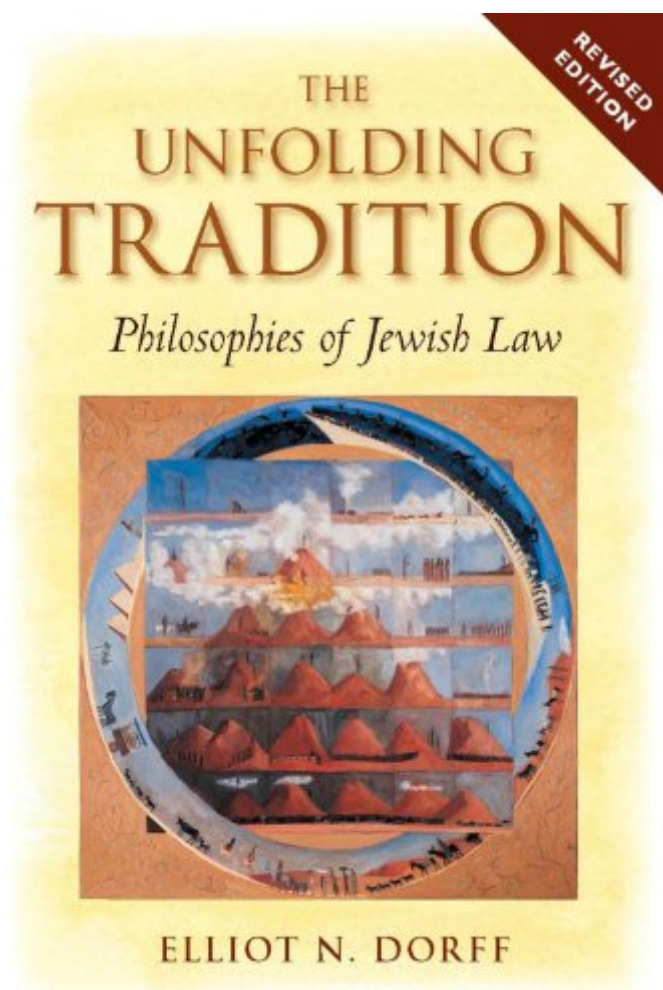


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THE UNFOLDING TRADITION: Philosophies Of Jewish Law



Synopsis

This volume analyzes the biblical and rabbinic roots of Jewish law, as interpreted by leading rabbis of the Conservative movement and beyond. This long-awaited work is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the roots, development and interpretation of Jewish law in general, and for those who wish to know how Conservative Judaism evolved and what it represents.

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Customer Reviews

What is halakha (loosely translated as "Jewish law".) This book systematically discusses questions such as: Where does it come from? Are Jews obligated to obey it? If so, why? What does it mean to be obligated? How does one decide questions of Jewish law? Unfortunately, most Orthodox authors do not study philosophy, and make no attempt to systematically describe their approach of halakha. On the other extreme, Reform authors do not view halakha as authoritative in any way. They have produced no systematic view of Jewish law, and wildly disagree themselves over whether any part of should be normative at all. In contrast, it is Jews affiliated with Conservative, Traditional and Masorti Judaism who have thus produced the most intelligible and systematic writings on this

subject. Not only does Rabbi Dorff systematically present his own philosophy in regards to the above questions, but he presents the views of many other Jewish thinkers, both inside Conservative Judaism, as well as Reform and Orthodoxy. Dorff presents a serious philosophical critique of every theory of law discussed: What are the strengths of each position, and what are the weaknesses. No partisan polemicist, he is equally critical of his own theory of law as he is of other people's theories. Why should anyone care about this subject? Rabbi Dorff writes: "A theory of law describes how the author understands the nature of human beings and human society, the role of law for people and societies construed in that way, the sources of authority of the law, the ways in which the law can retain authority and yet change over time to remain relevant to current circumstances, and the relationship between law and morality, religion, and custom. The reason why one should care about such matters is because the way you understand such matters has a critical effect on how you understand yourself and your community, the role of law in your life and that of your community, and the ways in which law can and should remain the same or change over time." This book includes readings by Zachariah Frankel, Solomon Schechter, Mordecai Kaplan, Robert Gordis, Jacob Agus, Abraham Joshua Heschel, David M. Gordis, Louis Jacobs, Joel Roth, Neil Gillman, Edward Feld, Alana Suskin, Raymond Scheindlin and Gordon Tucker, as well as theorists on the right and the left of the Conservative movement. The book also compares Jewish and American law, and asks questions about the nature of legal systems, the relationship between law and religion, and the evolution of law.

The author's summaries and analyses were excellent and sufficient for a non-expert like me. The extensive quotes from the works of the philosophers were more than I needed to get some understanding of the issues being dealt with.

this is a well written compilation of opinions about law and halakhah that spans the conservative movement and beyond.

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