complicit in oppression. Similarly to Pessin, Weinstein wishes to recover a materialist theory of knowledge as the means to undermine the dualism in Western—especially Christian—philosophy. Politics cannot be based on an abstract human being, separate from her/his natural, physical self. In the seeds of democratic thinking sown by Spinoza, Weinstein finds positive value for both feminist and Jewish philosophy.

A different perspective is articulated in Leora Batnitsky’s “Dependency and Vulnerability: Jewish and Feminist Existential Construction of the Human.” Batnitsky’s aim is to describe how Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and Emanuel Levinas define what it means to be human and how their Jewish existentialist thinking compares with that of “women centered” feminist philosophy, especially feminist philosophies of care. By the latter, Batnitsky refers specifically to those who argue that aligning “women,” “the feminine,” and “mothering” is not reactionary. Rather, such interconnection transforms not only feminist, but also

moral and political thinking. She argues—quite astutely—that these Jewish existentialists share three notions with feminist philosophies of care. They work to develop a concept of the self who is vulnerable and dependent on others and not wholly autonomous. They suggest that responsibility and ethics grow out of this dependency. And they designate dependence and our response to vulnerability as “feminine.” Contemporary feminist philosophy can then help us understand the use of gendered terms in Jewish philosophy. In essence, the philosophical accounts of the human as dependent are “philosophically and politically valuable” (Batnitsky 128). They insist that relationality is the foundation from which all else evolves. Levinas, for instance, insists that the passive capacity in the human being, “the feminine,” is the source of ethics.

While Buber famously maintains mutuality and reciprocity as hallmarks of the dialogical I–Thou relationship, Levinas takes a more radical stance. For him, ethics derive from relationship precisely because of its **assymetry**. Indeed, Levinas criticizes Buber precisely for the emphasis upon mutuality, insisting that ethics emerges from a one-sided responsibility for the Other. The Levinasian dialogical relationship is not reciprocal. It is also non-cognitive; “Relation itself...differs from knowledge,” Levinas writes (Quoted in Batnitsky, 131).

“The feminine,” for Levinas, is thus non-reciprocal and non-cognitive. Batnitsky sees this definition as part of Levinas’s lament against what he terms “the totalizing” propensities of modern culture. “The feminine” resists seeking the universal much as Judaism, according to Levinas, emphasizes the particular, in contrast to Greek thinking. Batnitsky analyzes in detail several works of Levinas, drawing conceptual parallels between Levinas’s theory of ethics and various feminist philosophies of care. For instance, she shows how Levinas’s conception of “the feminine” accords with Carol Gilligan’s description of “women’s morality.” For Gilligan, women define themselves in the context of relationships and judge themselves in terms of the ability to care. Woman is both creator and nurturer of the web of human relationships. Such a web spawns moral conundra different from the universal rule orien-

tation written about by those such as Lawrence Kohlberg, whose ideas originally challenged Gilligan to rethink “women’s morality.” Levinas would agree that the varied and manifold tasks of mothering give rise to ethical dilemmas quite distinct from those of the universal vs. self-interest, the Western, male-oriented, Kantian-influenced format. Instead, the many demands of mothering compel women to weigh the claims of one self-other relationship against another; to balance, reconcile, accommodate, satisfy, and act. Thus ethics are seen as infinite—the constant juggling of priorities in relationships—and action oriented. Batnitsky quotes Levinas’s words about what it means to be oriented by and toward ethics, which for Levinas are always understood in material, concrete form. Ethics, he states, “is to give to the Other...a gift of my own skin” (Quoted in Batnitsky, 134). Levinas’s stress on the material correlates with both feminist and Jewish ethics, and echoes Pessin’s analysis of Gabirol. He insists that human effort must be channeled toward maintaining and encouraging the flourishing of an ethic of care.

Some have argued—correctly, I believe—that the emphasis in Western philosophy on moral autonomy leads to the privatization of women’s experience and, as in Kohlberg, the exclusion of that experience from the accepted moral compass. In Western moral thinking, à la Kant and Rawls, the moral agent is a disembodied self-activated by reason and the abstract concept of justice. Levinas, as a modern Jewish philosopher, thus connects “the feminine” with caring and the good, rather than with rationality and justice. He reconfigures Judaism and “the feminine” into an interpersonal ethic, which can neither be private nor based solely upon abstract principles, both aspects of Western philosophical notions, but must rather have a public, material (embodied) dimension focused on the good.

Investigating the theological background of Levinas’s use of “the feminine” in his ethics, Batnitsky finds its roots in Rosenzweig’s arguments about the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. This is an unexpected—and tenuous—connection, which she summarizes this way:



“Levinas represents the ethical obligation to the other as the eternal mark of humanity while Rosenzweig describes the Jewish People as themselves living this timeless ethic for the sake of others” (Quoted in Batnitsky, 138). This is a creative, insightful analysis. In Batnitsky’s paraphrase, “A woman embodies natural openness to the supernatural realm of love, just as Jews embody in their love God’s revelation to them” (Batnitsky 140). Most disconcerting, however, is how Rosenzweig characterizes “Jewish blood.” Rosenzweig’s understanding of Judaism as a “blood community” fits the prevalence of eugenics in the 1920s, but surely jars when one confronts it in the twenty-first century! The same can be said for Levinas and Rosenzweig when they both justify and laud Hermann Cohen’s concept of exile and homelessness as part of the Divine plan for Jews and Judaism.

Batnitsky concludes that engaging Jewish existentialist configurations of “the feminine” is useful for both feminist philosophy and moral thinking. Buber, Rosenzweig and Levinas articulate innovative perspectives in philosophy and ethics from within a canon largely Christian and often anti-Jewish. After carefully laying out the value of “the feminine,” she inquires rather unexpectedly: “When does the notion of ‘the feminine’ do more damage than it does critical work?” She responds that Buber, Rosenzweig, and Levinas’s use of “the feminine”, despite their best intentions, does tend to relegate women to the traditional roles of homemaker and mother. But is this so? Does writing of “the feminine” in traditional categories necessarily preclude independence, autonomy, and egalitarianism? From a philosophical perspective, I would respond, “not necessarily.” It seems to me that Judaism, as well as feminist philosophers of care, emphasize what I would call practical or reasoned ethics. The system of *mitzvot* (commandments) creates internal awareness as well as external discipline. But this system requires knowledge of how to be virtuous and act ethically. Perhaps this is best seen by the question posed in BT Kiddushin: which is greater, study of Torah or the doing of (practical acts of) goodness? A system which weds learning to action so intricately surely can be egalitarian.

Enlightening and challenging as is this essay, it concludes on a surpris-

ing note. Batnitsky suggests in her closing paragraph that the philosophy of Hermann Cohen can enhance that of these Jewish existentialists in a way that leads to greater balance. She points to Cohen's stress upon *hesed*, or loving-kindness, a rationalized virtue that balances the pre-reflective ethic of Levinas. But one doesn't need Hermann Cohen to have an emphasis on *hesed*, as it is found throughout the rabbinic corpus. Indeed, that corpus is the very foundation for the work of these thinkers. Turning to Cohen—especially since his anti-Zionism and neo-Kantianism can be problematic—seems lame. It is a weak conclusion to an otherwise stimulating essay.

The very structure of Suzanne Last Stone's essay, "Feminism and the Rabbinic Concept of Justice", conveys the complexity and subtlety of her subject: an analysis of rabbinic sources that deals with the tension between justice and mercy, both Divine and human, and the relation of that tension to gender imagery. Last Stone's work traverses the boundaries between the philosophical, exegetical, legal, and the feminine/feminist aspect of each. She distills this theme in the literature from two perspectives. First, she examines the emotional framework supporting the legal concepts of justice and mercy in rabbinic thinking. Second, she explores the sources as a "window onto the role of the feminine in rabbinic tradition." Writing with great clarity, she sees her essay as "a response to the challenge of Jewish legal philosophy to take gender categories seriously in thinking through how the law historically has been shaped and what shape the law may take in the future" (Last Stone 263). This is a large task indeed.

Feminism has led to new inquiries revolving around sex and gender in legal issues and jurisprudence. One question emphasizes the effect of existing law upon the actual lives of women, which leads to another: are men and women different, and if so, in what ways? Surely legal doctrine must take account of such issues. The second question asks us to consider in what ways, if any, the modernist conception of law is itself gendered. Can—should—the lines between self and Other, reason and emotion, justice and mercy be blurred? Can—should—there be

a new paradigm to our binary way of thinking? Last Stone points out that while feminism has influenced general legal theory, its impact upon Jewish law has been far less. In the same way Christian feminists have often blamed Judaism and the Hebrew Bible for patriarchy in general (and in Christianity in particular) feminist legal scholars sometimes view the monotheism of Judaism as the foundation of authoritarian, patriarchal traditions in Western culture a perspective I heard espoused numerous times at meetings of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature. Monotheism is seen as cold, rigid, abstract, and hierarchical, while pluralism is viewed as open and more accepting of emotions and differences. This narrow construing of the rich traditions of Judaism arises primarily because familiarity with Judaism is usually based solely on knowledge of the biblical texts. Judaism—even in the twentieth-first century—is identified with the Hebrew Scriptures as mediated by centuries of Christian interpretation, and usually not at all with the corpus of rabbinic traditions. Understanding mercy and justice in Judaism requires sidestepping the Western Christian influence on the legal system and looking at the rabbinic system as an alternate paradigm, one able to critique the dominant conceptual perspective. Some claim that Jewish law has feminist aspects, despite its male focus. It emphasizes community, relatedness, and specific responsibilities and is framed by an ethic of care. Rabbinic law and feminist jurisprudence, according to Last Stone, illuminate and enrich each other.

Last Stone begins this exchange by exploring the rabbinic concept of justice. As multiple biblical sources indicate, God in the Hebrew Bible is a nuanced figure, having a variety of appellations, each indicating a different attribute. God manifests both strict justice and mercy. These polarities indicate the complexity of the Godhead and God's relation to humanity and are found in numerous interpretations of the text. Justice and mercy are intertwined and interdependent, especially in the multilayered midrashic literature. The text upon which Last Stone grounds her analysis is the well-known midrash from Lamentations Rabbah based on Jeremiah 31:14–17. Why is it that God responds to

the pleading of Rachel and not to the beseeching of the patriarchs and even of Moses? Last Stone's elucidation of the imagery in Jeremiah, including Jeremiah 11:19 and 31:28–29 is rich with insight, demonstrating how the etiology of the midrash comes to be that God "learns" mercy from the figure of Rachel. And what is mercy? According to Last Stone, it entails the ability to curb jealousy when overpowered by love, as exemplified in the midrash of Rachel sharing her secrets with Leah prior to Leah's marriage to Jacob. Mercy is an act of love, outside the context of justice.

In *Lamentations Rabbah*, the male figures—the patriarchs and Moses—question the justness of God's decree through logical argument, while Rachel's response embodies the emotional aspects. But does the choice of Rachel as this embodiment reflect assumptions about the nature of "the feminine" in rabbinic thinking? The interpretations are varied. Some see Rachel as a generic representation of human mercy, while others note that national suffering in the Book of Lamentations is personified as a woman in distress. Thus it makes sense that the source of solace in the midrash is a feminine voice. Last Stone also discusses the image of God as parent and the people Israel as children, an image made explicit in the pleadings of the patriarchs, Moses, and Rachel. Does Rachel's voice succeed in arousing God's compassion because it is maternal? It seems that only occasionally is God's attribute of mercy specifically associated with the feminine, despite the etymological connection between the Hebrew word for "compassion" and the noun meaning "womb." The image of God as a loving parent equates maternal and paternal love, demonstrating fluidity in the rabbinic use of gender imagery. But an asymmetry exists in that while men are often characterized as having feminine qualities, such as mercy, other attributes, such as legal reasoning, are seen as exclusively male. Is this asymmetry due to an essentialist understanding in rabbinic culture regarding male and female nature or is it motivated by molding societal behavior so as to build a particular vision of community? As Last Stone notes, this question divides the modern Jewish community and she does not argue for either side. She states, however, that the

gender imbalance “seems to be less a function of asymmetrical valuing of the genders themselves than that...men will elevate the importance of the role they believe they are obligated to perform”(Last Stone 283), a valuable insight.

Feminist jurisprudence seeks to reveal the gender and theological assumptions undergirding modern law in order to consider possible new configurations and concepts. It has uprooted itself from ancient roots which are modeled on impersonal rules and divine (male) justice and logic. Rabbinic ruminations on justice and mercy contribute to this rethinking by offering an alternate model of Divine justice, one which includes compassion and connectedness, jealousy and love, as integral to the notion of how God acts in the world. As Last-Stone indicates, how feminist discourse and rabbinic law will influence and enhance each other is a project just begun. This thought-provoking essay is an excellent contribution to the conversation.

In “Reconstructing Divine Power: Post-Holocaust Jewish Theology, Feminism, and Process Philosophy,” Sandra B. Lubarsky brings the perspectives of feminism and process philosophy to bear upon the thorny problem of theodicy as considered in post-Holocaust theology.

Her thesis is that post-Holocaust Jewish theologians, for the most part, have continued to view Divine power in traditional terms (i.e. God’s omnipotence as coercive power), which Lubarsky finds problematic. She begins by exploring the thinking of Eliezer Berkowitz and Irving Greenberg, both of whom write of God’s self-limitation of power as the *sine qua non* for human freedom, thus explaining God’s lack of intervention in the face of suffering due to moral evil. Lubarsky then critiques the notion of Divine hiddenness using a feminist lens and finally analyzes power based on the principles of process philosophy. The philosophical transformation of power based on a “relational metaphysics” has a significant impact, she claims, upon post-Holocaust theology and theodicy.

Lubarsky characterizes Martin Buber, Eliezer Berkovits, and Irving

Greenberg as “absence theologians,” releasing God from the culpability of inaction. God’s refraining from intervention, God’s seeming indifference to suffering reflects, in their understanding, God’s hiddenness, which is then, indeed, also God’s presence. Put another way, “...divine absence is a structural requirement that protects human existence in relation to divine omnipotence” (295). But there are certain problems in Lubarsky’s formulation. The complexity of theodicy requires meticulous attention to the minutiae of philosophical analysis. Even as she sets up the argument, she notes that for “absence theologians,” the power which God curtails is coercive power. Yet there is a distinction between brute force—as in the power of Niagara Falls—and coercive power, which requires intent and control. There is also relational power. I would say that omnipotence does not always—or necessarily—connote physical power. That omnipotence is traditionally construed only as coercive power is not the full picture. One might also question the notion of God’s restraint/indifference in order to allow for free will. It could be argued that God would permit no more evil than absolutely necessary for free will to exist. Yet the Holocaust surely goes beyond this. In Berkovits’s theodicy, God abandons the world out of respect for human freedom, no matter how abused. But God’s indifference is predicated, it seems, on an understanding of God’s power as physical and coercive. Thus God is essentially omnipotent, yet “impotent in history” (296).

To me, this seems a misreading of Berkovits, who attempts, perhaps desperately, to maintain the paradox of a powerful God who cares about the covenant with the God who remained hidden during the Shoah. Lubarsky reads Berkovits as removing God entirely from the historical arena. I would say that Berkovits affirms two contradictory ideas. To construe this as a removal from history and the covenantal arena is to affirm a kind of deism and to carry the idea to a conclusion Berkovits would have rejected.

Greenberg’s view of God as self-limiting is similar to that of Berkovits, but moves in a different direction. Greenberg argues that God is present in history, but not as an all-powerful, supernatural being. Rather,

God remains hidden in order for human beings to become more and more responsible. As covenantal partners in perfecting the world, each person has the task of increasing the way s/he reflects God's image by augmenting responsibility for the events of history. God's overwhelming supernatural powers were manifest in the infancy of history. Now, however, we are ever more accountable for our world, which increases human dignity. Similarly to Berkovits, Greenberg writes: "The deepest paradox of the Rabbis' teaching was that the more God is hidden, the more God is present" (297). For Greenberg, the establishment of the state of Israel (for Jews) is the strongest validation of God's hiddenness through human effort. Greenberg confronts the despair over the Holocaust, yet affirms covenantal renewal "in the living presence of a redemptive God" (294).

Two interesting points arise in Lubarsky's critique of Greenberg. First, she insists that Greenberg construes God's power solely as physical force. And secondly, she maintains that since God's activity is expressed through human agency, the covenant is undermined. Both of these claims require further analysis and support; I am not sure they will stand up to scrutiny.

Based on the earlier claim that in post-Holocaust Jewish theology divine omnipotence always connotes physical power, Lubarsky identifies omnipotence with the patriarchal, dominating power rightly criticized by feminism. "For it is patriarchal power," she writes, "that continues...to inform the thought of most post-Holocaust theologians" (301) She then identifies the hiddenness, or invisibility, of women with the hiddenness of God, arguing that feminist emphasis on relational power offers a corrective to the faulty theological strategy of divine hiddenness.

While astute in some ways, this argument is flawed, for the hiddenness of women means culture and society conspire to make women invisible. This is much different from the conscious withdrawal or abandonment ascribed to God by Berkovits and Greenberg.

The concluding section of this essay is a fascinating application of process theology to the concept of divine power and is based on the writings of Alfred N. Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. The two sources of power in process theology are self-determination and efficient causation, which alter the traditional understanding of omnipotence to mean Divine power existing *in relation* to human power. That is, divine power need not be curtailed to allow for human freedom. Evil exists not because God “allows” it, but because free human beings choose to ignore or contravene God’s will. According to Lubarsky, feminist and process thinkers affirm that true empowerment derives from “persuasive agency,” the strongest aspect of which is love. Thus God can be powerful without being coercive and without affecting human freedom. Applying process theology to the conundrum of theodicy is creative, although feminist theory doesn’t fit quite as snugly. Both, however, are assumed to circumvent the problem of Divine power as formulated earlier in the essay. Despite its interesting parallels and insights, the thorns still prick on the issue of theodicy.

Finally, two small things: notes 28 and 32 should cite the primary sources, and I would have wished for at least a brief reference to Zachary Braiterman’s book, *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton University Press: 1998), probably the best modern treatment of theodicy.

The other essays in the volume are as intriguing as these. Their themes range from feminism and Marxism, to epistemology, rabbinic exegesis, political philosophy, and even more about Emanuel Levinas. Rich and variegated, this collection illuminates the intersecting of gender and Jewish philosophy, constructing a foundation for further analysis.

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## Reckoning with Rival Religions

A review essay by Esther R. Nelson

***God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World—and Why Their Differences Matter* by Stephen Prothero. New York: HarperCollins Publisher.**

Prothero, in this excellent volume, claims to give us “new ways to enter into the ten thousand gates of human religiosity” (p. 338). He describes with some detail the diversity of eight world religions—Islam, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Yoruba Religion, Judaism, and Daoism. He adds a chapter titled, “A Brief Coda on Atheism,” although states at the outset of that chapter, “Atheism is not a great religion [n]onetheless, atheism stands in a venerable tradition...” (p. 317).

“Religion is now widely defined, by scholars and judges alike, in functional rather than substantive terms. Instead of focusing on some creedal criterion such as belief in God, we look for family resemblances” (p. 324). Members of the family of religions typically exhibit Four Cs: creed (statements of beliefs and values), cultus (ritual activities), code (standards for ethical conduct), and community (institutions). Prothero thinks it is imperative that we understand how various religions apply these “Four Cs,” not just so we can be religiously literate—something Prothero argues for in his book, *Religious Literacy What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn’t* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2007)—but so we can see how religious beliefs orchestrate world events. “Religion was behind both the creation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1947 and the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, both the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the Reagan Revolution of the 1980s” (p. 10).

“Religious folk worldwide agree that something has gone awry. They part company, however, when it comes to stating just what has gone wrong, and they diverge sharply when they move from diagnosing

the human problem to prescribing how to solve it" (p. 11). Prothero uses a four-part approach to his description and explanation of religions: a problem, a solution, which also serves as the religious goal, a technique(s) for moving from this problem to this solution, and an exemplar(s) who charts this path from problem to solution. In Judaism, for example, "this problem is exile—distance from God and from where we ought to be. The solution is return—to go back to God and to our true home. The techniques for making this journey are two: to tell the story and follow the law—to remember and to obey" (p. 253). The exemplars who chart this path are the Jewish people themselves who remember and obey while "wrestling with God."

Prothero's emphasis throughout this volume focuses on the differences among religious traditions. He is critical of Huston Smith (philosopher of religion, b. 1919) who writes, "At base, in the foothills of theology, ritual, and organizational structure, the religions are distinct. But beyond these differences, the same goal beckons" (p. 1). Not so, says Prothero. "One of the most common misconceptions about the world's religions is that they plumb the same depths, ask the same questions. They do not. Only religions that see God as all good ask how a good God can allow millions to die in tsunamis. Only religions that believe in souls ask whether your soul exists before you are born and what happens to it after you die" (p. 24).

"One purpose of the 'all religions are one' mantra is to stop this fighting and killing" (p. 3). "I too hope for a world in which human beings can get along with their religious rivals. I am convinced, however, that we need to pursue this goal through new means. Rather than beginning with the sort of Godthink that lumps all religions together in one trash can or treasure chest, we must start with a clear-eyed understanding of the fundamental differences in both belief and practice between Islam and Christianity, Confucianism and Hinduism" (p. 335). "In our bones" we know there are significant differences. We don't speak about having to "tolerate" a religion that is in agreement with our own.

Prothero adds, “The world’s religious rivals do converge when it comes to ethics, but they diverge sharply on doctrine, ritual, mythology, experience, and law” (p. 3). “No religion sees ethics alone as its reason for being” (p. 2). Prothero notes the work of Eboo Patel, a Muslim who runs Chicago-based Interfaith Youth Core, as a positive force as he (Patel) puts participants of different faiths “to work on community-based projects, encouraging them to discuss how their very different traditions impel them toward a shared commitment to service” (p. 336). This is a good example of how religious rivals converge on ethics. It’s the only “convergence” Prothero mentions.

I don’t see why the rituals, mythologies, and experiences of “religious rivals” could not converge as well, forming a rich, diverse tapestry of the various ways people have imaginatively approached and “entered into” both sacred and profane space—impelling us forward to celebrate and honor our shared humanity.

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## Two Poems

By Richard Sherwin

*All night the outside  
rain the roof tiles echoing  
my hollow brainfall  
youre home youre safe this moment  
transient and glittering*

*singing above deaths  
burden melodies whos such  
to call designed or  
unintelligent or nought  
but sparks of darkness rubbing*

*words into meaning  
less and more than lies the law  
our blessing curse and  
evaporated poem  
our flood a stain of dried sweat*

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mad cows chomping my  
synapses cud and asian  
birds pecking my lungs  
and scientists spraying my  
guts with ddt greens and

garbage polluting  
the wells and now these wouldbe  
imperialists  
irradiating what alls  
left us who needs death to die

Im joining rainbow  
peace movements everywhere so  
fast I'll be dodging  
everything this lethal world  
throws at my dekoshered ghost

worlds ends come and gone  
and judgment in and we're out  
and I refuse to  
compete with cockroaches and  
rats for whats left of this rock

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## Zachor: An Appeal for the Ransom of Captives

According to Jewish law, Jews are obliged to ransom their coreligionists from captivity. In the 11th century those of Fostat (ancient Cairo) and Alexandria, were frequently called upon to fulfill this obligation. Jews were great seafarers, and the Mediterranean was infected with pirates in those days. The capture of Jews was, therefore, a daily occurrence. They were largely taken prisoners for the express purpose of blackmailing Jewish communities. Great sacrifices were made in order to provide the sums demanded by the brigands, but in many cases single communities were unable to cover the expenses from their own resources, and thus appealed to communities abroad. The letters written for this purpose are testimonies to the solidarity of the Jewish people and their pious obedience to the Law. They are also the first documentary traces of that organized relief and rescue work.

The Cairo Genizah contained many such letters, of which the following is a good example, though it is somewhat incomplete.

*The Jews of Alexandria to Ephraim ben Shemarya and the Elders of the Palestinian Community of Fostat.* [Alexandria, first half of the 11th century]

To the highly respected Rabbi Ephraim, member of the great assembly, son of the Rabbi Shemarya, of blessed memory, and the Elders, the noble and highly honored men, may the Lord protect them, from your friends, the community of Alexandria, best greetings! You are the supporters of the poor and the aid of the men in need, you study diligently, you rouse the good against the evil inclination. You walk in the right way and practice justice. We let you know that we always pray for you. May God grant you peace and security!

We turn to you today on behalf of a captive woman who has been brought from Byzantium. We ransomed her for 24 denares besides the governmental tax. You sent us 12 denares; we have paid the remainder and the tax. Soon afterwards, sailors brought two other prisoners,

one of them a fine young man possessing knowledge of the Torah, the other a boy of about ten. When we saw them in the hands of the pirates, and how they beat and frightened them before our own eyes, we had pity on them and guaranteed their ransom. We had hardly settled this, when another ship arrived carrying many prisoners...

