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Review

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*Spinoza, Descartes and Maimonides.* By LEON ROTH. Oxford, at The Clarendon Press, 1924.—pp. 148.

Ever since Joël flashed upon an unsuspecting world—which indeed should have known better and should have been prepared for it—the tantalizing news that the literary background of Spinoza's works is to be found not so much in Descartes as in mediaeval Jewish philosophy, many an attempt has been made to trace Spinoza's indebtedness to various Jewish thinkers. Ibn Gabirol, Maimonides, Crescas and Judah Abarbanel were some of the names conjured with. Sometimes that awful and veiled anonymity parading under the name of Jewish Cabala was suspected as the sire of the unnamed offspring of Spinoza's mind. Occasionally, as if to relieve the monotony, various Schoolmen or some favored Moslem sages were drawn into this general quest of forebears. This sort of speculation, I imagine, will go on until scholarship emerges from its present stage of a puny domestic handicraft and becomes organized on industrial lines of large scale production, when a general index of mediaeval philosophy in all its various branches, Latin, Hebrew and Arabic, will be compiled. Then this effort will cease of itself, for, with such a general index at hand, whenever a student of Spinoza will become possessed of a desire to know the parentage of some of his strange phrases, expressions and ideas, all he will have to do will be to consult that index and have his choice.

The thoughtful and finely written book by Mr. Roth, *Descartes, Spinoza and Maimonides*, does not, truly speaking, limit itself to a mere comparison of parallel passages in the works of the three philosophers who grace its title. It does more than that. It aims to discuss what the author considers the central problems of their philosophies in their relation to each other. The title of the book, to be fully descriptive, should have really been, *Descartes, Spinoza, Kalam and Maimonides*. The starting point of the study would seem to have been a similarity which the author thinks to exist between Descartes' theory of "continuous creation" and the Kalam's "creation of the accidents." Descartes' theory, according to Mr. Roth, like that of the Kalam, implies a conception of discrete time (p. 27) and leads in its final analysis to a voluntaristic theism, an atomistic conception of knowledge and a denial of law and order and necessity in nature. To all this both Maimonides and Spinoza are found to be opposed, and the author, taking this opposition as the starting point of their philosophies, proceeds to construe their works as being primarily a criticism of these special views held by the

Kalam and Descartes. He further finds that Spinoza's criticism of Descartes runs parallel to Maimonides' strictures of the Kalam and is not uninfluenced by them. Along these lines he deals in the first three chapters with Descartes, Spinoza and Maimonides respectively. In the fourth and final chapter the author endeavors to establish Maimonides' influence on Spinoza's classification of knowledge and the deliverance of man.

Needless to say, the author's schematic presentation of the philosophy of Spinoza and Maimonides is not to be taken as a literal account of the manner in which the systems logically grew up in the minds of the philosophers nor of the order in which they are unfolded in their respective writings, though occasionally he speaks of it as if he actually meant it to be taken as such. Simply as a literary device the author has used it with considerable skill in linking together diverse philosophical speculations around a central problem. He has thereby been able to secure for his work a certain symmetry and architectural unity. But to accomplish this he has been forced occasionally to interpret texts rather freely and to introduce connections between problems which are otherwise unrelated. One may doubt, for instance, the historical accuracy of his interpretation of Spinoza's writings in the third chapter, especially of the *Cogitata Metaphysica*. The construction he puts on some of Spinoza's discussions would seem to import into them a meaning which, on any other showing, they do not possess. One may also doubt the soundness of what seems to be his main thesis, namely, the implication of an atomistic doctrine of time and essence in Descartes' theory of continuous creation, though he may find support for his view in Mr. Norman Smith's *Studies in the Cartesian Philosophy*. There is nothing in the theory of continuous creation itself to warrant such an inference, for its analogue is not necessarily the Kalam's "creation of the accidents." If we are to explain it at all by a historical analogy, we may find it in Maimonides' own theory of continuous creation, when he insists that God, being the formal as well as the efficient cause of the universe, is not only the creator of the universe but also its preserver and the cause of its continuance and permanency (See *Guide I*, 69).

The complete freedom with which the author sometimes deals with texts is especially to be noticed in his treatment of the *Guide for the Perplexed*. The author takes the *Guide* as a systematic work of theology, logically arranged, the central problem of which is a theory of knowledge and the objective of which is throughout the refutation

of the Kalam, or, as the author pleases to call its adherents, the theologians, who are accredited by him not only with the propositions attributed to them as a school by Maimonides himself but also with such beliefs as anthropomorphisms and attributes, which beliefs, according to the author, have their origin in their atomistic theory. One may doubt all these assumptions. The *Guide* is far from being a systematic work, logically arranged and well knit together, and on this we have Maimonides' own statement. It is not a fact that the Kalam as a School historically stands for anthropomorphisms and attributes. Nor must the belief in anthropomorphisms and attributes logically follow from the atomistic conception of matter and time. While it is true, as the author states, referring to Mabillean (p. 85, n. 1), that the theory of attributes is connected with theological atomism, it does not necessarily follow that theological atomism must be connected with physical atomism. It is also a wrong assumption that atomism, with all it implies, is an essential element in the Kalam's proof for the existence of God from creation (pp. 80-82). This is at variance with what we know of the nature of the proof, of its historical origin and of the use made of it in the literature of the time.

With equal freedom the author treats Maimonides' own views. His discussion of Maimonides' theory of attributes (pp. 74-77), for instance, does not reproduce accurately Maimonides' analysis of the problem, nor his criticism of his opponents, nor his own position on the subject. It is wrong to say that Maimonides considered it illegitimate to ascribe "any attribute but that of existence to God" (p. 79). It is also inaccurate to speak of Maimonides' discussion of the identity of essence and existence as purposing to prove the existence of God (p. 77). It is equally wrong to assume that Maimonides' discussion of the organic unity of nature, illustrated by an old analogy between the macrocosm and the microcosm (*Guide* I, 72), is the basis of the cosmological proof for the existence of God from motion (p. 86). Without going outside of Maimonides for evidence, we may point to Chapter I of Part II of the *Guide* where, after proving the existence as well as the unity and incorporeality of God by the proof from motion and other similar proofs, Maimonides adduces an additional proof for the unity of God based, as he says, on the doctrine of the organic unity of nature.

In one respect this work suffers in common with other works of its kind. It fails to distinguish between what is individual with the particular author under discussion, in this case Maimonides, and what is a mediæval commonplace, and tries to establish a direct

literary influence on the basis of a general similarity between ideas or between sets of ideas rather than on a study of the structure of the text. This may be especially illustrated by the author's discussion of Maimonides' influence upon Spinoza's classification of the types of knowledge and the deliverance of man. In Aristotle as well as in the works of the mediævals we find all kinds of classifications of knowledge in which imagination, reasoning and a sort of immediate knowledge are included. Any one of these classifications bears as much or as little resemblance to the classification of Spinoza as the passages quoted by the author from Maimonides. And then also, why look for a Maimonidean influence with reference to immortality when the "possibility of union" was a common mediæval problem? The author himself expresses surprise at Joël for going to Gersonides rather than to Maimonides for this theory (p. 139, n. 1). The fact is, it is of far greater importance to find out what use Spinoza has made of a mediæval doctrine than to try to determine the particular source from which he has drawn his information. The latter is most likely to prove a fruitless search.

Despite the inaccuracies which I have been trying to point out, the work is a valuable contribution to the study of Spinoza as well as to that of mediæval Jewish philosophy. It is original in its conception, ingenious in its execution and contains many penetrating observations. Its outstanding merit is the freshness and modernity with which the author envisages many a problem seemingly antiquated. The author is right in his contention that behind the historic terminology there are issues at stake which are essentially modern.

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The following books also have been received:

*Experience and Nature.* Lectures upon the Paul Carus Foundation. First Series. By JOHN DEWEY. Chicago and London, Open Court Publishing Company, 1925.—pp. xi, 443.

*The Concept of Evolution.* The Herbert Spencer Lecture. Delivered at Oxford, 27 November, 1924. By H. W. B. JOSEPH. Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1924.—pp. 32.

*A Study of the Major Emotions in Persons of Defective Intelligence.* By BEULAH MAY MORRISON. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1924.—pp. 73-145.

*The Principles of Reasoning.* An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method. By DANIEL SOMMER ROBINSON. New York and London, D. Appelton and Company, 1924.—pp. xviii, 390.