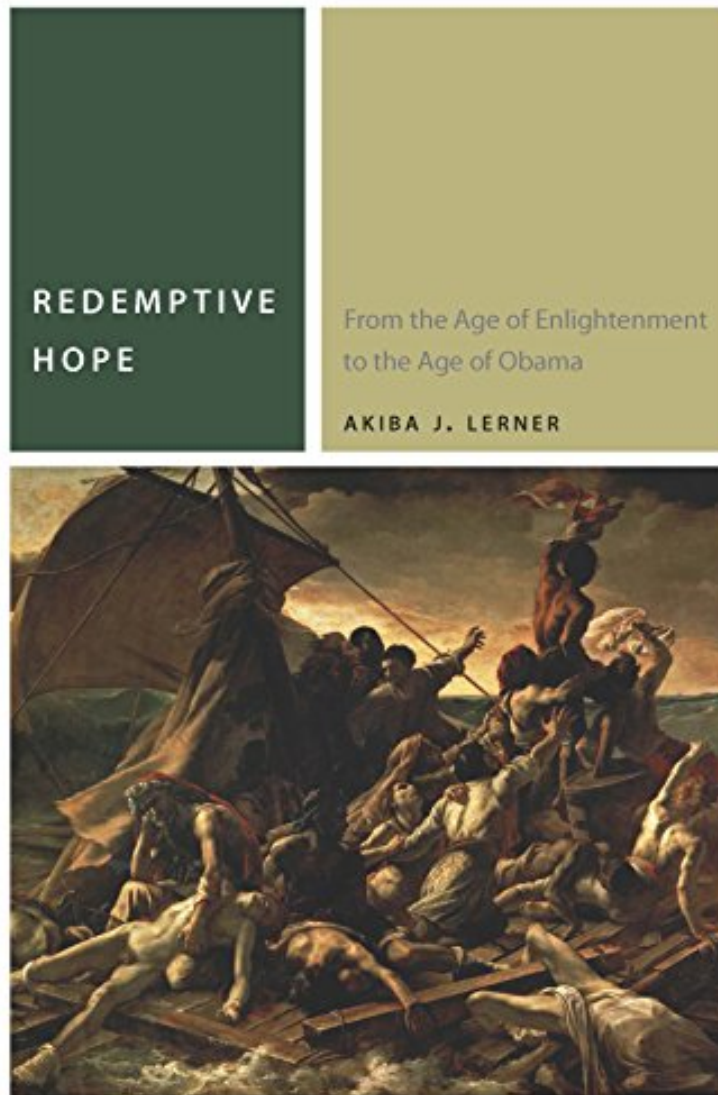


[Free read ebook] Redemptive Hope: From the Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Obama (Commonalities)

Redemptive Hope: From the Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Obama (Commonalities)

Akiba J. Lerner

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Akiba J. Lerner : Redemptive Hope: From the Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Obama (Commonalities) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Redemptive Hope: From the Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Obama (Commonalities):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. How dialectic of real and ideal hope can help us navigate that divide is one of the great themes of the bookBy germanlitfan234Akiba Lerner's book makes a significant contribution to

modern intellectual history and Judaic Studies. Lerner takes the long view, covering the unit history of the concept of hope from antiquity to the present. In doing so, he shows how intellectual historians have neglected to assign the concept its full potential and to recognize the powerful energy it exudes inside the force fields of the Western imagination. For too long, hope has been kept within the corral of Western Marxism, guarded by the messianic-utopian gatekeepers of a future redemption. Lerner shows us that hope has a far richer ancestral line and demands today a more complex assessment in post-modernity. By linking up the thinkers of the early twentieth century Jewish Renaissance with the secular neo-pragmatism of Richard Rorty, Lerner accomplishes a tour-de-force of intellectual bridge building. Throughout the book Lerner weaves in a recurring theme of how hope almost always raises expectations in a way that opens up new possibilities while harboring dangers of dashed expectations. We recently experienced this collective roller coaster ride when Obama was elected in 2008 and the world had to adjust to the mundane reality that he could not change the world overnight. By calling our time the "Age of Obama" he doesn't mean the flesh and blood man as much as metaphorically, the dilemma we face in post-modernity of possessing almost endless opportunities, both materially and culturally, on the one hand, and yet existential threats to our civilization on the other. How dialectic of real and ideal hope can help us navigate that divide is one of the great themes of the book. Chapter One sets the stage for expanding the discourse on hope by contrasting the biblical and Hellenistic attitude to hope as a choice between redemption and fate. The former established for later thinkers the possibility of human freedom, while the Greek emphasis on fate allowed contingency and solidarity to structure Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought, what Lerner calls, quoting Rorty, "clinging together against the dark." Lerner elaborates in this chapter how theologians, from Augustine to Aquinas connected hope in myriad ways to future salvation, but also how hope was to be incorporated into an imminent Christian world-view. These "vertical" hopes were then transplanted by the "horizontal" hope of the secular Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, and ultimately the Enlightenment and post-modern age. Human experience now trumps divine revelation. Hope also becomes a launching pad for a critique of religion and replacing truth, conscience and a rejection of blind authority as a path towards human redemption. Lerner rightly emphasizes Spinoza as the trailblazer who pointed the way towards modern political autonomy and personal liberation. With Spinoza and the later Enlightenment, especially Kant, hope comes down to earth dressed as ethical philosophy based on rational morality (practical reason). The ideal of hope for human happiness and progress becomes, with Kant, the ethical foundation of the modern, ethical, universal state. Lerner then follows the next step in this narrative by showing how the Young Hegelians and Marx turned German Idealism upside down into a materialistic philosophy that radically rejected the illusions of religion and directed redemptive hopes to the social and political here and now. This chapter ends with the last turn, a "secularized eschatology" of Nietzsche, which brings us back to where philosophy began: the paradox that by "overcoming" Christianity, modern philosophy could not shake off the kernel of redemptive hope that had been inherited from the ancient Jews and the Greeks. In the second chapter, Lerner focuses on the "crisis of reason" brought about by the shocking carnage and irrationality of World War I. In particular Jewish intellectuals in Europe reacted to the retreat of the Enlightenment by recovering the Messianic elements in Judaism that their rationalistic forefathers had rejected. Martin Buber is the prime example of this kind of thinker of the Jewish Renaissance, who created a new kind of philosophical anthropology by combining existentialist and Talmudic and Messianic tropes. Redemption in Buber's philosophy is relocated from the end-time to all the moments through time, which allows to him to get a purchase on inner subjectivity combined with a social philosophy of hope based on solidarity (I - Thou) and vitalism. Lerner then contrasts Buber with Rosenzweig, who argued against the politicization of Messianic hope (for example Zionism) and for integrating redemptive hope into everyday practices and rituals. Likewise Gershom Sholem was suspicious of the Messianic elements in Zionism, and foresaw that Buber's mixing of Messianism and politics could become a dangerous and intoxicating ideology. Lerner then brings Leo Strauss into the mix, who also recognized, but was wary of Buber's political theology on one hand, justifying the good life through a divine source, which existed uneasily, on the other hand, with a more secular kind of political philosophy based on the needs of the living community. Despite these critiques, Buber's Phenomenology of Hope, especially his book I and Thou (1922) had a profound influence on later theology and existentialism. Lerner dissects Buber's ideas with great precision and expertise, showing how he introduced into twentieth century thought an alternative epistemology, based on Biblical (in contrast to Hellenic-rationalistic) inter-subjective experience of "knowing" through individual encounters. Lerner also deftly explains how this kind of "knowing" was different from Heidegger's seemingly similar turn against the rationalist tradition, in that Buber doesn't abandon the individual to the lonely quest for authenticity in solitary being towards one's down death. Buber grounded hope in intersubjective dialogue and the social reality of community, which leads directly to the third chapter and Ernst Bloch's monumental attempt to establish a School of Hope based on an explicit philosophy of hope. Lerner carefully explores a series of related post-utopian narratives on hope, Erich Fromm, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, as well as contemporary scholarship by thinkers such as Jeffrey Bloechl, Jrgen Habermas and Gianni Vattimo, who all in one way or another want to recapture elements of religious thinking in a non-regressive manner in a post-metaphysical age. And so the stage is set for the introduction to Rorty's post-modernist turn to hope as a category for replacing the certainty of past metaphysical and transcendental philosophical systems. In his most utopian moments, Rorty thought that humans

could liberate themselves from the religious and metaphysical chains of the past and find emancipation in an ever more liberated, democratic, socially just and enlightened collective, held together by voluntary moments of willed solidarity without any truth narratives. Lerner offers us a very complex picture of how Rorty thought about timeless philosophical questions such as justice, knowledge, love, morality and community in a neo-pragmatic, postmodernist framework. He then gives equal time to Rorty's critics and shows that they found holes and aporias in Rorty's reasoning that were compelling, even to Rorty, who adjusted his views as he worked out his philosophical positions in his later years. In essence, Rorty's attempt to cleanse the public sphere of all remnants of religious transcendence and metaphysics ended up throwing out a lot of babies with the bath water. So Lerner takes us full circle back to where his book started, with exploring "transcendent signifiers" in Western thought. He ends this chapter by positing ecumenical tolerance for religious narratives. In the conclusion, Lerner tackles the question of how it is possible to build on Rorty's insights on leaving behind epistemological certainty, that knowledge is a "raft" and not a pyramid, but nevertheless elaborates on a holistic account of community based on liberal "true" principles of a just society. Buber's notions of intersubjective encounters provides for Lerner the missing element lacking in Rorty's stark relativism and neo-pragmatism. He calls Buber's account a "phenomenology of intersubjective hope" and makes a compelling case that Buber's form of what we today call communitarianism fills in many of the gaps left wide open by the stark and often lifeless structures of modern liberal society. The danger is that with Buber the public sphere can collapse into personal subjectivity, the secular into the sacred. In response to this problem, Lerner fuses Buber and Rorty together into a new synthesis, calling on various thinkers such as Emil Fackenheim, David Hartman, Steven Schwarzschild, Thomas Nagel and Jeffrey Stout, all working within and trying to expand the "School of Hope" towards a coherent narrative of hopeful human social and political progress minus all the illusions. The book ends with a plea for not abandoning the hard task of "keeping hope alive" against all the odds faced by very fallible human beings. This book will appeal to European intellectual historians, scholars in Judaic Studies and the history of religion. It will also be of interest to specialists on Buber and Rorty, but generalists as well, interested in the Jewish Renaissance, theology, eschatology, post-modernism and communitarianism. In sum, Lerner's book makes a very valuable contribution, not only to the scholarly literature of a key concept, a series of evolving ideas on hope, but also to the essential human project of finding and keeping our epistemological and moral bearings in an increasingly uncertain world.

This is a book about the need for redemptive narratives to ward off despair and the dangers these same narratives create by raising expectations that are seldom fulfilled. The quasi-messianic expectations produced by the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, and their diminution, were stark reminders of an ongoing struggle between ideals and political realities. Redemptive Hope begins by tracing the tension between theistic thinkers, for whom hope is transcendental, and intellectuals, who have striven to link hopes for redemption to our intersubjective interactions with other human beings. Lerner argues that a vibrant democracy must draw on the best of both religious thought and secular liberal political philosophy. By bringing Richard Rorty's pragmatism into conversation with early-twentieth-century Jewish thinkers, including Martin Buber and Ernst Bloch, Lerner begins the work of building bridges, while insisting on holding crucial differences in dialectical tension. Only such a dialogue, he argues, can prepare the foundations for modes of redemptive thought fit for the twenty-first century.

With nuanced erudition Akiba J. Lerner brings the neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty and the Jewish existentialist Martin Buber into a dialogue to explore narrative strategies to sustain social hope in an age duly skeptical of the utopian promises of political ideologies and wary of messianic enthusiasm. (Paul Mendes-Flohr The University of Chicago, Professor emeritus, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem) Many scholars within the field of affect studies will appreciate Akiba Lerner's illuminating treatment of Ernst Bloch, who has emerged as a key intellectual progenitor of the field. Jewish studies scholars, in turn, will gain a new appreciation for a figure whose connection to contemporary Jewish thought has often been overlooked. (Nathaniel Deutsch author of *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement*) Akiba Lerner is one of the courageous and visionary thinkers who creatively wrestle with philosophic hope grounded in prophetic praxis. He is part of a grand legacy in family and tradition that keeps alive a shattering of indifference and a compassion for justice. (Cornel West) About the Author Akiba Lerner is an associate professor of Religious Studies and Theology at Santa Clara University.