BOOK REVIEWS

Transvaluations

Science, Jews, and Secular Culture. Studies in Mid-Twentieth-Century American Intellectual History. DAVID A. HOLLINGER. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1996. xii, 179 pp. $24.95 or £19.95. ISBN 0-691-01143-5.

Those in search of a high-water mark from which to trace the diminished cultural authority of American academic intellectuals could do worse than the view of the matter offered by Walter Lippmann in 1966, with which David Hollinger opens this fine collection of essays. Following the eclipse of "traditional and customary authority," Lippmann noted, "there has fallen to the universities a unique, indispensable and capital function in the intellectual and spiritual life of modern society." In search of truths with which to guide their lives, he said, modern men and women no longer looked to religious elites but rather to "the universal company of scholars supported and protected and encouraged by their universities."

Such halcyon days are long gone, and Hollinger's book is marked by the contemporary culture wars that have rendered Lippmann's putative secular priesthood the subject of widespread—and sometimes well-deserved—contempt. But he seeks not to explain this fall from grace over the last 30 years but rather to understand the fashion in which such high hopes for (and by) academics emerged in the mid-century United States—hopes that crested in the early 1960s, a period that he nicely labels "the sixties before The Sixties." How, he asks, did secular American intellectuals housed in universities finally manage to undermine the power of a genteel Christianity that still exercised considerable influence over academic life as late as the 1930s? How did they not only establish the preeminence of secular inquiry and natural science as the standard for such inquiry but also come for a time to believe confidently that science was "a vehicle for a certain cluster of liberal, democratic values they thought appropriate for American society as a whole"?

Hollinger focuses on two contexts for the emergence and consolidation of this secular faith in science. First, he emphasizes the strategic role played in this story by those whom T. S. Eliot termed "free-thinking Jews." Eliot warned in 1933 (at the University of Virginia) that such Jews were particularly "undesirable" in societies that wished to ground themselves in Christian tradition, and Hollinger argues that Eliot's concerns about the threat that such Jews posed to at least one Christian institution, the modern university, were well placed, if contemptible. As a result of the discrediting by Hitler's tyranny of the anti-Semitism that had served to exclude Jewish scholars from the faculties of American universities before World War II and the explosive postwar growth of American colleges, Jews came to occupy an unprecedented place in American higher education by the 1960s. In 1969, even though Jews constituted but 3 percent of the U.S. population, they held 17 percent of the faculty positions in the nation's elite universities—and in some disciplines their representation was much higher. In an era before affirmative action, Jewish scholars won admission to university faculties not on the grounds that they were an underrepresented minority but under the banner of a universalistic, secular, scientific ideal of scholarship that challenged the still influential view that universities (and humanities faculties in particular) should remain redoubts of Christian gentlemen. Such Enlightenment Jews were thus a potent threat to Christian hegemony not because of any strong identification with Judaism (many had none) but because of "their manifest failure to be Jewish parochials" and their commitment to a cosmopolitan ideal.

Hollinger is quick to emphasize that Jews were not alone in their commitment to secularized higher education; they were joined by ex-Protestants and liberal Protestants equally committed to the project of demystifying the knowledge claims and moral hegemony of conservative Christians. But Jews, he compellingly argues, had a particularly large stake in de-Christianization, and hence took an especially prominent role in the secularization of the American university after 1930.

The second and related context that Hollinger points to as critical to the development of a widespread faith in secular, scientific inquiry among American academics is a *Kulturkampf* beginning in the late 1930s and lasting into the early postwar years. In this controversy, which sociologist Robert Merton (né Meyer Schkolnick) termed a "revolutionary conflict of cultures," the "scientific ethos" was pitted against not only totalitarianism abroad but also Christian authoritarianism and anti-Semitism at home. Critics such as Merton, whose "Notes on Science and Democracy" (1942) was a key text in this battle, worried, Hollinger says, that American democracy was being "subverted by the perpetuation of old-fashioned religious and ethnic prejudices and inhibited by a psychologically immature and socially provincial predilection for absolutes that portended an authoritarian political culture for the United States." Confronted with adversaries such as Mortimer Adler, who contended that John Dewey was a bigger threat to democracy than the Nazis, secular intellectuals (including Dewey himself) called for the promotion of what Mark A. May, the director of Yale's Institute of Human Relations, called the "morality of science"—"the code of honest, free inquiry, the code of critical, interactive, evidence-based, universalistic, antiauthoritarian, and hence 'scientific' conduct." Such a morality, they argued, not only was appropriate to scientists but should serve as a code for the ordinary citizens of a democracy as well. In such a scientific culture, scientists were heroes—or, at least, role models. The proponents of this culture won a victory in the wartime struggle with the critics of scientific reason, and their triumph was etched in the influential Harvard "red book," *General Education in a Free Society* (1945), which celebrated secular, scientific education. On the wings of this victory, secular academic intellectuals, many of them Jewish, assumed full command of American scholarship.

Hollinger's sympathies for the secular academics who are his subjects is manifest, yet he subjects their work to sometimes withering scrutiny. He laments the evolution of the defense of a scientific culture into a complacent satisfaction with existing American democratic institutions and an "end of ideology." He notes the ironic manner in which the linkages drawn by Merton and others between democracy and the practices of the scientific community developed into a "laissez-faire communitarian" argument for protecting that community from a wider democratic politics on the grounds that science was a democratic polity unto itself and thus was best left alone to work out its own destiny—albeit with government funds. And, for all his appreciation of the struggle of Jews for their rightful place in the American academic order, Hollinger describes in sharply critical terms the manner in which Jewish intellectuals such as Felix Frankfurter, Harold Laski, Morris Cohen, Jerome Frank, and Max Ler-

ner fashioned Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. into a liberal folk hero. Holmes, Hollinger shows, was useful to these intellectuals because he was an agnostic enemy of the genteel Christian culture against which they were struggling, and they turned a blind eye to those aspects of his thought and character that made him an unlikely candidate for canonization by liberals. By understanding Holmes's utility for Jewish intellectuals, Hollinger suggests, we can better grasp why they celebrated him, even though he was, as legal historian Grant Gilmore has said, "savage, harsh, and cruel, a bitter and lifelong pessimist who saw in the course of human life nothing but a continuing struggle in which the rich and powerful impose their will on the poor and weak."

On the whole, Hollinger's essays are exemplary instances of the "mainstream academic professionalism" that he tells us has characterized scholarship at the University of Michigan, where he taught for many years. Such professionalism, he says, is marked above all by "attention to aspects of the social sciences and humanities least likely to be mistaken for political advocacy, cultural criticism, or journalism." But fortunately Hollinger cannot resist a bit of cultural criticism, and it enlivens his book whenever it puts in an appearance. Hollinger worries over the fragility of the secular academic culture he analyzes, and he is anxious about the effects of "postmodernist" attacks on the authority of science by disciples of Michel Foucault and Thomas Kuhn—not only in themselves but also for the ironic opening they have provided for evangelical Christian scholars such as George Marsden to call for a reconsideration of the banishment of the "biblical episteme" from the university. Indeed, Hollinger's story of the secularization of the American academy is the mirror image of that offered by Marsden in his provocative book *The Soul of the American University* (1994): what Marsden sees as tragedy, Hollinger depicts as triumph. When addressing the arguments of Christian professors such as Marsden, who claim that they are now the victims of a secular academic culture, Hollinger's prose turns polemical, even bitter. Such critics, he says, invite the suspicion that they "are slow to shed the expectations and psychological habits of hegemony." Sensitive to the unhappy, anti-Semitic uses to which his emphasis on the role of Jews in the secularization of American higher education might be put by those who today lament it, Hollinger leaves no doubt where he stands. "Whatever may be wrong with American universities, and with America," he remarks, "it is not that they are insufficiently Christian."

Hollinger ends his book with an idiosyncratic vision of the Pentecost. In his version of the "jubilee morning when the curse of Babel shall be revoked and the dispersed children of Adam and Eve return to Eden to testify with cloven tongues of fire, the language in which they would testify would be the language of Newton and Locke, the language of intersubjective reason, the language of science." This delightfully revanche millennialism will win him few friends among postmodern multiculturalists who would have us Babel on, or among academic Christians, who have quite another *lingua franca* in mind for the end days. But I doubt that Hollinger will lose much sleep over objections from these quarters.

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Retrospective in Physics

History of Original Ideas and Basic Discoveries in Particle Physics. HARVEY B. NEWMAN and THOMAS YPSILANTIS, Eds. Published in cooperation with NATO Scientific Affairs Division by Plenum, New York, 1996. xxii, 1018 pp., illus. $195. ISBN 0-306-45217-0. NATO ASI Series B, vol. 352. From a workshop, Erice, Italy, July 1994.

This huge book, the proceedings of a workshop held at the "Ettore Majorana" Center for Scientific Culture, brings together contributions of 49 scientists who answered the call to describe from their own personal points of view the discoveries for which they are known. It is neither history in the usual sense nor exclusively particle physics. A harvest of diverse grains, sometimes accompanied by considerable straw, the content ranges from facetious to profound and needs much winnowing before it becomes coherent history. The subject matter ranges over past discoveries and future hopes in particle physics, but also in astrophysics and superconductivity. The style stretches from posturing to whimsy to straightforward to pedagogical.

The meeting was obviously a success for the participants, who manifestly enjoyed seeing old friends and, in some cases, the opportunity to set the record straight from their point of view. But, as Sheldon Glashow says in his paper, "Beware! We can no more be our own historians than actors can be their own critics." After reading a large fraction of the papers and turning every page, I conclude that such proceedings are nevertheless worthwhile. Biased and stale some contributions may be, but others bring valuable fresh perspectives. Even the straightforward accounts of accelerator and detector development are useful for assembling the (hi)story in one place.

For particle physicists a browse through the volume will prove enjoyable. Reliving the excitement and achievements of the past 40 years is always fun. The most impressive Standard Model and the experimental and theoretical physicists who made it are featured here. The competition and rivalries are visible (albeit in subdued fashion, as befits public presentation), with preening theorists jostling to occupy the central position in its development. Beneath the banter and the informality of first names, however, lie illuminating discussions of the emerging theoretical ideas and the stumbling way in which progress is made. David Gross's account of his conversion to field theory and, with the discovery of asymptotic freedom, to non-Abelian gauge theories is one example. Howard Georgi's short description of the origins of the SU(5) grand unified theory, though in a very different style, is another. The contributions by Piccioni (on the discovery that the muon was not Yukawa's strongly interacting meson) and by Turlay (on his part in the discovery of CP violation) are just two of many examples on the experimental side. The discussions at the end of each paper occasionally provide counterpoint to the position staked out by the speaker. It pays to know the personalities for full enjoyment here.

The interested reader, not an expert, who seeks insight into particle physics, a "big science," will do well to read the panel discussion on the status and future directions in high energy physics, chaired by Herwig Schopper. Come to think of it, particle physicists should read it, too. The nonspecialist will enjoy the paper by the Goodsteins on Richard Feynman and superconductivity, the paper on Emmy Noether by Nina Byers, and the pictures, drawings, and photographs in the contributions by C.-S. Wu and T. D. Lee.

Perhaps it is inevitable in a volume of this sort and size that typographical errors are rife, especially in the discussion portions, which apparently were developed largely from tape recordings. Phonetic spellings of names abound. Perhaps historians are adept at dealing with such infelicities.

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