

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Between Reason and Faith: Anti-Rationalism in Italian Jewish Thought 1250-1650*, by ISAAC E. BARZILAY (The Hague: Mouton, 1967).

*Reviewed by*  
Edith Wyschogrod

When skepticism and enlightenment run counter to the spirit of Torah observance their incursion upon a cohesive practice-centered Judaism is met with vigorous counterattack. A deepening attachment to the Torah as a means of drawing closer to the Divine source of life is evoked as the only appropriate response to the assault upon Jewish religiosity. Thus it was in the pale of settlement when Judaism, tainted by Haskalah culture, provoked the pious into bitter reaction against various manifestations of secular non-belief, or earlier still, when rational speculation as embodied in Graeco-Islamic philosophy was seen by some as the basis for a mass flight from Jewish faith.

In a series of monographs on representative thinkers of religious anti-rationalism as it took shape in Italy from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, Isaac E. Barzil-

ay presents a continuous history of the intellectual ferment that followed in the wake of Maimonidean rationalism. *Between Reason and Faith* also meticulously documents the historical context in which this speculation took place. Among the more important figures discussed are Hillel Ben Shmuel Ben El'azer of Verona, one of a group of "enlightenment" thinkers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, whose admiration for Maimonides was nevertheless colored by some negative criticism of Maimonides' view of prophecy; Joseph Ya'aves, a fifteenth century anti-rationalist to whom an anthropomorphic conception of the Deity appeared theologically more appropriate than that of "self-styled wise intellectuals," to use his terms, and Judah Moscato, a true Renaissance universal man whose neo-Platonism led him to assume that human beatitude consisted in contemplation of the Divine and who was one of the great musicologists of his time.

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Essays on Joseph Ibn Yahya, Azariah Figo and Judah del Bene are also included.

Perhaps the key essay in this volume is one on the Abravanel. It discusses among other matters the *locus classicus* of this conflict between rationalist and anti-rationalist thought, the Commentary of Isaac Abravanel on Maimonides's *Guide*. We see at once that both thinkers share a belief in the Scriptural doctrine of creation as over and against the view of the Islamic Aristotelians that matter is eternal. Where then is the difference? Why is Maimonides a rationalist and Abravanel an opponent of rationalism? While he praises his predecessor's refutation of the Aristotelian position as a "protective wall," the Abravanel considers Maimonides's replies weak and unconvincing. Indeed the chain of reasoning which leads to the opposite conclusion, namely that matter is eternal and that the *creatio ex nihilo* is impossible, presents a more formidable case. Abravanel is forced to conclude: "In view of the strength of the arguments on behalf of eternity, and the weakness of the arguments in support of creation, I have reconsidered my way and returned to the path of the holy sages of the past . . . I have chosen the way of faith; speculations I hate, and theorizing about things inconceivable by sense, I consider nonsensical and misleading."

Both thinkers are interested in conferring the strongest possible certainty upon the conclusion that God created the world out of nothing. What the Abravanel doubts is that such certainty can be estab-

lished by demonstrative reason, for it is precisely demonstrative reason which is fallible. If trusted too far, reason which is a mere accessory of faith might rebel against the truths of faith itself.

The contrast between so-called rationalist and anti-rationalist thought emerges most clearly in the field of Biblical exegesis. The book of Ezekiel have provided the subject for extensive commentary by both Maimonides and Isaac Abravanel. The Maimonidean reading insists upon translating the Biblical imagery into Aristotelian terms: the "wheels" of the chariot signify prime matter and the four elements, the "living creatures" refer to the heavenly bodies, the *hashmal* are the detached intelligences. While Abravanel points to some failures in terms of the literal correspondence of the philosophical to the Biblical entities, his criticism reverts to a more basic issue, that of the existential plight of the Jewish people at the time of the destruction of the Temple. Rejecting metaphysical and astronomical explanation, he argues that if it were the Divine intention to communicate speculative truths, these truths would have been revealed in a form appropriate to their content. As for Ezekiel, ". . . his prophecies are concerned with the sins of Israel, the destruction of Jerusalem, or the exile of the people and their future restoration. What possible interest could Ezekiel have had in spheres, elements, and intelligences, to place them at the beginning of his prophecies? And what bearing do they have altogether on the problem of the de-

struction and the exile?"

Finally the approach of Isaac Abravanel differs from that of Maimonides in the realm of ethical teaching. Why do Jews perform the *mitzvot*? According to Maimonides one obeys the commandments not for the sake of reward or punishment but "for their own sake since one should love truth for the sake of truth." Is this stand a plea for the autonomy of reason as, let us say, Kant understands it? Does he hope to establish, to borrow a phrase from Kant once again, "religion in the light of reason alone?" Does the virtue of the Divine commandment lie in its being commanded or in its inner reasonableness? Abravanel senses a painful ambiguity in the *Guide*. His own position is quite undialectical: we owe allegiance only to the heteronomous law which the commandment expresses. He contends that Maimonides's appeal to the Aristotelian mean as a standard of human action leaves man at the mercy of a rationality which, at best, serves divinely ordained ends, at worst leads man seriously astray. "The path of the Torah which God has set for his people is the only right one . . ."

Isaac Barzilay is a formidable scholar. He is both judicious and subtle in his presentation of the rationalist and anti-rationalist thinkers with whom he deals, engaging them in a kind of running dialogue. The anti-rationalists are not vague obscurantists. More often than not they are clear and clever exponents of the way of faith. But if this controversy is to engage us beyond the level of mere historical

curiosity we must try to understand it in terms developed by contemporary philosophy and theology. The designations "rationalist" and "anti-rationalist," which we have used up to now to distinguish those who have one standard of truth to which both Judaism and secular learning can be accommodated from those who wish to separate the realm of faith from that of philosophical speculation, must be re-examined in the light of what we mean by Reason. Let us turn for a moment to a distinction drawn by a modern thinker, Paul Tillich, between "ontological" (profound) reason and "technical" (shallow) reason. The former enables the mind to seize and transfigure reality. It is strongly charged with an Eros for truth which hurtles consciousness forward in its quest for reality. Technical reason is mere "reasoning"; it is ontological reason truncated and bereft of its aesthetic and emotive elements. Obviously all thought must use technical reason or it would degenerate into incoherence. But, can the existence of God, for example, ever be adduced by technical reason alone? When shallow reason replaces profound reason it tends to reason away the most significant aspects of human existence.

In the light of these modern distinctions what can we say of Maimonides's rationalism? Does his view of prophetic vision reason away the life world of the prophet? Or does his view that the perfect form moves all things, that we love truth for the sake of truth, confer a power upon his use of reason that elevates it to an ontological

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level? Does the Abravanel's concern for the sin of Israel and his rejection of Islamic Aristotelianism as a means for the interpretation of holy truth represent a deep use of reason? Or does he merely retreat from asking basic questions? Does Maimonides's *Guide* represent a form of *hybris* in the religious arena like that of modern positivism in the secular? Barzilay as a careful and conscientious scholar

quite rightly deals only with internal questions, questions raised and answered in the texts themselves. In this sense his book is first-rate and indispensable to anyone interested in the history of Jewish philosophy. However, it merits close reading not only for its intrinsic historical interest but also for the questions it provokes in the broader context of Jewish thought.

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*The Education of American Jewish Teachers*, edited by OSCAR I. JANOWSKY (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

Reviewed by Ephraim Frankel

Two impressive and highly professional books analyzing different spheres of Jewish education recently appeared. The first\* was a study replete with statistical data and tables tracing the rapid development of the Jewish Day School movement from its struggle for acceptance to its present budgetary problems. The second was an "inventory and assessment" of the other dominant force in Jewish education — the training of Jewish teachers — by 22 specialists who, according to the editor, "know the rewards and frustrations of Jewish teacher education."

Dr. Janowsky's book is a result of a Brandeis University colloquium on "The Education of American Jewish Teachers" held during the spring of 1966. The papers presented by the participants were incorporated in the

book and include the origin and development of Jewish teacher-training schools, profiles of Hebrew teacher colleges and students, and a discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the training schools. Unlike its non-Jewish counterpart, *The Education of American Teachers*, by James Conant (McGraw Hill, 1963), which deals entirely with the curriculum of the teachers' colleges, this volume follows the student from his matriculation to his employment, and ultimately (and regrettably) to his departure from Jewish education — at least for a large segment of the teaching profession. The book confronts the American Jewish community with a bewildering problem. Statistics clearly indicate that the largest number of Jewish children are presently enrolled in the various Jewish school systems. Yet there is a dearth of qualified teachers for these youngsters despite the

\* *The Jewish Day School in America*, by Alvin I. Schiff (New York: Jewish Education Committee Press, 1966).

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increasing number of teacher graduates from accredited colleges in the last decade.

There are 11 teachers' colleges accredited by the National Board of License — an agency of the American Association for Jewish Education. A basic requirement set down by the *Iggud* (association of Hebrew Teachers Colleges) is "that all instruction from the first to the graduating year be conducted in Hebrew." Dr. Janowsky cogently points out that "this provision severely limits the range of accreditation as it excludes some of the Yeshivot which are a source of day school teachers." The practical outcome is that many teachers who are engaged by the day schools — and are usually quite good — are not accredited by the American Association, although, because of their generally superior Jewish learning, they are usually accredited by agencies such as Torah Umesorah. On the other hand, many of those graduating from the accredited schools (with the possible exception of Yeshiva University schools) are inadequately prepared to meet the requirements of the day school.

Alvin Schiff's interesting and thoughtful essay on "The Students of Hebrew Teachers Colleges: Profile and Career Choice," is very revealing. Based upon the return of questionnaires of 897 students (almost 50 percent of those polled) in 16 teacher-training schools, the survey sought to profile the future teachers and to discern the personal, social, educational, and religious factors influencing their choice of Hebrew teaching as a career.

Dr. Schiff points out that the existing ratio between male and female Hebrew teachers is 7:1 in favor of the latter — a striking turn-about in the last half century! Proposals to alleviate the male shortage are suggested. Dr. Hyman Grinstein suggests that we "staff the lower schools with women. Thus men would be reserved for the higher schools." He foresees, however, opposition from the Orthodox because women are untrained in Talmud. Other proposals deal mainly with the material side of teaching; i.e., increasing the salary, providing security, expanding fringe benefits, etc. One can hardly find fault with these suggestions. Nonetheless, the problem is much more complex and involved. The element of self-respect is the greatest deterrent to making Jewish education a life career. It is inconceivable that those who prepare for the teaching profession will find satisfaction and growth in a part-time school, staffed by part-time teachers and attended by part-time students. The ambitious teacher utilizes his free time to advance himself academically. And once this goal has been met, more lucrative fields beckon him.

The day school movement emerges as a tri-dimensional force in Jewish life by providing its students with an intensive Jewish education, by employing teachers on a full-time basis and by recruiting and encouraging students towards Jewish education as a career. Religious affiliation, according to surveys, has also aided in influencing career selection. 61 percent belong to Orthodox synagogues as opposed to 32 per-

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cent and 2 percent belonging to Conservative and Reform respectively. In addition, 47.5 percent attended elementary day schools and 45 percent attended Yeshiva high schools. Despite their strong synagogue affiliation, most of the respondents decided to enter Jewish education on their own initiative. Very few (about 10 percent) credit their teachers. *Even fewer mention rabbis or principals* (my emphasis). These figures reflect our own sense of inadequacy and resignation.

The chapters dealing with the curriculum of the teacher-training schools raise pressing questions.

Are they realistic in their goals? Do the schools consider the needs of the elementary and secondary Hebrew schools? How frequent — if at all — is there an exchange of information between the theoreticians and the practitioners? Are the colleges succeeding in making an all-out effort on behalf of *chinukh*? These problems are discussed but their solutions depend on those committed to Jewish education.

The editor and his contributors are to be commended for their efforts. They look to rabbis and educators for help. What shall we offer?

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