

BOOK REVIEWS

One Man's Judaisms, by EMANUEL RACKMAN (New York: Philosophical Library, 1970).

Reviewed by
Michael Wyschogrod

In one of the essays that make up this collection, Emanuel Rackman writes as follows:

Rightly or wrongly, one Jewish sociologist has named me as an ideologist of "modern Orthodoxy." However, one can hardly regard modern Orthodoxy as a movement: it is no more than a coterie of a score of rabbis in America and in Israel whose interpretations of the Tradition have won the approval of Orthodox intellectuals who are knowledgeable in both Judaism and Western civilization. None of the rabbis feels that he is articulating any position that cannot be supported by reference to authentic Jewish sources. None wants to organize a separate rabbinic body, and several have rejected an attempt to publish an independent periodical, because they did not want the remotest possibility that this form of separatism be interpreted as a schism in Orthodoxy. I, no less than they, deny any claim to innovation. Our choice of methods and values in the Tradition, our emphases, and

our concerns, may be different. But the creation or articulation of shades and hues hardly warrants dignifying our effort with the terms "ideology" or "sect." We know that the overwhelming majority of Orthodox rabbis differ with us and that the faculties of most Orthodox day schools and rabbinical seminaries disapprove of some of our views and so instruct their pupils. It is not our mission to have them join our ranks. Rather do we seek to help Jewish intellectuals who are being alienated from the Tradition to realize that they can share a commitment to the faith which is acceptable to them and at least as authentic as the one they have received from their teachers but which they feel impelled to renounce. We reject the multiplication of dogmas and their precise formulation. . . . Ours is a commitment which invites questioning and creativity in thought and practice, as applied not only to the Law but also to theology.

Noteworthy about this passage is Rackman's realization that "modern Orthodoxy" is a minority view with which "the overwhelming majority of Orthodox rabbis differ" while "the faculties of most Ortho-

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

dox day schools and rabbinical seminaries disapprove of some of our views and so instruct their pupils." Not so long ago the philosophy of "synthesis," a term commonly associated with the ideology of Yeshiva University, was presented as the wave of the future, the hope of American Judaism. Suddenly we discover that the majority of Orthodox rabbis and faculties of Orthodox day schools reject modern Orthodoxy and that its exponents are therefore of necessity an embattled band surrounded by hostile forces. One can only conclude that either the "synthesis" preached at Yeshiva University is not quite the same product as the modern Orthodoxy to which Dr. Rackman refers or that events did not quite develop as anticipated. All this demonstrates that the condition of American Orthodoxy requires investigation.

Orthodox Judaism in America falls naturally into three divisions, each of which has its own diversity but which nevertheless can be identified in a broad sense. There is first the Yiddish speaking wing of Orthodoxy that rejects all secular education beyond the legally prescribed minimum. A large portion of this group consists of Hassidic Jews but it would also include such non-Hassidic centers as the Lakewood Yeshiva and similar institutions. Then there is the group that I would associate with *yeshivot* such as Torah Vodaath and Chaim Berlin. Most students in this group attend college though usually in the evening and with some degree of ambivalence, since secular education, while not altogether forbidden in these circles, is not exactly encour-

aged. Then there is finally the wing of Orthodoxy centered around Yeshiva University. Here secular education is less ambivalently embraced and, as noted, talk about "synthesis" is often heard. There are groups, such as that of Hirschian Orthodoxy which do not easily fit into any of the groups. But outside of such few exceptions, most of American Orthodoxy does fall into these three groups.

Dr. Rackman's book is, in the final analysis, a thoughtful defense of what might be called "rational Orthodoxy." He proves beyond shadow of doubt that the genius of Judaism has been its ability to embrace diverse points of view and its reluctance to declare heretical even views which did not gain wide acceptance. He shows how the greatest names in Jewish thought disagreed about some very fundamental matters (e.g., the corporeality of God) with everybody concerned retaining his good standing in the rabbinic fellowship. And he shows how Jewish law has developed in response to changes in the conditions of life to which the law was being applied. In short, Rackman makes amply clear that the kind of dark Judaism, a mutation of Judaism that asks no questions and permits no deviation from a party line, is not, in spite of what it claims, the real original but rather a modern corruption of a viable faith which did not shrink from life and its challenges when its health was in better shape.

And yet, rational Orthodoxy, as even Rackman admits, is on the defensive. It is not easy to see how this can be documented short of

Book Reviews

a large scale invasion by questionnaire of the major institutions of Orthodoxy, an approach which the empirical sociologist considers indispensable. But even in the absence of such documentation one does get the impression that thinking Orthodoxy is swamped in many places by a less complicated product which claims to have easy answers to questions and whose answers lack the complexity and perhaps, to a degree, even ambiguity which is almost always the result of thought. Right-wing Orthodoxy appeals to many for various reasons. It is uncompromising and demands much and the imaginations of many young people are moved by stringent, uncompromising demands. Furthermore, many think of Judaism in quantitative terms, reasoning that if Judaism is a good thing, then the more of it there is the better and the most the best. Intertwined with this is what might be called discount thinking: our young people will in any case shed a portion of their Judaism and it is therefore vital that there be some reserves so that even after the inevitable discounting, enough remain. All this produces a psychology of safety: it is safer to send a child to a right-wing Yeshiva than to a left-wing one; it is safer to depend on this *kashrut* endorsement than that, etc. Seen in this light, modern or left-wing Orthodoxy is a risky and dubious proposition indeed.

I forget now whether it was Huxley's *Brave New World* or Orwell's *1984* that depicts a society whose mottos consist of such absurdities as "Rebellion is Submission" and

"Innocence is Guilt." Whatever may be the case in the political order, in the sphere of faith there is an inherent dialectic such that safety is peril, certainty is ignorance and defeat is victory. The broader ramifications of this deserve more discussion than is possible here, but it is not going too far afield to point out that because in faith Israel relates to its God who, while historically immanent, is also totally transcendent, there is a constant unhinging of the human standpoint when the living God makes his demands. Any founding of Judaism which is basically (in contrast to tangentially) rooted in the wisdom of the world, in child psychology or in the principles of safety rather than in the obedience to a command which as often as not involves embarking on a journey through a perilous desert in which there is no security, is a wrong founding. Humanly speaking, it makes good sense, if we wish our children to retain a certain quantity of Judaism, to endow them with a larger quantity so that enough remains even if some of it wears off. But because Judaism is not only of this world, because it is largely the gift of God to Israel, such calculations are dangerous because they tend to assume success in a worldly sense (i.e., the success in numbers of right-wing Orthodoxy) and thereafter failure on the only level that counts: pleasing God.

Here, of course, answers are notoriously difficult to come by. What is God's opinion about this or that wing of Judaism, this or that wing of Orthodoxy? Surely

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

nobody knows for sure, and surely we begin to be religiously serious only when this dawns upon us, when we discover that we are all under God's judgment and that of which we are the proudest and which we despise the most may not correspond precisely to what delights and angers God. Therefore, as firm an adherent of modern Orthodoxy as I consider myself and as sharp a critic of dark Orthodoxy as I fancy myself, I must ask also whether there is something wrong in what modern Orthodoxy does and something right in the right? Without this question, the record would be incomplete.

In the scientific realm, it is widely believed, there operates a check on theory which precludes too radical a loss of contact with reality. This check consists of the "does it work?" criterion? A theory about metals which leads to a bridge that collapses is discredited; similarly, a medical theory which yields a therapy that produces no benefit cannot long be maintained. Is there anything even partly approximating such a reality check in the religious

domain?

It seems to me that after all the theories and debates are concluded, there remains one incontrovertible phenomenal fact in the domain of the spirit: the saint, the *Tsadik*, the man in whose presence argument ceases and spiritual existence is perceived. An analysis of the phenomenon can fill volumes, all that need be said here is that Judaism cannot possibly survive without the appearance of such *Tsadikim*, men who are fully whole and from whom the people can draw sustenance. This is not a question of scholarship; in fact one of Judaism's greatest weaknesses is the ever recurring tendency to confuse scholarship with saintliness, to bestow authority that belongs to spirit on something or someone else. *Tsadikim* cannot be planned for nor can any "system" be designed to produce a quota of them. And yet, a system out of which they do not arise is defective, in dire need of renewal.

Can a *Tsadik* arise from the soil of modern Orthodoxy? I find this question very disturbing.

9½ *Mystics*, by HERBERT WEINER (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969).

Reviewed by
Melvin Granatstein

"Seek not things that are too hard for thee." With this quotation Rabbi Herbert Weiner begins the chronicle of his own encounter

with a wide range of students of Jewish mysticism. His account, while journalistic in approach and popular in tone, gives considerable evidence both of hard scholarly work and an incredibly persistent search in which he interviews and

Book Reviews

lives with a wide range of people. Not only does he have the predictable interview with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and discussions with Gershom Scholem and Martin Buber; he provides us with glimpses of Bratzlaver and Belzer Hassidim, extended encounters with Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, the young *illui* Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Rabbi David Ha-Kohen, the "Nazir," among many others. We are presented with a veritable garden of traditional Jewish types.

While we can be grateful to Rabbi Weiner for presenting us with this chronicle, it is perhaps appropriate to reflect on the phenomenon of such a book being written at all. At the end of his account Rabbi Weiner muses briefly on the coincidence of finding both Rabbi Kook's Kabbalistic tract *Rosh Millim* and *Psychadelic Experience*, a book co-authored by Timothy Leary on his desk. Unmistakeably, the easy assumptions about the self-sufficiency of the scientific world-view have been shattered and a lost generation of youth is searching for something more than the one-dimensionality endemic to modern civilization. That which modern man assumed had been buried in a medieval past begins to resurrect itself and a rabbi operating in the context of a movement which, in its classic phase, vehemently rejected anything that smacked of mysticism now relates an event which symbolizes the strange confluence of a contemporary cultural revolution and an ancient, much

maligned, near-abandoned indigenous Jewish tradition. *9½ Mystics* is a monument to the persistence of dimensions of experience that the entire weight of the modern scientific world-view could never totally destroy.

Mysticism of whatever type assumes a multi-dimensional universe. The Zohar says that the world exists layer upon layer, dimension upon dimension. The Ten Emanations from the Infinite, the Four Worlds, the alternating movements of Divine *Histalkut*, and *Hitpashtut* all give expression to this multidimensionality. By contrast, the standard modern textbooks on Judaism are one-dimensional and rather flat, and fall in easily with the modern mythos of linear progress. For these authors, God, if he exists at all, confirms human achievement which vanquishes all obstacles and creates God's kingdom through the United Nations and the modern welfare state. The problem of evil, the relationship between God and man, the mingled love and terror which invested traditional religious experience have all but vanished from the scene. In discussing the question of primal sin, one modern writer even has the unmitigated *chutzpah* to say, "The Genesis myths were in no way decisive for the theology of Judaism."¹ By contrast, Rabbi Weiner's lucid and popular journal portrays traditional Jews in a Kabbalistic context as they really exist; deeply concerned about problems of relation to God, evil and sin, love and redemption,

¹ Silver, Abba Hillel, *Where Judaism Differed* (New York: Macmillan Co.), 1961, p. 166.

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

thus in many ways modestly confounding the conformist views propagated in Hadassah publications and Oneg Shabbat sermons. It is the very multidimensionality of Kabbalistic thought that intrigues our writer. But Rabbi Weiner himself recognizes an obstacle. He wishes to know if the "life-secrets can have meaning for those who do not share the full intensity of their (the Kabbalists) experience." It is clear that for Rabbi Weiner this is bound up with questions of traditional religious belief. Throughout the book this gnawing question is at work. The Tree of Life beckons, but the path back is lost. What does that man do who cannot believe? Rabbi Weiner portrays the problem most eloquently in one particular event. He has gone into a field with a Bratzlaver Hassid to practice *Hitbodedut* — lonely meditation in the presence of God. The aim of this exercise is to address the Creator from the depths on one's soul in solitude. He begins in dead earnest with a passage from the Psalms but then the communication is broken. The sophisticated musings of a Biblical scholar and skeptic come to mind. The effort is renewed but the ultimate impression is that Rabbi Weiner fails. He fails because that path of communication so open to the traditional Jew has been covered over with the thorns and weeds of the modern experience.

This is the dilemma of the search. If one believes and practices the Halakhah, " 'Blessed is he and it is well for him.' Others will have more trouble." Without Halakhah, what remains is "little more than a col-

lection of data . . ." Rabbi Weiner seeks to "walk the narrow ridge" between Tradition and anarchy, living responsibility in God's presence but without the weight of Tradition to guide him. The guide he chooses is clearly Martin Buber. But Buber himself is described by Weiner as an "anti-mystic." Rabbi Weiner notes the powerful contrast between Buber's anti-halakhic, anti-mystical interpretation of Hassidut and the shock of a real life encounter with flesh and blood Hassidim of the Belzer variety and this is coupled with a presentation of Gershom Scholem's critique of Buber's Neo-Hasidism. Rabbi Weiner modestly refuses to choose between the scholars but there can be little doubt that the living encounter supports Scholem's critique more than Buber's presentation. Yet in the end, Weiner, in Buber's footsteps, cannot totally accept the traditional context in either its exoteric or esoteric manifestations. But herein lies the problem.

The motive is pure but the path is more than just difficult. It defeats the purpose of the search. Surely Rabbi Weiner wanted more than merely the assurance of the value of a Buberian "Life of Dialogue." The vineyard of Jewish teaching can remain as abandoned and untended with the life of Dialogue as without it. Perhaps the error is to begin with the question of belief in the first place. Not belief but life-style would seem to be the key. Perhaps this is what the Lubavitcher Rebbe meant when he told Rabbi Weiner that the "logical" implication of belief in God is the performance of the *mitzvot*.

Book Reviews

One would have to conclude that Rabbi Weiner is also aware of this. Why else would he seek to immerse himself in the *Mikveh* of the Ari, to celebrate a *Seudat Shabbat* at the home of Rabbi Ashlag or Rabbi Kook, or to worship with the Bratzlaver Hassidim? Yet somehow the life-style itself is not totally compelling for Rabbi Weiner seeks belief first. This is the dilemma of a rather remarkable book.

If *9½ Mystics* is truly symptomatic of a trend that is to be with us for a while, then the wheel has really turned. The deep seated religious yearning that impelled Rabbi Weiner's search will come to

symbolize the quest of a generation and perhaps the treasures of our tradition will be preserved and handed on in renewed strength. The sophisticated banality of conformist interpretations of Judaism will be set aside for a profound analysis that will take the deepest claims of the human soul seriously. Rabbi Weiner raises the gnawing question of belief. Perhaps that too will be answered for the future generations. So changeable are the affairs of men that if Judaism has not been totally emasculated by its accredited interpreters we might find our way back to the Torah and the Tree of Life.

Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times, by NATHAN ROTENSTREICH
(New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).

Reviewed by Eliezer Berkovits

Teachers of Jewish philosophy are sadly aware of the dearth of source material in the area of modern Jewish philosophy that they might recommend to their students. A great deal of Jewish philosophy in the nineteenth and the present century was written in German and most of it has remained untranslated. Practically the only exception is Martin Buber, whose works are available in translation and about whom there exists a rich explanatory literature. This probably is the reason why Professor Rotenstreich did not include the philosophy of Martin Buber in his *Jewish Philosophy in Modern*

Times. All the more grateful are we to him for introducing the contemporary student to modern Jewish philosophy as it indeed does exist apart from Buber and even Rosenzweig. The thoughts of the latter are of course not quite as unknown as those of most of modern Jewish thinkers. Yet, in spite of the relative popularity of Rosenzweig, the name, it is rather doubtful how well known and understood is Rosenzweig, the thinker.

Rotenstreich discusses the various trends in modern Jewish philosophy under the headings: The Rule of Ethics — Moses Mendelssohn; The Religion of Morality — S. D. Luzzatto; The Inner Imperative and Holiness — M. Lazarus; From the Ethical Idea to the True Being —

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

Hermann Cohen; *The Religion of the Spirit* — S. Formstecher, S. Hirsch and N. Krochmal; *The Road Back* — S. L. Steinheim and Franz Rosenzweig; *Harmony and Return* — Rav Kook; *Between Man and Nature* — A. D. Gordon. The volume is the best introduction to Jewish philosophy in modern times available to the student.

From a historic point of view, the resurrection of such thinkers as Lazarus, Formstecher, Hirsch is valuable, though their contribution to a working philosophy of Judaism today is minimal. The same may be said of Krochmal and even Mendelssohn. Reading Rotenstreich's presentation one realizes with renewed amazement how little understanding these men had for the specific quality of the religious category.

One should be especially grateful to the author for rediscovering for us of Steinheim and such a secularist interpreter of Judaism as the ideologist of the *Haluz* movement in its most formative years, A. D. Gordon. Steinheim, in particular, deserves careful attention and study. Rotenstreich compares him to Yehuda Halevi. It may, perhaps, be more correct to call him the Hasdai Crescas of modern Jewish philosophy. True, like Yehuda Halevi, he sees Judaism not as an intellectual but a uniquely religious phenomenon. However, in addition to that, very much like Hasdai Crescas in his days, he subjects his predecessors, the rationalistic identifiers of religion with philosophy, to devastating and effective criticism.

Some of the problems with which

a student of modern Jewish philosophy has to struggle remain unresolved even in the painstaking analysis of Rotenstreich. For instance, has Hermann Cohen really succeeded in moving from the ethical idea to true Being? Did he convincingly transform his logic into ontology? Rotenstreich is, of course, right in saying that with his idea of man's reconciliation with God and God's forgiveness Cohen has come closest to a personal God. So was Rosenzweig right when he too declared that for Cohen God was more than an idea. So it was for Cohen the individual Jew, the son who in his old age returned to his father's house. But was it so also for Cohen the philosopher, even in his old age? On what can he base his idea of forgiveness, if revelation for him is not an event in time, but man's creation in reason? It appears that, philosophically speaking, Cohen never reached True Being. To the very end the gist of his philosophy remains expressed in his own formulation, when he wrote in his *Philosophy of Reason from the Sources of Judaism*: "But can one love anything else but an ideal!" Poor Cohen!

Similarly, one might say, notwithstanding the excellent chapter on Rosenzweig, Professor Rotenstreich hardly convinces us that Rosenzweig's claim that his method is that of "absolute empiricism" is a valid one. In his criticism of idealism, Rosenzweig was right in doing it on the basis of "absolute empiricism." But one remains unconvinced that his triad of Creation — Revelation — Redemption

Book Reviews

or his idea of faith are the results of that method. However, in reading Rotenstreich's presentation what does come through with great clarity is something that a student of the *Star* in particular has been hesitant to acknowledge, *i.e.*, that this illustrious and truly great *Baal Teshuvah* of modern times fundamentally misunderstood Judaism. Nowhere is this more obvious than when he places Christianity in time and Judaism outside of time and history. The truth is, of course, that whereas the Christian Kingdom of God is not of this world, Judaism asks for the establishment of this world as God's Kingdom. Whereas according to Christianity history itself is the Fall and all accommodation with it is a compromise with the original teaching, according to Jewish teaching history is the dimension of Jewish realization and responsibility. It is for this reason that Rosenzweig could have no understanding for the survival power of Judaism and hit upon the fantastic idea of Jewish eternality enclosed in the secret of the blood of the Jewish people. His explanation of the missionary drive in Christianity and its absence in Judaism must also be relegated into the realm of fantasy. It is based on the same lack of understanding the nature of Judaism. Needless to say that in a "Judaism" that is beyond time and unconcerned with man and his condition in history there can be no place for Zionism or a Jewish State. It is not that Rosenzweig was an anti-Zionist; he did not understand the historic quality in Judaism, *i.e.*, its very essence. One is inclined to

say that his "Judaism" was more Christian than Jewish, just as his "Christianity" is invested with some Jewish features which to erase was the very purpose of Christianity from the beginning. There is little doubt that existentially Rosenzweig was a saintly Jew; his philosophy, however, hardly belongs in a chapter entitled, "The Road Back." Steinheim, Yes! Rosenzweig, No! Did he not say himself that the *Star* was not a Jewish book?

Mainly under the impact of existentialism the writings of Rav Kook have become included in modern Jewish philosophy. Undoubtedly, one of the more difficult tasks of presentation was encountered by the author in presenting the thought world of Rav Kook. As is well-known, Rav Kook did not write systematically. His statements are more like poetic outpourings of a great soul, which he would jot down on all kinds of slips of paper at hand. They were collected and edited by his dedicated disciple, the *Nazir* of Jerusalem. The task that still awaits to be done is to crystalize the principles of Rav Kook's thoughts from his numerous exclamations and present them in systematic form. This, however, goes far beyond the scope of an introductory work like the one before us. Rotenstreich's chapter on Kook will send many to the study of the master. Often because of the vagueness of expression and formulation, it is not easy to fathom the meaning of Rav Kook. Until the systematic work on Kook will be written, his words will remain wide open to possibilities of interpretation. On a number of major

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

points we are unable to go along with Rotenstreich's interpretation. We believe that he exaggerates the principle of unity in Rav Kook's thought. The distinction between matter and mind, good and evil, right and wrong, secular and sacred is not only subjective. Subjective is man's seeing of these differences as absolute. The difference in kind exists only in an inadequate human understanding. However, the difference in degree is a real, objective one. There are different levels of reality, sharing in the divine substance in differing degree. They are all dependent on each other, they all influence each other, but they are not one. The spiritual builds on the material; the sacred, on the secular. Neither can one speak of a union of science and Divine knowledge. The *Chokhmat Hakodesh* is different in method as well as function from the *Chokhmat Hachol*. They are related to each other, secular knowledge in need of completion by sacred knowledge and sacred knowledge in need of the solid factual information provided by the other. Since Rotenstreich understands Rav Kook as maintaining the homogenous unity of all reality, he is consistent in saying that the improvement of the world depends on the manner in which the world is comprehended and not on actual change. This too is more than questionable. Actually Rav Kook even formulates a theory of qualitative evolution. He certainly recognizes history as a form of development during which the divine sparks are elevated from lower form to a higher one, as result of which the union of the

different part of reality will be accomplished through a process of sanctification through man living, acting, functioning, and not just comprehending. Even the positive function of evil with Rav Kook can be understood only within a process of sanctification that takes place in history. (See, f.e., Rav Kook's idea that God, who is the *Tov Hamuchlat*, Absolute Goodness, is in need of the *Tov Hayachasi*, the relative goodness, which emerges from man's struggle with evil in history.) It is for this reason that we are unable to accept Rotenstreich's interpretation that the world's longing to return to its source is one to be satisfied in knowledge, which, however, has no basis in objective existence where the world is in fact one with its source. It would seem to us that, on the contrary, the longing is the cause of all movement in reality. It is the dynamic principle in reality. It is responsible for all movement and development in nature as well as in history. It is the process of sanctification, which will ultimately overcome the very real difference in the degree of holiness in the universe and unite in the Divine source what is one in its root and origin and becomes differentiated in the act of Creation. Creation is very real with Rav Kook. At best one may speak of panentheism in his thought, but not of pantheism. Finally, we would not define Kook's concept of the *Kodesh Hakodashim* as "the combination of the holy and the profane" or the unity of the two. (In any case, one should not render Kook's Hebrew term, *Chol* as profane, but as secular.) In the pre-

