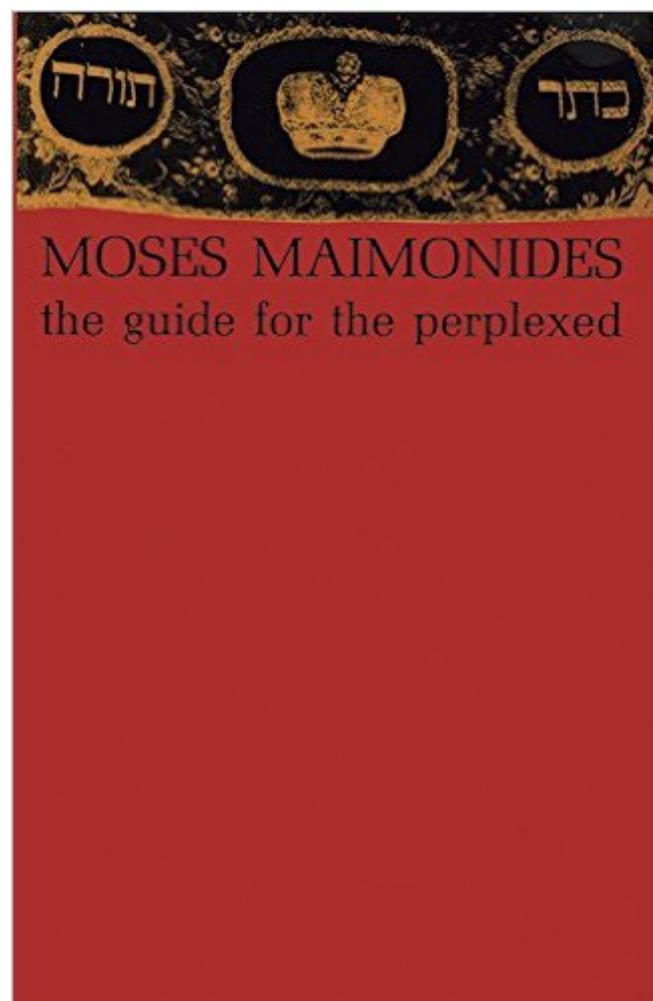


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The Guide For The Perplexed



Synopsis

This is the full, unabridged text of one of the greatest philosophic works of all time. Written by a 12th- century thinker who was equally active as an original philosopher and as a Biblical and Talmudic scholar, it is both a classic of great historical importance and a work of living significance today. The Guide for the Perplexed was written for scholars who were bewildered by the conflict between religion and the scientific and philosophic thought of the day. It is concerned, basically, with finding a concord between the religion of the Old Testament and its commentaries, and Aristotelian philosophy. After analyzing the ideas of the Old Testament by means of "homonyms," Maimonides examines other reconciliations of religion and philosophy (the Moslem rationalists) and then proposes his own resolution with contemporary Aristotelianism. The Guide for the Perplexed was at once recognized as a masterwork, and it strongly influenced Jewish, Christian, and Moslem thought of the Middle Ages. It is necessary reading for any full comprehension of the thought of such scholastics as Aquinas and Scotus, and indispensable for everyone interested in the Middle Ages, Judaism, medieval philosophy, or the larger problems which Maimonides discusses.

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Customer Reviews

I'm going to try to separate my critique of the text as it is presented, and Maimonides work. The typeface used here is awfully small, and crammed onto the pages with a crowbar, it seems. The margins must be measured with a micrometer. I suppose the publishers were determined to get the thing into one volume, but this book is really pretty slender; I don't see why it couldn't be larger to accommodate larger print, with more white space, so the words aren't crammed together like

passengers in steerage. The translation is dated, and takes some getting used to, if you haven't had a lot of exposure to late Victorian English, the language may be off-putting. I happen to have a degree in English literature, and have read many styles extensively, and barely notice how dated the language was. There are other translations, but Freidlander, in this translation is very cautious in keeping his words consistent. This is important, because a large part of Guide for the Perplexed is defining Biblical terms. The Guide for the Perplexed is a brilliant work. Maimonides is my nomination for "most important post-Talmudic scholar." The Guide is not a simple work; Maimonides does not spell things out; he doesn't give succinct answers to ages old questions. One doesn't go to this book, look up "Cain," and say, "Ah, there's where he got his wife." This is a book to aid the reader in becoming a better scholar. Where Maimonides does not give answers, he presents the tools that may assist the reader in studying the Torah, and coming up with his (or her!) own answers. Words are defined, and also analyzed in an etymological way, which is really more mystical than scientific, but we're talking Torah.

This has become one of my favourite non-fiction books. The Rambam (Maimonides) is an absolute giant of learning and explanations. In this volume, he presents many of the philosophical sides of Judaism which are rarely encountered. The text is divided into 3 books. The first book starts with discussing the use of homonyms in the Bible, especially in relation to describing God. The thesis that emerges is that it is only superficially that the Bible describes God as corporeal but the real doctrine precludes corporeality. The second topic discussed is the nature of esoteric study in Judaism and why it should only be taught in a restricted manner. The third topic is where Rambam protests against people using positive attributes to describe God and tries to prove that God is beyond such attributes. Then, he describes the Kalam argument (an Islamic school of thought that tried to prove the existence of God amongst other things) and points out his view of the flaws in it. The second book starts with a discussion of Aristotelian philosophy in terms of cosmology and metaphysics and compares that with Judaism, especially the mystical tradition. Rambam then gives his own view of the world structure which is at times very amusing in terms of what we know of science but still very interesting. Then, he describes the nature of prophecy and what exactly it meant to be a Biblical prophet. The third book opens with a hinted exposition of mystical passages in the Bible, such as Ezekiel's Chariot (Ezek Chap 1 and others). Then, he talks about God and the problem of Evil as well as providence. Finally, he describes the perfect worship of God as well as the purpose of most of the major commandments in the Torah.

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