

The History of History: German Philosophy, Judaism, and the Spinozist Moment

Review Essay

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German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses, by Michael Mack. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 229 pp. \$35.00 (c).

The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue: Jews and Germans from Moses Mendelssohn to Richard Wagner and Beyond, by Jeffrey S. Librett. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. 426 pp. \$75.00 (c); \$29.95 (p).

Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine, by Willi Goetschel. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004. 368 pp. \$45.00 (c); \$29.95 (p).

Jeffrey Librett begins *The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue: Jews and Germans from Moses Mendelssohn to Richard Wagner and Beyond* with a sobering passage from Gershom Scholem's 1962 essay "Against the Myth of the German-Jewish Dialogue." Given that this passage can serve as the conceptual starting point for Michael Mack's and Willi Goetschel's studies as well, I will quote it at some length: "I deny that there has ever been . . . a German-Jewish dialogue in any genuine sense whatsoever, i.e., as a *historical phenomenon*. It takes two to have a dialogue, who listen to each other, who are prepared to perceive the other as what he is and represents, and to respond to him. Nothing can be more misleading than to apply such a concept to the discussions between Germans and Jews during the last 200 years. The dialogue died at its very start and never took place. . . . To be sure, the Jews

attempted a dialogue with the Germans, starting from all possible points of view and situations. . . . The attempt of the Jews to explain themselves to the Germans and to put their own creativity at their disposal, even to the point of complete self-abandonment (*Selbstaufgabe*), is a significant phenomenon. . . . In this, I am unable to perceive anything of a dialogue" (p. xv). If the history of German Jewry is marked by continually having to respond to (and account for) accusations made by an unwilling partner, then we might suggest (with Scholem) that the dialogue between Jews and Germans was, from the beginning, a marked discourse. This suggestion is borne out by the provocative thesis of Mack's *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses*, which holds that there are certain antisemitic tropes occurring in 19th-century German philosophical and cultural writings which provide a justification for German antisemitic practices over a century later (p. 3). Rather than being merely incidental aspects of German philosophy, Mack holds that these tropes are a manifestation of "the presence of irrationality in the self-declared 'rational' philosophies of Kant [and] Hegel" (p. 1). Both Mack and Librett are fairly explicit about the normative and binary structure of these tropes; German antisemitic discourse revolves around three oppositions: spirit/letter, spirit/matter, and autonomy/heteronomy. In each case (and in all cases), non-Jewish Germans (or perhaps, in Scholem's view, just "Germans") occupy the former term of this opposition. Consequently, in the language of these tropes, Jews are continually perceived as (and thus denigrated to) the "literal embodiment" of the latter term. For this reason, as Goetschel suggests in *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine*, any and all visible traces of "Jewishness" strikes German philosophy (with its universalizing tendencies) as a scandal (p. 5).

It would be fairly easy to view this historical illustration of Jewish-German (non)relations in a despairing manner. In one sense, this is precisely what Scholem's passage does. This is understandable, given Scholem's radical proximity to the Shoah and the morbid awakening into which it forced worldwide Jewry. For this reason, Scholem is not concerned with reclaiming the intellectual history of German-Jewish relations for a new age. After Auschwitz, he quite rightly views Jewish contributions to German culture (e.g., the Buber-Rosenzweig translation of the Hebrew Bible) as having amounted to "the tombstone of a relationship that was extinguished in unspeakable horror."¹ We can ask, however, whether this legacy *need* be transmitted in a static form to contemporary Jewry. At the other extreme, Eva Hoffman holds that "[t]here is a Jewish tradition that says we must grieve for the dead fully and deeply; but that mourning must also come to its end.

¹Gershom Scholem, "At the Completion of Buber's Translation of the Bible," in Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 318.

Perhaps that moment has come, even as we must continue to ponder and confront the knowledge that the Shoah has brought us in perpetuity.² If Scholem's passage is extreme in consigning memory to destiny (in a way that ironically runs counter to his texts on Jewish mysticism), Hoffman's statement is extreme in the exact opposite manner: it amounts to a sign of hopefulness that contemporary Jewry might gain a healthy relation (or, for that matter, any real relation at all) to the Shoah and thus (we might suggest) to its own traumatic modern history.

The question which Mack's, Librett's, and Goetschel's texts ask and attempt to answer can be stated as follows: How can German Jewish history of the past two centuries serve as both a philosophically affirmative and critical resource for Jewish thought in a manner which avoids both resignation and illusion? How can contemporary Jews understand their recent history in a manner otherwise than through despair and hope?

Mack, Librett, and Goetschel seek to provide just this third path for Jewish thought. These three books collectively (as well as individually) constitute a thoughtful response both to the aforementioned question, and to the ideological tropic narratives of German antisemitism. By retracing the conflicted intellectual development of German Judaism over the past two centuries, they allow their readers to explore anew the concrete developments of modern Jewish thought and its history. In so doing, they can be understood as attempts at actively reclaiming this history for Judaism and thereby providing resources for contemporary Jewish thought's continuous self-understanding. Insofar as these texts attempt to account historically for the creation and dissemination of intellectual stereotypes applied to Judaism, they contribute to a revitalized and exciting discussion regarding the "history of history." And insofar as the 17th-century Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza appears as a maligned, yet crucial, figure with respect to these projects of reclamation, these texts indicate the significance of the "Spinozist moment" for modern (and, ultimately, contemporary) Judaism.

I. The History of History

To say, however, that Mack, Librett, and Goetschel all participate in this reclamation of Jewish history is not to suggest that, in so doing, they adopt similar strategies. While they all provide interpretations of German Jewish thinkers as struggling against anti-semitism, their modes of presentation differ greatly.

Mack's ten chapters and conclusion take the reader through a whirlwind tour of fourteen German and German Jewish intellectual figures in order to lay out the road-map of 19th-century German antisemitism and its various 19th- and 20th-century Jewish responses. The initial antisemitic narratives are to be found in Kant

²Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), p. 279.

and Hegel (to be discussed in section two of this review essay), their synthesis is found in Wagner, and their subsequent internalization in Otto Weininger.

In making use of the dual categories of “pseudothology” (“a secularized and politicized Christian theology” [p. 10]) and “pseudoscience” (“a theological notion of the secular” [p. 10]), Mack shows how both the biologicistic and nationalistic forms of German antisemitism depend upon the aforementioned tropic narratives (Part 1—Narratives). The rest of Mack’s text shows how the Jewish responses (with the exception of Weininger) constitute progressively stronger departures from these initial narratives (Part 2—Counternarratives). Moses Mendelssohn inaugurates the reclamative project by creating a Jewish “counterhistory”—i.e., a narrative which suggests a transformation in concrete historical details in order to distance itself from antisemitic stereotypes. While it meets with a certain amount of philosophical success, it leaves the dominant conceptual framework of the stereotypes (in this case, the tropes of materiality, literality, and heteronomy/particularity) intact (therefore providing an insufficient critical response to the initial narratives) (p. 12). This regressive tendency becomes visible in the counterhistories of Abraham Geiger and Heinrich Heine. In contrast, Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Elias Canetti, and Franz Baermann Steiner all provide full-fledged “counternarratives” which constitute conceptual breaks with German antisemitic discourse (p. 12); the transitional moment of Jewish resistance (for Mack) is Heinrich Graetz, whose discourse manifests ambivalences which straddle the fence between counterhistory and counternarrative.³

Librett’s approach is less indebted to the historical materialism of the Frankfurt School (as in the case of Mack) than to the textual approaches of Jacques Derrida and Paul De Man (p. 2); Librett situates himself within the project of de-structuring certain specific conceptual oppositions (which, one will notice, parallel the German tropic narratives)—“those between rhetoric and philosophy, figural and literal uses of language, figural transformation and persuasive power, [and] material writing and spiritual speech” (p. 2). By proceeding in this way, Librett undercuts the all-too-comfortable distinction between Germans and Jews which motivates both German antisemitic narratives and German Jewish narratives of victimization. This discomfort, Librett hopes, will allow for the beginning of “a different rhetoric . . . in which the reading of the other would always have been taken to comprise the (in principle) infinite and (in fact) finite search for a meaning that will never fully have arrived” (p. 285). By acknowledging the finitude of such an in-

³Mack also wants to claim that Heinrich Heine occupies a similar transitional space (p. 98). However, his analysis appears (to me) to place Heine’s thought in closer proximity to the counterhistorical than counternarrative project.

finite search, perhaps (according to Librett) both Germans and Jews will be able to embody, envision, and therefore, reclaim their dual history in a different manner.

Librett takes his point of departure from Scholem's aforementioned passage and from Eric Auerbach's significant essay "Figura" (which deals with, among many other things, religious supersessionism).⁴ By questioning Scholem's conception of dialogue as "simply the complementary, additive conjunction of understanding and response, passivity and activity" (p. 5), without recognition that "it is this conjunction conjoined with the constitutive mutual interruption and violent undoing of the terms conjoined" (p. 5), Librett aims to show that "[d]ialogue consists neither of understanding nor of response and paradoxically both" (p. 5). Consequently, the dialogic oppositions of activity/passivity, understanding/misunderstanding, listening/interruption constitute a discursive field which cuts across *both* the discourses of the Germans and of the German Jews.

Similarly, by questioning Auerbach's "realist prejudice" (p. 12), Librett aims to show that, with respect to textual interpretation, "the movement from prefiguration to fulfillment is not simply a movement from reality to reality, because both terms are marked by a certain nonreality or figurality, nor is it simply a movement from figural to literal, because both terms are divided between their figurality and their literality" (p. 16). Consequently, the rhetorical structures of *both* the German and Jewish discourses are organized around both sides of the literal/figural and prefiguration/fulfillment oppositions: "the passage from prefiguration to fulfillment is not merely the passage from figural to literal but rather the passage from one doubled and self-reversing figural-literal pair to another, the reiteration of the inwardly differentiated structure of that pair rather than its overcoming" (p. 18). Thus, the development of German-Jewish dialogue is marked by both an "empiricist" movement towards the fulfillment of figuration and an "idealist" movement opposing it. By tracing these dual movements with respect to both (1) the religious triad of Judaism/Catholicism/Protestantism and (2) the historical/literary/philosophical periods of Enlightenment, Romanticism, Post-Romanticism, and Modernism, Librett illustrates the structural undecidability regarding the history of the German-Jewish dialogue.

Starting off in the Enlightenment period, Librett begins by exploring Mendelssohn's work. Where Mack sees a rejection of the tropic narratives in Mendelssohn, Librett finds the site of occurrence of the double movement toward and away from such narratives (in the context of the aforementioned structure of dual figural movements). Mendelssohn's thinking manifests this double movement insofar as he desires to "demonstrate by his argumentative performance—and in writing—that a Jew can exemplify the concrete, literally fulfilled spirituality of the

⁴Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays* (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1959), pp. 11–76.

“rational” Word and not merely the abstract, (pre)figural materiality of the “irrationally” corporeal dead letter. He must show, in short, that, like a Christian, when a Jew writes, he is actually speaking” (p. 43). However, in attempting to interrupt the association of Judaism and literalism, Mendelssohn ends up “out-Christianizing” Christianity in his steadfast pairing of Judaism with spirit: “In each case, whether while defending Judaism as rational or while defending rationality as religious (in terms of natural theology), Mendelssohn was compelled to show that what his opponents determined as the prefigural letter contained its spiritual other within itself, while showing that the ostensibly spiritual discourse which claimed to shun the letter was a pure form of the letter, and (provisionally) nothing more” (p. 98).

The same structural undecidability traverses the next historical period of Librett’s inquiry—the Romantic period. In this context, Librett takes the “both the ‘life’ and the ‘work’ of Friedrich Schlegel” (p. 103) as emblematic of German Romanticism. The “figure” of Schlegel attests to the strong desire to harmonize Jewish externalized literalism and Christian internalized spiritualism, thus doing away with any undecidability. But again, what one finds (in Schlegel’s earlier work) is that the extremes undercut the very dichotomy upon which they are based: “the spiritualization of writing: writing as the externalization of the interior, comes . . . to be situated beyond the artificiality of works in the Judeo-Enlightenment sense. . . . As externalization, writing is realization or fulfillment. It thus occupies the position of Christian spirituality, whereas pure inwardness occupies the position of mere potential, prefiguration, Judaic anticipation” (p. 155). Schlegel succeeds, beyond his wildest dreams, at creating nothing less than a Jewish supersessionism! Conversely, in Schlegel’s later work “the dialogical letter of the philosophical text is both *not letter enough*, that is, insufficiently literal (or literate) to contain the spirit, and *too much of the order of the letter*, that is, too literal (or literate) not to displace that spirit with its own materiality” (p. 216). Librett sums up this situation with the following statement: “Dialogical writing burns itself out” (p. 215).

This double movement assumes even wilder, more torturous contours in the post-Romantic period where both Karl Marx and Richard Wagner—exemplifying the attempts to emancipate the Jews from the Germans (Marx) and the Germans from the Jews (Wagner)—reflect the desired opportunity “to become one’s oppressor, the opportunity to be included in that from which one has hitherto been excluded” (p. 221). Differently stated, the Post-Romantic period signals nothing less than “the becoming-German of the Jews” and “the becoming-Jewish of the Germans” (p. 221). One can infer from Librett’s discourse that the synchronous double movements of the previous periods find their diachronous fulfillment in this historical moment. And, according to Librett, “[w]hen the epoch of emancipation comes to an end, so does the notion of a possible Jewish-German dialogue” (p. 261). From this point on (i.e., the Modernist period), there emerges a continuous pattern of prefigural—or, in Librett’s terms “anticipatory”—repetition (examples

being Freud, Nietzsche, and the fiction writer Martin Walser). It is this moment of “anticipatory repetition” which discloses the undecidability of dialogue (as traditionally conceived) and calls for the necessity of “a different rhetoric” (p. 285).

While Goetschel’s text shares a broadly historical materialist framework with Mack, it differs in its theoretical impetus. Whereas Mack’s materialist inquiry derives its theoretical apparatus from post-Marxists such as Adorno, Goetschel grounds his inquiry squarely in the thinking of Spinoza. Goetschel’s text is, quite simply, a *tour de force* combination of Spinoza interpretation and its subsequent historical transmission in the work of Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine. Given that Goetschel’s historical analysis is *inseparable* from his interpretation of Spinoza, I believe that his text is best treated in the overall context of a discussion concerning the Spinozist moment in these three works.

II. The Spinozist Moment

According to Mack, Kant’s misinterpretation of Spinoza (particularly his *Theological-Political Treatise*) results in the view that Judaism is “a religion without a religion” (p. 23) which turns out to be “a form of politics” (p. 23). For Kant, Spinoza clearly shows Judaism to be a completely secular communal-historical formation bereft of any causality other than nature (p. 34). This formation implies a lack of spirituality insofar as it signals a lack of transcendence. In charging Spinoza (as an exemplar of Jewish philosophy) with a lack of transcendental autonomy, Kant effectively divests Judaism of any notion of ethics (p. 34), thus reducing it to a literalist and materialist worldview more concerned with the heteronomous and immanent rule of law than with the exercise of human freedom (and, therefore, of ethics and religion). Put differently, Mack holds that Spinoza’s call for separation between state and religion (taken up decisively by Mendelssohn [pp. 81–82]), “as most clearly announced by ‘the first secular Jew,’ Benedict Spinoza, actually eventuated in a pseudotheological construction of the body politic in Germany” (p. 13). In contrast, Judaism is perceived as focusing on the letter of the law and as being concerned with the attainment of goods: “Kant interpreted Judaism as ‘materialistic’ and so, according to his interpretive framework, Jewish law emerges as being oriented toward the ‘goods of this world’” (p. 37).

In Mack’s account, Hegel similarly reads Spinoza’s thought as an incarnation of materialism, literalism, and heteronomy: “Spinoza’s pantheistic philosophy [for Hegel] . . . does not acknowledge the limits of empirical existence and, by not knowing these, conflates the finite with the infinite” (p. 45). In suggesting this, Hegel takes Spinoza’s thought—again, exemplary of Jewish thought *per se*—to manifest the aforementioned tropes: “The religion that perceives the absolute in immediate being is the most reprobate and therefore the most rejected, for it does not attempt to leave the mark of an autonomous, mediating human spirit on the world but, rather, remains closed in itself” (p. 53). Hence, for Mack’s Hegel, Judaism is guilty of a material particularity and tribalism which does not acknowledge

its mediated universality; it is (one might say) “wholly particular”—God forces the Jewish people to obey His laws (the primary example for Mack’s Hegel being the laws of *kashrut*), and immediately and materially punishes the Jews who do not obey them. This view of Judaism, as Mack notes, stands in direct opposition to Hegel’s conception of a fully collective (religious) self-consciousness wherein opposites dialectically reflect each other. For Mack, these quick and dirty usages of Spinoza help Kant and Hegel to develop the philosophical anthropology of Judaism as the religion of the material, literal, and particular. This theoretical view, on Mack’s account, eventually leads to the political antisemitism “which the supposed objectivity of pseudoscientific writing serve[s] to substantiate” (p. 40). Mack notes that this view eventually takes the form of internalized self-hatred in the work of Otto Weininger.

For Librett, Spinoza’s presence is even more ephemeral. Like Mack, Librett sees Spinoza as a decisive site of German attempts at establishing (once and for all) the materiality of Judaism (p. 77). Librett notes that the pantheism debate of the 19th century, spearheaded by Jacobi (and touched upon more significantly by Goetschel), focuses on Spinoza as both a Jew and “a materialist and an atheist who reduces the idealities of God and human subjectivity to the materiality of world substance” (p. 77; see also p. 89). Spinoza the Jew is thus once more associated with the German tropic narratives. But since Librett (like Mack) grounds his theoretical apparatus elsewhere, Spinoza remains one moment among many with respect to Librett’s treatment of the development of (and responses to) such narratives. Spinoza’s historical importance, which Librett (like Mack) acknowledges, is thus mitigated by his theoretical non-essentiality.

In a sense, Goetschel picks up where Librett leaves off with respect to Jacobi’s interpretation of Spinoza. For Goetschel, not only is Jacobi’s reading significant insofar as it serves as a visible and intense moment whereby the German tropic narratives are developed, but also Jacobi’s Spinoza interpretation fundamentally alters Spinoza’s place in the German philosophical landscape: the emphasis on practical reason (which, in other contexts, Jacobi praised [p. 12]), was systematically obscured in most 19th-century German discussions of Spinoza’s philosophy. This meant that the great social and political interpretations of Spinoza—i.e., those given by Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine—were ignored for the more metaphysical interpretations given by the German Idealists and Romantics: “Jacobi’s campaign sparked and defined the Spinoza dispute, and it shaped the discussion for a long time to come by advancing a particular reading of Spinoza—one that, ironically, ignored precisely those aspects of Spinoza’s philosophy that had been the most fertile and productive ones for Mendelssohn and Lessing [and, subsequently, Heine]. As a result, the recognition of Spinoza’s significance for the reconstitution of epistemology, political theory, psychology, and aesthetics fell by the wayside” (p. 15). One might take this analysis further and suggest that it was this “metaphysical Spinoza,” with its emphasis on immanent nature, which helped

serve as the basis for Kant's and Hegel's construction of the German tropic narratives.

Whatever the case may be, the project of reclamation of Spinoza and his lost German legacy is Goetschel's explicit project: "Reading Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine anew thus promises to break the spell cast by the . . . distorting optics of Jacobi's ontological-metaphysical screen" (p. 17). Such "reading anew" means to retrieve the social/political Spinoza and thereby provide (in Mack's terms) a "counternarrative" for Spinoza's Jewishness (and, therefore, for the history of German Jewish thought). Goetschel accomplishes this first by providing a strong interpretation of Spinoza along materialist lines, and then showing how this interpretative legacy is at work in the thought of Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine.

Goetschel's Spinoza interpretation can be summarily characterized with the following three attributes:

1. Spinoza's epistemology focuses on singular objects of knowledge (instead of universals) and proceeds nonteleologically (p. 7). In this way Spinoza reconceives the relation of universality and particularity by situating the universal differently within each particular human being (p. 8). This allows for critical questions concerning the self-evidence of concepts such as "individual" and "society" to be raised and explored with an eye towards their hidden assumptions. Such notions can then be understood as co-operative rather than contradictory (pp. 9–10). It also allows for a rethinking of the legitimation of both politics and religion as based on a strict distinction between universality and particularity (p. 11).
2. Spinoza articulates a non-dualistic conception of nature (p. 8). This allows him to conceive of affects as simultaneously psychological and physical, thus leading to both a materialistic conception of individuality and to a dynamic role for affectivity in the social/political sphere (p. 9).
3. For Spinoza, religion amounts to a legitimating myth in the service of politics. Hence, religion (when properly construed) can play an affirmative and constructive role with respect to understanding the formations of social/political spheres (p. 10).

Insofar as these three attributes all contribute to human flourishing, they can (for Goetschel's Spinoza) all be understood as affirmative positions. In this way, Goetschel's interpretation of Spinoza can serve as a crucial resource with respect to resituating and reclaiming the tropes of materiality, literality, and particularity with respect to the history of Jewry. For Goetschel, this is exactly what happens in the thought of Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine.

Mendelssohn's appropriation of this social/political Spinoza begins with his conception of aesthetic experience which constitutes an affective economy able to transform affects into reason (thus contributing toward the project of self-improvement) (pp. 97–98). Additionally he understands religious assertions "as a theological-political issue rather than merely a theological one" (p. 126). In so do-

ing, he is able to recognize the claims of religion as stemming from the particularity of context and situation rather than from an all-binding (and intolerant) universal conception of spirituality (p. 126). This amounts to the formulation of an emancipatory political philosophy based on the separation of religion and state (p. 159). In Mack's terminology, Mendelssohn's thought issues in an "other Enlightenment" to that of Kant and Hegel.

Lessing's appropriation also consists in emphasizing that "truth consists in a specific effect of certain constellations rather than in an ensemble of fixed contents" (p. 198). His Spinozistic conception, now critical rather than dogmatic, contains a historical and dialogical dimension which presses him to "respond to the question of truth by examining the conditions that establish the parameters for determining an answer" (p. 198). Quite similar is Lessing's conception of religion: religion is now viewed "more in terms of its functions than in terms of a metaphysical essence" (p. 203). Taken together, they amount to a restatement of Spinoza's view (in the *Theological-Political Treatise*) that the truth of religion contains praxical, rather than doctrinal, value (p. 206). Lessing, in turn, incorporates this into a philosophy of history which "refuses to sacrifice the individualism of the individual but [instead] regards the moment of enlightenment as the moment of realization of the individual virtue under the sign of social and historical fulfillment" (p. 228).

Finally, Heine's appropriation of Spinoza unlocks the critical potential that was merely anticipated in Mendelssohn and Lessing. With Heine, one finds a full-blown critique of the German tropic narratives and their attendant canonical assumptions (p. 254). The attribution of pantheism to Spinoza by the German Idealists is, in Heine's narrative, reconceived in such a way that it leads directly to Spinoza's non-dualistic conception of nature and his "critical rehabilitation of the flesh" (p. 261). The project of emancipation is now explicitly combined with the project of reclamation. With Heine (following Mendelssohn's and Lessing's leads), one finally sees the full Jewish Spinozist response to the German tropic narratives—i.e., the critical normative "re-placement" of the values contained in such narratives. Goetschel ends his study with the following claim: "Heine does not aim simply at reverting the historical order but at reinventing the script for the story of progress and liberation itself" (p. 265). This reinvention through reclamation is the legacy which Spinoza bequeaths to German Jewish thought.

III. Final Remarks

Insofar as these books can all be understood to form something of a collective project, they should ideally be read together (either simultaneously or in linear fashion). Mack's historical breadth, Librett's textual depth, and Goetschel's rigorous philosophical grounding and conceptualization of historical transmission provide an invaluable service to understanding how one might proceed with respect to the project of Jewish self-understanding. In projects which strive for

such size, complexity, and nuance, there will always be discrepancies of preference: Had Mack's book been twice its present size, he would have been able to further substantiate his myriad interpretations of German philosophers and German Jewish thinkers. Had Librett provided more initial discussion of Auerbach, his subsequent deconstructing of the figural interpretations provided in the German-Jewish (non)dialogue would have gained in clarity. Had Goetschel further explored Jacobi's interpretive hijacking of Spinoza's thought, his text would have further communicated the urgency for a recovery of the materialist social/political Spinoza readings of the 18th and 19th century in Germany. Such criticism, however, comes to the fore when readers are significantly provoked by the question concerning the "future" of Jewish history and its stakes. If these books are able to solicit such preferences, and I believe they are, they can be considered (individually and collectively) as successful.