an afterlife, and its rewards and punishments, “they would return to their natural disposition, and would prefer to govern all their actions according to lust, and to obey fortune rather than themselves” (Spinoza, Ethics V, prop. 41, s.). Indeed, the fact that most men cannot free themselves of superstition is the starting point of his Theological Political Treatise. But if Spinoza does have a political project, then does it not behoove us to consider how it shapes his philosophical agenda?

Spinoza’s Heresy forces us to revisit the debate between Maimonides and Spinoza on the nature of Judaism and its relation to philosophy. The difficulty in re-creating this debate and taking seriously Maimonides’ account of Judaism is that we are inclined to agree with Spinoza. We tend to agree, in other words, that reason and revelation cannot have any honest relationship, since each seeks to make the other submit to its authority. As a result, we read Maimonides as having an untenable political project and Spinoza as having no political agenda at all. In order to take either thinker seriously, we have to return to a number of fundamental questions about the nature of Judaism and about the relationship of philosophy to the city. I suspect that in doing so we may begin to see that, for Maimonides, the expression of philosophy is a profound concern for the Jewish people. Similarly, we might be able to make sense of Spinoza’s treacherous betrayal of the Jewish community.

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Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe

Medieval Spanish Kabbala at the root of the Florentine philosopher Pico della Mirandola’s so-called “Oration on the Dignity of Man”? Depictions of Moses and Solomon by the Venetian painter Giorgione enriched by Midrash? The censor of Jewish books in Counter-Reformation Italy as a forerunner of the modern, secular Jew? The most learned Englishman of the seventeenth century asserting that Christians can attain salvation through observance of the rabbinic Noahide laws?
These are tantalizing possibilities and but a taste of the riches on display in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*. The direct outgrowth of a year-long colloquium and conference by the same name at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, *Hebraica Veritas?* presents a highly stimulating collection of articles reflecting the state of the field when it comes to the Christian study and use of Hebrew, Jewish texts, and Judaism. A welcome supplement to, and in some cases revision of, other recent scholarship on this topic, *Hebraica Veritas?* offers scholars of Jewish history and religion, Hebrew language, Bible, and Jewish-Christian relations a treasure-trove of fascinating details and broader themes. While this book hardly provides comprehensive coverage of the field—such stalwarts as Johannes Reuchlin and Guillaume Postel receive little or no mention in its pages—it does succeed in showcasing the wide relevance of Christian Hebraism to the cultural and intellectual life of early modern Europe.

In their introduction, editors Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson emphasize their commitment to recent trends in historical scholarship—to the move away from broad narratives in favor of more localized investigations that convey the variety of experiences. Their approach is characterized by an enhanced interest in processes of exchange and interaction (p. 1) in social, cultural, and economic spheres, rather than in purely textual or intellectual issues. In the case of Christian Hebraism, this means increased attention to print culture (Stephen G. Burnett’s contribution), ethnography (Yaacov Deutsch), censorship (Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin), and the logistics of study (Peter N. Miller), whereas less attention is paid to the treatises read and written by Christian students of Hebrew and Judaism (not by accident does the book’s subtitle refer to “Christian Hebraists” as opposed to “Christian Hebraism”). These tendencies come across both in the selection of articles and in their organization. The stress on relations between Jews and Christians in particular is reflected in the two sections into which the book is divided:

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“Negotiating Dialogue” and “Imagining Difference.” The editors also note an interest in displaying Jewish resilience and resourcefulness alongside the more expected tales of persecution and oppression, what Salo Baron memorably styled the “lachrymose conception of the Jewish history.” What emerges, then, is a picture of Jewish interdependence with the larger world, even of borrowing from Christian traditions to facilitate the defense of Judaism, as found, for example, in the contribution of Ora Limor and Yisrael Yuval, “Skepticism and Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Doubters in Sefer Hanitzahon.”

No review can hope to do justice to the wide range of approaches and subjects featured in this book. The following analysis of selected articles conveys but a taste of Hebraica Veritas?, in particular showcasing and critiquing some of its most cutting-edge research.

Moshe Idel’s contribution (“Man as the ‘Possible’ Entity in Some Jewish and Renaissance Sources”) treats kabbalistic anticipations of, and possible influences on, the fifteenth-century philosopher Pico della Mirandola’s dynamic conception of man. Qualifying the conventional historiographic contrast between the “mentalistic” Middle Ages and the “active” Renaissance, Idel proposes instead “the movement of certain theories” of medieval or earlier provenance “from the margins of thought to the intellectual center… to their dissemination among audiences previously unacquainted with more activistic and optimistic views of human nature” (p. 34). Specifically, the thematic heart of Idel’s piece is concerned with possible kabbalistic antecedents to the notion of man’s uniquely unfixed nature, popularized by Pico in what has come to be called the “Oration on the Dignity of Man.” Idel uncovers strikingly similar themes in a variety of texts stretching back to the twelfth-century Spanish Arab philosopher Ibn al-Sid al-Batalyawsi, where man is associated with hyle (“matter” in Greek) and thus associated in turn with the quality of contingency (p. 34). For example, the thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalist R. Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov interprets man’s hylic nature as encapsulating the potential of his becoming like God. Despite the clear similarities between the ideas of Shem Tov and those of Pico, we have no hard proof the former were available in Italy before the 1530s. Thus, though it is certainly possible that individuals may have brought these ideas to Italy before that time, it may simply be that we have a case of interesting parallels. On the other hand, we do know that Pico’s contemporary, the Jewish philosopher and kabbalist Yohanan Alemano, was very interested in al-Batalyawsi’s writings, suggestive evidence that these rather obscure medieval sources may in fact lie at the root of Pico’s renowned “Renaissance” vision.
The theme of interaction—social and intellectual—with all its attendant complexities is also prominent in this article. The key relationship for Idel is that between Alemanno and Pico della Mirandola. While Alemanno makes extensive (albeit sometimes cryptic) reference to Pico and appears to record details of their conversations, Pico never mentions his interlocutor, nor for that matter his other teacher and translator in Kabbala, Flavius Mithridates, though he of course stresses his use of ancient kabbalistic materials. Thus, Idel makes the point that it may at times be easier to credit ancient (or dead) sources than contemporary ones. Indeed, it may well be that the prestige associated in the Renaissance with the revival of ancient ideas resulted in the elision of the contemporary conduit. Pico, after all, was interested in ancient sources, and Alemanno never claimed to be originating anything fundamentally new. Finally, Alemanno himself makes for an interesting contrast with Pico. While the teaching of Hebrew and Jewish texts to non-Jews was often controversial among Jews in this period, Alemanno at times openly reveals his pride in having such an esteemed Christian as his colleague.

Jason Rosenblatt’s fascinating examination of the English jurist and scholar John Selden focuses on the latter’s \textit{De Jure Naturali} (\textit{On Natural Law}), a dense treatment of natural law in the context of the seven commandments of the sons of Noah, the so-called Noahide laws. Selden, as Rosenblatt convincingly shows, accepted the rabbinic claim that this legislation is incumbent upon the gentiles and suggests that its observance is sufficient for the non-Jew to attain salvation, provided that he recognizes its divine origin. Elsewhere, Selden claims that God’s covenant with the Jews is still valid and that Jews can still enter heaven on the basis of Torah law, Jesus simply enabling the same result for the non-Jew. Thus, there appears to be something of a tension in Selden’s conceptions of Jesus and the Noahide laws. If, indeed, the Noahide laws in conjunction with belief in their divine origin are sufficient, then what need is there for Jesus at all? This tension is left unresolved in this chapter, leaving the reader to reflect on the problem Hebraism potentially poses for Christianity.

Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin’s “Censorship, Editing, and the Reshaping of Jewish Identity: The Catholic Church and Hebrew Literature in the Sixteenth Century,” makes bold and exciting claims, though its assertions aren’t always proven by the evidence here assembled. The primary thesis of this chapter is that Catholic censorship had two contradictory yet complementary functions: To “[separate]… Jews from Christians,” and to “[integrate]… Jewish literature in Christian culture” (p. 126). With regard

\footnote{I am grateful to Professor Arthur Lesley for sharing this information with me.}
to the second point, the author casts the censor (often a Jew or convert) as a kind of precursor of the modern, secular Jew. He notes, for example, that many today who are quick to condemn this early modern censor in fact “[reject] the same passages he omitted” (p. 143) and “have accepted the same values and principles that directed [him]” (p. 145). Thought-provoking as the suggestion is, it is nonetheless worth pointing out the great difference between personal initiative and outside pressure in the promotion of particular values or policies. The end result in terms of liturgy, for example, may be the same, but will likely feel very different to members of the involved community. Indeed, Raz-Krakotzkin himself acknowledges this in noting that some of the changes promulgated by the censors did not stick.

An interesting subthesis in Raz-Krakotzkin’s contribution suggests that the removal (albeit temporary in some cases) of the derogatory term goy (literally “nation,” traditionally used to denote the non-Jew) from the Jewish liturgy helped lead toward the creation of an “autonomous Jewish self-definition, that is to say, the establishment of an identity that was separated from the Christian-Jewish polemics through which it had previously been defined” (p. 140). It is hard to take this argument too seriously, as we are dealing with precisely the period in which ghetto walls were going up throughout Italy, even if we accept the arguments of scholars like Robert Bonfil and Benjamin Ravid, namely, that the emergence of ghettos coincides paradoxically with the period of the greatest Jewish cultural integration into Italian society. Significant cultural integration and a polemical or at least oppositional basis for identity are not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, the textual excision under pressure of a derogatory term tells us little about the overall status of the term, or the views underlying or accompanying it, in the minority culture. In short, did Italian Jews in this period continue to use the derogatory term “goy” or an equivalent amongst themselves?

Raz-Krakotzkin’s essay makes a number of other provocative claims. Perhaps chief among them is the observation that the Counter-Reformation Church couldn’t (and didn’t) totally ban postbiblical Jewish literature because this would, by analogy, seem to back Protestant claims.

about the need only for Scripture. This important detail could perhaps bring us to at least partial acceptance of Raz-Krakotzkin’s claim that censorship helped create a Judeo-Christian (or perhaps one should say, a Judeo-Catholic) tradition, though, again, specific evidence is required here. In short, the Church in this period may have needed a Judaism that embraced tradition as the Church itself did, albeit stripped of its earlier anti-Christian elements.

In a chapter based largely on a careful survey of sixteenth-century Christian Hebraist authors and books in the German lands (“Reassessing the ‘Basel-Wittenberg Conflict’: Dimensions of the Reformation-Era Discussion of Hebrew Scholarship”), Stephen Burnett arrives at some surprising conclusions. He rejects Jerome Friedman’s claim (in *The Most Ancient Testimony*) of two key “schools” (Basel and Wittenberg) in Reformation-era Christian Hebraism, and highlights the dominance of German publishers in the publication of Christian Hebrew books, arguing that Jewish teachers of Hebrew played a minor role, even in the early sixteenth century, as compared with that of Christians and converts. This contradicts the general assumption that Jews, initially very important for Christian Hebraism, were only gradually eclipsed as more and more universities began to teach Hebrew. In fact, Burnett notes, “the most important role that professing Jews would play in the development of Reformation-era Hebrew studies was not as tutors but as Hebrew printers and authors” (p. 184).

Further data reveals the marginal nature of the Christian Kabbala and the increasing use of Jewish biblical scholarship in the course of the sixteenth century. Martin Luther and other prominent Protestants referred to rabbinic commentaries in order to demonstrate their competence, but also needed to show that they weren’t under the sway of these extrabiblical texts. Luther, as it turns out, was more open on this front than some others (Conrad Pellican, for example), but would also criticize those he felt to be naïve concerning the dangers of Jewish scholarship (such as Sebastian Münster). For Luther, the overall sense of the Bible was clear, despite some obscurities; knowledge of Hebrew language and grammar, while important, was not sufficient, and could sometimes lead one astray. Luther’s sense of the danger represented by Jews and Judaism increased substantially in the early 1540s. But this end-of-life palinode does not seem to have reduced the overall Protestant interest in Hebrew, particularly in his base of Wittenberg, which went on to become one of the centers of Hebrew printing in Europe.

Yaacov Deutsch’s treatment of early modern Christian Hebraist accounts of Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of atonement, is entitled “Polemical
Ethnographies” in order to emphasize the subjective nature of these texts. In selective descriptions, which often highlighted marginal aspects of Jewish holidays such as *kapparot* (“the custom of discharging one’s sins on a rooster,” p. 204), flagellation, and candle lighting, the authors of ethnographic texts conveyed particular criticisms of Judaism. Nonetheless, the depictions of Jewish customs, if not always the rationale offered for them, appear to have been backed up by Jewish sources.

Deutsch offers four motivations for this particular genre of polemical writing: to reveal (1) the absurdity of Jewish ritual, (2) the superstitious character of Jewish ceremony, (3) the anti-Christian nature of Jewish practice, and (4) the deviation of Judaism from the biblical text. Additionally, he notes that some of the ceremonies (for example, *kapparot*) drew criticism from some Jews as well in this period. Deutsch has also tracked differences between native and convert Christian writers—the former tending to emphasize Jewish divergence from biblical religion, the latter the anti-Christian elements in Jewish practice. Later works (from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as opposed to the sixteenth) show a decline in anti-Christian aspects in both camps in favor of the supposed “superstitious and ridiculous nature of the Jewish religion” (p. 223). The article might have tried to offer more of an explanation for this shift, as well as to account for the convert’s tendency to highlight the anti-Christian tendencies in Judaism.

Deutsch concludes his investigation with two fascinating claims. First, he argues that polemical ethnography did not only have negative effects, but also led to or reflected a shift away from dealing with Judaism to dealing with Jews, thus paving the way for the later naturalization of Jews (though one could claim that as such it also paved the way for ethnic, as opposed to religious, persecution of Jews). Second, polemical ethnography contributed to Jewish abandonment of “superstitious” customs. These ideas are so interesting that the reader would have enjoyed hearing more about them, specifically with regard to the mechanics of these processes. How much influence did these Christian writers have on the reform of Jewish practice, especially given the fact that *kapparot* had already been criticized by some Jews in the Middle Ages? Was this medieval self-criticism similarly promoted by external criticism, or was it more a part of an autonomous Jewish acculturation or evolution (incomplete, perhaps, to this day)? Whatever the case, there are interesting parallels here with Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin’s suggestion that censorship, including the Jewish role therein, played a role in the creation of Jewish modernity.
The final contribution, from coeditor Allison Coudert, centers on Christian Hebraists active at the German court of Prince Christian August of Sulzbach. Coudert is eager to stress Sulzbach’s role as a center for Christian Hebraist scholarship in the seventeenth century, highlighting in addition the philo-Semitism and theological shifts that resulted from this activity. In particular, Kabbala came to be understood as at the core of every religion, offering a kind of universal salvation that enabled Christians (and others of different faiths) to set aside their divisive doctrines (Trinity, original sin, etc.). Kabbala was also partly responsible for the emergence of the belief that human effort is the key to the restoration of the world’s original perfection.

Apart from surveying the varying spiritual directions in which Christian Hebraism could lead—including one case of conversion to Judaism—this chapter makes some interesting arguments about religious life in the early modern period. Coudert suggests that the growing religious intolerance of early modern regimes paradoxically fostered an increasing fluidity of religious identity (p. 291), which in turn led to essentialist theories about religion (p. 293)—for example, claims that Jewish converts to Christianity could never really shed their Jewishness. At the same time, though, increasing contact between Christians and Jews led a number of individuals to question their religious beliefs or to doubt the possibility of dogmatic religion at all.

In conclusion, Hebraica Veritas? significantly broadens our notion of the cultural conditions that allowed Christian Hebraism to flourish in various periods. It demonstrates the centrality to the study of Christian Hebraism of issues such as printing, censorship, the mechanics of study, and ethnography. And it convincingly shows how scholarly engagement with Christian Hebraists can yield important insights into Jewish-Christian relations and early modern cultural and intellectual history. As such, it points the way for additional research in these and related areas. Similarly, the stress on exchange and interaction between Jews and Christians suggests exploration of an issue hardly touched upon in this book, namely, how Jews perceived and reacted to Christian Hebraism itself. Yet while promoting new specialized areas of research, Hebraica Veritas? largely rehashes the traditional story line of Christian Hebraism: accustomed emphasis on fifteenth-century Florence followed by a primarily Reformation focus in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Additionally, one worries that amid all the emphasis on social relations, the textual issues at the heart of Christian Hebraism—Christian engagement with the Hebrew language and Jewish texts—will be neglected. Much remains to be explored and digested here, too, and it is
to be hoped that future studies will balance and, to the extent possible, integrate these corresponding approaches. In the meantime, however, *Hebraica Veritas?* represents a most significant contribution to a burgeoning field.

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