Economics, as we know it today, began to take shape in Europe during the eighteenth century. Yet, economic analysis has a much longer lineage. Such analysis may be found in the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers, Islamic scholars, medieval Schoolmen, and the Mercantilists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The literature of ancient China, as well as that of India, also provides instances.

There exists, however, a vast, ancient Jewish literature which contains a wealth of analytical insights on economic issues. This Jewish contribution has been subject to little scientific investigation in the light of modern Economics. The predominant source of that contribution is found in the surviving writings of antique Jewish civilization – the Talmud.

Through study of the original dialectics of the Talmud, the present authors have been able to discern a wide range of economic discussions which display an extraordinary degree of sophistication when viewed from either contemporary or modern perspectives. Some of these discussions are extensive in scope, singular in approach, analytic in method, and profound as to insight. Sections of the Talmud, and the reflections of subsequent commentators on those passages, are rich in concepts and in statements of functional relationships that were later to become significant in the reasoning of the political economists or that of their professional-academic successors.

It is in this latter sense that the talmudic tradition embodies thought which can be said to “anticipate” later developments. This is not to claim that economists, modern or contemporary, have drawn consciously on talmudic sources. Nor is it to claim that Economics as a discipline was conceived, or even contemplated, by the rabbis. These latter were concerned with matters legal, moral, and theological, as were later the medieval scholastics. Nevertheless, in the process of investigating some of those matters they were led to insights that were to emerge again in a new disciplinary context. This book attempts to identify certain of those insights. Its findings are intended to be of interest to students of the history of
economic thought and of the *Talmud*, as well as to the general reader in the broad field of the history of ideas.

Part One of the book is devoted to background analyses. The opening chapter is designed for readers unfamiliar with the *Talmud*, and it offers an introduction to that work's scope and development, plus some illustrations of its methodology. The second chapter outlines the biblical background to talmudic economic analysis, with particular reference to economic observations in the Wisdom tradition, and to the economic content of the legal codes contained in the Torah (Pentateuch). Both the Wisdom tradition and the law codes were vital elements in the intellectual milieu which gave rise to the talmudic tradition. As such, they provided points of departure for aspects of rabbinic debate.

Parts Two, Three and Four take up particular issues in economic analysis, and then compare the relevant talmudic treatments of them with those that correspond in the literature of Economics. Part Two deals with questions of macro-economic significance. In Part Three, the focus is on micro-economic matters. Part Four is devoted to the economic implications of the rabbinic treatment of the values of persons. Finally, in Part Five we turn to the question of whether or not talmudic insights may have had an impact on the evolution of economic thought and practice in the West.

The foregoing are supplemented by an Appendix which lists related modern studies. This bibliography is intended as an aid to further research. It includes publications by historians of economic thought, plus other items that could prove helpful to workers in this field.

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R.A.O.

B.G.