

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Tradition In An Age of Reform — The Religious Philosophy of Samson Raphael Hirsch*, by NOAH H. ROSENBLOOM (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976).

*Reviewed by* Mordechai Breuer

Ever since S. R. Hirsch started on his mission as champion of modern Orthodoxy he has been the object of excessive veneration by his followers and passionate attacks by his opponents. A scholarly, critical and unbiased study of his life and philosophy has long been due, and this Professor Rosenbloom has set out to present in his voluminous book.

The opening chapter is promising enough: After assuring the reader that the pains of his labor had been compensated for by "calm detachment and dispassion," clearing the way for "an objective analysis and evaluation," the author proceeds on a well-done exposition of the young Hirsch's time and milieu. The rest of the book, regrettably, is a grave disappointment.

Hirsch's parental home and education are depicted as having been in a state of progressive assimilation, with "religious moderation"

as the dominant factor. Rosenbloom hinges this discovery on a single phrase, *erleuchtet religiös* ("enlightened-religious") which he found in Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters* and which he keeps harping on throughout the book to the point of tediousness. Unfortunately, the phrase is torn out of its context. Hirsch merely used it to explain how it was that contrary to the common usage in Jewish homes and schools, his own parents made a point of introducing him to the study of the Bible at an early age. It is well-known that long before the enlightenment, neglect of Bible study had been severely criticized by the rabbis, and so this phrase has not much significance in its context. Worse still, the author has done little research on Hirsch's father, of whose "Haskalah values" he makes so much ado, or else he would have discovered that when Hirsch was about to publish his *Horeb*, he had to defend himself in a lengthy correspondence with his father against the latter's

## Book Reviews

demand that the book be printed in Hebrew script.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the significance of this fact, surely it should have been considered by a scholar trying to evaluate the "Haskalah antecedents" of Hirsch's upbringing.

Rosenbloom maintains that Hirsch was sent to a non-Jewish primary school, while there were still some religious schools in Hamburg which he might have attended. Again the lack of research is astounding. "We have no information about Hirsch's teachers," laments Rosenbloom. But we have plenty! Hirsch was sent to the private school of J. A. Isler, a competent talmudist who did most of the teaching himself, including some secular subjects.<sup>2</sup> Thus one of the fundamentals of Rosenbloom's theory about the poor quality of Hirsch's elementary Jewish education, which serves him so well further on, is in shambles. Likewise, he is wrong on many points concerning Hirsch's first *rebbe*, the enigmatic *Hakham* Bernays, such as Bernays' motive for rejecting the title of Rabbi or his alleged denial of the authorship of the *Bibelsche Orient*.

When we come to Hirsch's decision to study at Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger's yeshiva in Mannheim, Rosenbloom's bias becomes painfully obvious. He poses the question: why didn't Hirsch prefer to study with one of the famous talmudic scholars outside Germany or with Rabbi Akiba Eger in Posen? The author thereby betrays his ignorance of the history of student migrations in the realm of Torah learning, as well as of the history

of the German *yeshivot* in the first half of the 19th century. Suffice it to state that neither did Ettlinger himself (who, Rosenbloom has to admit, albeit rather grudgingly, was "a distinguished talmudic scholar") study at any of the eastern *yeshivot* nor did S. B. Bamberger or E. Hildesheimer. The simple explanation that Bernays was Ettlinger's close friend and schoolmate must seem too down-to-earth for the flights of the author's psycho-historical imagination. Rosenbloom notes the patently perfunctory nature of Hirsch's formal academic studies, but the use to which he puts this observation leaves the reader gasping. In this connection there is at least one unforgivable omission. Hirsch explicitly formulated his personal attitude to university studies in a letter to one of his very few intimate friends.<sup>3</sup> You will look in vain in Rosenbloom's book for both the letter and the man.

Rosenbloom's account of Hirsch's rabbinical career is a medley of guesswork, distortion and discreditation. He does not know that Hirsch's candidacy for the Oldenburg rabbinate received the backing of the already-powerful house of Rothschild,<sup>4</sup> which was also behind many other nominations of Orthodox rabbis to German communities in danger of becoming reformed. He ignores the certificate issued by Bernays, affirming Hirsch's eligibility as a candidate for the rabbinate.<sup>5</sup> He quotes profusely from Graetz's diary to show that Hirsch declined the rabbinical posts at Posen and Wollstein because he would not face the tal-

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

mudical scholars in those communities. The careful reader will easily detect that these projects, which never materialized, were designed by Graetz purely to satisfy his own ambition. He will also ask himself a question which Rosenbloom never allowed to interfere with his preconceived idea: If Hirsch was that much conscious of his talmudical deficiencies, how do we explain that there is not even a faint hint of this in the diary, abounding as it does in venomous allegations about Hirsch's shortcomings, of Hirsch being a *Siddur-lamdan*, an epithet often used by Hirsch's opponents and quoted with relish by Rosenbloom? And Graetz had studied at Wollstein! Surely a careful, scholarly study should not have let this *argumentum e silentio* go unheeded! Eventually Hirsch did follow the invitation to Nicolsburg, an ancient seat of "eastern" learning, and this puts Rosenbloom in a real dilemma (see pp. 89-90) which he disposes by offering a tragi-comic account of Hirsch's departure from Moravia ("virtually a rout!") which even the unsuspecting reader will find hard to believe. The knowledgeable reader is shocked by the studied nonchalance with which the author selects some details, suppresses a mass of others, injects a few drops of psycho-history and presents the whole as an "objective analysis and evaluation."

The space of a review essay does not allow for enumeration of all errors, omissions and misjudgments encountered in this chapter. Two points will do. Rosenbloom has never heard about the College for

Rabbis, Teachers and Cantors, which was Hirsch's pet project in Moravia.<sup>6</sup> It was Moravian Jewry's indifference, to say the least, to this project which led to his decision to resign. This phase, totally ignored in this book, is important not only for being a major factor of a fateful turn in Hirsch's life, but for illuminating his attitude towards a significant aspect of Jewish higher education. The second point concerns the manner of his departure. Here are the facts, most of which would have to be known to the author, judging by his bibliography: On 5th May 1851 Hirsch informed the Moravian communities of his decision to resign. May 13-14: Representatives of the great majority of Moravian communities, including 49 rabbis headed by Rabbi Shlomo Quetsh (who had been Hirsch's chief antagonist among the Orthodox rabbis), assembled in Nicolsburg and entreated Hirsch to stay (Rosenbloom, p. 93: "some members of the community!"). The representatives resolved to raise an annual amount of 3000 florins for the establishment of the College. There were also other resolutions, all designed to move Hirsch to cancel his resignation. These included a raise in Hirsch's salary (Rosenbloom "may have offered some financial inducements!"). Hirsch asked for time to consider the changed situation, but insisted he could stay only with the consent of the Frankfurt congregation whose appointment of him as their rabbi he had already accepted. May 19: Hirsch wrote to Frankfurt asking to be released from his obligation. At the same time one of the

## Book Reviews

Moravian notables travelled to Frankfurt to intercede with the congregation. He may have carried Hirsch's letter with him. The members of the Frankfurt congregation insisted that Hirsch fulfill his obligation and leave for Frankfurt at the earliest convenience. July 11: Hirsch submitted his request for release from duty to the Vienna government. The request was granted without delay. July 31: Hirsch sent a farewell circular to the rabbis and elders. August 12: Hirsch left Nicolsburg with his family. A delegation of notables accompanied them to the next town.<sup>7</sup> All the relevant documents show that the attitude and policies of the reactionary government in Vienna had a much larger share in Hirsch's frustrations than Rosenbloom cares to admit. There is no denying that relations between Hirsch and parts of Moravian Orthodoxy had been strained, there had been many disappointments and some people were manifestly relieved when Hirsch finally left. However, can this honestly be described as a "rout"?

And so to Frankfurt. Rosenbloom's treatment of Hirsch's communal activities in Frankfurt shows the same slipshod manner, shallow research and biased approach that mark the Nicolsburg episode, notwithstanding the fact that Hirsch's Frankfurt period is much more fully documented. Rosenbloom writes (p. 94) that after Hirsch's "traumatic experience in Moravia" (his previous experiences in Oldenburg and Emden had been "failures" too!) the only way open to him was "to form his own community, which he could then struc-

ture and mold to his own image." Rosenbloom may be interested to learn that before going to Frankfurt Hirsch applied (on 2nd February 1851) for the post of principal Orthodox rabbi of the Jewish Community of Hamburg, which had become vacant on the demise of his former teacher Bernays.<sup>8</sup> That this came to nothing was due to Hirsch's insistence upon two conditions defining his personal position, which were unacceptable to the Hamburg board, yet had nothing to do with the structure and constitution of the community which were certainly not in accordance with Hirsch's ideals, as is well-known from his subsequent writings.

What Rosenbloom makes of Hirsch's struggle for secession is downright preposterous. There is no other topic on which Hirsch wrote so profusely and explicitly, and yet Rosenbloom finds it "difficult to understand what prompted Hirsch to undertake this course of action" (p. 115). He makes the unreserved pronouncement that "secession appears hardly justifiable on religious grounds" (p. 116), yet has not taken the trouble to digest Hirsch's purely halakhic argument in his famous correspondence with Bamberger, nor to point out that Bamberger himself, together with Hirsch and more than 100 other rabbis, had signed a *herem* (according to Rosenbloom's terminology) against association with the Vienna community, nor to mention that the far less intransigent Hildesheimer publicly and wholeheartedly identified himself with Hirsch's argument, on purely religious

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

grounds. Failing, as he does, to grapple with Hirsch's theory of a "Jewish" community, Rosenbloom is utterly at a loss to comprehend how Hirsch could admit unobservant Jews into his congregation. Instead of informing the reader that Hirsch plainly considered his congregation to represent the ancient, genuine Jewish community, comprising, as of old, each and every Jew in the town, Rosenbloom has recourse to his favorite solution, the "dual standard."

The account of the events of that fateful year of secession (pp. 118-9) is partly based on gross falsifications of historical facts. "Hirsch rejected all concessions offered by the *Gemeinde*?" No concessions were offered until more than half a year had gone by after the Prussian (not German!) diet had passed the secession law. "Bamberger dismissed Hirsch's *issur*?" Yes, but only *after* the *Gemeinde* had offered substantial concessions, a fact Rosenbloom is careful not to point out. Hirsch demanded a separate cemetery?" No! Hirsch pleaded with the *Gemeinde* that all charitable institutions should be used and administered jointly by both communities, including the cemetery, and only after this proposal was rejected outright by the *Gemeinde* a separate cemetery had to be projected. It is also quite untrue that secession "meant disaster" (p. 115) to German Jews, as was feared by its opponents. The number of Jews who opted out of the communities for other than religious motives was very small indeed, and as to the religious interest, it was subsequently

admitted freely by many Orthodox anti-secessionists that the rise of organized Orthodoxy in the *Gemeinden* was a significant achievement of Hirsch's struggle.

Whether Rosenbloom's insinuation that Hirsch was motivated by wounded pride and personal ambition, a slur that must involve Hildesheimer no less than Hirsch, is an "objective evaluation" or a gross misrepresentation, can be left to the discrimination of the reader.

After this unfortunate venture into history and biography, Rosenbloom proceeds to an exposition of Hirsch's religious philosophy, drawing chiefly from *Nineteen Letters* and *Horeb*. Many of these pages are little more than revised versions of four papers published by Rosenbloom in the past in various journals. He leans heavily on previous studies by Heinemann and Rotenstreich, with much of his space being devoted to tracing Hirsch's indebtedness to Hegel, an endeavor which at times appears rather forced. The remaining pages are largely taken up with mostly well-done summaries of Hirsch's classification and interpretation of Jewish Law. Serious students of the Hirschian *weltanschauung* will miss a penetrating analysis of such singular and characteristic ideas as "divine anthropology" (subsequently borrowed by Heschel, though without acknowledging his source) and the dichotomy of the "male and female" principle. For an attempt, long over-due, to trace Hirsch's antecedents in the world of German Hasidism, Rosenbloom was patently ill equipped. He also passes over in almost complete sil-

## Book Reviews

ence the obvious impact of Schelling's speculative theology which was imparted to Hirsch through Bernays.

When it comes to the Hirsch-Maimonides relationship, Rosenbloom reverts to his by now familiar technique of speculation and conjecture in the face of plain evidence to the contrary. He starts on his discourse by telling us that "Hirsch's *Horeb* . . . did not differ essentially in content and purpose from Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*" (p. 125). Now Maimonides's intent to compose a code of law that would supersede all previous texts and compilations is too well-known from his Introduction and epistles to necessitate quotation at any length. Hirsch, too, stated his purpose in terms that could not be more explicit: "This, then, is the standpoint from which I should like these essays to be considered . . . They contain these two elements, the שמענתתא and the אגרתא . . . The latter section represents the more characteristic contribution which these essays are intended to offer. The *legal excerpts*, which are of the most general character, and aim not so much at answering *she'eloth* as at evoking them, are meant to *prepare* the reader for the performance of the law in actual life, at the same time bringing in numerous *ideas* by which the practice of the commandments should be accompanied."<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere Hirsch was even more categorical: "It had not been my intention . . . to write a code of ritual law."<sup>10</sup> So much for the similarity of purpose.

As to the content, the passage quoted above leaves no doubt about

the vast difference that divides Hirsch from Maimonides. Whereas Maimonides made rare and carefully chosen inroads into the realm of ideas underlying the law, this realm was Hirsch's central field of occupation. Moreover, Hirsch went to great lengths in an attempt to rationalize the minutest details of Torah law and ritual (numbers, measures, colors, material, etc.), considering this to be the true "science" of Judaism, while Maimonides, as is well known, condemned such an endeavor as being futile and "mad." To be sure, the author is repeatedly compelled to admit the breakdown of his theory of essential similarity (see pp. 286, 370 *et passim*), yet while he points out "vast ideational divergence" he still clings to the last straw of "formal thematic similarity" (p. 212), which is, as any scholar of "Hebraic studies" knows, meaningless.

What, then, spurred Rosenbloom on to postulate his theory, indefensible as it turns out to be, of the essentially Maimonidean framework and texture of Hirsch's main philosophical works? Here we come back to Rosenbloom's preconceived ideas about Hirsch's psyche. Probing into the rabbi's soul and subconscious mind is, of course, an entirely legitimate undertaking, were it not that Rosenbloom's psychology is less sound even than his scholarship. Hirsch, Rosenbloom reveals to us, was driven by an unquenchable ambition to emulate Maimonides, to assume Maimonides's mantle, to become the Maimonides of the modern era (pp. 126, 398). What are the facts underlying this psychoanalysis?

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

Hirsch consciously or subconsciously selected titles and pen names that cannot be explained unless we presuppose this innermost desire to become a second Maimonides. To take only one example out of many: "The Hebrew title of Hirsch's . . . *Nineteen Letters* . . . — *Igrot Tzafon* (Letters to the North) — parallels Maimonides's *Iggeret Teman* (Letter to the South). It suggests that Ben Uziel — Hirsch's pen name — hoped to resolve the religious dilemma for the Jews of the North, a euphemism for Germany in Haskalah literature, just as Ben Maimon — Maimonides — had helped to solve the religious problem of the Jews of the South approximately seven centuries earlier" (p. 125). Very good! Only that there is one little mishap, caused by the annoying habit of Hirsch's to omit supplying vowel points for his Hebrew titles. Hirsch never called his book *Igrot Tzafon* but *Igrot Tzafun* (Letters of the Concealed One, i.e., one who conceals his name),<sup>11</sup> and it is really a pity to make Rosenbloom's psychoanalytical edifice come tumbling down over just one tiny vowel dot. It would have been pointless to dwell on Rosenbloom's *jeux d'esprit* at any length had he at least had the good sense to confine them to a footnote. But no! he roams on for pages, including plenty of learned notes (see especially p. 428 n. 41!), with his pseudonymistic *pilpul* — "mountains suspended on a hair" which on closer examination turns out to be non-existent.

With all this, Rosenbloom's treatment of the Hirsch-Mendelssohn relationship seems reasonable

enough, though at least two points should not go unprotected. Rosenbloom writes that Hirsch's symbolism had its roots in Mendelssohn and quotes a few passages from *Jerusalem* to corroborate his assertion (p. 198). In truth, nothing could be more remote from Hirsch's concept of laws as symbolical (or rather allegorical) presentations of spiritual and rational values than Mendelssohn's notion of "ceremonial law." Mendelssohn merely explained that the oral law was not originally meant to be written down, for the practice of the *mitzvot* itself was supposed to rouse the mind and the soul to ponder on the Divine truths. There was nothing symbolic or allegoric in that. Hirsch's symbolism was concerned with bringing *specific* truths into rational correspondence with *specific* details of religious practice, something Mendelssohn did not even remotely consider. Thieberger was surely right when he wrote that Mendelssohn "drained the realm of (specific) religion of its last drop of reason."<sup>12</sup> Hirsch's master in symbolics was Bernays who in turn took it from Schelling. Again, the author maintains that Hirsch's concept of *Mensch-Jisroel* "merely echoes Mendelssohn's fundamental idea" (p. 168) of man's division into a confessional and extraconfessional being, a distinction nowhere to be found in Hirsch's writings. Hirsch's concept did not signify a combination of the external-universal aspect with the internal-Jewish aspect of the Jew, but the Jewishness of human values and the universal validity of Jewish values. The Hirschian Jew, in theory

## Book Reviews

at least, never ceased to be a Jew, both at home and abroad, both internally and externally. "Israel" is "Man" on a higher plane. With Mendelssohn there was a peaceful, if static, co-existence between "Man" and "Israel"; with Hirsch the relationship was one of dynamic interaction and subordination.

The chapter on Hirsch's educational philosophy also leaves much to be desired and corrected. The section dealing with Hirsch's projected curriculum is particularly unsatisfactory. After making the sweeping assertion that "Hirsch makes no attempt to balance the secular and religious parts of the curriculum," Rosenbloom goes on to declare that "a *careful analysis* (my italics) will reveal that out of all the . . . subjects (Hebrew, German, Bible, natural and social sciences, history, practical ethics, writing and arithmetic) only Bible could be properly called a religious subject" (p. 360). Well then, let us carefully analyze Hirsch's own utterances on this, on the very pages to which Rosenbloom refers:<sup>13</sup> Hebrew — "From an early age every child in Israel should become familiar . . . with the language . . . of the writings which are to guide his life, namely, Hebrew . . . With it you place in his hands the key to realizing that the Scriptures ought to be the basis and source of his life, and also to making them actually his constant companion in life." History — "Let your child then trace the Divinely ordained course of history . . . in order that in this first journey through history its heart may turn to the eternal and imperishable God

and may learn to love its Jewish mission." Practical ethics<sup>14</sup> — "Introduce him to the practical teaching of the Torah-wisdom . . . the knowledge of what is meant by Jewish duty and a Jewish life." Rosenbloom achieves his purpose not only by twisting the meaning of some of the terms used by Hirsch, but by totally ignoring the vital distinction he made between specific Torah studies and "subsidiary studies," a term which recurs three times on these pages.

This is no *apologia* for Hirsch and his work. I have purposely refrained here from juxtaposing the author's "analysis" with what I would consider to be a well-balanced, objective presentation, something Rosenbloom has utterly failed to achieve. His study does not live up to the most elementary standards of scholarship. Many important items among Hirsch's copious writings are not so much as mentioned, such as his lengthy and very revealing Hebrew responsum on the Braunschweig convention of Reform rabbis. Rosenbloom also seems to be suffering from severe linguistic limitations. How else could he have cited in his bibliography the notorious Hebrew edition of a selection of Hirsch's collected articles (Bnei Brak, 1965-66), when even a random check with the German text should have convinced him that this is an unreliable, inaccurate and distorted translation.<sup>15</sup> Many recent publications on subjects dealt with by Rosenbloom have apparently not come to his notice, and thus his study, apart from being slanted, is also outdated. There is no trace of Ja-



## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

cob Katz's book on *Freemasons and Jews* (Jerusalem, 1968) which reveals new aspects of the social background of reform in Frankfurt; or of his instructive paper on Kant and Judaism (Tarbiz 1972); and not even of his penetrating study of Rabbi Z. H. Kalisher (Shivat Zion 2/3, 1951-52), defining Hirsch's position in the typological context of 19th century German rabbis. When Rosenbloom points out that "Hirsch courageously accepted the Copernican outlook" (p. 365) he demonstrates his ignorance of the fact that nearly three hundred years previously the rabbis had already made their peace with the Copernican revolution, as shown by André Neher,<sup>16</sup> and instead of quoting the Maharal of Prague and David Gans he quotes Cardinal Baronius. S. W. Baron's paper on "The Revolution of 1848 and Jewish Scholarship," (Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, XX, 1951), showing the very positive and decisive role played by Hirsch as a communal and political leader, was too inconvenient for the Hirschian image Rosenbloom wishes to project to be included on his reading list. Similarly, the extended and well-known correspondence of Hirsch with Rabbi I. E. Spektor of Kovno, demonstrating his great concern for the plight of Russian Jewry and his unceasing activity on their behalf, and documented in the papers by I. Halpern,<sup>17</sup> is passed over in silence by Rosenbloom who will not attribute to Hirsch more than "some interest in the fate of Russian Jewry" (p. 119). Not surprising, of

course, since it concerned "Polish Jews, whom Hirsch had always abhorred" p. 87).

Rosenbloom indulges in romantic speculation and guesswork where he should have done meticulous research. Obviously he was faced with a psychological dilemma: he set out to write a book about a person whom he dislikes intensely. So he chose for Hirsch a suit of a certain size and fabric and then labored to fit Hirsch into it. Rosenbloom sees Hirsch as a clinical case of a person inflicted with an inferiority complex, a fairly gifted man who was consumed all his life with insatiable drives and ambitions, frustrated by the realization "that he was not a Maimonides" (p. 399). One is struck by the fact that Rosenbloom completely overlooked the probability that Hirsch must have borne a life-long grudge against his father for not naming him Moses and that he tried to emulate Nahmanides in his commentary on the Bible! The contrasting traits of Hirsch's character as painted by Rosenbloom, showing a curious co-existence of "arrogance," "disdain," "vindictiveness" (pp. 92, 118) with "unquestioned sincerity," "high religious and moral integrity," "modesty," "sincerity and genuineness" (pp. 60, 183, 321, 367), remain unresolved. Rosenbloom should have delved more deeply into the intricacies of psychonanalysis to make his picture of Hirsch's character and personality really convincing. Despite all Rosenbloom's protestations to the contrary, this is definitely a partisan study.

## Book Reviews

### NOTES

1. M. Cohen, "Hundert Jahre Neunzehn Briefe," in *Jahrbuch für die Jüdischen Gemeinden in Schleswig Holstein*, Nr. 8, 1936-37, p. 20.
2. See the memoirs of Isler's son in *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte*, xlvii (1961), especially pp. 48-62.
3. *Samson Raphael Hirsch-Jubiläums-Nummer*, Frankfurt a.M., 1908, p. 35.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
5. R. Breuer *Unter seinem Banner*, Frankfurt a.M., 1908, p. 218.
6. See G. Wolf, "Die Versuche zur Errichtung einer Rabbinerschule in Oesterreich," in *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, 1892.
7. M. H. Friedländer, *Zur Geschichte des mährischen Landrabbinates*, Brünn, 1889, pp. 42-49; *Nachalath Z'wi*, vi (5696), p. 252.
8. The documents are in the Saenger-Grossmann Collection of Hirschiana at the Institute for the Research of Diaspora Jewry, Bar-Ilan University.
9. S. R. Hirsch, *Horeb*, ed. I. Grunfeld, London, 1962, p. clix. The italics, except one, are mine.
10. S. R. Hirsch, *Postscripta*, Altona, 1840, p. 15. This important publication by Hirsch is nowhere quoted by Rosenbloom, though listed in the bibliography.
11. See M. Cohen, *loc. cit.*, Hirsch's letter to Z. H. May, 8th September 1835.
12. F. Thieberger, "Samson Raphael Hirsch," *Der Jude*, iv (1919-20), p. 559. This important study by a scholar not belonging to the Hirsch circle was totally ignored by Rosenbloom.
13. All the passages quoted in this paragraph are from *Horeb*, ed. Grunfeld, pp. 408-12.
14. This is Rosenbloom's internationally inaccurate rendering of Hirsch's *Lebensweisheit (Pflichtenlehre)*. Grunfeld's *Right living (teaching of duties)*, though inelegant, conveys the exact meaning intended by Hirsch.
15. See M. Breuer, "Mishut beshuk hassefarim," *Hama'ayan* vii, 1, (Tishri 5727) pp. 64-72.
16. "Gli ebrei e la rivoluzione copernicana," *Rassegna mensile di Israel*, October 1973.
17. *Eastern European Jewry* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1968, pp. 357-70.

---

*Rational Irrational Man: Torah Psychology*, by AVROHOM AMSEL (New York: Feldheim, 1976).

Reviewed by Irwin I. Mansdorf

In *Rational Irrational Man*, Amsel has attempted to expound a Torah view of human behavior and

demonstrate how it is in complete contradiction to what he refers to as "Psychology." There is some merit in his views, although he is in error regarding what he calls

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

psychology. Amsel is correct in his accusation that many Orthodox Jewish therapists have become so imbued with Freudian thinking so as to distort the Torah's view of rational man. More important is that, in attempting to alleviate patient problems, some therapists subscribing to analytic theory tend to totally ascribe the causes of behavior to unseen and unconscious (what Amsel calls "irrational") motives. In doing so, outwardly committed Jews may be ignoring Torah views on personality and behavior, which stress, for the most part, personal responsibility for behavior. To this end, Amsel has made a contribution. Far too many psychotherapists have for too long viewed psychoanalytic ritual as a science which can do no wrong. This, however, has long been recognized by many psychologists, and Amsel's views on the matter are hardly original and certainly not "trail-blazing" (as the jacket description would have one believe). His contribution could well have been delivered in a different framework, one which does not take a distortive and viciously antagonistic attitude toward all of psychological theory simply because of some errors of psychoanalysis.

Amsel proceeds to indict psychology for a series of alleged inconsistencies with Jewish thought. His discourse is professionally immature, in that he attributes certain characteristics to psychology which most Psychology I students would recognize as false (e.g., claiming that behaviorist theory agrees with psychoanalytic principles). An extensive analysis of the book, given its

wholesale misrepresentation of psychology, is beyond the scope of this review. Instead, several (of many) examples of Amsel's distortions will be pointed out.

Amsel places far too great an emphasis on the influence Freudian psychic determinism has on psychotherapeutic practice. While inconsistencies with Jewish thought may indeed be present, one must separate the theory from the practice. Many psychoanalysts, for example, might contend that while they do not subscribe to questionable areas of psychoanalytic theory, they find its techniques useful in practice. Moreover, as noted by Mischel,<sup>1</sup> Freud did not necessarily believe that all of one's actions are irrational and impulse driven. In fact, a healthy ego would preclude such behavior. More important, however, are the advances in behavioral and social learning theories of personality in the last twenty years which have been totally ignored by Amsel. As a "trail-blazing" theorist, Amsel should know quite well that the influence Freudian theories of personality have on contemporary psychological theorizing is far from widespread. This is because current psychological thought, as most scientific thought, seeks to be descriptive, not explanatory. Scientific (including psychological) determinism, thus, simply means that any given event is caused by events which precede it. Is this any different from the view of the Vilna Gaon,<sup>2</sup> who says,

כל הדברים שבעולם מורכבים המה  
ביציאותם לאור מסיגה ומסובב בו.  
כל סיגה היא מסוגבת מסיגה הקודמת

## Book Reviews

לה כו'. סוף דבר אין מסוג כל. סיגה  
להולד ממנה דמסוג כו'. ואין סיגה  
אשר איננה נולדת מסיגה המסוגה כו'.

The strict, rigid determinism of Freudian theory, as well as other deterministic theories, is not totally accepted in psychology, and is a matter of strong debate (see Carpenter,<sup>3</sup> pp. 68-77).

Because of Amsel's initial erroneous equation of Freudian theory with all psychological theory, his subsequent contention that psychologists focus on determinants of behavior which negate individual free will and self direction is also in error. The entire burgeoning field of behavior therapy, for the most part, (as noted by Rimm and Masters<sup>4</sup>) does not actively concern itself with hypothesized internal and uncontrollable states of behavior. They tend to concentrate on the particular maladaptive behavior in question. Furthermore, most social learning theorists (e.g., Bandura<sup>5</sup>) indicate that individuals play an important active, rather than passive, role in producing the various behavioral contingencies with which they come into contact.

Amsel's strong focus on the internal ("rational") motivations in man does not give justice to Judaism's and behavioral psychology's view that external contingencies can influence behavior and modify it. By showing that behavior (including criminal behavior) may be in part controlled by external events, one does not have to conclude (as Amsel does) that these events caused the behavior, thus justifying it. Correlation, as most scientists know, does not imply causation.

Hence, in Judaism, we have the concept of *seyag latorah*, an external contingency applied without regard to an individual's internal controls. Other types of external contingencies may function to cause anxiety and fear, which may manifest itself as a phobia. Such anxiety and fear, according to Amsel (p. 16) is strictly a case of one's not having *emunah*, and is a sin. It has long been demonstrated, however, (e.g., Watson and Rayner<sup>6</sup>) that a fear can be acquired through an unpleasant association, a classical conditioning phenomenon. Thus, one who walks in a street and is bitten by a dog may develop a fear of dogs. Is such a person a "sinner" according to Amsel? If so, what is the *onesh*?

Rabbi Amsel's selective use of Judaic sources also bears some mention. In discussing Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's<sup>7</sup> ruling on *shoteh*, he brings R. Moshe's comments that a *shoteh l'davar ehad* can effect a divorce, as evidence that such a person is responsible for his actions. Rabbi Amsel fails to note, however, that R. Moshe (citing among others, Maimonides) differentiates between a *kinyan* (as divorce) and *mitsvot* in general. With regard to a *kinyan*, which divorce is, he is responsible, but in the greater realm of responsibility, as in *mitsvot*, he is not responsible.

Amsel spends considerable time on the relationships between physiology, pharmacology and behavior. For example, he contends that Judaism does not believe that physiological and chemical agents can strip man of his free will. This entire treatment of physiological in-

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

fluences on behavior is questionable. One wonders if Amsel would recommend seeking treatment from practitioners who believe (as Amsel cites from Talmudic sources) that the spleen controls laughter and the kidneys cognition. As to the inability of chemicals to influence behavioral choice, what would Amsel say to the Talmudic discussion of *יין יצא סודו*<sup>8</sup>.

Does this not indicate an altering of choice? Moreover, the *Midrash Tanhumah*<sup>9</sup> discusses the influence alcohol has on behavior change in discussing Noah. It mentions the limitations one must place on such imbibing and states

שותה יותר נדי נעשה כחזיר.

While there are certainly questions in the areas of psychology and Judaism, Amsel's treatise is not the answer. Its pretentiousness and egotistical style, its lack of citations for incredible remarks, and basic misrepresentation of psychology is misleading and unfortunate. His point that Jewish values must be considered in therapy is well taken, but his indictment of psychology as a whole is largely incorrect and erroneous. The subject matter covered by this book is interesting, but requires one who is a psychologist (which Amsel is not) or familiar with psychological theory (which Amsel is not) to give it justice.

### NOTES

1. Mischel, W., *Introduction to Personality*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), p. 188.
2. In R. Yisrael Salanter, *Ohr Yisrael*, (*maamar shaarei ohr*), 1.
3. Carpenter, F., *The Skinner Primer*, (New York: The Free Press, 1974).
4. Rimm, D. C. and Masters, J. C., *Behavior Therapy: Techniques and Empirical Findings*, (New York: Academic Press, 1974), p. 6.
5. Bandura, A., "The Ethics and Social Purposes of Behavior Modification," in C. M. Franks and G. T. Wilson (eds.), *Annual Review of Behavior Therapy: Theory and Practice*, Vol. 3, (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1975).
6. Watson, J. B. and Rayner, R., "Conditioned Emotional Responses," *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 1920, 3, 1-14.
7. Feinstein, R. Moshe, *Iggrot Moshe (even haezer)*, (New York: Balshon, 1961), p. 285.
8. *Eruvin* 65a.
9. *Midrash Tanhumah*, Noah, 13.

## Book Reviews

*Perakim Be Patologia Be Talmud ube Nosei Kelov* (Chapters on Pathology in the Talmud and its Commentaries), by DR. AVRAHAM STEINBERG (Jerusalem: Falk-Schlesinger Institute at Shaare Zedek Hospital, 1975).

Reviewed by  
Fred Rosner, M.D.

The oldest known Hebrew medical writing is that of Asaph the physician which dates from the seventh century. Since the ancient Hebrews left us no specific medical texts, our only sources of knowledge on this subject are the medical and hygienic references found in the Bible, Talmud and rabbinic writings. It is from these that the fragments of our knowledge of their medical views and practices have been gathered. The difficulty has been great, for the material is scant and its meaning often uncertain; the period which these sources cover is very long. Much of the material is "popular medicine"; most, if not all, was transmitted by laymen.

The first systematic studies of the medicine of the Bible were published early in the seventeenth century, among the first fruits of the study of the Bible awakened by the Reformation. The earlier books dealt only with the Old and the New Testaments (with the single exception of the dissertation of Gintzburger of 1743). It was not until the nineteenth century that studies included the Talmud and other ancient Hebraic writings.

The literature that has grown up during the past three centuries is extensive; much of it deals with special subjects. Some studies are

limited to single works such as the Talmud. As would be expected, these studies reflect the scientific spirit of their period, the uncritical or the critical attitude of the Biblical scholars, and the current views on medicine.

The writers have, for the most part, been Biblical students; others were students of medical history; there are a few who were both.

Thus, for instance, Wunderbar, who completed his *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* in 1860, was a layman. Ebstein, whose writings appeared in 1901 (*Die Medizin im Alten Testament*) and 1903 (*Die Medizin im Neuen Testament und im Talmud*) was dependent upon the use of available fragmentary translations. Other works concerning the totality of Biblical-Talmudical medicine did not exist.

It was not until the publication of Julius Preuss' *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* in 1911 that we acquired a reliable, comprehensive, and scholarly exposition of the subject by a first class physician on the one hand, and a thorough semitic philologist who made the history of medicine his life's study, on the other.

Preuss' classic book, the most definitive work on the subject to this day, is an anthology of all his articles published over many years in a variety of scholarly journals beginning with his pioneering study entitled *Der Arzt in Bibel und Tal-*

