

dent that he considered abdicating. In his influential *Rights of Man* (1791–92), Thomas Paine lauded the French Revolution and dismissed the British monarchy as useless. The head of the Manchester Constitutional Society declared that Paine “has wounded [the British aristocracy] mortally . . . and monarchy will not, I think, continue long in fashion.”

But the British crown did not fall. Morris, a history professor at the University of North Texas, contends that most of Paine’s admirers favored only parliamentary reform, not abolition of the monarchy. By the end of the 1790s, moreover, “the invasion scare and dread of Bonaparte drew people together in defense of the nation.” Britons realized that their monarchical constitutional order protected against both the horrors of the Reign of Terror and the despotism of Napoleon.

While persuasively arguing that most Britons of the 1790s opposed revolutionary change, Morris points out that we should not be too quick to dismiss those who feared that “the French disease” (as Gibbon termed it) might infect Great Britain. Toward the end of the decade, a group of British and Irish repub-

lican extremists formed a revolutionary underground in hopes of coordinating a French invasion, an Irish rebellion, and an insurrection in London. Though their plot failed, small bands of revolutionaries sometimes do succeed, as the world has learned in the two centuries since.

Morris gives considerable credit to George III for shoring up the monarchy. He had survived the shame of the American defeat to become “a cultural icon” widely admired for his patriotism, his dedication to the duties of kingship, and his “paternal disposition.” A devoted husband and regular churchgoer, George was accessible, often appearing in public with his children and chatting with commoners. Press coverage of the royal family’s activities increased during the decade, and, for the most part, familiarity bred affection. George’s position as “moral exemplar,” Morris observes, “eclipsed his political role.” Yet charisma and affability are only part of the explanation. Britons, regardless of their feelings for the monarch and the royal family, have always associated the crown with political stability—as much in the 1790s as in the 1990s.

—Stephen Miller

Religion & Philosophy

KADDISH.

By Leon Wieseltier. Knopf. 588 pp.
\$27.50

The death of a parent is supposed to bring you face to face, as nothing else can, with the realities of time. When Leon Wieseltier’s father died, the event, though not unexpected, plunged him backward in time and into the mysteries of his own tradition. Determined to honor his father with a proper Kaddish, the ritual Jewish observance of a year of daily mourning, Wieseltier found himself in synagogue two or three times a day, immersed in customs and laws from which he had long kept his distance. Why was he doing it? What could be the legal or theological basis for this enigmatic custom, in which the name of God is obsessively “magnified and sanctified,” and death, mourning, and sorrow are never mentioned?

Torn between these questions and the certainty that he was doing the right, the only, thing, Wieseltier turned to the tradition itself

for help. The result is a reader’s diary of his journey down the byways of Jewish law, of Talmudic and rabbinic commentary and arcana, the “sea” of Jewish tradition about which the rabbis say, “Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it.” This is no mere narrative of the sort that has become familiar: the secular Jew returning to the fold, or the untrained Jew becoming entranced late in life with the richness of Torah, Talmud, and ritual observance. Wieseltier was trained rigorously in all those things as a youth and gave them up only later to become a journalist and public intellectual (he is literary editor of the *New Republic*). Unlike the many who “return,” the author starts with the tools to read and navigate the sources.

Perhaps more striking, he has a feel for the meandering, spiraling form of these voluminous sources, in which rabbis jump from century to century and from topic to topic, multiplying distinctions and piling cases upon cases. This cadence Wieseltier man-

ages, rather remarkably, to reproduce, letting his reading and the calendar pull him from medieval folktale to Enlightenment response, from philosophical aperçu to ritual prescription to outright flight of fancy. Wondering why mourners all say the Kaddish in unison rather than following a leader, Wieseltier finds a 19th-century Moravian rabbi citing a 16th-century Egyptian rabbi's account of an incident in which one mourner, vying for the leadership role, punched another in the face. Dipping into the mystics, he stumbles on an enchanting line of commentary that says the Kaddish is intended by the mourners to console God himself for the delay of redemption—and that it is said partly in Aramaic to keep it private from the angels, who do not understand that tongue!

The result comes as close to the feel of studying Talmud as the modern layperson without extensive Jewish education is likely to get. It's a lovely excursion, threaded through with the mysterious beauty of the Kaddish itself, a prayer that another writer, Allen Hoffman, once described as "the building-blocks of the universe rumbling against one another as their names are called."

—Amy E. Schwartz

**MANIFESTO OF A PASSIONATE
MODERATE:**

Unfashionable Essays.

By Susan Haack. Univ. of Chicago Press. 223 pp. \$22.50

"Anyone except cops and charlatans," the Czechoslovak Academy of Science immunologist-poet Miroslav Holub writes, "must realize that the ideas and laws of basic research [i.e., scientific inquiry] have nothing to do with power, for a simple, fundamental reason: that an Eastern political leader owing to his constitutional laziness understands them no better than does a creation-science evangelist who has trouble with the American IRS because of his Sunday TV profits."

But cops and charlatans are not the only dissenters. Reputed deep thinkers—in some odd disciplines, a majority of the reputed deep thinkers—defend the antic proposition that scientific inquiry and its results have *everything* to do with power. These are the adherents of social constructionism, who populate many academic fields, from poli-

tics to epistemology, plus those public philosophers who are proud to be postmodern. They are conscripts to one side in the culture wars, the side that seeks to debunk science, the idea of objectivity, the possibility of transcultural knowledge, the notion of truth—a word they never use except surrounded by quotation marks.

For Susan Haack, these current fashions on many questions of science, objectivity, knowledge, and truth are, in a word, nonsense. And tasteless, to boot. Haack's credentials—she is a noted logician, epistemologist, and philosopher of science—should not imply, as they might for some distinguished philosophers, anesthesia in the prose. On the contrary, Haack's writing is as lively as Holub's. Her sentences and paragraphs are honed to a fine edge, and an unexpectedly impish sense of humor invigorates some of her more technical discussions. Hers is a tough mind, confident of its power, making an art of logic.

Haack is no dogmatist, or traditionalist, or foundationalist. But she does believe in the value of philosophy, in the possibility of approaching truth that is not just agreement by bargaining. Her argumentation demonstrates, as does that of few of her contemporaries, that honest inquiry is not only possible and valuable but moral. She insists upon philosophy as the unique tool for judgment of inquiry. And for her, "scientific method" is neither more nor less than honest inquiry. The institutionalized effort (at least) of honest inquiry is what distinguishes natural science from other means of interpreting the world, and has so distinguished it for the last 400 years.

Those who cannot believe that any sensible person (let alone a professor or scholar) would argue to the contrary—and who cannot believe that their children will be taught the contrary in college—particularly need to read Haack's essays. Multiculturalism, relativism, knowledge versus propaganda, feminism, affirmative action, and yes, "preposterism": all are dealt with in (politically) non-partisan, fully documented essays. Those are important subjects that most academic philosophers, protecting perks and avoiding angst, won't go near. Haack engages them with a cool mastery. We need reminding by good philosophy of what Cicero saw: that there is nothing so absurd but some philosopher has said it.

—Paul R. Gross