



# Not in the Heavens: The Tradition of Jewish Secular Thought

*David Biale*

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*Not in the Heavens* traces the rise of Jewish secularism through the visionary writers and thinkers who led its development. Spanning the rich history of Judaism from the Bible to today, David Biale shows how the secular tradition these visionaries created is a uniquely Jewish one, and how the emergence of Jewish secularism was not merely a response to modernity but arose from forces long at play within Judaism itself.

Biale explores how ancient Hebrew books like Job, Song of Songs, and Esther downplay or even exclude God altogether, and how Spinoza, inspired by medieval Jewish philosophy, recast the biblical God in the role of nature and stripped the Torah of its revelatory status to instead read scripture as a historical and cultural text. Biale examines the influential Jewish thinkers who followed in Spinoza's secularizing footsteps, such as Salomon Maimon, Heinrich Heine, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein. He tells the stories of those who also took their cues from medieval Jewish mysticism in their revolts against tradition, including Hayim Nahman Bialik, Gershom Scholem, and Franz Kafka. And he looks at Zionists like David Ben-Gurion and other secular political thinkers who recast Israel and the Bible in modern terms of race, nationalism, and the state.

*Not in the Heavens* demonstrates how these many Jewish paths to secularism were dependent, in complex and paradoxical ways, on the very religious traditions they were rejecting, and examines the legacy and meaning of Jewish secularism today.

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