

Conclusion

Throughout our three chapters on modern Jewish appropriations of the Maimonidean legacy we have assessed the value of arguments put forward by three thinkers: Yeshayahu Leibowitz, David Hartman and Joseph Soloveitchik. Like a stockbroker seeking out inefficiencies in a derivatives market, we have tested the philosophical metrics and relative worth of their respective Maimonideanism, of how far they stray from or adhere to the original intentions—as difficult as they may be to measure—of the Rambam. By way of conclusion, here are the final assessments:

The opening chapter centered on the various roles Maimonides, in the *Guide*, assigns the commandments, and Leibowitz's response to them. We argued that his positivist case could be made if and only if the final chapter was chapter 51, rather than the technical conclusion of the book in chapter 54. It was a difficult case to argue but a worthwhile one, as David Shatz showed. It permitted a radical new insight into the purpose of the Law: that the ostensible teleology of Maimonides—that is, that the function of the Law focuses on the perfection of the body and soul, leading to union with the Active Intellect—in fact hid the singular rationale of the commandments—the worship of God. Notwithstanding the uniqueness of this argument—it is unacceptable for most scholars of Maimonides—it has clarity and can be supported through Maimonides' texts. However, we do recognize that the selective use of the *Guide*'s comments on the Law leaves Leibowitz open to charges of over-emphasis on some features (3.51) along with an underdeveloped appreciation for others (3.25-3.50). While we acknowledge the mixed success of Leibowitz's management of the Maimonidean legacy, we can confidently assert that his case for a positivist/formalist reading of the Rambam is cogent and worthy of further reflection and study.

The Moses Maimonides of David Hartman parallels most closely another Moses: Moses Mendelssohn, the central figure of the *Haskalah*. The *Haskalah* was the Jewish Enlightenment of the 18th century, linked to the general Enlightenment culture of Western

Europe. Mendelssohn held close to the principle features of the Enlightenment: a discriminating use of reason, skepticism towards traditional authority, a stress on the universality of ethics in place of the particulars of belief and a sensibility about the world that can be described as pluralistic. If Hartman's Moses was Mendelssohn instead of Maimonides, then his appropriation would have been spot on. But Maimonides was not a well-heeled 18th century German burgher. Hartman wrenched Maimonides out of the philosophical matrix of medieval Aristotelianism, and attempted to pass him off as a *philosophe*. The endeavor failed. Maimonides was neither a pluralist, nor an *Aufklärung* rationalist (he was an Aristotelian metaphysical rationalist), nor an ethicist of the type depicted by Hartman. It is not from an absence of understanding that Hartman misreads Maimonides (he is often intelligent and always thoughtful), but rather from an ideological need to coerce the Rambam into philosophical and religious attitudes that he would not countenance.

The thinker most at comfort with Maimonides among the three covered in this thesis is Soloveitchik. Due to the high level of comfort and ease of use with which Soloveitchik utilized Maimonides, his success is, in some ways, the hardest to determine. Soloveitchik's Maimonides was as much a proof-text as a presence in *Halakhic Man*. No large claims of novel interpretive strategies were advanced by Soloveitchik in his use of the Rambam. Instead, Maimonides was tactically deployed to reinforce Soloveitchik's innovative conceptions of creation, repentance, time, divine providence and prophecy. In this regard, he was the most successful. But Soloveitchik also took the fewest chances with Maimonides; he had a bigger gamble: the total revaluation of traditional Jewish thought in light of new scientific and mathematical models of reality. In the quadrant of risk, then, Soloveitchik's use of Maimonides was located in the best quarter: low risk, high reward.

The above paragraphs describe the immediate concerns of this thesis. However, a global question is embedded within the thesis as well. The nature of Jewish religious identity in the modern world is close to the hearts of all three thinkers. Leibowitz proposes a split in consciousness and epistemology. Knowledge of God and knowledge of the world are not antithetical; they simply have nothing to do with one another. One knowledge has no points of comparison with the other. This points to a Jewish identity

that allows for a fully secular life and a fully religious life. For Hartman, religious identity does not involve a split in knowledge and epistemology. He seeks integration of the religious self and the secular self that Leibowitz wants to keep apart. Soloveitchik, we would argue, exploits modernity for Jewish ends. All the advances in the sciences lead to greater opportunity for halakhic creativity. Moreover, Soloveitchik uses the model of the sciences to look at halakha as a data set, as when he discusses the dimensions of a natural spring and whether it fits the halakhic dimensions for constructing a spring for use for immersion.¹ Although our sympathies are with Leibowitz and his demand for the removal of human psychology from the epistemology of belief, it is Soloveitchik who most ably brings together philosophy and faith. Soloveitchik is able to use the philosophical tools of modernity to serve the Jewish aims of a religious life. He comes closer than Leibowitz and Hartman to harmonizing universality with particularity. And Maimonides is his model and guide for this endeavor.

Other sons of Maimonides are worthy of critical attention: Hermann Cohen, David Novak, Lenn Goodman, to name a few.² The three sons discussed here, however, were the most public of Maimonides' modern sons and their use of him reached the widest audience. Each approached the Rambam in their unique way, with greatly varying levels of accomplishment. Little secondary work has been done on their extensive relationship with Maimonides, but I hope our contribution, no matter how small, is a step in the right direction.

¹ Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 20

² Hermann Cohen, *Ethics of Maimonides*, trans. Almut Sh. Bruckstein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); David Novak, *Natural Law in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Lenn Goodman, *God of Abraham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Maimonides plays a central role in Goodman and Novak, but the latter has a more complex, more nuanced view of the Rambam.