

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