



## Penn History Review

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Volume 20  
Issue 1 *Spring 2013*

Article 4

12-11-2013

# From Torah im Derekh Eretz to Torah U-Madda: the Legacy of Samson Raphael Hirsch

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The Legacy of Rabbi Hirsch



Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

FROM *TORAH IM DEREKH ERETZ* TO  
*TORAH U-MADDA*:  
THE LEGACY OF SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH  
*Max Levy*

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Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) was part of the earliest generation of Jews born and raised outside of the confines of the ghetto and in the intellectual capital of Europe: Germany. In the nineteenth century Germany was a society saturated with philosophical and literary giants and in the midst of profound creativity by Idealist and Romantic thinkers. Internally, the German Jewish community was undergoing change in the nineteenth century as Reform Judaism—against which Hirsch was an extremely outspoken ideological opponent—rose to prominence. As a dynamic leader, prolific writer, and an innovative thinker, Hirsch confronted these challenges and emerged from this crucible as a pivotal rabbinic figure who operated under his mantra of “Torah im derekh erez” (Torah with the way of the land”) within both the world of traditional Judaism and that of German culture and intelligentsia. Twentieth-century American Jews faced a similar allure of cultural and intellectual assimilation. Yet despite the many parallels between Hirsch’s milieu and that of modern America, his legacy remains rather ambiguous among those whose lifestyle and religious hashkafa (worldview) most closely mimic Hirsch’s ideology—Modern Orthodox Jews. While American Modern Orthodox thinkers continue to draw on Hirsch as a source of inspiration and legitimacy for their vision of openness toward secular culture, historical circumstance and genuine intellectual disagreements have relegated Hirsch’s ideology to the periphery.

#### Hirsch’s Conception of Torah and German Culture

In order to understand Torah im derekh erez, it is important to examine its two core components: Hirsch’s

understanding of Torah and his relationship with secular knowledge. Hirsch's conception of Judaism is grounded in his conviction in the primacy of biblical texts and in the indisputable truth of the Torah. He believed that the Jewish people received "the revelation of [God's] will as a guide to human life – the Torah."<sup>1</sup> The Torah's divinity is therefore unquestionable and its significance as the source of commandment is irrefutable. But in order to understand God's will more clearly, Hirsch sought a pure and direct approach to Torah study that would ascertain the peshat, or simple meaning, of the text. Thus Hirsch disparaged scholars who analyzed Judaism using mystical and irrational frameworks. According to Hirsch, such beliefs "[make] Jewish law appear antiquated, obsolete, and moribund."<sup>2</sup> He insisted that his epoch demanded an approach to Torah that would present the rationality and cogency of its system. In his opinion, such an approach necessitates the classification and explication of mitzvot (commandments) in order to ascertain the fundamental principles behind religious ceremony.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, according to Hirsch, man's observance of God's commandments cannot be contingent on man's ability to rationalize them. Since "the very essence of Israel's Being rests upon the Torah" it is impossible to construct a system of Judaism that disjoins the Jewish people from Torah law.<sup>4</sup>

As opposed to many of his traditional contemporaries, Hirsch did not completely circumscribe Jewish existence within the strict confines of Halacha (Torah law); rather, he believed that secular philosophy plays a crucial role in developing Judaism. Hirsch himself attended the German Gymnasium and studied at the University of Bonn, in addition to devoting considerable time to independent study.<sup>5</sup> Most tellingly, Hirsch's writings reflect ample tropes from German Enlightenment and Idealist thought that—although not made explicit—defined much of his philosophical approach to Judaism.<sup>6</sup> For example, Hirsch's emphasis on Biblical study, anachronistic for a nineteenth-century traditional rabbi, reflects Johann Gottfried Herder's

notion that “the literature of a people reveals its fundamental characteristics.”<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Hirsch approached the issue of man’s knowledge of God from a seemingly Kantian perspective by arguing that man can only know God through revelation. Thus Hirsch contended, “The idea of God is the result of personal or national experience in the history of our people as recorded in the Torah.”<sup>8</sup> Like Kant, Hirsch proposed that the foundation of man’s relationship with God is the actual knowledge derived from revelation; a religion grounded solely in reason would provide an insufficient basis for commitment.<sup>9</sup> The pervasive signs of secular influence in Hirsch’s work are not peripheral or coincidental; rather, they are crucial to the fundamental principles of his thought. Although Hirsch did not use these sources explicitly, German philosophical ideas manifested in foundational principles of his ideology.

While aspects of Herder and Kant’s ideas permeate Hirsch’s thought, the two most significant philosophical influences on Hirsch’s ideology are two towering figures of nineteenth-century German thought: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805).<sup>10</sup> According to Hirsch’s biographer, Noah Rosenbloom, Hegel had a monumental impact on Hirsch’s philosophical conception of Judaism. Rosenbloom argues that Hirsch adopted aspects of Hegelian metaphysics, objectivism, historicism, and teleology.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Hirsch believed in the notion of a basic spirit of Judaism that “is a potential in the Bible which became actualized in subsequent rabbinic literature.”<sup>12</sup> This facet of Hirsch’s thought closely mirrors the fundamental Hegelian notion that the Idea of Spirit is actualized through history. Hegel himself was a very systematic thinker and Hirsch’s attempt to classify and rationalize the entirety of the Jewish experience echoes the all-encompassing nature of Hegel’s philosophy.

The Romantic poet Schiller so captivated Hirsch’s intellect that the Schiller Festival in 1859 prompted Hirsch to

deliver a speech to the Israelitischen Religionsgesellschaft's School in which he praised Schiller's contributions to the world and specifically to Judaism. Hirsch said, "Who understood as well as Schiller how to so beautifully express truths that can save the world and men."<sup>13</sup> Hirsch adamantly believed that Schiller grasped the profundity of human experience and articulated it in a way that was comprehensible to the masses. He even claimed that, "[Our Sages] would have greeted Schiller as one of their own, and would have recognized only familiar tones among his sounds."<sup>14</sup> In almost radical language Hirsch emphatically declared that Schiller was a unique thinker and artist whose works penetrated the core of Jewish values, thereby bringing Schiller into the intellectual Jewish fold by virtue of his commonalities with the Jewish tradition. Evidently, Hirsch believed in the possibility of an organic relationship between secular and Jewish philosophy.

Not only was Hirsch interested in German intellectual trends, but also he was a fiercely proud German and embraced many aspects of broader European culture. Most importantly, he believed that, "European culture had substantive, not merely instrumental value."<sup>15</sup> In other words, Hirsch did not view the diffusion of secular culture into Jewish life as detrimental to German Jewry since much of European culture, he believed, was intrinsically good and not just useful. In an essay in 1854, Hirsch wrote, "[Orthodox Judaism] has no reason to fear the light of the world or fear that its own light be eclipsed by the bright sunshine of any genuine culture."<sup>16</sup> Hirsch saw no reason to completely shy away from secular culture, despite the natural limits of cultural integration that he defended. Moreover, a close reading of the rest of his 1854 essay reveals a profound implication: by describing Jewish culture as a "light," Hirsch evokes common Jewish symbolism of the light of Torah, or the light that the Jewish people are unto the world.<sup>17</sup> Yet Hirsch describes German, or Western European, culture as a "bright sunshine," thereby implying that it too serves to better mankind,

perhaps with greater vigor even than the “light” of nineteenth-century German Jewry. That Hirsch judges Europe to offer a “genuine culture” additionally suggests either that either European culture is substantively on par with Jewish culture, or that it is qualitatively distinct from Judaism. If the latter, it appears that Hirsch believes European culture offers benefits unavailable with a hermitically constructed Judaism. According to Rosenbloom, “Hirsch...[had] a deep emotional feeling for German and a strong attachment to German culture.”<sup>18</sup> That Hirsch wrote and lectured largely in German—when Rabbis had written commentaries and Biblical exegesis in Hebrew for centuries—was not only a product of pragmatism but also of an ideological commitment to German culture.<sup>19</sup> Hirsch’s emphatic appreciation of German culture distinguished him from many of his predecessors and almost all of his Eastern rabbinical peers.

#### Torah im Derekh Eretz

The term that Hirsch used to express his complex ideology that maintained the integrity of the Torah while engaging with western philosophy and culture was coined “Torah im derekh erez.” Literally “Torah and the way of the land,” Hirsch’s used “way of the land” as a reference to secular society. Hirsch envisioned that, “The Jew was to be a ‘human being and a Jew’ (Mensch-Jisroel), a Jew to whom no values and no achievements of ‘pure humanity’ were alien, whose Jewishness meant a higher rung of humanness.”<sup>20</sup> An ideal Jew, for Hirsch, is one who is intimately familiar with all aspects of secular culture that are compatible with authentic traditional Judaism— contributions of “pure humanity.” Not to know such aspects of the world is to deny oneself the full potential of humanness. Although Hirsch was certainly not the first rabbi to embrace aspects of secular culture, his strong formulation turned what previously existed mainly in the realm of practice into a nuanced ideology. Moreover, Hirsch’s great-grandson, historian Mordechai Breuer, posits that Hirsch reached a new level of cultural embracement whereas his predecessors mostly

championed toleration of secular culture. The study of secular knowledge and the attainment of general wisdom became veiled in near messianic terms for Hirsch, because Torah im derekh erez extended beyond a pragmatic structure of Judaism and into an ideal way of life by which Jews could gain even greater merit in God's eyes.<sup>21</sup>

A comparison of Hirsch's thought with the ideologies of the Medieval philosopher and Torah scholar Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) and the German Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) sheds light on Hirsch's unique nature within the canon of Jewish thought. At first blush both Maimonides and Mendelssohn appear to mirror Hirsch's model of Torah im derekh erez due to their own similarly positive views of secular culture; however, further examination reveals that despite structural similarities there are sharp distinctions between the three thinkers. Hirsch contends, "[Maimonides] is responsible for all the good which blesses the heritage of Modern Judaism as well as for the evil which afflicts it."<sup>22</sup> Although Hirsch praised Maimonides for strengthening Judaism, he sharply criticizes Maimonides for approaching Judaism from the external perspective of Greek philosophy and attempting to reconcile Judaism with those philosophical notions. In contrast, Hirsch insisted on an organic and innate understanding of Judaism. Similarly, Hirsch admired Mendelssohn's "brilliant respect-inspiring personality" and appreciated much of his approach and his efforts to understand the mitzvot.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Hirsch admonished Mendelssohn for not building a philosophy of Judaism based on an internal, Torah-centric rationality. Consequently, Hirsch acknowledged the great debt Jews owed Maimonides and Mendelssohn but at the same time he affirmed the need for a new approach to Judaism.

Hirsch's piercing criticism of both Maimonides and Mendelssohn for relying on systems of thought external to Judaism seems to contradict the secular influences on his ideology discussed previously. This ostensible inconsistency



may be resolved by a distinction in approach between Hirsch and Maimonides and Mendelssohn. Hirsch did not attempt to reconcile Judaism with Hegelianism, and indeed, he felt no need to do so. Hegelianism provided Hirsch with the tools to unearth authentic Judaism and to articulate it attractively. In contrast, Maimonides and Mendelssohn had starkly different agendas, since their projects were primarily aimed at philosophical reconciliation.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, as Rosenbloom explains, Hirsch saw the Maimonidean and Mendelssohnian undertakings “as a model in approach but not in the execution of [their] concepts.”<sup>25</sup> Like his predecessors, Hirsch’s goal was to articulate a modern, intellectually compelling framework of Judaism. While he certainly saw his work in the same vein as these monumental figures, Hirsch demanded a distinctly different methodology.

#### Two Modern Reactions to Hirsch

Given the similarities between the cultural allure of nineteenth-century Germany and twentieth-century America, one may expect Hirsch’s influence among American Modern Orthodoxy to be ubiquitous.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Hirsch’s writings are popular and numerous translations of his key texts are available to an American audience; however, American Modern Orthodox Rabbis rarely engage the full breadth of Hirsch’s philosophy and hashkafa. Some praise Hirsch as an important Jewish thinker yet completely sanitize and distort his beliefs in order to constrict and suppress his relationship to German culture. Others engage him as a crucial example of a traditional Jew who maintained strict halachic (ritual law) observance while encountering the broader world. Nevertheless, they do not develop his thought into the philosophical foundation for their own frameworks and instead prefer to use Hirsch on a more superficial level. Neither party embraces the full implications of *Torah im Derekh Eretz*.

Those American Jews who wish to limit Hirsch’s views interpret his openness towards German society as either misrepresented or merely a historical necessity.<sup>27</sup> The Artscroll biography, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, encapsulates this

notion, for it barely mentions the many German thinkers who substantially impacted Hirsch's thought. As one of the most prominent presses for Jewish publications aimed at an American Orthodox audience, Artscroll's message is exceptionally noteworthy. The author contends that Hirsch was acutely aware of the dangers inherent in studying secular subjects, and therefore, allowed such study in a very qualified way and "under the guidance of those well versed in Torah, who could point out how and why the Torah rejects those ideas."<sup>28</sup> This argument is completely inconsistent with the life of Hirsch who attended university, was steeped in secular knowledge, and praised Friedrich von Schiller as one whom Jews must greet with blessing, "Blessing and praise to him who has imparted of His wisdom to mortals."<sup>29</sup>

Even within the milieu of American Modern Orthodoxy's flagship institution, Yeshiva University—the Jewish university dedicated to combining Torah and secular studies—there is a tendency among some rabbis to stray from the spirit of Hirsch's words by minimizing the scope of Hirsch's worldview.<sup>30</sup> In 1989, in the very first issue of Yeshiva University's journal on Jewish Thought, *The Torah U-Madda Journal*, Rabbi Mordechai Willig wrote an essay that builds a defense for the study of secular subjects. Willig identifies leniencies that allow studying in order to earn a living and at times to understand Judaism better.<sup>31</sup> Yet in his legalistic rhetoric, Willig completely misses the flavor of Hirsch's insistence on the ability of German culture to enrich Judaism and provide a "genuine culture" for Jews. Interestingly, in the very same journal issue, Professor Walter Warzburger castigates the blatant misinterpretations of Hirsch that frequently occur in America.<sup>32</sup> This disagreement within *The Torah U-Madda Journal* indicates the widespread contention over Hirsch's legacy, especially within the community that purportedly supports Hirsch's appreciation of secular knowledge, culture, and society.

Within the context of Yeshiva University, Rabbi

Hirsch is invoked regularly as a source of inspiration for the school's motto and mission of Torah U-Madda ("Torah and Wisdom").<sup>33</sup> At the same time, it appears that Rabbi Hirsch's ideas do not form the driving ideology behind the formation of Yeshiva University, nor is there an attempt to engage him as a systemic thinker. In Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm's treatise on Yeshiva University's ideology, *Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition*, an entire chapter is devoted to Hirsch's thought. Nonetheless, Hirsch is included as only one of many historical precedents for YU's project. In fact, he is only allotted more discussion because his context and writings are more explicitly relevant, not because they are perceived as more philosophically pertinent.<sup>34</sup> As a result, Lamm emphasizes Hirsch's formulation of Torah im derekh erez and not his philosophical contributions to Judaism.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Lamm places Torah im derekh erez on a long historical trajectory that culminates with Yeshiva University, thus suggesting that Hirsch was significant in this historical chain but not someone whose legacy stands alone. While Lamm admits that, "Insofar as Torah im derekh erez as a theory is concerned, Torah Umadda shares with it to a greater extent than it diverges from it," the theory presented by Lamm appears rather divorced from Hirsch as a luminary figure and his precise impact is left ambiguous.<sup>36</sup>

### Historical Explanations

Hirsch's relative unimportance as an intellectual figure in Modern Orthodox American Jewry can in part be attributed to the sharp decline in the popularity of his thought after his death.<sup>37</sup> While during his life Hirsch ascended to the pinnacle of German Orthodoxy, his religious community suffered several setbacks following his death. Although several prominent German rabbis such as Esriel Hildesheimer, David Hoffman, and Dr. Solomon Breuer continued Hirsch's work after his death, Hirsch's Frankfurt Yeshiva did not sustain itself by producing rabbinic leaders.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, in succeeding generations, Hirsch's model

of religious life met increasing skepticism. Some contemporaries believed that he remained too guarded against German culture, while others “clung to his thought structure, but did not feel secure enough to keep building at it.”<sup>39</sup> That is, they idealized the form of Judaism that he espoused but were not well grounded enough to progress further within his system. After the Holocaust, Hirsch’s teachings met equal hesitation but this time with the opposite result. According to historian Marc Shapiro, “Many of the young Orthodox were no longer interested in intellectually grappling with religious and philosophical problems. Rather, they were looking for an easier solution, which they found in Eastern European Orthodoxy.”<sup>40</sup> Hirsch’s Orthodoxy was indeed challenging because it sought to balance competing forces of influence—the religious and the secular.<sup>41</sup> After the Holocaust many Jews deemed the closed world of Eastern European Jewry as a more accessible model of Jewish life that promised greater communal success. Consequently, Hirsch’s ideology failed to gain a strong foothold in the generations that followed him.

There is an additional historical explanation for Hirsch’s limited presence in America: in the first half of the twentieth century, the major rabbinic leaders and a broad swath of laymen who formed the early cadre of Modern Orthodox leaders were much more influenced by the Eastern European Yeshiva world than by German neo-Orthodoxy. Although there were notable exceptions such as Rabbi Bernard Drachmann, who had a PhD from the University of Heidelberg and studied with Zacharias Frankel, and Rabbi Phillip Hillel Klein, who had a PhD from the University of Jenna and studied with Rabbi Hildesheimer, the majority of prominent ‘Modern Orthodox’ rabbis in America were similar to Rabbi Moses Zebulun Margolies (Ramaz) who studied in bastions of traditional Eastern European learning, such as Kovno (modern-day Lithuania) and Bialystok (modern-day Poland).<sup>42</sup> While Drachmann and Klein were active in the Orthodox community they did not build or shape landmark Orthodox institutions. A critical case that demonstrates the early

reliance of American Modern Orthodoxy on Eastern European rabbinic authorities occurred during the early twentieth century in Washington Heights.<sup>43</sup> An influential leader in Baltimore and Manhattan, Rabbi Shimon Schwab, turned to illustrious Eastern European rabbis—Rav Barukh Ber Leibowitz, Rav Elchanan Wasserman, Rav Avraham Yizhak Block, and the Rogatchover Rebbe Rav Yosef Rozin—for advice regarding the permissibility of studying secular subjects. The rabbis' responses are antithetical to Hirsch's opinion and mainly reflect the view of Rav Elchanan Wasserman that "secular studies are the exact opposite of Torah."<sup>44</sup> While this particular case is merely one incident, it demonstrates where American rabbis found their roots. As one of the early discussions regarding American Orthodox Jews studying secular subjects, it was likely a formative event that influenced the ongoing discussion of secular culture in an American context.

Perhaps the most pivotal transition for American Modern Orthodoxy was the appointment of Bernard Revel as the first Rosh Yeshiva and President of the fledgling Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Rabbinical School in 1915.<sup>45</sup> Revel was an extraordinary individual with the unusual skillset needed to help define the young Yeshiva University. Originally from Kovno, he was recognized as a Talmudic genius at a young age and received ordination from Telshe Yeshiva at the age of sixteen. Upon arriving in America he furthered his studies at New York University, Dropsie College, and the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>46</sup> While in some respects Revel emerged as an 'American Hirsch,' steeped in Torah and philosophy, he never saw himself as the bearer of Hirsch's legacy, which he believed was specific to Hirsch's time.<sup>47</sup> Revel's Judaism was bred in the traditional yeshivot of Eastern Europe and therefore, while he advocated secular studies, his conception of Torah remained that which he fashioned in Telshe. His embrace of secular studies did not stem from Hirsch's ideology but from practical considerations. Moreover, the strength of Revel's own Torah education likely

prevented him from turning to Hirsch for anything more than historical precedence for engaging secular culture and learning.<sup>48</sup>

#### Intellectual Rejection

The continued underrepresentation of Hirsch in American Modern Orthodoxy can also be attributed to an intellectual rejection of Hirsch's ideas. Some scholars argue that Hirsch's influence was profound on a communal level because of his innovation in the field of Jewish education, but as a Jewish thinker, they claim, he did not develop novel ideas.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, for these Jews, Hirsch is a source of inspiration for creating institutions that promote openness towards education and culture, but he does not offer an intellectualization or halachic discourse regarding its permissibility. Rather ironically, some Jewish thinkers such as the influential Modern Orthodox Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein rarely turn to Hirsch for philosophical formulations because they criticize him for falling prey to his own complaint against his intellectual predecessors. Namely, Lichtenstein criticizes Hirsch for championing a humanism containing "an element that has been engrafted" just as Hirsch decried the work of Maimonides as too heavily influenced by Greek philosophy.<sup>50</sup> Despite Hirsch's own claims that he seeks an authentic and organic conception of Judaism that purely arises from internal sources, Lichtenstein and other scholars view Hirsch as promoting a particular philosophical approach and imposing structures that are derived from German philosophy.

Indeed, Hirsch's conception of secular knowledge is based on the notion that no true form of knowledge is foreign to the wisdom derived from Torah and religion. Shapiro contends that Hirsch saw "a single tree growing from one root that sends its branches out in many directions."<sup>51</sup> Torah and secular wisdom are not two completely different worlds for Hirsch, rather they are but two different forms of knowledge—two different branches—in God's world. According to Shapiro, "His ideal, the Mensch-Jisroel, was not the product of an interconnection or even a fusion."<sup>52</sup> Hirsch aspired for a balance between these

two aspects of worldly wisdom. As a result, Hirsch appeared much less concerned about conflict between Torah and secular wisdom than many of the rabbis who followed him because Hirsch believed that the two modes of thinking fill different voids in man and serve different functions. Unquestionably, Torah remains at the center of the Jewish people's existence, but secular knowledge joins and complements the immutable knowledge of the Torah, thereby providing another window into the world.<sup>53</sup>

In contrast to Hirsch's formulation, Yeshiva University's faculty have historically promoted a notion of synthesis that draws heavily from the work of Maimonides. In his inaugural address as President of Yeshiva University in 1944, Dr. Belkin described "the blending of science and religion and the integration of secular knowledge with sacred wisdom."<sup>54</sup> Integration implies not the harmonious coexistence of Hirsch, but the fusing of two threads of knowledge into one completely unified view of the world—exactly what Maimonides sought to do with his attempts at reconciliation eight hundred years earlier. Belkin's successor, Rabbi Lamm, expressed the same ideology in his analysis of Torah U-Madda by arguing that the final stage in the history of Torah U-Madda denies "the ultimate metaphysical validity of the bifurcation of cognitive experience" and instead advocates a comprehensive vision of man's intellect.<sup>55</sup> Lamm insists that a Jew must occupy only one vantage point that incorporates his Torah and general knowledge when approaching the world. Lamm defends this approach from Hirsch's attack on Maimonides by claiming that Maimonides believed that reason and revelation are derived from the same source and thus Greek philosophy merely provided the tools to help articulate and unlock the reason that was inherent in Torah and intrinsically part of God's system.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Lamm rejects Hirsch's specific terminology of Torah im Derekh Eretz in part because of its political connotation with Hirsch's communal separatism and he labels his chapter about Hirsch as "The Cultural Model," further

separating the two thinkers.<sup>57</sup> While Hirsch nonetheless remains important for Lamm's defense and history of Torah U-Madda, he is not essential for Lamm's ideological and philosophical explication or justification.

### Conclusion

Hirsch's teachings have lost their profundity and philosophical importance among American Orthodoxy. Clearly, the most dominant and influential thinker of the past century for Modern Orthodox Jews is Rabbi Dr. Joseph Soloveitchik, and neither he nor his prominent students rely much on Hirsch in their writings.<sup>58</sup> Soloveitchik earned a PhD from the University of Berlin and was exposed to German Jewry, but it is probable that he found German Jewry severely lacking in comparison to the overwhelming religious milieu of his family's Volozhin Yeshiva. Additionally, Soloveitchik – whose father and grandfather were famous for their erudition of Maimonides – Revel, and other Eastern European rabbis displaced in America, sought to place themselves on the historical trajectory of Eastern European Jewry from which they derived their own approaches to Torah. Part of this vision was certainly due to their respective backgrounds and part stemmed from the general shift among American Jews who in the wake of the Holocaust viewed Eastern Europe as the source of authentic Judaism and thus desired for their yeshivot to be the Kovno or Volozhin of America.<sup>59</sup> Despite the current victory of the Maimonidean approach, Hirsch continues to serve as a source of inspiration, at least indirectly, for many American Jews who invoke his legacy as a precedent for embracing western culture. It is impossible to determine, however, whether Hirsch himself would be content with Modern Orthodoxy's development of Torah im derekh erez into Torah U-Madda. While its proponents adhere to his commitment to both Torah and the secular world, Torah U-Madda aligns with the Eastern European legacy – often associated with the Lithuanian Yeshivot – and with Maimonides' philosophy that Hirsch argued eroded the authenticity of the Jewish experience. What is certain,



is that a more sophisticated understanding of Hirsch would grant contemporary Jews a more nuanced appreciation for Orthodoxy's confrontation with modernity and in the process enrich the modern religious experience.

<sup>1</sup> Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Nineteen Letters*, trans. Joseph Elias (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1995), 59.

<sup>2</sup> Noah Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform: The Religious Philosophy of Samson Raphael Hirsch* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976), 136.

<sup>3</sup> Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb: A Philosophy of Jewish Laws and Observances*, trans. Dayan Dr. I Grunfeld (London: The Soncino Press, 1962), ciii.

<sup>4</sup> Hirsch, *Nineteen Letters*, 117.

<sup>5</sup> Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*, 58, 61-62. Some historians have hailed him as an autodidact.

<sup>6</sup> Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*, 152-153. Rosenbloom discusses Hirsch's schedule of study in Oldenburg. The intense schedule provided daily allotments for the study of Greek, history, Latin, physics, mathematics, and geography (72).

<sup>7</sup> Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*, 153. That Hirsch made analysis of biblical texts his primary focus was unusual among traditional rabbis, whom for generations had viewed the Talmud and halachik (legal) codices as the most important Jewish texts. In his excellent work on the Eastern European Yeshivot (institutions of higher Jewish learning), historian Shaul Stampfer, in discussing the curriculum at the prominent Volozhin Yeshiva, says that although Bible and kabbala (mysticism) were studied, "the main emphasis in Volozhin, however, was always on the Talmud" (Shaul Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas of the Nineteenth Century: Creating a Tradition of Learning* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012, 42). It is clear from his writings

that Hirsch did not devote the same attention to Talmudic studies as he did to study of the Torah. Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) was a German Enlightenment philosopher, theologian, and poet. For a general introduction to Herder's life and thought see The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Johann Gottfried von Herder" by Michael Forster, accessed 10 April 2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/herder/>.

<sup>8</sup> Grunfeld, Horeb, xliii.

<sup>9</sup> Alan Mittleman, *Between Kant and Kabbalah: An Introduction to Isaac Breuer's Philosophy of Judaism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 30-31. Also see The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Kant's Philosophy of Religion," by Philip Rossi, accessed 10 April 2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/kant-religion/>.

<sup>10</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) was the most important post-Kantian German Idealist. His philosophy attempted to create a comprehensive philosophical system that incorporated a conception of history, art, religion, the state, the subject and object of knowledge, and the mind and nature. He is famous for the notion of thesis—antithesis—synthesis, which is derived from his ontology as well as for his teleological account of history that influenced Karl Marx. Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1749-1805) was a German Romantic author and philosopher who, along with Goethe, is often cited as one of Germany's elite literary figures. Schiller was Christian and devoted much of his writings to exploring aesthetics and the notion of freedom. That Hirsch identified this Christian Romantic as particularly important for Jewish thought demonstrates Hirsch's ability to search his intellectual milieu broadly for sources of influence and inspiration.

<sup>11</sup> Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*, 153-174.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>13</sup> Marc Shapiro, "Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and Friedrich von Schiller," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 15 (2008-2009),

176.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition: The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany*, trans. Elizabeth Petuchowski (New York: Columbia Press, 1992), 22.

<sup>16</sup> Hirsch, *Collected Writings*, VI:147.

<sup>17</sup> See Isaiah 60:3.

<sup>18</sup> Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*, 109.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 69. Note that “pure humanity” refers to secular society.

<sup>21</sup> Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition*, 73.

<sup>22</sup> Hirsch, *Nineteen Letters*, 119.

<sup>23</sup> Hirsch, *Nineteen Letters*, 123; Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*, 124.

<sup>24</sup> Allan Arkush, *Modern Jewish Philosophy*, eds., Peter Gordon and Michael Morgan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 36-37. Maimonides’ *Guide for the Perplexed* seeks to explain the Torah in accordance with principles of Greek philosophy.

<sup>25</sup> Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*, 128.

<sup>26</sup> A complex term to succinctly define, Modern Orthodoxy in America can be described as the movement that seeks to embrace aspects of secular society while remaining true to Orthodox theology and practice of halacha (Jewish law).

<sup>27</sup> There is an ongoing debate among religious Jews whether or not Hirsch permitted the study of secular subjects as a leniency for sha’at hadchak, a time of danger. If so, then Hirsch would believe that it is permissible only in extenuating circumstances but that le’hatchitla (from the outset) it is not ideal.

<sup>28</sup> Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Klugman, *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1996), 205 and 207.

<sup>29</sup> Shapiro, “Samson Raphael Hirsch and Friedrich von Schiller, 174.

<sup>30</sup> Although Modern Orthodoxy does not operate within a clearly defined governing body, as does the Conservative and

Reform movements, a majority of American Modern Orthodox rabbis have received ordination from Yeshiva University or have studied with rabbis trained at or affiliated with Yeshiva University. As a result, Yeshiva University serves as a good barometer for the Modern Orthodox rabbinate.

<sup>31</sup> Rabbi Modechai Willig, “Secular Studies: Are they for Everyone?,” *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 1 (1989), 91-103.

<sup>32</sup> Dr. Walter S. Warzburger, “Confronting Challenges of the Values of Modernity,” *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 1 (1989), 107.

<sup>33</sup> “Torah U-Madda” is the motto of Yeshiva University and used to encapsulate the institutions ideology of emphasizing both study of Torah and secular knowledge. The exact limits of this approach are contested. Rabbi Lamm’s work discussed below is one of the most important attempts to explore the ideology of Torah U-Madda because Lamm served as President of Yeshiva University for many years, was a student of the monumental Modern Orthodox thinker Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, and is regarded as a prominent spokesperson for American Modern Orthodoxy.

<sup>34</sup> Norman Lamm, *Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1990), 24-25. Here Hirsch is seen as one of many precursors who embraced Torah while engaging in secular subjects.

<sup>35</sup> Lamm’s chapter on Hirsch does not evaluate him as a systematic thinker.

<sup>36</sup> Lamm, *Torah Umadda*, 124.

<sup>37</sup> Prominent Orthodox thinkers—such as Joseph Soloveitchik (1903-1993), Eliezer Berkovits (1908-1992), David Hartman (1931-2013), and Aharon Lichtenstein (1933-present)—make little use of Hirsch in their philosophical work. Of those, only Berkovits was trained by German rabbis.

<sup>38</sup> Lamm, *Torah Umadda*, 119-120; Grunfeld, 24-25, regarding the rabbis who continued his legacy. Although Hildesheimer

was not a student of Hirsch's, the two figures shared much in common including their teacher Rabbi Isaac Bernays. From his seminary in northern Germany, Hildesheimer pursued many of the same goals that Hirsch pursued in southern Germany.

<sup>39</sup> Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition*, 164.

<sup>40</sup> Marc Shapiro, "Torah im Derekh Eretz in the Shadow of Hitler," *The Torah U-madda Journal* 14 (2006-2007): 85. Even Hirsch's own descendants, the Breuers, aligned with the Lithuanian yeshiva world and had rabbis from Telshe and Mirrer (Mir) educating their children rather than teachers who espoused Hirsch's embrace of secular culture. See Jeffrey Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 219.

<sup>41</sup> It is important to note that although thinkers like Maimonides had also struggled with this balance, Hirsch was innovative in part because he made acceptance of secular society an ideology for the masses and not just the intellectual elite. See Jacob J. Schachter, "Torah u-Madda Revisited: The Editor's Introduction," *The Torah u-Madda Journal* 1 (1989), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America*, 124, 135, 144. The term Modern Orthodox is problematic in general and especially when discussing Early 20<sup>th</sup> century American Jewish history. Until after World War II it is difficult to distinguish neatly between different categories of Orthodox Jews. For the sake of this paper, the term 'Modern Orthodox' applies to those Orthodox Jews that seriously and ideologically engaged modern society and secular studies. Drachman and Klein both became important religious leaders in Manhattan and were influential in the creation of national institutions. Drachman served as president of the Orthodox Union and Klein was one of the founders of the Orthodox Jewish Congregation Union. Klein also was president of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, which became part of Yeshiva University under the guidance of Bernard Revel.

<sup>43</sup> In email correspondence, Gurock agreed that American

Orthodoxy consistently turned to Eastern Europe and not central Europe for religious guidance and inspiration.

<sup>44</sup> Willig, "Secular Studies: Are they for Everyone?," 96-97.

<sup>45</sup> Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America*, 143. As the first President and Rosh Yeshiva, and as the figure responsible for helping formulate the Yeshiva College, Revel had an instrumental role in shaping Yeshiva University.

<sup>46</sup> Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America*, 143.

<sup>47</sup> Revel's Biographer, Aaron Rothkoff, argues, "Revel's outlook was not motivated by the weltanschauung of the Orthodox Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch of nineteenth-century Germany. Hirsch's positive attitude toward secular study was in reaction to the vast inroads made in Germany by Reform Judaism, in the wake of the new epoch that had its origin in the Renaissance and humanism" [Aaron Rothkoff, *Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), 72].

<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting that as he added more professors teaching academic or secular subjects at Yeshiva University he also enhanced the core Talmud program with Eastern European Rabbis (Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America*, 144).

<sup>49</sup> Schachter, "Torah u-Madda Revisited: The Editor's Introduction," 3. Robert Liberles presents a similar emphasis on Hirsch as a community leader in his essay, "Champion of Orthodoxy: The Emergence of Samson Raphael Hirsch as a Religious Leader" *AJS Review* Vol. 6 (1981), 43-60.

<sup>50</sup> Aharon Lichtenstein, *Leaves of Faith: The World of Jewish Living* Volume 2 (New York: Ktav Publishing, 2004), 304.

<sup>51</sup> Shapiro "Torah im Derekh Erez in the Shadow of Hitler," 93.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Concerning the centrality of Torah see Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Collected Writings* Vol. VI, David Bechhofer and Elliott Bondi, eds. (New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1990), 41.

<sup>54</sup> Schachter, "Torah u-Madda Revisited: The Editor's

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Introduction,” 8.

<sup>55</sup> Lamm, *Torah Umadda*, x.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>58</sup> Hirsch is essentially absent from Soloveitchik’s writings, including his ideologically defining pieces: *Lonely Man of Faith* (1965) and *Halachik Man* (1983). In his essay on secular culture, Soloveitchik’s disciple Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein does not even mention Hirsch.

<sup>59</sup> The yeshivot in Kovno and Volozhin were two of the largest and most influential institutions of Jewish learning in Eastern Europe.

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