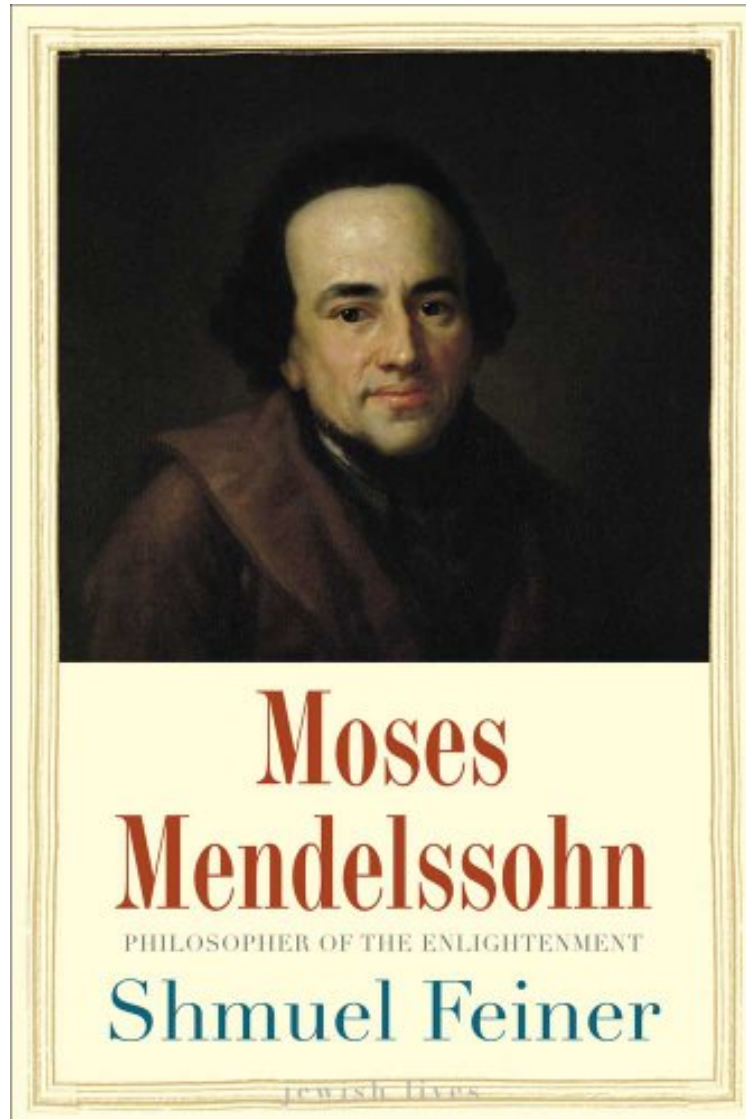


(Free download) Moses Mendelssohn: Sage of Modernity (Jewish Lives)

## Moses Mendelssohn: Sage of Modernity (Jewish Lives)

*Shmuel Feiner*

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**Shmuel Feiner : Moses Mendelssohn: Sage of Modernity (Jewish Lives)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Moses Mendelssohn: Sage of Modernity (Jewish Lives):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A New Biography of Moses MendelssohnBy Philip BrantinghamIf not the widest-known philosopher of the Enlightenment today, Moses Mendelssohn still was famous in his time. A Jew, he managed to overcome the anti-semitism of his time and garner praise from many contemporaries, including Immanuel Kant, who admired his writings and was a close acquaintance. Shmuel Feiner's biography is an authoritative

review of Mendelssohn's thought and life. Certainly a new study of Mendelssohn's ideas was overdue. Indeed, Feiner's explication of the philosopher's ideas is clear and detailed. Mendelssohn chiefly promoted an enlightened Judaism, free from the conservatism of the rabbinical councils of the time. The reform movement he supported, the "Haskalah," had many followers and was intended to make Judaism more progressive. That is, to attune it more with current Enlightenment ideas. Mendelssohn's friendship with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was one of the great blessings of his life, for Lessing, poet, dramatist, and critic, helped acquaint Mendelssohn with many of the prominent Berlin intellectuals. Feiner describes the uneasiness of Frederick the Great with this outstanding Jewish thinker. Actually, when Mendelssohn was proposed as a member in the Berlin Academy of Science the king ignored the proposal and let it drop. A great Francophile, Frederick had no respect for local philosophers, especially those who wrote in German! Feiner's book is well worth reading, especially for his clarity in explaining the difficulties faced by a Jewish intellectual in a society in which such persons were dismissed as being unwelcome. .13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. The most accessible and, in some respects, best biography of Mendelssohn to date. By goodmusicman Since the review titled "A Love Letter Does not a Biography Make" is not really a review of Feiner's book about Mendelssohn but more of a polemic against Mendelssohn (and the Enlightenment), I feel compelled to write a review of this book. While Alexander Altmann's *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization) remains the most magisterial and detailed study of the life of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), and remains essential reading for all interested in Mendelssohn, Shmuel Feiner's "Moses Mendelssohn: Sage of Modernity" (translated from the Hebrew original, which was published in 2005) surpasses Altmann's book in certain respects. First, it is far more readable: while Feiner's book is around the 200-page mark, Altmann's is over 900 pages. While Altmann immerses the reader in 18th century intellectual history and the details of Mendelssohn's philosophy and how each episode of his life reflects different aspects of that philosophy, Feiner gives us a personal portrait of Mendelssohn, a glimpse into his private life, his fears and joys alike. The opening paragraph, describing Mendelssohn walking with his family in Berlin and getting taunted for being Jewish--despite the wide acclaim he had already received in Germany and beyond as a leading Enlightenment philosopher--is a preview of what is to come. Feiner's portrayal of Mendelssohn is sympathetic without being reverential. His Mendelssohn is an heroic figure but equally a tragic one. Mendelssohn's courtship and marriage, his ten children (four of whom died very young), his friends and rivals are all portrayed in a personal and human light. While Feiner is an academic and Yale University Press is an academic publisher, this book reads like a serious but popular examination of Mendelssohn's life. (Footnotes, which are missing, would have been nice.) Feiner significantly diminishes Mendelssohn's historical significance by arguing that he did not found a movement (the Haskalah) nor did he foresee the radical direction (from the point of view of traditional rabbinic Judaism) which that movement would later take. Feiner sees Mendelssohn as almost sui generis: deeply dedicated to preserving rabbinic Judaism (contra Arkush and more in keeping with Sorkin) and yet dissatisfied with the manner in which rabbinic Judaism was practiced in his time. Feiner's book is a fascinating look at an all-too-often misunderstood man. The book is highly accessible and the interested reader may finish this in one sitting. Highly recommended for anyone interested in the life of Moses Mendelssohn. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Phenomenal! By The Personal Inquirer This book gives an explanation of how Christians and Jews thought and how they viewed each other during the enlightenment in Berlin. One is given insight into the prejudices and fears of both groups - in an engrossing and sensitive and intelligent way.

The German Socrates, Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) was the most influential Jewish thinker of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A Berlin celebrity and a major figure in the Enlightenment, revered by Immanuel Kant, Mendelssohn suffered the indignities common to Jews of his time while formulating the philosophical foundations of a modern Judaism suited for a new age. His most influential books included the groundbreaking *Jerusalem* and a translation of the Bible into German that paved the way for generations of Jews to master the language of the larger culture. Feiner's book is the first that offers a full, human portrait of this fascinating man uncommonly modest, acutely aware of his task as an intellectual pioneer, shrewd, traditionally Jewish, yet thoroughly conversant with the world around him providing a vivid sense of Mendelssohn's daily life as well as of his philosophical endeavors. Feiner, a leading scholar of Jewish intellectual history, examines Mendelssohn as father and husband, as a friend (Mendelssohn's long-standing friendship with the German dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was seen as a model for Jews and non-Jews worldwide), as a tireless advocate for his people, and as an equally indefatigable spokesman for the paramount importance of intellectual independence.

"An all-encompassing biography of Mendelssohn . . . Feiner describes Mendelssohn's intellectual and social ascent in a tight, concise narrative." *Publishers Weekly*