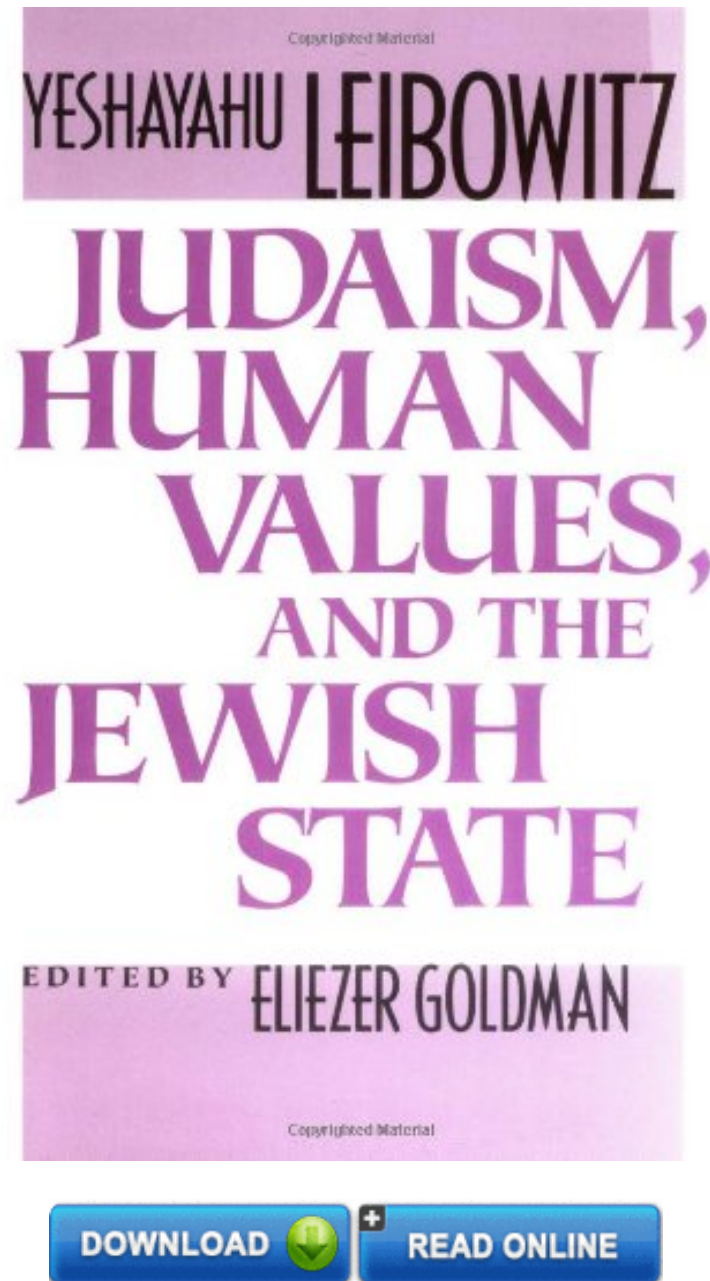


[Free read ebook] Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State

Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State

Yeshayahu Leibowitz

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Yeshayahu Leibowitz : Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State:

40 of 42 people found the following review helpful. Compelling Ideas for Judaism and the Jewish State By Jeffrey N. Saks Perhaps the best introduction to Yeshayahu Leibowitz in English is Eliezer Goldman's prefatory essay to the volume he edited, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State (Cambridge, MA: Harvard,

1992). This volume contains 27 translated essays, most of which come from Leibowitz's Hebrew collection, *Yahadut, Am HaYehudi u-Medinat Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1975). Goldman's recent collection of his own essays, *Mehkarim ve-Iyyunim* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996) contains a number of pieces on Leibowitz as well. Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903-93) was the often paradoxical, so-called "conscience of Israel"--a philosopher, controversial social critic, and sharp-tongued Socratic gadfly. He was born in 1903 in Lithuania, and was educated in Germany prior to settling in Jerusalem in 1934, where he taught chemistry, physiology, and the philosophy of science at the Hebrew University. He was an author and editor of the *Encyclopedia HaIvrit*, and taught, lectured, and wrote on a wide range of issues throughout his long life. Beyond his political thought, Leibowitz is perhaps best known (and critiqued) for his radical conceptions of Judaism. In brief, his position focused on the centrality--indeed, exclusivity--of mitsvot as the constitutive factor in Judaism. Observing the commandments (i.e. fulfilling the divine will) is an end in itself, and not a means to achieve personal, spiritual, or communal benefit. The significance of a religious act, argues Leibowitz, is in its performance qua worshipping God. To seek any meaning beyond that is, in his opinion, idolatry. Critics took Leibowitz's position as atheistic--and indeed, he effectively removes God from the human experience of religion: God as the transcendent being is unimportant to Leibowitz, only the service of God holds any meaning. The relationship between man and God can only exist in the arena of the normative practice of halakhah (Jewish law). Leibowitz feared (and in this many feel he was prescient) that the continued entanglement of religion and state would ultimately lead to a corruption of religion. He felt that the inability or unwillingness of rabbinic authorities in the early years of the State to forge innovative halakhic approaches to unprecedented situations (engendered by the return of Jewish sovereignty in the modern era) would turn religious Jews into parasites. Leibowitz further articulated views on the State, such as positing that the ascription of inherent sanctity to the land is a form of idolatry, and that viewing the state as a value in and of itself (rather than a vehicle for social or national good) is a precursor to fascism. He believed that Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza after the 1967 war would ultimately corrupt the state in the way in which all colonial regimes become corrupted. All of these elements bear the common thread of his repugnance at the use of religion to justify what he saw as political corruption or oppression. He remains an original (albeit controversial) voice on every issue within the Israeli social discourse. This helped generate the visceral connection the Israeli public has to Leibowitz and the issues on which he wrote. This volume introduces the reader to these compelling issues, and to a thinker who articulated positions which anyone interested in understanding Jewish life in the Jewish State in the modern era must contend with.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating book. It is a challenge to read, ...By Patty Miller Fascinating book. It is a challenge to read, but worth it. 15 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Superb exposition By E. Rodin MD Eliezer Goldman, the editor, has done an excellent job in presenting the ideas and views of Leibowitz to the English speaking public. This collection of articles gives a broad overview of the Jewish faith, the relationship of religion to the people and the state of Israel, the political problems of the Israeli state and finally the relationship of Judaism to Christianity. It is a thoroughly honest exposition of the problems inherent in the various topics and it is a pity that the book has not become more widely known and reviewed. It should be of interest to a Jewish as well as Gentile readership and had his warnings after the 1967 war, in relation to the occupation of the conquered territories, been heeded Israel would not be in the difficult straits the country finds itself in today. His discussion of the Judeo-Christian heritage and refusal to accept the term is also valuable. He does not mind explaining "the repugnance Judaism has for Christianity" as seen from a genuine orthodox Jewish perspective, rather than from any of the other parts of the spectrum which comprises today's Judaism. While some may not agree with all of his views, they are honest, well reasoned and therefore important to be listened to.

A biochemist by profession, a polymath by inclination and erudition, Yeshayahu Leibowitz has been, since the early 1940s, one of the most incisive and controversial critics of Israeli culture and politics. His direct involvement, compelling polemics, and trenchant criticism have established his steadfast significance for contemporary Israeli and Jewish intellectual life. These hard-hitting essays, his first to be published in English, cover the ground Leibowitz has marked out over time with moral rigor and political insight. He considers the essence and character of historical Judaism, the problems of contemporary Judaism and Jewishness, the relationship of Judaism to Christianity, the questions of statehood, religion, and politics in Israel, and the role of women. Together these essays constitute a comprehensive critique of Israeli society and politics and a probing diagnosis of the malaise that afflicts contemporary Jewish culture. Leibowitz's understanding of Jewish philosophy is acute, and he brings it to bear on current issues. He argues that the Law, Halakhah, is essential to Judaism, and shows how, at present, separation of religion from state would serve the interest of halakhic observance and foster esteem for religion. Leibowitz calls the religious justification of national issues "idolatry" and finds this phenomenon at the root of many of the annexationist moves made by the state of Israel. Long one of the most outspoken critics of Israeli occupation in the conquered territories, he gives eloquent voice to his ongoing concern over the debilitating moral effects of its policies and practices on Israel itself. This translation will bring to an English-speaking audience a much-needed, lucid perspective on the present and future state of Jewish culture.

The essays are incisive, provocative, fearlessly consistent...No one interested in Israel, Judaism and the nexus of the two can afford complacently to ignore the questions Leibowitz refuses to stop asking. (Menachem Kellner New York Times Book)The essays in this fine collection amply reveal Leibowitz's unswerving consistency...At the same time, though, a close reading of the essays reveals tensions which, although possibly reconcilable, nevertheless point to a certain elasticity in this seemingly inflexible thinker. In the end, authorLeibowitz's humanity stands revealed as much in these rare moments of inconsistency as in his fanatic adherence to principle. (David Biale Religious Studies)The most significant criticism of Israel that Israel has ever been handed by one of its own citizens. [Leibowitz] has a rare moral presence. (Moshe Halbertal New Republic)Yeshayahu Leibowitz's significance in contemporary Jewish intellectual life, and in Israel's political and intellectual life, is comparable to that of figures better known in the United States--Buber, for example, or Scholem. Leibowitz is more locally involved, and he is more openly polemical. But he is never mysterious or evasive, oracular or reticent. He just fights his battles, but the result of all his battles is a remarkably consistent doctrine. It remains lean and elegant--and, even for people who disagree, heartening and enlivening. (Michael Waizer)About the AuthorYeshayahu Leibowitz was head of the Biological Chemistry Department at the Hebrew University and Professor of Neurophysiology, Hebrew University Medical School.