



Review

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be able to formulate this difference precisely but I think he will sense it. I doubt that the attempt to reduce science to indemonstrability is a valid approach to the justification of Judaism as a religion.

The reviewer would not, therefore, recommend the sections on science in Dr. Singer's book. The remaining sections, however, which constitute the greater portion of the volume and which are devoted to a clarification of the principles of Judaism, will be found extremely suggestive, useful, and applicable to a classroom.

It should also be noted that Dr. Fackenheim, while he represents Reform ideology, is very sympathetic in the book under review towards the traditional viewpoint. This may be a result of the fact that the issues he raises for discussion are not those upon which the different denominations of Ju-

daism display vehement disagreement. Dr. Singer's volume, on the other hand, though he writes for the youth of the Conservative denomination of Judaism, attempts, to the extent that it is possible for him to do so, to describe the points of view of the various religious segments in Judaism. However, since it is obviously not possible in a book of this kind to combine all points of view into a coherent unity or to give each point of view equal treatment and consideration, the Conservative doctrines which he represents emerge strongly in his treatment and exposition of the precepts of Judaism.

Both Professor Fackenheim and Dr. Singer are to be commended and congratulated for making a significant contribution towards the solution of a serious problem in Jewish tradition.

Judaism, A Portrait, by Leon Roth (New York: The Viking Press, 1961)

Reviewed by Shubert Spero

The author in his preface points out quite correctly that "a portrait is not a photograph or a systematic survey." True to his word, the book consists of a series of almost self-contained essays in Jewish thought following now a chronological, now a topical order. The thin thread of continuity is a search for the essence or defining characteristics of Judaism and an excessive regard for Maimonides. Professor Roth indeed writes "tersely and with

vigor." His prose is lean, shorn of all excess verbiage, precise and pungent. The work is sprinkled almost too liberally with chains of quotations from classic works, with lengthy illustrations from infrequently quoted sources such as Josephus, Philo, and the Letter of Aristeas.

Professor Roth's grasp of many of the fundamental concepts of Judaism are profoundly perceptive: the universality of the doctrine as compared to the particularity of its transmitters; that Judaism is not a

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product but a programme and the Jews are the instruments of its fulfillment; that the community of Judaism is neither race nor blood but root loyalty to a teaching. After delineating the Jewish concept of God, Roth notes that the way of God leaves nothing for improvisation but is expressed in concrete specification, in definite rules for life, in a vision of divine holiness to refine human nature. The author includes an excellent discussion of the concept of the Jewish people as "witnesses for God" and the significance of the Kingdom of God. His analysis of the relationship between Halakhah and Aggadah and between the Oral and Written Law is quite adequate. His observations on the prayer book are incisive and sympathetic and his treatment of Mendelssohn, Ahad Ha-Am and Krochmal, properly critical.

In his discussion of certain key issues, however, Professor Roth appears to be on the verge of saying something decisive but then peters out in a cloud of evasiveness. On the question of Dogmas in Judaism, for example, the author, with great precision and clarity, sets forth the issue: "(a) Are there beliefs which are fundamental to Judaism in the sense that if they are accepted, Judaism is affirmed, if they are rejected, Judaism is denied? (b) If there are such fundamental beliefs, have they been put into words and formulated authoritatively?" Responds Roth, "A summary answer to both questions would have to be no." But instead of defending his answer, Roth

turns around and explains that in reality both the question and the answer need "modification" because the terms "belief," "fundamental," and "authoritative" are not at home in Judaism. Roth then goes on to (1) give a long quotation showing that Hinduism seems to suffer from a similar disability, (2) point out that the ancient Hebrew "believed in" rather than "believed that" (trust in God and belief that He exists are two different, distinct things) and (3) say that Judaism requires something more than Dogma, i.e., positive action. Putting all these together would appear to support a "summary yes" rather than a "summary no" to Roth's opening question. As Roth himself admits, even Maimonides was interested in the thirteen principles primarily from the point of view of their "practical consequences." In short, there are implicit in Judaism certain theoretical principles which can be abstracted by analytic reason, the consequences of which lead to the positive actions required by Judaism. Surely, one cannot trust in God without also believing that He exists! One cannot enter into a "covenant of holiness with God" unless God communicates with man. It is also likely that one going to his death in "Sanctification of the Name" might wish to have something "authoritative" on the Jewish concept of immortality! Admittedly, biblical man was not aware of these principles as such nor did he articulate them in so many words. Yet this was precisely the contribution of the medieval Jew-

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ish philosophers as seen by Roth himself (p. 45). Judaism became reflective and was brought to disentangle the root conceptions underlying the complex known as Tradition. Roth is quite right that affirmation of these beliefs alone is not yet Judaism, yet on the other hand, rejection of these beliefs surely leaves nothing to build on. J. Albo has asserted that there are three fundamental principles of Judaism in the sense that the removal of one will collapse the entire structure. The three are: existence of God, revelation, and reward and punishment. If Professor Roth disagrees with this, he should say so clearly and show how the Judaism he describes can persist in the absence of any one of these principles.

In his discussion of the reasons for the commandments, Professor Roth applauds Maimonides' "appreciation of history" as indicated by his introducing historical reasons for many of the commandments without discussing the problem which arises when these "reasons" no longer apply. Here again, one feels that the author has not gone far enough. "The reason behind the very idea of the commandments," concludes Professor Roth, "is the need of our fallible humanity for moral education." Yet, the very question of reasons for the commandments, Professor Roth states amounts to, "Why should I be moral?" (p. 136). Indeed, this is still unanswered. One would like to inquire as Socrates did of Euthyphro, "Is something holy because it is desired by the

gods or is it desired by the gods because it is holy?" Does Professor Roth mean that our rational faculty can intuit the right and the wrong, the moral and the immoral independently of the Bible (see p. 171) or does our entire concept of right and wrong stem only from the nature of God's commands?

On the subject of immortality, the author makes some fence straddling statements and concludes with the vague assertion, "But on the whole there is very little and that is imprecise" (p. 83). And yet, it is Maimonides who clearly teaches that the natural consequence of performance of the commandments is the actualization of a portion of the rational soul and immortality. So that the answer to the question of "why should I be moral" can be pushed at least one step further. It may be said that in addition to its beneficial social consequences, morality leads in the individual to immortality of the soul. What is most strange is the absence of any treatment of the problem of evil. This is perhaps not unrelated to the author's inadequate evaluation of the concept of immortality.

Roth sees the significant contribution of Judaism in the area of morality in its insistence upon "serving God out of love" with its ultimate rejection of self-interest or utilitarian motivations. In spite of all the quotes, however, Roth succeeds in showing only that God should not be served for material rewards or on condition of rewards. If acting righteously is meeting "the claims of our rational fac-

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ulty," then surely there can be nothing wrong with serving God in order that the purpose of the commandments may be realized, which purpose is nothing but the perfection of our soul. Here man serves God in order to perfect his soul, which is a form of what G. E. Moore has called "Egoistic Hedonism," a doctrine of an ultimate end. This is an inescapable conclusion for the rationalist who rejects the self-transcending significance of the commandments offered by the Kabbalah and should be accepted as such, as does Isaac Abarbanel in his commentary on *Avot* 1. People in rational houses, should not throw stones against "interest moralities."

What the reviewer found most puzzling, however, is the fact that Professor Roth has managed to write an entire book on Judaism containing a chapter entitled "Revelation, Metaphysics and History" without giving a clear explication of his view of revelation. There are statements in the book which lend themselves to opposite and conflicting conclusions. On the one hand we are told, "It is by our intelligence that we are linked to God." "Human thinking is part of a process initiated by the thought of God." "The wonder of Abraham is that by the use of reason man can find God . . . It is thus regular order of nature which is the door to religion. . . But God is also manifested in the order of morals . . . Creation, Abraham and Sinai are wondrous events which as a fact took place in nature." These assertions put together seem

to point to a sort of humanism in which God's revelation to man is His gift of reason. Yet, Professor Roth repeatedly states that Judaism is not the product of the Jews; that Judaism is not man's image of God but God's image of man! Indeed, our author goes further and states that Judaism rests on certain minimal data which are not metaphysical, i.e., deducible from first principles, but historical; that religion though consonant with human nature is not a manifestation of human nature but rather of a divine nature (p. 154). As Professor Roth puts it in his earlier work on Maimonides, "Religious truth arises in the heart. All that the rationalist asks is that it should come out through the head." ("Guide For the Perplexed: Moses Maimonides" p. 130). In these latter statements our author appears to be pointing to an intuitive or prophetic source of religious truth.

However, if in the basic data of Judaism such as the theophany at Sinai, "God is breaking into our lives," if information is being revealed from above, then certainly this is not an event in the natural order but rather the intersection of the eternal and the temporal. In short, on the most crucial question of all — how should or could modern man apprehend the Bible as the word of God — Professor Roth is unclear and ambiguous.

In his treatment of Zohar mysticism, Professor Roth is true to his rationalistic bias and sees it as a "revolt" which runs "counter to the basic assumptions of Judaism." Although he quotes Profes-

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sor Scholem's work on the subject, Professor Roth has evidently been unimpressed by Scholem's attempts to show that in terms of establishing a satisfactory and intimate relationship to the Halakhah the Aggadah and the Liturgy, the outstanding manifestations of rabbinic Judaism, the Kabbalah succeeded where the philosophers failed.

Professor Roth is strangely silent on the entire question of the land of Israel, mentioning it only periph-

erally in connection with Yehudah Halevi and Achad Ha-Am. He makes no attempt to show its place in the scheme of Judaism or the challenge the State of Israel poses for the Jew in Galut today.

We could only wish that Professor Roth leave portrait painting to the artist and give us next a systematic account of the philosophical issues involved in a personal commitment to Judaism today.

On Sexual Intercourse, by MOSES MAIMONIDES, translated from the Arabic with introduction and commentary, edited by Morris Gorlin (Brooklyn: Rambash Publishing Co., 1961)

Reviewed by Jacob I. Dienstag

Among the many books by Maimonides on medicine is one entitled "On Sexual Intercourse." The book, originally written in Arabic at the request of a nephew of Saladin, the Sultan al-Muzaffer, was published by Rabbi H. Kroner with a German translation, followed by a commentary and Hebrew translation.

The work before us contains an English translation from the German of Kroner, though the claim on the title page is that it was "translated from the Arabic." We are at a loss to understand the purpose of this publication in which the editor admits that "no attempt has been made to set up a scholarly apparatus of various versions, translations, etc." (p. 22), the procedure followed by the leading scholar in the field, Dr. S. Munt-

ner. If this work is for the general reader, why was it necessary to interpolate the text with a "commentary" in which the editor displays overabundant erudition in aphrodisiac literature? The title page carries the presumptuous caption "Medical Historical Studies of Medieval Jewish Medical Works" of which this is volume I. One would expect that such a work, prominently advertised in the New York Times under this caption and selling for ten dollars, should at least be written in a coherent manner. The following is an example of the style: "He [Maimonides] fell ill in 1200 and probably was unable to appear at the court until his death in 1204" (pp. 11-12). Similar examples are found in the entire volume.

The translation, the introduction, including the editor's rather erudite commentary, and the ex-