



Maimonides the Rationalist (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization)

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 intensely studied works of medieval rabbinic scholarship, while his Guide for 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 skeptic, 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 for 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, Herbert Davidson examines Maimonides' efforts to reconstitute this all-embracing, rationalist worldview 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, Vol. 38, No. 2, June 2012 [Subject: Jewish Studies, History, Medieval Studies, Philosophy, Religious Studies]

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