

Adolphe Franck, Philosophe juif, spiritualiste et libérale dans la France du XIX siècle. Actes du colloque tenu à l'Institut de France le 31 mai 2010 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp. 234.

by Chiara Adorisio

This book is a collection of essays contributed to the international conference on Adolphe Franck, which took place at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* on May 31, 2010. Published in the rich series of the *Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Sciences religieuses*, this book is an extraordinarily rich resource of historical information and philosophical reflections on a major but still little known figure among 19th century French scholars.

Being an eclectic and spiritualist philosopher in the wake of Victor Cousin and, at the same time, a politically engaged Jewish scholar, Adolphe Franck is described in the essays gathered in this book as an intellectual whose work and intellectual path traverses several disciplines, a circumstance that is characteristic for the pioneering work that Jewish and non-Jewish scholars did in the first half of the 19th century in France. Having been librarian, together with Hermann Zotenberg and Salomon Munk, at the National Library in Paris, Franck worked at the Catalogue of the Jewish and Samaritan manuscripts contributing to rediscover materials which became very important for establishing the role of Jewish and Islamic culture and philosophy within the history of western philosophy.

Conceived as an introduction to Franck's life and work, the book is divided into four sections entitled: *Adolphe Franck, un israélite français*; *Adolphe Franck, le philosophe*; *Adolphe Franck et le religieux en son temps*; *Adolphe Franck et la politique*.

The second section, which illustrates Franck's effort in studying the history of philosophy, is also the core of the book. Jean-Pierre Rothschild's essay *Le moyen âge dans la philosophie, le dictionnaire des sciences philosophiques, Adolphe Franck et quelques autres* focuses on Franck's work for the edition of the *Dictionnaire des sciences philosophiques* and analyzes above all the role and the functions of the history of philosophy according to the French academic culture of his epoch. An expression of this culture dominated by positivistic currents was for example the position of Victor Cousin, well known as a spiritualistic and eclectic philosopher, who identified in the history of philosophy three main functions. The first of these functions was to inventory and classify the different historical epochs, the second was to describe the genesis and constitution of human thought as the result of a collective effort, and the third function was to illustrate the tendencies of human spirit in order to understand it in a universal way. On the background of these three principal functions Rothschild describes the interest in history and in the history of philosophy as a need of 19th

century's reason to cover every domain of the human spirit. For this reason, says Rothschild, the famous Ernest Renan wrote a book on Averroes and Averroism, following Cousin's and Le Clerc's suggestions, though he was not interested at all in medieval and scholastic philosophy.

It is in this context, under the influence of Cousin's ideas, that many studies on medieval scholastic and, also, on Jewish and Islamic philosophy, appeared in France. As a disciple of Cousin, Franck did not separate philosophy from its history. Therefore, using his knowledge of various classical and modern languages, and last but not least, his expertise in philosophy, Franck intended to publish the *Dictionnaire des sciences philosophiques* as a work whose task was that of exploring all the different ages of philosophy. Rothschild's essay has the merit of reconstructing Franck's work besides that of many important scholars, for example that of the German-Jewish emigré Salomon Munk who gave also his contribution to the work for the *Dictionnaire*.

The second section of the book analyzes the relationship between Franck's work and the religious currents of his epoch, while the forth part takes into examinations Franck's relationship to politics. To this very last section of the book belongs *Perrine Simon-Nahum's essay: Philosophie et science du judaïsme: la place d'Adolphe Franck dans le paysage intellectuel français du XIX siècle*. Simon-Nahum's essay shows how Franck was not only influenced by French academic philosophy but also by the work of German scholars, and in particular by the ideas and ideals of the Jewish movement called *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. He therefore can be considered as one of those Jewish scholars who during the 19th century participated in reshaping a new field of studies the history of Jewish and Islamic philosophy.

The influence of Cousin is evident in his *Dictionnaire*, but it is also testified by the fact that Franck dedicated to him a work entitled *Kabbale ou philosophie des Hébreux*. The analysis of this work leads Simon-Nahum to analyze Franck's work within the framework of the works generated in the context of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. As a Jewish scholar adherent to this very current, Franck contributed to make the historians of philosophy aware of the importance of the Jewish and Islamic contribution to the history of philosophy. These two sources of influence intertwines in Franck's intellectual path, according to Simon-Nahum, which is the path of a thinker who was deeply involved in the reflection on the juridical, religious and philosophical foundations of liberal society in France. This is why Simon-Nahum recognizes in Franck a sort of precursor of Henri Bergson as the author of *Deux sources de la morale et de la religion*.

Similarly interested in the contribution that Franck gave to the social criticism in France are both Paola Ferruta's contribution on the relationship between Franck and the religious and political movement of Saint-Simonianism (a current which, beginning

from the 1825, became also popular as a philosophical school), and Jérôme Grondeux's contribution on Franck's philosophy of natural right and law.

All these essays have the merit of showing the double aspect of Franck's work: his contribution to Jewish scholarship and Jewish life in France, on the one hand, and his contribution to the philosophical and social criticism in France, on the other. This double aspect has been also thematically treated in the rich contribution by George Weill entitled *Un philosophe engagé: Adolphe Franck et les organisations juives de France*, which the editors placed at the very beginning of the book.

Among Jewish scholars Adolphe Franck has not yet been fully recognized as a researcher who contributed in a seminal way not only to rethinking the role of Jewish philosophy within the history of philosophy, but also to opening the path to the scientific study of the Kabbalah, as Moshe Idel already suggested in his *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, published in English in 1988. Many essays of this book rightly recall Franck's study of the Kabbalah as an important part of his scholarship.

For having rediscovered an important figure of both French and Jewish scholarship during the 19th century and having underscored its importance from a historical and philosophical point of view, this book is a precious as well as rare tool for studying anew Franck's work in its historical, political and philosophical context.

Franck succeeded in gathering for this work important contributions from different scholars. One of these scholars was his colleague at the National Library in Paris, the German-Jewish orientalist Salomon Munk, translator of Maimonides *Guide of the Perplexed* and author of several studies on the history of Jewish medieval philosophy, that he considered to be a sort of synthesis between Jewish tradition and philosophical rationalism, a synthesis which was possible during the Middle ages, in particular thanks to Maimonides, but disappeared as a possibility in the modern ages after Spinoza.

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