



Maimonides the Rationalist

Herbert A. Davidson

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Maimonides was not the first rabbinic scholar to take an interest in philosophy, but he was unique in being a towering figure in both areas. His law code, the Mishneh Torah, stands with Rashi's commentary on the Babylonian Talmud as one of the two most intensively studied rabbinic works coming out of the Middle Ages, while his Guide of the Perplexed is the most influential and widely read Jewish philosophical work ever written. Admirers and critics have arrived at wildly divergent perceptions of the man. We have Maimonides the atheist or agnostic, Maimonides the sceptic, Maimonides the deist, Maimonides the Aristotelian, the Averroist, or proto-Kantian. We have a Maimonides seduced by the blandishments of 'accursed philosophy;' a Maimonides who sowed the seeds that led to Spanish Jews' loss of faith and mass apostasy and who was therefore responsible for the demise of Spanish Jewry; a Maimonides who incorporated philosophical elements into his rabbinic works and wrote the Guide of the Perplexed, not to propagate doctrines to which he was personally committed, but in order to rescue errant souls seduced by philosophy; a Maimonides who was the defender of the faith and defined the articles of Jewish belief for all time. In his own estimation, Maimonides was neither exclusively a dedicated philosopher nor exclusively a devoted rabbinist. He saw philosophy and the Written and Oral Torahs as a single, harmonious domain, and he believed that this view was similarly fundamental to the lives of the prophets and rabbis of old. In this book, now available in paperback, author Herbert Davidson examines Maimonides' efforts to reconstitute this all-embracing, rationalist world-view that he felt had been lost during the millennium-long exile. *** "Davidson contributes much to the understanding of Maimonides. recommended for all students of Maimonides and religious thought. " -- Stephen D. Benin, Religious Studies Review **** "Not surprisingly, this book is a major contribution to Maimonidean studies and to the history of medieval Jewish philosophy generally." -- Aleph [Subject: Jewish Studies, Religious Studies, Philosophy, History]

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