# Part I

**1.2a** *In the name of the LORD, God of the universe.*
—Genesis 21:33[2]

My dear student Rabbi Joseph (thy Rock protect thee), son of Rabbi Judah (may he rest in paradise)[3]—When you first introduced yourself, proposing to travel so far to read with me, I admired your zest for inquiry and the hearty appetite for ideas I could see in your poetry. Your essays and artful prose pieces[4] arrived from Alexandria before I could assay

2. Jewish documents in Aramaic, Hebrew, or Arabic typically open with an invocation—e.g., "In Thy name, O Merciful, do I trust." Even the Amidah prayer is prefaced by such an invocation. The rabbinic norm and usage are paralleled in the Islamic *basmallah*, "In the name of God, merciful and compassionate." See Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 5.325, 5.595 *n.* 3. Where a poet might invoke the Muse and Plato's Athenian stranger invokes the gods (*Laws* 712b), Maimonides opens each part of the *Guide* with Abraham's proclaiming of the God of the universe—*el ʿolam*, by which Maimonides understands the universal, not the eternal God, as the words are often read (e.g., by Abraham Ibn Ezra at Isaiah 40:28); see 2.28a, 58b, 71b, 3.63b, 3.126b. See Onkelos, Jonathan, and the Samaritan versions. The verse uses the Tetragrammaton, taken by Maimonides to signify God's absoluteness (I 61). It was by this name, the Sages say (B. Berakhot 7b, on Genesis 15:8), that God made Himself known to Abraham, whom Maimonides credits with the reasoned discovery of God's universality (*MT* Laws regarding Pagan Worship 1.2; cf. II 39; III 29). See 2.58b and III *n.* 585.

3. Joseph b. Judah b. Isaac Ibn Shimon (Ibn Simeon, d. 1226). The addressee, a member of the rabbinical court in Egypt, corresponded with Maimonides throughout his life. He should not be confused with Joseph b. Judah Ibn ʿAqnīn, another disciple close to Maimonides when both lived under wraps in Fez. Joseph, the addressee of the *Guide*, had studied medicine in Ceuta and became a highly respected physician in Aleppo; see Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, 130. His philosophical work on Necessary Existence and Emanation, much in the spirit of the *Guide*, favored arguments for creation over an Avicennan argument from contingency. The work is extant but was long erroneously ascribed to Ibn ʿAqnīn, a confusion resolved by Baneth in "Joseph Ibn Shimon"; see Maimonides, *Igrot*, Shailat, 1.246–48.

4. Joseph's poetic gift piqued Maimonides' interest. See Yahalom, "Maimonides and Hebrew Poetic Language." The artful prose pieces were *maqāmāt*, a genre of poetry-laden prose invented by the Muslim literary virtuoso al-Hamadhānī (968–1008), notably imitated by al-Ḥarīrī (1054–112) and (for the first time in Hebrew) in the *Takhkemoni* of Judah al-Ḥarīzī (1165/66–1225), who also made Hebrew translations of parts of *CM* and all of the *Guide*—less famously than Ibn Tibbon but with literary flair; see Scheindlin, "Al-Ḥarīzī's Translation." Joseph's poetic sense drew Maimonides' attention, since understanding the Torah demands sensitivity to its poetics (1.4a, 6ab). Poetry, Maimonides holds, can be a moral and intellectual guide (1.39a)—although unworthy poetry panders to base appetites and passions. See 3.18a; cf. Fārābī, *Fuṣūl al-Madanī*, Dunlop §52. Moses bids farewell to Israel in

your thinking firsthand. 'Perhaps his reach exceeds his grasp,' I said. So when we reviewed some of the astronomy you had done, with the mathematical prerequisites you'd studied,[5] I was all the more delighted with your quality of mind and swift grasp of ideas. I could see how keen you were for mathematics. So I let you work with it, confident of the outcome. But once you reviewed for me some of the logic you'd studied, I set my hopes on you, sensing that you were ready for some of the mysteries of Scripture to be opened up to you and to discover what advanced readers should find there.[6] I dropped a few hints and glimmers and saw you asking for more. You wanted me to clarify certain points of **1.2b** theology, to tell you what the *Mutakallimūn* were after and whether their methods are cogent—or, if not, how to class them.

I saw you had touched on these subjects with others but were still puzzled and perplexed, your fine soul *seeking the right words* (Ecclesiastes 12:10), but I kept reining you in, urging you to take one step at a time and get a firm grip on the truth, not just stumble

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a song (Deuteronomy 32:1–43), and Maimonides balks at translating *MT* into Arabic, lest that spoil its melody (*Igrot*, Shailat, 409). For the Yad as poetry, see Gillis, *Reading*, 25–27, 63–64.

5. Maimonides had studied geometry and knew well the advances and unsolved problems of Ptolemaic astronomy in his day; I 73, 1.115a; II 9, 11, 24; III 15, 3.29a. For the religious importance of astronomy for him, see 1.19a and Pines, *Works*, 5.89–103. Study of astronomy and seeing its mathematical basis, Plato argues, helps minds rise from the physical to the intellectual (*Republic* 527–30; Plato, *Timaeus* 20a, 27a; cf. Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 8, LCL 1.8–9). To Fārābī, astronomy is the highest of the physical sciences. He, too, sees the search for the principles of astronomy as leading on to metaphysics (Fārābī, *Fī Taḥṣīl al-Ṣaʿādah*, tr. Mahdi as *The Attainment of Happiness* in *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, §§16, 21–22). The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ write, "When a person of intelligence and understanding studies astronomy and reflects on the measure of the spheres, the speed of their revolutions, the vastness of these stars and marvel of their motions . . . his soul will yearn to rise to the sphere and witness all that it holds. It is impossible to reach such heights burdened with this gross body. But the soul, once freed of this body, if unhindered by any base act or foul thought and not weighed down by ignorance or vice, will be there in a trice, timelessly, in fact. For a soul is where its aspirations lie; it lives with what it loves, as a lover's soul is with the beloved. If one's soul yearns to abide with this body, and what it craves are the false, sensory pleasures of corporeality and its bodily attachments, it will never leave this place or yearn to rise to the empyrean, heaven's doors will not open to it, and it will not enter paradise with the angelic throng but linger below the lunar sphere, roaming this cavern with these inconstant bodies as they reel from becoming to decay and from decay to becoming" (*Risālah 3*; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *On Astronomia*, 85–87). After echoing Plato's Myth of the Cave here, the Brethren go on to treat confinement to this world as the true sense of the Qurʾān's images of Hell: Astronomy is the gateway to paradise since it opens the mind to the realm beyond the senses, where the rational soul finds eternal life, its heritage as an emanation of God.

6. The order of study is critical, lest one get ahead of himself; cf. Plato, *Symposium* 210e.

into certitude.[7] As long as you were here, whenever some verse came up, or some passage from the Sages that hinted at an out-of-the-way idea, I explained it to you freely. But when God decreed our parting and you moved on, memories of our sessions revived an old plan of mine: Your absence spurred me to set down this work, written for you and others like you, no matter how few. I've laid it out in separate chapters,[8] all of which will reach you as I write them. Farewell.

## Introduction

*Teach me the path to take, for to Thee do I raise my soul.*
—Psalms 143:8

*To you, people, do I call; my voice, to all mankind.*
—Proverbs 8:4[9]

*Lend an ear to the words of the wise, take to heart what I have learned.*
—Proverbs 22:17[10]

The first aim of this work is to clarify the meanings of certain terms in Scripture. Some of these have multiple senses, but the ignorant take them only in certain of those senses: Although some are figurative, they take them only in the sense underlying the figure.
**1.3a** Others are ambiguous, to be taken now at face value, now metaphorically.[11]

7. "Judging things aright although unable to give a reason," as Plato's Socrates remarks, sets one, as it were, between knowledge and ignorance. "How could knowledge be unreasoning?" he asks. Yet true belief is not ignorance—"How could what hits the truth be ignorance?" (Plato, *Symposium* 202a). Still, faith is fragile and readily misled, lacking the assurance reason can afford.

8. Not disordered or "scattered" (Strauss, *Persecution*, 61)—nor simply prose. Unlike *MT*, the *Guide* does not display its thematic structure on its face. Nor does it, like *CM*, hug the coastline of the canon. The chapters, sent in installments, suggest the topic headings the Sages expect will come alive to a ready student. Maimonides' frequent anticipations and flashbacks show that the work is well planned, as he claims, and that it probably makes use of materials from his earlier drafts. See 1.3b, 6a, 9b, 9ab; cf. Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, 6, 26.

9. Efodi, Abravanel, and Shem Ṭov all note hints of a contrast in the verse: The people (*ishim*) are the elect, whom God invites to raise their souls; the voice (*kol*) heard by all mankind (*benei adam*) is the sound (*kol*) all Israel heard at Sinai, articulated in words by Moses. The verse Maimonides quotes here alerts the reader to the dual audience of this work and of the Torah. See II 33 and Diamond, *Maimonides and the Hermeneutics*, 7–9.

10. B. Ḥagigah 15b cites the verse to commend openness to truth from any source—even an apostate like Elisha ben Avuya ("Aḥer"). The sources Maimonides intends are philosophical.

11. Language exists to signify, Galen writes. Its virtue is to signify well; its vice, to signify badly. Ambiguity corrupts language and can foster equivocation, the source of all fallacies

It is not my goal to make this work transparent all through to the masses or to intellectual tyros. Nor is it my object to instruct those who study the Torah only for its law. The object of this work throughout, like that of any other of its sort, is a sound understanding of the Torah. But the specific purpose here is to arouse intellectually a religious, morally and spiritually mature person who is settled of mind and committed to the Torah's truth, who has studied and absorbed the philosophical sciences.[12] Human reason draws such a person invitingly to its domain, but he is troubled by the surface sense of certain biblical expressions. Resisting what he still takes (or was taught) is the meaning of its multivalent, metaphorical, or ambiguous words, he hangs back, perplexed and confused.[13] Should he follow his reason, reject what he took those words to say, and presume that he has shed core biblical precepts? Or should he hold fast to what he took those words to mean and fight reason's sway, dig in his heels and resist, feeling injured by reason, as though it had sullied his faith, retain his fanciful beliefs, yet remain deeply troubled by anxiety and disquiet.

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(Galen, *De Captionibus* 2, Edlow, 92–96). Galen's text, with its full taxonomy of the fallacies Aristotle treats in *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, was translated by the Christian philosopher Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī. The Torah does not use sophisms, but it can work on multiple levels, so its language does breed perplexity. Words are equivocal, Maimonides writes, when they denote quite different things, as *ʿayn* in Hebrew can mean 'eye' or 'spring.' They are univocal when their referents share an essence, as 'animal' applies to a man and a horse. Terms are ambiguous when the word alone leaves it unclear whether it should be taken in its base sense or a derived sense, as 'man' may refer to Socrates but also to his corpse or his portrait. Ambiguous terms are sometimes called amphibolous. See Harry Wolfson, "Amphibolous Terms," citing Aristotle's *Topics* II 3, 110b16–17, and commentaries like those of Alexander of Aphrodisias. Metaphors use terms in a derived or secondary sense (Maimonides, *Treatise on Logic*, Efros, 58). Al-Fārābī defines *metaphor* as the use of a term coined for one purpose to name something else, to highlight a relationship such as similarity (Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, ed. Mahdi, 141). All metaphors have a certain iridescence when we know that their terms are not meant literally. But the recognition that nothing else is like God means that any image applied to God may deconstruct itself or be deconstructed by other imagery.

12. Maimonides' *Treatise on Logic* notes two senses of 'philosophy': One refers to cogent argumentation; the other, to the views of a specific school. To disambiguate, we capitalize 'philosophy' when Maimonides intends the Neoplatonic Aristotelians who take the name *philosopher* as their own. We use lowercase when his sense is generic.

13. Maimonides uses the term *dahsha* for the consternation he hopes the *Guide* will help allay, alongside the Arabic *ḥaira*, perplexity, as in the Arabic title of the work. For thoughtful readers, the struggle to take Scripture seriously can open onto deeper, more authentic understanding. But for others, caught on the horns of the dilemma Maimonides has described, the Sages may seem simpletons, and the Torah itself will be at risk—if not dismissed as mythology, then locked in a cabinet to protect it from the rest of what one knows. Cf. *CM* Sanhedrin 10, Introduction.

A second aim of the work is to clarify the thickly veiled imagery of Scripture. Since it is not identified as imagery, dull or naive readers see only the surface sense and no deeper meaning.[14] Even a true scholar who ponders such expressions but takes them at
**1.3b** face value will be much perplexed by them. But once I have explained an image to him or noted that the language is figurative, he will get back on track and break free of his confusion. That is why I titled this work *Guide to the Perplexed*. I do not pretend it will banish every problem for one who understands it. But I can say that it will dispel most, including the gravest. Still, no sensible reader would expect me to treat exhaustively the topics I raise or to analyze in full every image I address. No rational man could do that even orally. So why would one put such things in a book, just to make himself the butt of ignorant barbs from every sophomoric blockhead?[15]

I have raised these issues broadly in my juridical writings and noted many of the key themes. I said there (*CM* Ḥagigah 2.1) that the Account of Genesis is Physics; that of the Chariot, Metaphysics.[16] And I explained the Sages' saying, "The Account of the Chariot may not be expounded even to one, unless he be wise and can grasp it of his own accord"—and even then, "only the rubrics are shared" (B. Ḥagigah 11b, 13a).[17] So do not ask me to go beyond those topic headings here. Even these basics are not set out thematically in this work but informally, intertwined with other issues that I hope to clarify. My aim is to reveal but also conceal the truths I disclose so as not to resist God's irresistible intent: to keep from the vulgar truths critical to knowing Him—as it says, *The* LORD*'s mystery is for those who fear Him* (Psalms 25:14).[18]

**1.4a** Certain core principles of physics, too, you see, are not to be taught directly. You know their words: "Nor the Account of Creation to two" (B. Ḥagigah 11b). Yet laying out all these things in a book teaches thousands in effect. So Scripture itself treats these themes figuratively and poetically, and the Sages fell into step, addressing such matters by

14. Imagery here is *mathal* (cf. the Hebrew *mashal*), often translated as "parable"—but Maimonides' reference extends far beyond what we normally call a parable.

15. Cf. Plato, *Second Letter* 314a.

16. Like Aristotle, Maimonides calls metaphysics theology. He first mentions *Pardes*, the garden of speculative inquiry, in *MT*, identifying the areas probed with Physics and Metaphysics (*MT* Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 4.13); Stern, *Matter and Form*, 81–83.

17. See *MT* Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 2.12; cf. Plato, *Republic* II 378a. Taking Solomon, the notional author of Proverbs and Song of Songs, as his guide, Maimonides follows Rabbi Ḥanina b. Ḥama (B. Taʿanit 7a) in reading Proverbs 5:16–17 as permitting instruction in metaphysical profundities so long as one's student is worthy and well prepared—despite the strictures the Sages saw in Song of Songs 4:11. See *Guide* I 34 and Klein-Braslavy, "King Solomon."

18. True piety lies in understanding; the naive may misdirect their devotion (see I 60, 1.76b).

imagery and indirection. For these cosmological issues link tightly to metaphysics. They, too, involve theological mysteries.[19]

Do not presume that any of these depths is plumbed fully and exhaustively by any of us. No. The truth may gleam for a moment, seeming bright as day, only to be obscured by matter and habit, plunging us back into the black of night, almost as dark as ever. It is like lightning flashing repeatedly overhead in the darkest night.[20] For one of us it might flash so steadily that he seems to be in constant, unbroken light, a night like day. That is the level of our greatest prophet, who was told, *But thou, stand here by Me* (Deuteronomy 5:28)[21]—and of whom it was said, *The skin of his face shone* (Exodus 34:29). For others the lightning flashes but once all through the night. That is the plane of those of whom it says, *They prophesied but did not continue* (Numbers 11:25). For still others the flashes may be steadier, or less so. Some never reach a plane where lightning illuminates the darkness for them, but some polished body might, a stone or such, gleaming in the dark.[22] But even

19. Cf. *CM* Sanhedrin 10, tr. Rosner, 140–41. Ghazālī describes physics as "investigation of the celestial world, its stars, the simple bodies that lie beneath them (water, air, earth, and fire), and their compounds (animals, plants, and minerals), what causes their changes, transformations, and intermixtures" (Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, Jabre, 23; Montgomery Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 36–37). Cosmology is the atrium to metaphysics, since the motions of the spheres mediate God's governance of nature.

20. For enlightenment as lightning, see Plato, *Letter* VII 341c; Avicenna, *Ishārāt wa-'l-Tanbīhāt*, ed. Forget, 202–3, tr. Goichon, 493; and Pines, "Limitations," 89.

21. Having told Moses to send the Israelites back to their tents, God charges him to remain and receive the Law. The verse continues: *I will tell thee every commandment, and the laws and statutes thou shalt teach them to perform in the land I give them as their heritage*. Moses' prophetic role is anchored here. His communion with God is a goal to emulate, for it is here that individual providence takes hold (III 18; cf. Fārābī, *Ārā'* 15.11, Walzer, 244).

22. Pines takes this talk of a shiny, polished body to confess that all human knowledge depends on physical objects—so immortality (won by a grasp of pure ideas) is possible only for prophets (*Works*, 5.404–31). Josef Stern follows up to build a full-bodied skepticism as the true reading of Maimonides' views on metaphysical knowledge, its motto: "No Cognition without Representation"—where 'representation' stands in for what the imagination builds and projects from the materials of sensation (Stern, *Matter and Form*, 132–249; for the motto, 191). Pines's inference, however, hangs by a philological thread, the use of the word *ṣaqīl* to characterize the polished bodies that give a secondary light to those who do not see light for themselves (*Works*, 5.411–12). The image is found in Ibn Bājjah's account of intellectual contact (*ittiṣāl*) with the divine (Bodleian MS Pococke 206). Pines cites Fārābī's reported denial of immortality in his lost commentary on *NE*. Maimonides, he reasons, must deny immortality too on the Kantian grounds that all human knowledge rests on sense perception (*Works*, 5.422). But Ibn Ṭufayl, too, uses the word *ṣaqīl*, applying it to the highly polished mirrors that relay divine light to those unable to see it for themselves (*Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, tr. Goodman, 152–53). Ibn Ṭufayl, one of our witnesses as to Fārābī's denial of immortality, roundly criticizes his predecessor for the view, not found in Fārābī's other works.

so faint a light shining down on us will not be constant. It flashes and vanishes like *the*
**1.4b** *glittering spinning sword* (Genesis 3:24). The ranks of the enlightened vary accordingly. Some never see this light but grope in the dark. Of them it is said, *They know not, neither do they understand. They walk in darkness* (Psalms 82:5). Truth, brilliant as it is, is hidden from them utterly, as it says: *Even now they see not the light shining clearly in the heavens* (Job 37:21). These are the general populace.[23] We have no need to speak of them here in this work (but see III 51).

When one who is enlightened seeks to express, orally or in writing, something of what he has gleaned of these mysteries, reflecting the level he has reached, he still cannot make even what he knows as clear and crisp to others as it is for him, as he might have done in teaching any ordinary subject. He will suffer the same effect in teaching as in learning—the same appearing and disappearing, as if by the very nature of the subject, however great or slight what he hoped to impart. So all rabbanite theological sages[24] with such truths to share speak poetically and in riddles,[25] using many images of diverse sorts, or even from diverse domains.[26] Often they situate their point in the beginning, middle,

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He complains, too, that Ibn Bājjah, distracted by his worldly concerns, left his philosophical works often sketchy or unfinished and quotes him as confessing that he wished he had had a chance to rewrite his *Essay on Contact* (*Ittiṣāl al-ʿAql bi 'l-Insān*, ed. Fakhry in *Rasā'il*, 155–73), where he had addressed the question. Yet death overtook him, Ibn Ṭufayl writes, before he could do so (*Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, tr. Goodman, 99–100). By echoing Ibn Bājjah's language, Ibn Ṭufayl signals his intent to take up the issue himself. He admires Ibn Bājjah's acuity but regrets his unfulfilled potential. It is Ibn Ṭufayl whom Maimonides echoes here: Prophets, not bodies, are the "shiny objects," mirrors, as Ibn Ṭufayl writes, reflecting and relaying God's light. Inspiration, even in prophets (other than Moses), Maimonides will argue, is mediated by the imagination (II 36). So it does have a sensory base. But reason, aided by the Active Intellect (not just in prophets!), surmounts its sensuous precursors, as Aristotle argued (*Posterior Analytics* II 19; *De Anima* III 5). We all have access to God's light. The "glittering sword" still shines for those who do not turn their backs on it. But training, as Maimonides sees it, enhances the shine of natural talents and moral purity.

23. For those unable to rise beyond the senses, see Isaac Israeli, *Works*, tr. Altmann and Stern, 139.

24. The masters intended, as Efodi explains, have engaged with philosophic, scientific, biblical, and rabbinic learning and culture. Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 28c.

25. "Perhaps those who set our mystic rites were not inferior but spoke in riddles long ago" (Plato, *Phaedo* 69c). 'Riddles' (Hebrew, *ḥiddot*) are oblique discourse, reliant on indirection. See Klein-Braslavy, "Maimonides' Commentaries," 123 *n.* 10.

26. Biblical mixed metaphors are not stylistic flaws but tacit acknowledgments that language breaks down before God's ultimacy. The Psalms teem with examples: *With Thee is the fountain of life; by Thy light do we see light* (36:10): Life, gushing from God's fountain, becomes a flood of light, awakening insight. Metaphor yields to metaphor, each image displacing and enriching the last.

or end of a figure, finding no one image apt from start to finish for the idea they hope to convey. Or the theme to be taught to those unversed in it is parceled out over several discrete images, although it is but one idea.[27] Or, more obliquely, one image might represent several different themes—one at the start, another at the end. Or it might all stand for two related theological themes. Even someone who wants to teach without imagery or indirection is drawn into a style where obscurity and compression produce a like effect—as if the wise and learned were hemmed in not just by their natural limitations but by God's will. **1.5a**

God—exalted be His very mention—wished to perfect us and enhance our lives in society with His practical laws. But this required our attaining certain intellectual convictions—chiefly, an awareness of Him, so far as we are able. That depends on metaphysics, theological knowledge, which is won only after study of natural science. For physics borders on metaphysics and is its prerequisite, as its students clearly see.[28] That is why God opens His book with the Account of Creation, which belongs to physics, as I explained (1.3b).

Given the immensity and sublimity of the idea of creation and our incapacity to grasp such ultimates themselves, the profundities that divine wisdom saw we need were broached to us obliquely and poetically—in words quite baffling. As the Sages say, "It is impossible to convey to flesh and blood the power of the Creative Act, so Scripture baldly tells you, *In the beginning God created . . .*" (Midrash Sh'nei Ketuvim, Batei Midrashot 4)—putting you on notice that these things are ineffable. You know Solomon's words: *Far off it was, and deep, deep—who can plumb it!* (Ecclesiastes 7:24). Everything about it is couched in multivalent terms. So the masses take it as best their limited understanding permits; but the astute, if they are learned, take it otherwise.[29] **1.5b**

In commenting on the Mishnah, I promised to explain certain puzzling ideas in a Book of Prophecy and a Book of Correlation,[30] the latter explaining all the troubling midrashim—all of them poetic, irrational, and much at odds with the truth if taken literally.[31] But when I began these books years ago and had written parts of them, I did not

27. Of Plato's images of the Sun, the Divided Line, and the Cave, Julia Annas argues that the transcendent Form of the Good demands seemingly disparate images to supplement and restrain each other (Annas, *Introduction*, 256).

28. Cf. Ptolemy, *Almagest*, Toomer's preface, 35–37.

29. "The young cannot distinguish what is and what is not allegory; whatever beliefs are absorbed in the mind at an early age often prove indelible and immutable" (Plato, *Republic* II 378d).

30. See *CM* Sanhedrin 10, Introduction, ed. Shailat, in *Hakdamot*, 140, 144.

31. See Davidson's discussion of the promised books, *Moses Maimonides*, 323–26.

like how the explanations were coming out.[32] If I stayed in the poetic mode, veiling what should stay hidden, I could see I would preserve the intent but just exchange one image for another, as it were. But if I explained what calls for explanation, the end product would ill suit a popular audience.[33] For my hope was just to open up these homilies and the surface sense of Scripture to ordinary people. Besides, I saw that to some numbskull from the rabbanite masses, these midrashim present no trouble at all. To an untutored clown with no grasp of nature, even impossibilities do not seem far-fetched.[34] But an honest and insightful thinker reflecting on these homilies faces a dilemma: Take them at face value, at the expense of his opinion of their author, thinking him an ignoramus, although not undermining any core belief, or give them some hidden meaning, solving the problem and still respecting the author, whether or not one had correctly grasped the inner sense.

So this work takes a different tack on the idea of prophecy, sorting out the ranks of
**1.6a** prophets and clarifying the tropes they used in their books. I have dropped the two book projects I had in hand in that earlier vein and kept to brief statements of cardinal beliefs and digests of basic truths, with hints and intimations about as explicit as in my big juridical work, *Mishneh Torah*. But here I address a reader who has done some philosophy, as I said, who knows some real science and is committed to the Torah but perplexed as to its meaning and troubled by its imagery and its multivalent terms.

Certain chapters here cite no ambiguous word but lay a groundwork for other chapters or alert you to some sense of such a word that I had rather not spell out just there. Such a chapter might resolve an image or note that a certain story is symbolic. Or it might address unusual ideas liable to be misunderstood because of ambiguous language or the mistaking of a symbol for what it represents, or vice versa.[35]

Having mentioned symbolism, I should say, by way of preface, that the key to understanding anything the Prophets say and seeing its truth lies in interpreting their language and understanding their imagery. You know God's words: *Through the prophets did I use similitudes* (Hosea 12:11). You also know how it says, *Riddle a riddle and frame a figure* (Ezekiel 17:2).[36] The Prophets rely so heavily on imagery, as you know, that one will say,

32. In the original plan, perhaps, the *Guide* would complement *MT*, making sense of biblical narrative and rabbinic *Aggadah*, much as *MT* makes sense of the prescriptions of *Halakhah*.

33. A commentary "would either be too obscure or too explicit" (Robinson, "Maimonides," 293).

34. Such persons live "contentedly . . . in a world of the absurd" (Diamond, *Converts*, 2).

35. On the risk of confusing symbols with what they represent, see Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, tr. Goodman, 161.

36. The verses from Hosea and Ezekiel, Diamond writes, show Maimonides' appreciation of prophets' "parabolic language," letting "the truths of Scripture radiate out" to varied audiences, "satiating their diverse intellectual capacities" (Diamond, *Maimonides and the*

*They say of me, "Isn't he a riddler!"* (21:5). You know Solomon's opening: *to understand proverb and figure, and the words and riddles of the wise* (Proverbs 1:6). The Midrash says, **1.6b**
"What were the Torah's words like before Solomon arose? Like a well with waters deep and cool that none could drink from. What did one insightful man do? He spliced cord to cord and rope to rope and drew them up and drank. So did Solomon lay figure upon figure and splice words together until he understood the Torah's words" (Song of Songs Rabbah 1.1.9).[37]

I do not think any sensible person imagines that the biblical words said here to need subtle unriddling of their imagery are the rules for building a sukkah, or those about the lulav, or the four kinds of trustees.[38] The point, clearly, is our grasp of profundities. Of this the Rabbis say, "Someone who has lost a silver *sela*ʿ[39] or a pearl at home can find it by lighting a penny candle. Just so, a figure is nothing, but by its light you can make out the Torah's words" (Song of Songs Rabbah 1.1.8). Notice how they call the deeper meaning of the Torah's words a pearl but confess the surface sense of any figure is nothing. They compare the unseen sense of an image to a pearl lost in a dark, cluttered house. It is there, but the owner cannot see it or know that it is there. He might just as well not own it. He cannot use it until he kindles the light they mention—grasping a figure's meaning.

*Golden apples chased with silver is a word well spoken*, says the sage (Proverbs 25:11). To explain: The chasing (*maskhiyot*) is a filigree tracery with tiny openwork eyelets like the ones that silversmiths make. They are called eyelets because you can see through them. **1.7a**

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*Hermeneutics*, 17). According to Wittgenstein, "A good simile refreshes the intellect" (*Notebooks: Culture and Value*, 1).

37. Like Maimonides (I 71), Fārābī (*On the Attainment of Happiness* §53, Mahdi, 43), and like Philo, Origen has it that the Greeks copied and passed off as their own the wisdom God gave Solomon (1 Kings 4:29–34). Solomon, Origen says, addressed ethics in Proverbs ("putting rules for living in short, pithy maxims"); physics, in Ecclesiastes ("discussing at length natural things; and, by distinguishing the useless and vain from the profitable and essential, counsels us to forsake vanity and cultivate things useful and upright"); and "metaphysics, in the Song of Songs" (which instills "love of things divine and heavenly . . . and teaches us that contact with God must be attained by the paths of charity and love"). Solomon, Origen urges, "was neither ignorant of rational science nor unwilling to deal with it." The very word "proverb" (*mashal*) "means that one thing is said openly, and another inwardly meant." So the Book of Proverbs praises those who grasp subtle nuances and see through sophistries. Using parables, riddles, wise sayings, and dark speech, Solomon points to moral virtue as the key to understanding. See Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, tr. after Lawson, 39–43.

38. Leviticus Rabbah 30.12 offers fanciful midrashim on the lulav. In *SM* Introduction, the laws of the sukkah and lulav are paradigmatic halakhic particulars. Maimonides offers straightforward explanations of the norms for trustees and the symbolism of the lulav and sukkah at III 42–43.

39. The talmudic silver *sela*ʿ was worth two shekels or four dinar (4 *zuz*), 4/25 of a gold dinar, or 1/1500 talent; Steinsaltz, *Reference Guide*, 494–96.

For the Targum renders the *va-yashqef* (Genesis 26:8) as *ve-istekhi*, "he looked out." A poetic figure, it says, is like a golden apple encased in silver filigree with tiny piercings, an expression that works on two levels, internal and external. See how wonderfully this describes well-wrought imagery. When words work on two levels, it says, a surface and a deeper meaning, the outer sense should be fine and fair as silver, but the inner must be more, as gold is more precious than silver. Still, the surface sense should lead those who ponder it toward the inner, as the tiny eyelets do in the silver tracery around this apple. At a glance or at a distance, it looks like a silver apple, but a keen observer who studies it closely will see inside and realize that it is gold. Just so the prophets' poesy holds practical wisdom on the surface, including much that is wholesome socially, as the plain sense of Proverbs and similar sayings clearly do. But the inner sense bears a wisdom salubrious in another way, imparting truths about Reality.[40]

Now, there are two kinds of prophetic figures: those in which each word intends a specific idea and those in which the figure as a whole makes a broad point but a great many words are used that do not all add meaning but only enrich and elaborate the imagery or
**1.7b** keep it consistent, as called for by the poetry. Do bear this in mind.

An example of the first kind of prophetic symbolism: *Lo a ladder stood on the ground . . .* (Genesis 28:12–13). When it says *a ladder*, that means one thing; *stood on the ground*, another; *its top reaching up to the heavens* signifies a third idea; *lo the angels of God*, a fourth; *ascending* points to a fifth; *descending*, a sixth; and *there was the* LORD *standing atop it*, a seventh. Every expression in this image adds another idea to the import of the figure as a whole.

The second kind of prophetic symbolism is, for example, *At the window of my house I looked out through the lattice and saw such simpletons! Amongst the boys I saw a thoughtless youth crossing the street near her corner, walking toward her house at twilight, as dusk was falling. A woman meets him, dressed like a whore, knowing what she wants. Coy, wild, unruly*, [*she cannot sit still at home!*] *Now on the street, now in the square*, [*she lurks at every corner.*] *She has caught hold of him and kisses him*, [*saying brazenly,*] *'I had some offerings to make*, [*and today I've paid my vows.*] *So I came out to meet you.* [*I hoped I would see you, and I've found you!*] *I've spread coverlets on my bed*, [*dyed fabrics of Egyptian linen.*] *I've sprinkled the bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let's drink our fill of loving* [*until morning, and frolic with love.*] *My husband is away.* [*He's on a long trip.*] *He took his purse* [*and won't t be home until midmonth.'*] *With a flood of enticing words she sways him, seduces him with her glib chatter* (Proverbs 7:6–21).

40. "The whole point of allegory is that it does not *need* to be read exegetically; it often has a literal level that makes good enough sense all by itself. But somehow this literal surface suggests a peculiar doubleness of intention . . . that lends itself to a secondary reading . . . once seen . . . felt strongly to be the final intention behind the primary meaning" (Fletcher, *Allegory*, 7–8).

The point is to warn against chasing bodily pleasures and passions. He likens matter, the root of all such passions, to a woman, a married harlot. The whole book is based on this conceit.[41] In a later chapter (III 8) I shall explain the wisdom of this likening of matter to a married harlot and why he closes this book of his with praises of a woman who is no harlot but is wholeheartedly devoted to her family's welfare and her husband's interests (Proverbs 31:10–31). For whatever impedes our ultimate human fulfillment—all that is unruly or wanting in us—comes strictly from the physical side, as I'll make clear (III 8, 12, 22).[42] That is the point of the image: that one should not just follow one's physical, animal nature. For a man's proximate matter is like that of any animal. **1.8a**

Now that I have explained this and opened up this image for you, you will not be hunting for a hidden meaning in *I had some offerings to make, and today I've paid my vows*, or try to divine what is meant by *I've spread coverlets on my bed*, or what is added by *My husband is away*. Likewise with the rest of the passage. This is only what the imagery calls for—details suggestive of philandering and the things loose people say.

Mark the point that I'm making here. It's critical to what I want to clarify. If you find that I've shed light on the sense of a certain image in some chapter of this work and alerted you to its broad theme, don't go probing every piece of it for some special meaning, seeking messages in every detail. You'll either miss the point or start glossing things not meant for glossing and not suited to it.[43] That is the kind of project that breeds the mad ravings and written rants most sects today indulge in. They all hunt for meanings in words spoken with no such intent as they read into them. Your steady aim, with most imagery, should be for the general sense. Sometimes it may suffice if I just note that a certain narrative is allegorical and not spell things out. Once you know the passage is figurative, its symbolism will be plain to you; my saying so will be like taking off a blindfold. **1.8b**

### Advice about This Work

To get the most out of this work and leave nothing behind, review the chapters against one another.[44] Don't just focus on the main point of each chapter, but pay attention to each term used in the argument, even those not central to that chapter's theme. For the argument of the work is not laid out randomly but carefully and exactingly so as to omit

41. In his Letter of Consolation, Maimonides' father had compared worldliness to the married harlot of Proverbs 7.

42. Matter is the root of desire. "Form cannot desire, for it is not defective. . . . What desires form is matter, as female desires male" (Aristotle, *Physics* I 9, 192a23; see III 8, 3.11b). Cf. Plato's "receptacle," *Timaeus* 49e–51b; Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.6.45; Numenius, frags. 11, 18 in Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 367–70.

43. As Gillis remarks (*Reading*, 43), it takes sensitivity to know when (and how) to find a meaning latent in a biblical passage and when to resist overinterpreting.

44. One must read the *Guide* recursively; see Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 395.

no issue that needs clearing up. Nothing is out of place unless to shed light elsewhere. So focus, and do not chase after any will-o'-the-wisp.[45] That would only harm me and help
**1.9a** you not at all. Just master all that you need and keep on studying the work. It will clear up most of the problems in the Torah that would trouble any thoughtful person.

I charge whoever reads this work of mine to promise in God's name not to gloss or comment on a word of it to anyone beyond what recognized Torah scholars before me have taught. Whatever you glean here that was not set forth by some reputable authority must not be expounded to others. Nor should you rush to refute it.[46] What you took me to be saying might be counter to my intent. So you would be requiting with injury the help I offer, *repaying ill for good* (Psalms 38:21). Let anyone into whose hands this work falls study it well. If it slakes his thirst as to but one problem, he should thank God and be happy with the insight he has won. But if he finds nothing at all helpful, he should just think of it as if it had never been written. And if any of it looks unsound by his lights, he should tilt the balance charitably, even by stretching a point. We owe that much to anyone[47]—let alone to our scholars and exponents of the Torah, who work creatively to help us toward the truth as best they see it.

Any beginner who is no thinker at all can profit, I'm sure, from some chapters in this work. An accomplished student of the Torah who is perplexed in the way that I've described will profit from every chapter and should be all the more thrilled and delighted to hear them. But the addleheads whose brains teem with the unsound notions and specious
**1.9b** teachings that they take for solid science, the self-styled thinkers who know no science worthy of the name, will shy at many a chapter, alarmed when they fail to grasp its sense, or it begins to dawn on them how worthless is the dross they own, the false coin they've hoarded against hard times.

God knows I've had constant grave concerns about setting down the things I mean to set down in this work. They do belong under wraps. What I register here is recorded in no book extant in our nation in our present age of exile. How, then, can I break precedent and commit such things to writing? I rely on two warrants: first, the Sages' saying, at a like pass, *The time has come to act for the* LORD (Psalms 119:126, quoted at B. Berakhot 63a),[48]

45. Beginners often read their own thoughts into a text, perhaps taking key terms in some familiar sense or projecting notions onto what they read that mask an author's intent.

46. The verb here, *tahāfata* (to rush), echoes the title of Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, rendered by Scholastics *Destructio Philosophorum*, since *tahāfut* means "collapse." In Maimonides, the suggestion is of parlous haste. Cf. I 5, 2.55b, 3.31a, 40ab, 135a; see Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, 44–45.

47. "Tilt the scale favorably for all" (M. Avot 1.6). As Maimonides explains (ad loc.), this means give everyone the benefit of the doubt.

48. The Psalmist had called on God: *Now is the time for the* LORD *to act!* But Judah the Patriarch (ca. 135–ca. 217), exploiting the flexible syntax of the Hebrew, applied the verse to the

and their words "—and all thy deeds, for the sake of Heaven" (M. Avot 2.17). These are the grounds I plead to justify my decision to set forth what I have in certain chapters of this work. I am, in a word, a man constrained. I see no way of sharing proven truths unless by meeting the needs of one outstanding person, even if I displease ten thousand know-nothings.[49] I'd rather address a single soul and ignore the censure of that throng. My brief is to free that one fine mind from the mire and guide him from perplexity to inner peace and perfection.

**Preliminary**

Contradictions or inconsistencies seen in any book or piece of writing have one of the following seven causes:

1. The author has drawn theses from people with conflicting views but failed to cite his sources and ascribe each position to its author. So contrary or contradictory statements are found in the text, reflecting one person's stance and another's. **1.10a**

2. An author held a view that he later rejected but retained both positions in his text.

3. Not all the sentences are meant literally. Some are, but others are figurative and bear a deeper meaning. Or two sentences incompatible on the surface might both be figurative—contrary or contradictory to one another if taken literally.

4. Some proviso, for some reason, could not be spelled out in context. Or two passages may address different subjects, but the difference was not explained right then, leaving a seeming contradiction where there was none.

5. In teaching or explaining things, some deep or difficult concept may be needed in the analysis of a simpler one that by rights should come first. (For one should always teach simpler ideas first.) So the teacher takes some liberties and oversimplifies, using any notion that comes to mind, leaving it to the hearer's imagination to get the general idea so as to explicate the deeper concept properly later on.[50]

6. The contradiction is unseen, coming to light only via many added premises. The more that are needed, the more hidden it is. It might elude an author who sees no conflict between his original theses. But if each is examined in the light of true premises, and the implicit conclusion is drawn, and supplemented with more true premises, and **1.10b**

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crisis of his day. He read it as calling on him to act for the Lord—by collating the Oral Law in the Mishnah, lest it be forgotten. Maimonides makes the same bold claim in the philosophical crisis he sees in his own day.

49. Cf. Heraclitus frag. 29 ap. Galen, *De Dignoscendis pulsibus*, a work known in Arabic and quoted by Ibn al-Haytham (ca. 965–ca. 1041). See Freudenthal, "Four Implicit Quotations."

50. Maimonides presumes anthropomorphism false long before arguing the larger, harder point from which it follows: that God's perfection implies absolute simplicity and so precludes all proper predicates. The Torah itself opens with creation but leaves it unexplained; see 1.5a.

further implications are drawn, the process leads ultimately, after many steps, to contrary or contradictory conclusions. This can happen to learned authors. But if the original theses conflict blatantly and the writer has just forgotten one before recording the other elsewhere, that is quite a serious lapse, and this author's work does not deserve to be taken seriously.

7. The demands of the argument. Sometimes, with the deepest subjects, certain ideas may have to be suppressed and others revealed. A certain premise may be needed for the sake of the argument in one context; its contradictory, in another.[51] The ordinary reader should not sense the discrepancy at all, and an author might use all sorts of devices to conceal it.

Contradictions in the Mishnah and baraitot[52] reflect the first cause. You always find them asking, "Is this not inconsistent with the premise?" (e.g., B. Giṭṭin 73a). The answer: The first is Rabbi So-and-So's view; the other, Rabbi So-and-So's. Similarly, you find them saying, Rabbi [Judah the Patriarch, in collating the Mishnah,] follows Rabbi So-and-So
**1.11a** here, so our text states it without attribution; but there he follows Rabbi So-and-So, so it has *this* without attribution. Often, you find them saying, Whose ruling is this? Rabbi So-and-So's. And this? Rabbi So-and-So's. This occurs countless times.

The contradictions and disagreements in the Talmud stem from the first or second cause. You constantly find them saying, "Here he holds with Rabbi So-and-So; there, with Rabbi So-and-So." Or "He concurred with him here but dissented there." Or they say, "Two Amora'im differ as to Rabbi So-and-So's view" (cf. B. Ketubot 57a). All such cases reflect the first cause. Of discrepancies of the second type, they say, "Rav dropped this view. Rava abandoned that." So one must investigate which view came later. On the same lines, they say, "We take this to be Rav Ashi's view in his earlier recension of the Talmud; the other, to be from his later version."

The contradictions and discrepancies found all through Scripture when passages are taken literally reflect the third or fourth cause. That was my whole point in this Introduction. You know how often the Sages say, One verse says this; another says that (cf. B. Pesaḥim 68b). They point to a seeming contradiction and then note a tacit qualification or a shift in subject. They say, "Solomon, is it not enough that you contradict your father, must you even contradict yourself!" (B. Shabbat 30a). They often say such things,
**1.11b** but mostly about law or morals. My focus here is on convictions and beliefs. Some of the

51. For the sake of the argument, Maimonides will assume the world's eternity, although he rejects that view, since the Philosophers' eternalism is necessary to their proof that God is the prime mover. That argument, in turn, is part of his own disjunctive argument for the existence of God: If the world is eternal, only an incorporeal deity could keep it forever in motion. But if it began, it needs the act of a Creator capable of bringing it to be from nothing.

52. A baraita is a tradition from the era of the Mishnah but uncollected there. The Amora'im were the authorities of the Talmud from the third to the fifth century.

obscurities here will be cleared up as the chapters of this work unfold. For difficulties of this kind are one source of puzzles in the Torah.[53] Whether Scripture contains contradictions owing to the seventh cause is a matter for inquiry and investigation. One should not jump to conclusions about it.

Discrepancies in the works of philosophers—true philosophers, that is[54]—stem from the fifth cause. Those in the works of most authors and commentators besides those already mentioned arise from the sixth cause. In aggadah and midrash, too, deep contradictions reflect this cause. That is why they say one must not be too strict with Aggadah. But it also contains contradictions resulting from the seventh cause.

The discrepancies in the present work reflect the fifth and seventh causes. If you see this and bear it very much in mind, you will not be perplexed by certain of its chapters.[55]

Having laid out these preliminaries, I shall begin to address the terms whose true intent, in context, should be noted. This will be a key that opens doors, which, when unlocked, lead to places where a soul can find rest, where eyes will find delight, and where bodies will find surcease from toil and troublement.[56]

## Chapter 1

*Open the gates, and let the righteous nation enter, who safeguard the truth.*
—Isaiah 26:2

*Tselem u-demut*, image and likeness. Thinking that *tselem* in Hebrew means the shape and contour of a thing has led people to sheer corporealism. It says, *Let us make man in Our image and after Our likeness* (Genesis 1:26). So they supposed God to have the form of a man—that is, a human figure and features, implying that He is corporeal—and so did they believe,[57] convinced that to stray from this belief was to belie Scripture. To them, **1.12a**

53. The Torah, of course, is rarely explicit about its use of indirection.

54. True philosophers, *muḥaqiqūn*, are those deemed theistic, including Plato and Aristotle.

55. Thus, Maimonides speaks of divine wrath (I 36; cf. I 54), although God has no passions. The contradiction dissolves when we see that wrath must mean alienation from God. Maimonides acknowledges his own pedagogical devices, and we can see premises suppressed, delayed, or deployed for the sake of the argument. But we need to take seriously his claim that his focus as to the sources of conceptual disparities is on Scripture and Midrash, not chiefly on the *Guide* itself.

56. The Torah, Maimonides argues, frees the body of onerous pagan practices and the soul of superstitious anxieties sprung from pagan piety (3.64ab). For his therapeutic aims here, see Kraemer, "Maimonides, the Great Healer."

57. Troubled by the corporealism of some rabbis, Maimonides pictures Christian critics mocking Deuteronomy 4:7: "Surely this tiny nation is a foolish, senseless people" (*CM* Sanhedrin 10.1). He scores those who take literally allusions to God's feet (Exodus 24:10), finger

indeed, it was tantamount to atheism to deny that God has a body with hands and a face like their own in anatomy and features, only larger and more glorious, they supposed, and of some other matter, not flesh and blood. That was as far as they felt God's transcendence should go.

What needs to be said against corporealism and for God's true unity (which is not real unless corporeality is excluded), you will find fully demonstrated in this work.[58] In this chapter, however, I want only to show you how to analyze *Tselem u-demut*.

Form, I say, as popularly understood, meaning the shape or configuration of a thing, is
**1.12b** properly called *to'ar* in Hebrew. So it says [of Joseph], *Fair of form* (to'ar) *and fair of visage*

(31:18), or hand (9:3). The anthropomorphisms are metaphorical, he urges, accommodating the masses, "who know only bodies" (*MT* Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 1.8–9; cf. *Guide* I 46, 1.50b). Maimonides' harsh critic Rabad castigated him for condemning corporealists: "Why does he call such a person a heretic? Many greater and better than he have held this view, based on what they saw in scripture and even more in troublesome aggadot" (Rabad, *Hasagot ha-Rabad* on *MT* Laws of Repentance 3.7; see Twersky, *Rabad*, 282–83). An extreme case of Jewish corporealism, the *Shi'ur Qomah* ("The Divine Measure," ascribed to Rabbi Ishmael and admired by the tenth-century Geonim Sherira and Ḥai), expatiates on God's anatomy in terms that might remind one today of the hyperbolic descriptions of Babe, Paul Bunyan's blue ox. In the "crude anthropomorphism" of this text, Altmann sees a stark exception to Edmund Burke's linking of sublimity to "greatness of dimension." The overall impression, Altmann writes, "is one of stupefaction rather than elevation." In "Moses Narboni's 'Epistle'" (130), Altmann documents Karaite attacks and those of the Muslim theologian Ibn Ḥazm (994–1064) on rabbinic anthropomorphism in general and the *Shi'ur Qomah* in particular (132–33). Asked if the work might harbor profound rabbinic ideas, Maimonides replied, "I never thought this came from our Sages. God forbid! It is just the work of some European homilist. It is a great mitzvah, in a word, to obliterate such writings and efface all memory of the notions they contain" (Maimonides, *Teshuvot Responsa* #117, ed. Blau). Ibn Da'ud confesses to finding Christian thinking purer than the views of some Jews and tells of ignorant Jews thinking they must believe God corporeal because humans were made in His image (Ibn Da'ud, *Emunah Ramah* [ca. 1168], Samuelson, 135; see Heschel, *Theology of Ancient Judaism*, I, xxv; Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis*, 1–6; Y. Fraenkel, *Darchei Aggadah ve-ha-Midrash*, 504ff.).

58. Maimonides defers his argument and will turn to the Philosophers for it when it comes (1.96b; II 1). For now, he assumes God to be incorporeal: "If the Creator were a body He would have bounds and limits. For no body is unbounded, and a finite body is of finite force. But our God, blessed be His name, is of power without bound or limit. For the Sphere rotates without ceasing. . . . That the Holy One is not a body is patent in the Torah and the Prophets. For it says, *He is God in heaven above and on earth below* (Deuteronomy 4:39). But a body cannot be in two places at once. It also says, *Ye saw no figure . . .* (4:15), and *to whom shall ye liken or compare Me?* (Isaiah 40:25). Were God a body, He would be like other bodies" (*MT* Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 1.7–8). Note the reliance on the Philosophers' doctrine that the sphere rotates unceasingly; cf. Aristotle, *Physics* VIII 6, 10.

(Genesis 39:6), or [of the specter of Samuel raised by the witch of Endor], *What does he look like?* (1 Samuel 28:14), or [of the men killed by Zebah and Zalmunna at Tabor], *With the features of the sons of the king* (*ke-to'ar b'nei ha-melekh*, Judges 8:18). The same term is applied to a man-made form: *He inscribes it* (*yeta'areihu*) *with a stylus . . . and marks it* (*yeta'areihu*) *with a compass* (Isaiah 44:13). Such terms are never applied to God—heaven forfend!

But *tselem* is said of the natural form that gives reality to a thing and makes it what it is, its essence as that thing. In the human case, this is the seat of our consciousness, the rational intellect, in virtue of which it is said of man, *In the image of God created He him* (Genesis 1:27).[59] Thus it says, *Thou dost despise their* tselem (Psalms 73:20). For it is the soul that is despised, the specific form, not one's bodily shape or anatomical features.

Idols, I note, then, are called *tselamim* not for their shape or configuration but for the essence supposedly in them to which an appeal is made. Thus, with the [golden] *images of the swellings* [sent back by the Philistines with the Ark] (1 Samuel 6:5). The point was not their tumid shape but the protection hoped for against such swellings. *Images of the swellings* and *tselamim* [idols] do refer to shapes, of course—physical configurations. So *tselem* is ambiguous; it has multiple senses. It may mean a man-made form, or the natural form of a species, or the shape and structure that manifest it physically. But *Let us make man in Our image* (Genesis 1:26) refers to man's specific form, rational awareness, not a shape or figure. So I have explained the difference between *tselem* and *to'ar* and what *tselem* means.

Likeness, *demut*, however, is a noun derived from *damoh*, to be like. Here too the likeness is conceptual: The Psalmist says, *I am like a pelican in the desert* (102:7)[60]—not that he has wings and feathers like a pelican, but that he is as desolate. Likewise, *No* **1.13a**
*tree in God's garden was its like in beauty* (Ezekiel 31:8) makes its comparison in terms of beauty.[61] Similarly, *Their venom is like a serpent's venom* (Psalms 58:5) and *He is like a lion, avid for prey* (17:12), all compare ideas, not figures or shapes.[62] Just so when it says, *The likeness of a throne . . . the likeness of a throne* (Ezekiel 1:26). The comparison is in terms of sublimity and eminence, not the foursquare shape of a throne,[63] or its breadth,

59. Cf. Plato, *Republic* 501b, citing Homer, *Iliad* 1.131 and *Odyssey* 3.416; Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 69, *Quod Deterius* 86, and *Questions on Exodus* 2.51, LCL 1.54–55, 2.260–61, supplement 2.97–99.

60. The *ke'at* of the Psalm is taken to be a pelican (*kik*) at B. Ḥullin 63a, J. Shabbat 4c.

61. The tree did not resemble beauty; it was compared to other trees in terms of beauty. Beauty itself is imperceptible; see Plato, *Phaedo* 65d; and Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.3.1–2, 6.1–9.

62. The venom and avidity here are moral, not physical, traits.

63. A throne's squarish shape symbolized stability—and thus legitimacy. See Ettinghausen on Ernst Kitzinger's analysis of the Arabizing iconography (based on Byzantine precedents) seen in Cappella Palatina in Palermo (Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, 44–47; cf. 63–67).

or the length of its legs, as some poor souls presume. The same holds true for the *likeness of living creatures* (1:13).[64]

Since man is distinguished by a most unusual trait found in no other sublunary being—rational awareness,[65] which does not depend on sense perception or any limb or organ[66]—our awareness is likened to God's, which uses no organ, although it is not like it really but only at first impulse (See 3.42b–43a). It is because of this, the divine mind that touches us, that man is said to be *in the image and likeness of God*[67]—not that God has a body and a shape.

## Chapter 2

Years ago, a sophisticated man[68] faced me with an odd objection worth considering, along with the response I gave to scuttle it. But before stating the problem and its solution, I will say that every Hebrew knew that *elohim* has multiple meanings. It can mean God,
**1.13b** or angels, or political authorities. Onkelos the Proselyte rightly explained that when it says, *Ye shall be as* elohim *knowing good and evil* (Genesis 3:5), that last sense is meant. He translates, "Ye shall be as lords."

Recognizing the multiple senses of this word, I turn to the objection: Taking the text literally, the objector said, the original intent was for man to be like the other animals, without thought or reason and not knowing right from wrong. But when he disobeyed, his rebelliousness brought him the splendid, uniquely human attainment that is our

64. Maimonides anticipates his discussion of Ezekiel's vision (III 1–7): The objects the prophet beheld symbolized unseen realities and relations. The prophet saw no physical thing but images representing higher realities.

65. Man is the only animal with the discourse of reason (Aristotle, *Politics* I 2, 1253a9–10). For the mind as the referent of the figure of God's image, see Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 69, LCL 1.54–55.

66. See Aristotle, *De Anima* II 1, 413a6–7.

67. "Man, best of the animals by what is best in him, the soul, is most akin to heaven, the purest thing in all that is, and, as most admit, also most like the Father of the world, having, in his mind, a closer likeness and copy than anything else on earth of its blessed and eternal Original" (Philo, *De Decalogo* 134, LCL 7.72–73).

68. Klein-Braslavy, in *Maimonides' Interpretation of the Story of Creation*, detects a touch of condescension here. She finds it "very likely that the objector was a physician who read philosophy superficially" and compares the objection physicians made about Psalms 94:6–9 as to God's creating the eyes and ears (III 19). Physicians and those who are credulous about astrology, Maimonides finds, are prone to raise captious objections, "imagining their own intelligence to be of a higher order than that of the Sages, whom they picture as simpletons and dunces." *CM* Sanhedrin 10 (Perek Ḥelek, Introduction).

noblest trait, the ability to distinguish good from evil that makes us what we are. Disobedience, amazingly, was punished with the gift of reason, which man did not yet have.[69] Is this not the same as saying that someone committed some egregious wrong and was made a star in the sky? That was the gist of the objection, although not in so many words.[70] Now listen to the tenor of my response:

Well, sir, you are quite a thinker, relying on the first notions that occur to you to master a book that is the guide of every generation from first to last[71] by browsing in it in a moment of leisure between having a drink and making love, as if it were some history[72] or piece of poetry.[73] Stop and think! Things are not as you thought at first glance. You

69. Julian the Apostate, scoring Christianity in *Contra Galileos*, urged that the serpent did man a favor. See Pines, "Truth and Falsehood," 120–21.

70. The objector reads Genesis on the lines of a myth like that of Orion, punished by being made a constellation. Maimonides soft pedals the pagan allusions.

71. "The Torah's words are life for this world, and the next" (Song of Songs Rabbah 1.3 on Psalms 48:15; cf. Jubilees 2:17, 15:27). For Maimonides, the biblical story of Adam and Eve is no mere tale or history but a portrait of the human condition. Cf. Klein-Braslavy, "Interpretative Riddles." Beyond the rule of charity in our reading (1.9a), we have an obligation, not least with Scripture—but with other serious works too—to read with respect and resist the temptation to raise captious objections.

72. Philo, like the Rabbis (*Tanḥuma* 1.11), asks why the Torah, a book of law, opens with the creation rather than Israel's first commandment. This narrative, he answers, is no ordinary history. It is written not for entertainment but to show "things most essential": that God is the Creator, Founder of nature's laws, Legislator, and moral Preceptor, teaching us to live by the laws that govern nature. God metes out rewards and punishments consequent on our heeding or flouting those laws. See Philo, *De Vita Mosis* II 8.47–51, *De Praemiis et Poenis* I 1–2, and *De Opificio Mundi* I 1–3, LCL 6.470–75, 8.312–21, 1.6–15; Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, 2.210.

73. The Torah, Maimonides holds, should not be read as poetry (cf. Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 157, LCL 1.122–23). Yet resolving its mysteries demands a grasp of its poetics. Must we not read the story of Eden as either history or poetry? For Maimonides, there is poetry and 'poetry.' He uses a different word here for poetry from those used in his introduction. Bracketed here is *shir*, not *mathal*: Figurative language is essential in prophetic discourse, for language cannot capture God's perfection. But the poetry disparaged here belongs to the culture (*adab*) prized by literati as entertainment and edification. Plato writes,

> When you meet encomiasts of Homer who tell us that this poet has been the educator of Hellas, that for the conduct and refinement of human life he is worthy of our study and devotion, and that we should order our entire lives by this poet's guidance, we must love and salute them for doing what is best by their lights, and grant them that Homer is the most poetic of poets and the first of tragedians, but we must stand by our conviction, that we can admit no poetry into our city but hymns to the gods and praises of good men. For if you give entry to the honeyed Muse, in lyric or epic, pleasure and pain will be lords of your city instead of law and what common reason has ever deemed best. (*Republic* X 606e–7a)

can see that if you think again: Reason, shed by God on man by emanation, is indeed our highest attainment. But this Adam had before he disobeyed. That is why he was said to be in God's *image* and *likeness* (Genesis 1:26)—and why he could be addressed and given
**1.14a** duties, as it says, *the* LORD *God commanded . . .* (2:16). Beasts receive no precepts,[74] nor does anyone who lacks reason.[75]

Reason discerns true from false. Adam had it fully and flawlessly. But fair and foul are matters not of reason but of repute: We do not say that it is fine that the heavens are spherical, or foul that the earth is flat, but that this is true and that false. Likewise, in our tongue, true and false are called *emet* and *sheker*; fair and foul are called *good* and *bad*. By our reason we distinguish *true* from *false* with any rational question. So man, at the peak of perfection, his innate rational gifts intact, was such that it was said of him, *Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels* (Psalms 8:6).[76] He had no such faculty as to conventions and no notion of such things. Even what is plainly improper by convention—exposing one's nakedness—was not wrong in his eyes. He did not think it unseemly.[77] But once he disobeyed, following the passions stirred by his fancies and the

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The most poetic of poets often make their artistry an end in itself or let their art pander to the passions of their audience.

74. Cf. Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 69, 149, LCL 1.54–55, 118–19. Maimonides' word here is *waṣiyya*, a precept, stressing the rational roots of the mitzvot, where prescription fuses with instruction. Mitzvot are duties, blessings, and privileges; but privilege here is not exemption from the law but a sacred honor and responsibility. Moral obligations address free and rational subjects. Only those "created in God's image," Faur writes, "can be subject to a *mitzvah*." There is no real allegiance where "the subject of a command is in a state of perennial *submission* and is excluded from any decision-making." A mitzvah "cannot be *imposed*." Its fulfillment rests on understanding and acceptance: "A 'command' is an order issued by a superior force *imposing* its will. . . . Freedom of choice is 'the great principle upon which the Law and precept stand' (*MT* Laws of Repentance 5.3)" (Faur, *Horizontal Society*, 2.9).

75. The image of God is human reason (I 1; cf. *Eight Chapters*, 1). God does not have an "essence"—so the human form, the rational soul, is active and aspirational, not a fragment of the Godhead.

76. Adam was created perfect (Genesis Rabbah 8.10, 17.4, 21.2). Genesis introduces him as an adult, articulate and aware. If he is to represent the human condition, Maimonides reasons, his endowment of natural powers—his *fiṭra*, in the Arabic term Maimonides adopts here—must lack none of the capacities of sound judgment. We may deceive ourselves morally, but that only shows, as Socrates was fond of noting, that there are truths about values; see *Eight Chapters*, 1.

77. Maimonides takes it as a paradigm case of a conventional judgment that exposing one's nakedness is foul (*qabīḥ*; Maimonides, *Treatise on Logic* §8, Efros, Arabic, 17, English, 47). Moral conventions, Aristotle writes, are "indifferent originally, but not once laid down, e.g., that a prisoner's ransom shall be a mina, or that a goat and not two sheep shall be sacrificed" (*NE* V 7). Cf. 3.59a. Al-Āmirī quotes Alexander of Aphrodisias' examples of what is

pleasures of his bodily senses—as it says, *that the tree was good to eat and a delight to the eyes* (3:6)—he was punished by being stripped of that rational awareness. He broke the command given in virtue of his reason and took on a sense of convention, mired in judgments of fair and foul. Only then did he realize the worth of what he had lost, how naked he had become and how low he had sunk. That is why it was said, *Ye shall be like* elohim*, knowing good and evil* (3:5)—not knowing true and false, or distinguishing false from true. With matters of necessity, there is no "good" and "evil," only true and false.[78]

Consider the words *Their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked* (3:7). It does not say 'Their eyes were opened, and they saw . . .' What they saw was the same as ever. There was no blindfold to remove.[79] But Adam was changed. He now disapproved of what he had not thought improper: *Opened* refers not to his vision but to his outlook—as it says [of Hagar], *God opened her eyes* (21:19), *The eyes of the blind shall be opened* (Isaiah 35:5), and *With open ears he heareth not* (42:20), paralleling *Eyes have they to see but see not* (Ezekiel 12:2). **1.14b**

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fair by nature, from Aristotle's *De Generatione et Corruptione*: to revere God, act justly, and respect people, but not eating in the marketplace is proper by convention; see Ghorab, "Greek Commentators."

78. In their first rude sense of propriety, Adam and Eve model the suborning of moral judgment by bias. Reason can discern moral truths, and there are indeed facts about values (see *Eight Chapters*, 1–3). But appetite, passion, and convention, led by imagination, may skew our judgments. In eating of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve fancied themselves arbiters of right and wrong—lords in that sense. The serpent, of course, spoke with forked tongue. Hence the weight of Maimonides' noting at the outset that *elohim* can mean lords. Eve, wishfully, heard the serpent hold out promises of divinity, but the first couple's disobedience in fact betokened human illusions of moral sovereignty. Genesis, for Maimonides, pinions the all-too-human penchant to see our choices as self-certifying. Nietzschean promises of godlike moral sway flatter that delusion. For Maimonides, just as God cannot make the diagonal of a square commensurate with its side (2.28a), He cannot make wrong actions right. His justice is inseparable from Him (1.19a, 3.35a). The Eden story dramatizes a critical human failing latent in our subjecthood: We succumb to subjectivity, displacing moral truths with *mashhūrāt*—conventions, matters of repute. Pines sees the Arabic term as a calque on the Greek *endoxa* and translates it as "generally accepted things" (*Works*, 3.97–99). Solomon Maimon preserves Maimonides' sense in his (Kantian) reading of the *Guide*: "The vocation of humanity was to use reason alone to gain knowledge of (absolute, universally valid) good and evil, and to distinguish true from false. The form of reason was meant to yield the highest laws of both morality and logic, since knowledge of relative good and evil, grounded in material objects, lies beyond the scope of reason and thus cannot yield a universally valid principle of morality" (*Autobiography*, 141).

79. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ imagine the first couple clothed, from their creation, by "long hair streaming down from their heads, lovely as ever graced a maiden, reaching their feet and covering their nakedness" (*AvM*, 134).

So when it says of Adam, *he changeth his face, and Thou sendest him forth* (Job 14:20), the verse must be glossed and understood so: Man was expelled on changing his outlook. For *face* comes from facing, as one faces one's goal: When he turned toward what he was commanded not to seek, it says, he was banished from the Garden of Eden. The punishment fit the crime, measure for measure. He had been free to eat good things and enjoy a life of peace and ease. But when he greedily followed his appetites and fancies, as I said, and ate what he had been forbidden to eat, all that was lost. He had to eat the coarsest foods, things he had not eaten before—and only after toil and trouble, as it says, *Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for thee* and *by the sweat of thy brow . . .* (Genesis 3:18–19). As it explains, *The LORD God banished him from Eden, to work the soil* (3:23). God set him on the level of a beast in terms of food and most of his living conditions, as it says, *Thou shalt eat the grass of the field* (3:18), as his status is explained: *Man bereft of precious wit is like the dumb beasts* (Psalms 49:13).

Glory, then, to Him, who acts as He will; the wisdom in His ends is far beyond us.[80]

## Chapter 3

**1.15a** One might suppose that the Hebrew words *temunah* and *tavnit* have the same sense, but they do not. *Tavnit* is a noun based on the verb *banoh*, to build. It signifies the figure of a thing, its shape or structure—square, round, triangular, or such. So the Torah speaks of *the pattern* (tavnit) *of the Tabernacle and the pattern* (tavnit) *of all its vessels* (Exodus 25:9); it says [*fashion them*] *after the pattern* (be-tavnitam) *shown thee on the mountain* (25:40). It [forbids idols in] *the shape* (tavnit) *of any bird . . .* (Deuteronomy 4:17). It mentions *the shape* (tavnit) *of a hand* (Ezekiel 8:3) and *the pattern* (tavnit) *for the porch* [of Solomon's Temple] (1 Chronicles 28:11). In all these cases, *tavnit* means "shape." So the Hebrew never applies these terms to God.

But *temunah* has three senses: (a) It is said of the form of an external object of the senses, its shape or figure, as in [*When ye . . .*] *fashion an idol in the image* (temunah) *of anything . . .* (Deuteronomy 4:25) or *For ye saw no figure* (temunah) [*the day the LORD spoke to you from the fire at Horeb*] (4:15). (b) It is applied to the image of someone no longer present to the senses—thus, *specters and night visions* (Job 4:13–16). For the passage ends, *It halted, but I could not make it out, its image* (temunah) *before my eyes*. He means a phantasm seen in sleep. Or (c) it is said of a true idea grasped by the mind. It is in this third sense that *temunah* is applied to God: *temunat Adonai yabiṭ—The vision of the LORD doth he behold* (Numbers 12:8). Interpreted, this means he has true knowledge of God.

80. Maimonides telegraphs his rejection of anthropocentrism in III 13.

## Chapter 4

The words *ra'oh*, *habīṭ*, and *ḥazoh*, you know, are all three applied not just to visual but to metaphorical sight, mental apprehension. In the case of *ra'oh*, this is well known to the masses. It says, *What did he see but a well in a field* (Genesis 29:2). This was visual. But it also says, *My heart hath seen much wisdom and knowledge* (Ecclesiastes 1:16).[81] This was intellectual. Any talk of *seeing* applied to God has this figurative sense. Thus, *I saw the Lord* [*sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven in attendance to His right and left*] (1 Kings 22:19); *the Lord appeared to him* [*by the oaks of Mamre*] (Genesis 18:1); *the Lord saw that it was good* (Genesis 1:10); *show me, pray, Thy glory* (Exodus 33:18); and *they saw the God of Israel* (24:10) all refer to intellectual apprehension, not sense perception. Our eyes see only bodies, which must lie in some direction and have specific physical features—color, shape, and such. But God's awareness does not come by way of any organ, as will be made clear. **1.15b**

Similarly, *habiṭ* can mean directing one's gaze: *Look not behind thee! But his wife looked back* (Genesis 19:26) and *If one look to the land*, [*lo it is darkness, close darkness, the light barred by lowering clouds*] (Isaiah 5:30). But figuratively it can mean turning one's mind to something. Thus, *No ill hath He beheld in Jacob* (Numbers 23:21). For evil is not seen visually. It is in this sense that it says, *They gazed after Moses* (Exodus 33:8), which the Sages took in this way, holding that the elders studied his words and deeds and acted accordingly.[82] This is the sense again when it says, *Look to the heavens* (Genesis 15:5). For this gazing was in a prophetic vision. It is in this figurative sense that every occurrence of *habiṭ* is applied to God: [*Moses hid his face, for he feared*] *to look upon God* (Exodus 3:6), *the vision of the Lord doth he behold* (Numbers 12:8), and *Thou canst not look on evil* (Habakkuk 1:13). **1.16a**

And *ḥazoh*, too, is applied to seeing: [*Now are many nations gathered against thee, saying, Let her be defiled!*] *Let our eyes gaze on Zion!* (Micah 4:11). But figuratively it refers to the heart's insight: *Isaiah's vision* [ḥazon] *concerning Judah and Jerusalem* (Isaiah 1:1) and *The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision* (Genesis 15:1). It is in this figurative sense that it is said *they beheld God* (Exodus 24:11). Do understand this.

81. Ibn Ezra, too, cites Ecclesiastes 2:13, on "seeing wisdom," to show that God's seeing that the light was good (Genesis 1:4) was not sensory. "Sight is the keenest of our senses, but it does not see wisdom" (Plato, *Phaedrus* 250d).

82. See Tanḥuma, Ki Tissa; Exodus Rabbah 51, B. Kiddushin 33b, and Sanhedrin 110a.

## Chapter 5

When the prince of philosophers[83] undertook to probe some very deep questions and reason about them, he spoke apologetically, saying, in effect, that a student of his books should not think him rash, overeager, or precipitate for exploring these topics where he lacked knowledge but should see how eager he was to seek and find sound beliefs wherever humanly possible.[84] In the same spirit, I say one should make no foray into these sublime and awesome domains before preparing himself in the disciplines of science and inquiry, truly refining his character,[85] and slaying the passions and the cravings of fancy. Once one has found and mastered true and sure premises and knows the laws of logic and inference and the safeguards against fallacies, one may advance to this subject[86]—but not just seize upon the first thought that occurs to him or stretch and strain his thinking at the start, grasping for God. He should stop and hold back in reverence and awe
**1.16b** and then advance gradually. That is why it says, *Moses hid his face, fearing to look upon God* (Exodus 3:6)—not just as the verse suggests if taken literally, that he was afraid to behold the brilliant light he was shown, as if God, Who far transcends every limit, were visible to the eye. Moses was praised for his modesty, and God ultimately shed so much of His goodness and bounty upon him that it had to be said of him, *The vision of the* LORD *doth he behold* (Numbers 12:8). The Sages call this his reward for hiding his face at first, so as not to "look upon" God (B. Berakhot 7a).

But *the elite of Israel* (Exodus 24:11) were hasty and strained their minds. They did perceive, but imperfectly. So it says, *They saw the God of Israel, and under His feet . . .* (24:10)—not simply 'They saw the God of Israel.' The words do not describe but criticize their vision for being so corporeal, since they rushed ahead when not fully prepared.[87] They deserved to perish, but Moses pled for them. So they were spared—until they were burnt at Taberah [when fire broke out in the camp's outskirts after the Israelites' protest]

83. Maimonides refers to Aristotle with marked deference, despite his rejection of eternalism and other doctrines of the Philosophers' school.

84. "We regard the zeal of one whose thirst for philosophy leads him to accept even slight indications, where it is hard to see one's way, as a proof rather of modesty than of overconfidence" (Aristotle, *De Caelo* II 12, 291b 24–29).

85. The phrase echoes the title of ethical works by Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and Miskawayh.

86. Mutakallimūn fell into fallacies like that of division. They avoided natural science and mathematics and let their theological wishes drive their cosmological posits; see *Guide* 1.95b, 108a.

87. Haste is at the heart of the intellectual vice Maimonides condemns, typified by Elisha ben Avuya's fate and contrasted with Moses' humble patience and any wise seeker's disciplined and reasoned progress. Inspiration may come "like a leaping spark," Plato wrote, but "only after a long period of attendance on instruction." Only with discipline and discipleship does the flame become self-sustaining (Letter VII, 341c). See 1.38ab.

(Numbers 11:1–3), as were Nadab and Abihu in the Tent of Assembly (when they offered "strange fire" before the LORD; Leviticus 10:1–3), as our sound tradition relates.[88]

If this was what they deserved, all the more must we lesser men, and those lesser than we, strive to prepare ourselves fully and gain the basis we need to cleanse our consciousness of the taint of error and only then advance to glimpse God's holy Shekhinah.[89] As it says, *Let even the Priests who approach the* LORD *sanctify themselves, lest the* LORD *break forth upon them* (Exodus 19:22). Solomon, in figurative terms, sternly warns one who aspires to that degree: *Guard thy step on entering the House of God* (Ecclesiastes 4:17). **1.17a**

Returning now to what I was explaining: Israel's nobles, I say, suffered not just a cognitive but a practical lapse, turning toward the corporeal, since their awareness was sullied. As it says, *They beheld God, and they ate and drank* (Exodus 24:11).[90] The rest of the passage, *and under His feet . . .* (24:10), will be explained in later chapters of this work (II 26, 28; III 4). My point here is simply that whenever *seeing*, *looking*, or *vision* is used in this way it means intellectual, not visual, apprehension. For God is not visible. But if someone cannot reach the plane, I hope he will rise to and takes all these words, when

88. Tanḥuma, Be-haʿalotkha; Leviticus Rabbah 20.12. The tradition is that the elders deserved death, but God *stayed His hand* (Exodus 24:11) so as not to mar the joyous occasion. The offense, Rashi opines, was eating and gawking as if at a spectacle. For Maimonides, the elders' epiphany was marred by the haste that left it all too corporeal. The object lesson at Numbers 11 is that only Moses was capable of the sustained converse with God required of him as Israel's lawgiver.

89. The Shekhinah, as Urbach stresses, "is no 'hypostasis' and has no separate existence alongside the Deity. This fact is stressed by Gershom Scholem even with respect to the literature of the *Hekhalot* ['Heavenly Halls'] and the surviving fragments of the *Shiʿur Qoma*." Urbach does find a single midrashic exception, which seeds a wider trend (*The Sages*, 1.63).

90. The elders at Exodus 24:10–11 are called *atzilei b'nei Yisrael*—conventionally, "the Israelite nobles." At its base, the root *a-tz-l* signifies 'extending.' So God asks Moses (Numbers 11:23) if he thinks His hand *too short* to reach His goal. Esau bitterly asks his father, *Hast thou not saved* (*atzalta*, literally, extended) *a blessing for me?* (Genesis 27:36). *Atzilut* will become the standard kabbalistic term for emanation, seen as early as the *Raʿya Meḥemna* by a younger contemporary of Moses de León (1240–1305). See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, 66–67. In later Kabbalah, Atzilut names the first of four supernal worlds. Maimonides links the word to emanation at I 40, glossing Numbers 11:17 and 25, regarding God's shedding His prophetic spirit onto Israel's elders: The gift was spiritual/intellectual. For enlightenment, like teaching, entails no loss to the Giver—the hallmark of emanation. Al-Ḥarīzī, in translating the *Guide*, renders *fayḍ*, Maimonides' Arabic term for emanation, by the hapax legomenon *shefaʿ* (Deuteronomy 33:19). But Ibn Tibbon uses inflected forms of *a-tz-l*, as he does in translating Halevi's *Kuzari* (1.1; cf. 4, 3, ed. Baneth, 4, 234, tr. Hirschfeld, 36, 217), as noted by Naḥmanides, an early aficionado of Kabbalah, who proposes in commenting on the verse, "The elders are called *atzilim* because the spirit of God emanated to them." For Maimonides, the elders are called *atzilei b'nei Yisrael* because they will be touched by enlightenment.

used in this way, as alluding to the perception of created lights—angels or such. There is no harm in that.[91]

## Chapter 6

*Ish* and *ishah* are nouns originally meaning 'man' and 'woman,' later applied to any male or female animal: *Of every clean beast shalt thou take seven pairs: ish ve-ishto* (Genesis 7:2)—a male and a female. In time, the noun *ishah* was applied figuratively to any-
**1.17b** thing considered paired, as in *Five curtains shall be joined each to the next* (*ishah el aḥotah*, literally 'woman to sister'; Exodus 26:3). Brother and sister, too, are clearly polysemous and used figuratively in the same way as woman and man.

## Chapter 7

*Yalod*, to bear. The sense commonly understood is familiar, signifying procreation: *They bore him sons* (Deuteronomy 21:15). Later the term was applied figuratively to anything arising in nature: *before the hills were born* (Psalms 90:2). The metaphor was also applied to the earth's yield of plants: [*rain falls . . .*] *and maketh it bear and bud* (Isaiah 55:10). Events, too, are metaphorically said to be born: *Thou knowest not what the day will bring to birth* (Proverbs 27:1). A like metaphor is used for how thoughts arise and for the views and doctrines they engender: *He breedeth lies* (Psalms 7:15), or *teeming with alien spawn* (Isaiah 2:6)—that is, full of foreign notions. As Jonathan ben Uzziel glosses, "They embrace foreign ways." Thus, one who teaches someone or gives him an idea fathers him in a sense. So the prophets' disciples are called *the prophets' sons* (2 Kings 2:15), as I will explain in treating the senses of 'son' (2.73b).[92]

91. Saadiah and others think of God as manifesting a sort of "created glory" (*ED* II 10, 12, Kafiḥ, 103–4, 110–11; Rosenblatt, 121, 130). Saadiah, as Altmann explains, turned to the idea of God's created glory in "embarrassment" at "the crude anthropomorphism" of the *Shiʿur Qomah* conceit, regularly lampooned by Karaites and Muslims, who saw the Rabbanites as primitives (see *n.* 57 above); Altmann, "Saadya's Theory of Revelation" (1943); and Altmann, "Moses Narboni's 'Epistle'" (1967). Maimonides held open the door to the idea that *something* was seen visually in prophetic epiphanies. He makes his own appeal to God's creative power as regards the letters engraved on the tablets Moses received at Sinai (I 66)—and in treating Ezekiel's vision (III 7), for although the *Shiʿur Qomah* literature made the Song of Songs its vehicle, its target was that vision.

92. Cf. 1.82a. Since spiritual paternity is what matters, Obadiah the proselyte is a bona fide Israelite.

It is in this figurative sense that it says, *Adam lived one hundred thirty years and begat in his own image and likeness* (Genesis 5:3). You have seen (I 1) what Adam's image and likeness means. None of his prior offspring had fully realized the human form, the image and likeness of Adam, said to be *in the image and likeness of God* (1:27). But Seth, taught and enlightened by Adam, reached full humanity. So of him it says, *begat in his own image and likeness*. **1.18a**

As you know, anyone who has not attained this form, in the sense I explained, is not really human but just an animal with human shape and features—yet capable of mischief and evil of all kinds, worse than any other animal.[93] For he devotes to all sorts of noxious, wicked schemes the powers of judgment and reflection that suited him for the humanity he fails to achieve. He is a sham, in effect—a counterfeit human.[94] Such were Adam's progeny before Seth.[95] As they say in the Midrash, "In his hundred thirty years under reproof, Adam begot spirits" (Mekhilta to Exodus 12)—meaning demons. Once returned

93. See Aristotle, *Politics* I 2, 1253a33. Despite the seeming absence of an Arabic translation of the *Politics*, the passage, like others from *Politics* I, is echoed in Āmirī's *K. al-Saʿādah wa 'l-Isʿād*; see Pines and Schwarz, "Aristotle's *Politics*," 2.147.

94. Maimonides lays a basis here for resolving a seeming paradox in the Law: Why is capital punishment (Genesis 9:6) not just another murder? The murderer, he reasons, may have forfeited the special sanctity of every human life; see 3.38a ad fin.; cf. Philo's treatment of Moses' slaying the (abusive) Egyptian taskmaster in Philo, *On the Life of Moses* 1.43, LCL 6.298–99.

95. Philo reads the name Enos (*Enosh* = mankind) and his walking with God (Genesis 5:24) as signaling that "one should not even be called human who does not set his hope on God" (Philo, *De Praemiis et Poenis* 14, LCL 8.321). Access to wisdom is what humanizes humankind: "The Sages taught . . . one should not marry the daughter of an ignoramus (*ʿam ha-aretz*). They are vermin; their women, reptiles. It is of their daughters that it says, *Cursed be he who sleeps with any beast* (Deuteronomy 27:21)" (B. Pesaḥim 49b). Maimonides takes the Sages' hyperbolic disparagement to target boors. They are not mere dolts, since they can plot and scheme. It is not illiteracy but crude ways and crass values that sink the uncouth. They lack the zeal to reach for the heights reason might have opened to them. Their failure of aspiration is a moral flaw. One should avoid them unless to meet one's needs (2.79b). Cf. Aristotle: "If it is rare to find a man who is divine . . . just as rarely is a brute found among men. But it does happen" (*NE* VII 1, 1145a28–31, tr. after Ostwald). Fārābī names eight classes of human brutes (*Fuṣūl Muntazaʿah*, Najjar, 33; Fārābī, *K. Tanbīh ʿalā Sabīl al-Saʿādah*, al-Yassin, 62; Fārābī, *Ārāʾ* 18.3–5, Walzer, 286–93). See Fakhry, *Al-Fārābī*, 107; and Mahdi, *Al-Farabi*, 205–7. Ibn Ṭufayl finds "most men no better than unreasoning animals" (*Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, tr. Goodman, 164). One who has never known "the Necessarily Existent, never encountered Him or heard of Him," on leaving the body will "neither long for this Being nor mourn His loss. His bodily powers will go to ruin with the body. . . . This is the fate of all dumb animals—even those of human form" (137). Maimonides' appraisal is monitory and so not inconsistent with Perek Ḥelek (M. Sanhedrin 10): *All* Israel (and the righteous of all nations) have a share in immortality—through the wisdom implicit in their faith and practice. But as the Mishnah specifies, that meed may be forfeit by those who scorn their heritage.

to favor, he begat his like—*in his own image and likeness*. Hence, *Adam lived one hundred thirty years and begat in his own image and likeness*.

## Chapter 8

*Maqom*. The base sense given this noun is that of place in general[96] or a specific place. But usage broadened it to signify someone's status or standing—his degree in some sense. Thus, one speaks of So-and-So's place in this or that domain. You know how often
**1.18b** Hebrew speakers say, "He filled his fathers' place" in wisdom or piety, or "The dispute rests where it lay," meaning the question remains unsettled. It is in this metaphorical sense that it is said, *Blessed be the glory of the* LORD *from His place* (Ezekiel 3:12)—in keeping with His degree, His rank in reality. Whenever 'place' relates to God, it means His exalted standing in the order of being, unique and without peer, as will be proved (I 55–56).[97]

Do understand that with each term I analyze in this work, the point is not just what I say in that chapter but to broach a theme and alert you to the senses of the term pertinent to our purpose, which is not linguistic. As you study Scripture and other works by informed authors, think about all the terms they use and take each polysemous term in a sense that fits the context. My advice here is the key to this work and others. The sense of *maqom* that I explained here, in *Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place*, is a case in point. For you see it in the same sense when God says, *Lo, there is a place by Me* (Exodus 33:21). It signifies a certain intellectual plane, a vantage point not for vision but for reason—not just the site alluded to on the mountain, where Moses stood apart and reached fulfillment.

## Chapter 9

**1.19a** *Kisse*, seat. In its basic sense, this was a word for a throne. But only people of majesty and authority, like kings, sat on a throne. So the throne became a concrete symbol of the rank and authority of one deemed worthy of it. Hence the Temple was called God's throne, emblematic of the majesty of Him who revealed Himself there, imbuing it with His light

96. Like Aristotle (*Physics* IV 1), Maimonides speaks of 'place' rather than space, for a 'place' is defined by (and relative to) the body located in it. Talk of "space" suggests the reality of the void, which Maimonides, like Aristotle, thinks impossible—as if nothingness could be real.

97. Rabbinically, God, as the Ground of all reality, is called the Place (*ha-Maqom*). See Urbach, *The Sages*, 1.66–69; cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.5.9.5–10.

and glory. As it says, *Throne of Glory, exalted from the start* [*is our holy Temple's site*] (Jeremiah 17:12).

It is in this sense that the heavens are called God's throne. They show those who know and study them the majesty of the Creator who moves them and governs the world below through the bounty flowing from them—as it says, *So saith the Lord: "The heavens are my throne . . ."* (Isaiah 66:1). "The heavens," He says, "betoken My reality, My majesty and sway, just as a royal throne bespeaks the majesty of its rightful tenant." This is what theists should believe, not that there is some body upon which God is enthroned on high.[98] I will prove to you that God is not a body. So how could He have a place or be seated on something? The simple truth is that any place God has ennobled or favored with His light and splendor, like the Temple or the heavens, is called His throne.

Taken broadly, as in *hand on God's throne* (Exodus 17:16),[99] the word stands for God's majesty and sublimity, not to be imagined as anything apart from Him or created by Him, as if He might have or lack His 'throne.' That would be unbelief without question. For it says plainly, *Thou, Lord, art forever, Thy throne in every generation* (Lamentations 5:19)—showing that He and His throne are inseparable. Here, and in all such passages, *kisse* refers to God's majesty and sublimity, which is Himself, as will be explained in other chapters of this work (I 51–58; III 7).[100]

98. God's being seated on His throne is a dogma in several Islamic creeds. In *Waṣīyat Abī Ḥanīfa*, for one, believers affirm, "We confess that God is seated on His throne" (Wensinck, *Muslim Creed*, 127). Also, "Even al-Ashʿarī in his *Ibāna* combats with vigour any allegorical or spiritual explanation of Allah's sitting on his throne" (ibid., 116; cf. 67, 90, 148). Cf. 1.31a; and for the throne (or chariot) Ezekiel beheld and the nature of its occupant, see 3.11a.

99. Moses cites God's oath, swearing, as it were, by His throne; see Ibn Ezra et al. ad loc.

100. God's "throne" symbolizes the justice that renders His rule unshakable (III 17, 3.35a; cf. Psalm 93). Saadiah writes, "When a man is unjust and hates just rule, his own affairs are not well ordered or successful, as it says, *A man is not established by iniquity* (Proverbs 12:3). But He, whose concerns run in perpetual order and stability is on a plane which precludes His being unjust. . . . His judgment cannot be impugned. . . . For it is absurd to impugn Truth itself. . . . The king deserves to rule only for his justice. So it is absurd that He be a rightful king and yet be vicious. Such a thing could occur only among humans, through a struggle for power" (at Job 34:13–18; Goodman, *Book of Theodicy*, 359–60). According to al-Āmirī, "Porphyry said, 'He who deserves to rule is he who manages his own affairs rightly. He can rule well politically,' he said, because the true artist is he who can elevate his work to the highest perfection. The highest capacity to command and forbid goes with that" (Ghorab, "Greek Commentators," 80).

## Chapter 10

**1.19b** As I said, when I discuss one or another polysemous term in this work, my aim is not to list every sense in which the expression is used. This is not a work on language. I will cite only the senses relevant to our purpose. Such is the case with *yarod* and *ʿaloh*. These Hebrew terms signify descending and rising: If a body moves downward, it is said to descend; if it moves up, to rise. Figuratively, the terms denote shifts in rank or dignity: Someone demoted was said to fall; if promoted, to rise. Thus God says, *The stranger amongst you shall rise ever higher above you, and ye shall decline . . .* (Deuteronomy 28:43); again, *The* LORD *God will set thee on high, above every nation on earth* (28:1). It also says, *The* LORD *raised up Solomon* (1 Chronicles 29:25). You know how often they invoke the rule "with holy things one may upgrade but not downgrade."[101] Similarly, one who directs his thoughts toward what is very base is said to lower himself. When he turns to the lofty and sublime, he is said to be uplifted.

**1.20a** Now since we, the tribe of Adam, are the lowest of the low, not just in place but in the order of being compared to the encircling sphere,[102] and He is the highest of the high, not spatially but in majesty, reality, and sublimity, and He was pleased to shed upon some of us some measure of knowledge and inspiration, that influx of prophetic inspiration or Shekhinah was termed His descent, and loss of that prophetic state or of the Shekhinah was called ascent. Every ascent or descent that you find ascribed to the Creator is meant solely in this sense.[103]

101. One may sell land to buy a synagogue but not vice versa (M. Shekalim 6.4, Megillah 3.4, B. Yoma 73a). On Hanukkah, a candle is added each night, not taken away (B. Shabbat 21b).

102. Earth is the lowest of things in position and worth: "What part of the universe is more ignoble than the earth?" (Galen, *De Usu Partium* 17.1, May, 730). So much for the notion that earth's centrality makes man the cynosure of the cosmos; see *Guide* III 13 and cf. Saadiah, *ED* IV Exordium, IX 1.

103. Thus, too, Onkelos and the Jerusalem Targum on Exodus 19:20 (cited at I 27; cf. Pesikta Rabbati 21.5–6, etc.). The rabbinical teacher in Halevi's *Kuzari* (2.7) has it that what "descends" is God's created glory; cf. Saadiah, *ED* 2.4. But Baḥya ben Asher, like Maimonides, reads descent as a metaphor for enlightenment. The de-anthropomorphizing had its target. *Tanna de-Bei Eliyahu* proclaims, "God descended from the abode of effulgent glory, the highest heavens" (chap. 17, ed. Ish Shalom [Friedmann], *Tanna de-Bei Eliyahu*). Rabbi Meir Ibn Gabbai (a fifteenth-century kabbalist), reacting against Maimonides, wrote, "The Divine Glory came down the mountain. There is nothing surprising here. Did God Himself not say, *I will go down with you to Egypt* (Genesis 46:4)? Do not be misled by the sowers of confusion who weigh their deceitful reason against the Torah's words that issue from our blessed Creator and are understood aright only from His mouth. All their words and arguments to the contrary, aimed ostensibly at exalting God, are utterly for nought! It is of such that the Psalm says, *Who blaspheme Thee, raising Thee up for the worse* (139:20)." The word for *blaspheme* here is an anagram of exalt. "What was the point of building a Tabernacle

Similarly, when ill befalls a people or a land in God's eternal plan, before describing the event, Scripture says that God marked their doings and brought down punishment upon them. So the metaphor of descent is used in this sense too. Man would be too small for his actions to be noted and punished were it not for God's plan, as is clear when it says, *What is man that Thou art mindful of him, the son of man that Thou payest him heed?* (Psalms 8:5). That is what this verse means. Accordingly, divine chastisement is termed a descent. It says, *Let us go down and confound their speech* (Genesis 11:7), *God went down to see* (11:5), and *Let Me go down and see* (18:21). In all these passages, the reference is to retribution visited upon those dwelling here below.

The prior sense, referring to inspiration or edification, is often found: *I will descend and speak to you* (Numbers 11:17), *The Lord descended on Mount Sinai* (Exodus 19:20), *The Lord will come down in the sight of all the people* (19:11), *God ascended from him* (Genesis 35:13), and *God ascended from Abraham* (17:22). When it says *Moses went up to God* (Exodus 19:3), we have this third (inspirational) sense of rising, besides his ascent to the mountaintop, where God's created light had fallen—not that God has a location to which one might rise or from which He might descend. Far exalted is He above the fancies of the benighted![104] **1.20b**

## Chapter 11

*Yeshivah*. Originally, the word meant sitting: *Eli the priest sat in a chair* (1 Samuel 1:9). But since a seated person is steady and stable as can be, the term was applied metaphorically to any fixed and stable state. So in pledging that Jerusalem would endure at the highest rank, it says, *She will rise and sit in her place* (Zechariah 14:10). Again, *He seats the barren woman in her home*, [*a happy mother*] (Psalms 113:9)—settles and establishes her there.

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and a Temple on earth modeled on the heavenly chariot, if not to provide Him a dwelling place below like the one He has on high? We, faithful offspring of the faithful, rightly believe God's glory descended on Mount Sinai. The Torah itself attests it, and *The testimony of the* LORD *is sure* (Psalms 19:8)" (*'Avodat ha-Kodesh* Sitrei Torah, 30, quoted in Heschel, *Heavenly Torah*, tr. here after Tucker). Maimonides allows for a visible manifestation, God's "glory" (I 19; cf. I 5, 1.17a), but God's created glory is not God. "One who translates Scripture literally is a liar" (B. Kiddushin 49a).

104. Maimonides has not yet proved that God does not travel; he assumes it. He does have rabbinic support: "How is it possible to say, 'The LORD went'? Did not the prophet say long ago of God, *Do I not fill heaven and earth?* (Jeremiah 23:24). Is it not written, *The whole earth is full of His glory* (Isaiah 6:3)? How can we say of God, 'He went'?" *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Beshallaḥ.

It is in this sense that it says, *Thou, O Lord, shalt sit forever* (Lamentations 5:19), *who sittest in the heavens* (Psalms 123:1), *who sitteth in the heavens* (2:4)—ever abiding, invariant in every way, changeless in Himself, with no feature beyond Himself in which He might change, nor changeable in relation to anything else.[105] For nothing is related to Him in ways that would imply His changing, as will be shown (I 52). The image of sitting perfectly expresses His absolute invariance, as He states plainly: *I, the LORD, do not change* (Malachi 3:6). His immutability is absolute. It is in this sense that He is said to sit.

This imagery is most often linked with the heavens. For they too are invariant,
**1.21a** immune to the alterations of transitory, corruptible, terrestrial things. So when He is likened (albeit equivocally) to the species of things that arise and perish, He, too, is said to sit. For species are constant, ordered, and abiding, like the celestial beings. Thus it says, *who sitteth above the circle of the earth* (Isaiah 40:22), steady and stable beyond the earthly round—that is, the cycles of transient, terrestrial things.[106]

It also says *The Lord sitteth at the flood* (Psalms 29:10), meaning that through all the earth's upheavals and metamorphoses, His relation to it does not change but abides, fixed and unaltered, whether things arise or decay. For He relates to the species of things that come to be, not the particulars (III 17). If you study the usage of 'to sit,' you'll find that it's always in this sense that it's applied to God.

## Chapter 12

*Qimah*, rising, has multiple meanings. One is to get up rather than remain seated. Thus, [*Mordecai*] *did not rise or even stir for him* (Esther 5:9). But it can also indicate steadfastness and constancy: *The Lord keep* (yaqem) *His word* (1 Samuel 1:23), *Ephron's field was made*

105. Cf. Plato, *Republic* II 380–81. God's immutability may seem an exotic idea, but it is of ancient provenance. Of Platonists, Augustine writes, "They saw that nothing physical can be God, so they raised their eyes above all material bodies in their search for God. They realized that nothing changeable can be the highest god, so in their search for the highest god they raised their eyes above all mutable souls and spirits. They saw too that in all mutable beings the form determining its being, its manner of existence and its nature can come only from Him who truly is since He exists immutably" (*City of God* 8.6).

106. Maimonides takes the hapax legomenon *ḥug* in Isaiah's *ḥug ha-aretz* to mean nature's cycles that track the celestial revolutions and sustain all living species. See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* II 12, 96a; *Metaphysics* H 9, 1050b28–30; and Lang, "Why the Elements Imitate the Heavens." Seeskin, in *Searching for a Distant God*, notes with surprise that Pines, unaccountably, offers "over and above the circling of the earth—he means its rotation," although Maimonides clearly does not hold that the earth rotates. Indeed, he precludes any such misreading of his sense by adding, in Pines's own translation, "the reference being to the things generated in it in rotation"—that is, to the cycles of natural change.

*over* (yaqom) [*to Abraham*] (Genesis 23:17–18), *A house in a walled city* [*if unredeemed for a full year*] *is* [permanently] *conveyed* (qam; Leviticus 25:30), and *rule over Israel shall remain* (qamah) *in thy hand* (1 Samuel 24:21). It is always in this sense that the term is applied to God: *Now will I arise, saith the Lord* (Psalms 12:6; Isaiah 33:10)—meaning 'Now will My word, My promise and threat, be fulfilled.' And again, *Thou wilt arise and have compassion on Zion* (Psalms 102:14)—'What You promised, in Your mercy, will hold.'

When someone resolves to do something, he rises; and a rebellion is called an uprising: *My own son hath made my servant rise up against me* (1 Samuel 22:8). This sense is applied metaphorically to the execution of God's sentence on folk deserving destruction: *I have risen against the house of Jeroboam* (Amos 7:9), or *He will rise up against the house of evildoers* (Isaiah 31:2). When it says, *Now will I arise* (Psalms 12:6; Isaiah 33:10), the expression has the same sense. Likewise in *Thou wilt arise and have compassion on Zion* (Psalms 102:14)—meaning 'Rise up against her foes!' Many texts use the expression in this way—not that God literally sits or rises. As the Sages say, "On high there is no sitting or standing," using 'standing' to signify rising (B. Berakhot 17a).[107] **1.21b**

## Chapter 13

*'Amidah* is another word with multiple senses. It may mean 'standing' or 'rising.' Thus, *when he stood before Pharaoh* (Genesis 41:46), *though Moses and Samuel stood before Me* (Jeremiah 15:1), and *he standing by them* (Genesis 18:8). Sometimes it means to give off and cease: *They came to a stand and spoke no more* (Job 32:16), or *She gave off childbearing* (Genesis 29:35). But it can also signify stability or permanence: *that they may long stand* (Jeremiah 32:14), *You will be able to stand* (Exodus 18:23), *His savor still stands in him* (Jeremiah 48:11). It is unaltered, and *His justice stands eternal* (Psalms 111:3)—abiding, everlasting. Whenever related to God, standing has this last sense. So *On that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives . . .* (Zechariah 14:4) means that His acts—their impact—will endure.[108] This will be explained when we treat the senses of 'foot' (I 28). It is in this sense that God tells Moses, *But thou, stand here by Me* (Deuteronomy 5:28), and *I stood between the Lord and you* (5:5).

107. The passage raises an early difficulty about 1 Kings 22:19, *I saw the Lord sitting on His throne*, cited at I 4, 15b—and thus about Ezekiel's vision that comes to the fore in III 1–7.

108. Zechariah envisions the setting of God's final judgment on the Mount of Olives. By citing this verse here (and in I 28) and its counterpart, 14:9, *On that day the LORD shall be one and His name one*, Maimonides offers glimpses of his vision of the Messianic Age (III 11–13), when the spread of understanding fulfills God's purpose in history; cf. Zechariah 5:11 and Maimonides' glosses at I 61 and 67. See Diamond, *Maimonides and the Hermeneutics*, 65–70, 155.

## Chapter 14

**1.22a** The senses of *adam*. This is the name of the first man, derived, as the text relates, from *adamah*, the soil (Genesis 2:7). It also names the species: *My spirit will not ever abide in man* (6:3), *Who knows if the spirit of the sons of man* [*rises*] (Ecclesiastes 3:21), and *The preeminence of man over beast is nought* (3:19). And it can mean the masses, the common folk rather than the elite: *men and people* (Psalms 49:3). It is in this third sense that we read *The sons of the notables saw the daughters of men*[109] [*that they were fair and took for themselves all that they chose*] (Genesis 6:2) and *So shall ye die, as men* (Psalms 82:7).[110]

## Chapter 15

*Natzov* and *yatzov*, to stand up. The two words have distinct roots, but their meaning is the same, as you know, in all their inflections.[111] Yet the term does have multiple senses. It may mean standing or rising: *His sister stood at a distance* (Exodus 2:4), *The kings of the earth stand* (Psalms 2:2), and [*They came out*] *and stood* (Numbers 16:27). Or it may signify stability or permanence: *Thy word standeth in the heavens*, fixed and abiding. That is the sense whenever the expression is applied to the Creator: *There was the* LORD *standing atop it* (Genesis 28:13)—eternal and everlasting atop the ladder whose upper end was in the heavens, the other on earth. All who ascend climb by this ladder and must know Him. For He is there eternally at the summit.[112] What I say here clearly fits the imagery.

**1.22b** And *the angels of God* (28:12) here are prophets, in the sense found in *He sent an angel* [*to*

109. Like Rabbi Yudan in the Talmud, Onkelos, Jonathan ben Uzziel, Saadiah, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Naḥmanides, and Kimḥi, Maimonides takes *elohim* here to mean 'notables,' not gods (see 1.13ab), avoiding the notion of divine congress with mortals: The women were commoners' daughters. See *MT* Laws regarding Pagan Worship 5.8.

110. Sc., like ordinary men.

111. For the complementary roots, see Ibn Janāḥ (ca. 990–ca. 1055), *Sefer ha-Shorashim* (The Book of Roots), ed. Bacher, 201, 313.

112. Jacob's ladder symbolized the order of perfection, with God atop it, much as the Form of the Good surmounts the Divided Line in Plato's *Republic* 508b–11e. Neoplatonic images of ascent found a home in the tenth-century glosses by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' of the Qur'ānic account (17:1) of Muḥammad's *miʿrāj*, or ascent to the heavens; see Altmann, "Ladder of Ascension," *Studies*, 41–72. The Brethren invite their readers to join them in the spiritual journey (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *AvM*, 71–72); Ibn Gabirol (ca. 1020–1052/57/58) saw in Jacob's dream promises of guidance for the rational soul in its quest. The Andalusian philosopher al-Baṭalyawsī (1052–1127) fuses the kindred symbols in *K. al-Ḥadā'iq*, a work multiply translated and widely read in Hebrew.

*bring us out of Egypt*] (Numbers 20:16)[113] and *An angel came up from Gilgal to Bochim* (Judges 2:1). How fitting that it says *ascending and descending*, ascent first! After rising to a certain rung comes descent with what was gained, to govern and teach those on earth[114]—descent in the sense already explained (I 10).

Returning to our point: *Standing atop it* (Genesis 28:13) means that God is there, eternal and ever abiding, not that He stands bodily. It is in this sense that it is said, *Stand by the rock* (Exodus 33:21). *Natzov* and *ʿamod* clearly work the same way: As God says, *Lo, I will stand before thee at the rock in Horeb* (Exodus 17:6).

## Chapter 16

*Tzur*, rock, has multiple meanings. It may mean the mountain, as in *smite the rock* (Exodus 17:6), or a hard type of stone like flint, as in *knives of flint* [ḥarvot tzurim] (Joshua 5:2). It can also mean the quarry where stones are cut: *Look to the rock whence ye were hewn* (Isaiah 51:1). From this sense comes a metaphor for the source or origin of something. So after saying, *Look to the rock whence ye were hewn* [*and the hollow whence ye were dug*], it continues, *Look to Abraham, your father* [*and Sarah, your source*]. The text explains, in effect, that the rock whence we were hewn is our Father Abraham—follow in his footsteps, keep his religion, preserve his virtues. The chip should be true to the block.

113. Maimonides takes Moses humbly to call himself God's emissary—the sense he sees in 'angel' here. God's outreach meets and lifts one in his ascent. Creation, revelation, and providence, the great themes of the *Guide*, all address this encounter. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.7, 8.5. "The real conclusion" of the *Guide*, Lawrence Berman wrote, lay in Maimonides' ambitious effort "to restore a philosophic way of life" among his people. The emissary "must ascend to the truth . . . then descend to the society," emulating God's *ḥesed*, *tzedakah*, and *mishpaṭ* (III 53, 54). The *Guide* retraces this path, "which itself must mirror the path of Maimonides himself." L. Berman, "Structure of Maimonides' *Guide*," 10.

114. See I 54. "Our task as founders, then, is to compel the best natures . . . to make the ascent and see the Good. But when they have made it and looked long enough, we must not allow them . . . to remain on the heights and refuse to come down again to the prisoners in the cave and share their labors and rewards, however much or little these may be worth." The enlightened must govern, watch over, and care for the rest, helping those still in the dark to distinguish reality from shadows (Plato, *Republic* VII 519c–20c). According to Plotinus, "All that is fully achieved engenders" (*Enneads* 5.1.6; cf. 5.7.17, tr. MacKenna). Since emanation is the font of insight, Maimonides, too, sees the obligation to lead and guide as touching all who are able: They must share what they have learned, giving guidance, moral and spiritual. All real riches invoke an imperative to create. The same call to giving is found in Maimonides' models of education and of charity. Dāwūd al-Muqammiṣ sees a general obligation to attain the virtues but a special obligation for prophets, Priests, and Levites to teach and guide others. See Muqammiṣ, *ʿIshrūn Maqāla*, Stroumsa, 260.

**1.23a** It is in this sense that God is called a *rock*. For He is the Ground and active Cause of all else.[115] Thus, *the Rock whose work is perfect* (Deuteronomy 32:4),[116] *you forget the rock that begat* thee (32:18), *their rock had sold them* (32:30), *there is no rock like God* (1 Samuel 2:2), and *Rock of Ages* (Isaiah 26:4).

*Stand by the rock* (Exodus 33:21)—lean on Him, hold fast to the thought that He is the Source. For this is the entryway by which you will reach Him, as I explained (I 8) in glossing *Lo, there is a place by Me* (33:21).[117]

## Chapter 17

Do not assume that only theology is veiled from the masses. So is most of natural science. More than once I have cited the words "nor the Account of Creation to two" (B. Ḥagigah 11b). Not just exponents of our Torah but the philosophers and religious teachers of antiquity also cloaked their talk of ultimates and spoke in code: Plato and his predecessors called matter the female and form the male.[118] As you know, things that arise and decay have three facets: matter, form, and specific privation, always linked to matter. Without limitation, matter would have no form (see III 10). That is why privation counts as an ultimate.[119] When a form is gained, one privation—lack of that form—vanishes, and another takes its place in that matter, and so it goes continually, as physics shows. But if those who would never have been blamed for speaking plainly use metaphors and similes
**1.23b** in their teaching, are not we, who hew to the Law, all the more obliged to avoid being

115. It is "an indemonstrable axiom" that "nothing occurs without a cause" (Galen, *MM* 1.7.50).

116. The Torah's calling God a rock here is another mixed metaphor, confessing the inadequacy of any figure pointing toward God's absoluteness. As such images self-deconstruct and deconstruct one another, their dissolution reveals the poet/prophet's keen awareness of the limits of language.

117. Maimonides calls God his reader's Rock in the first line of the *Guide*. Isaiah invokes Abraham's moral and intellectual example in 51:1–2, naming Abraham and Sarah as Israel's rock and quarry. Abraham aids one in reaching God, the higher Rock; for at Moriah, he showed the nations of the earth "the ultimate limits of the love and fear of God" (*Guide* III 24). The Abrahamic pathway to God is limned vividly when Moses, standing at a rock, is shown God's grace and justice in nature's governance (Exodus 34:5–7).

118. See Plato, *Timaeus* 48e–52b. For the Pythagorean background, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A 5, 986a25; and Dillon, "Female Principles." For proximate sources of Maimonides' wording, see Robinson, "Some Remarks."

119. Maimonides anticipates his treatment of the problem of evil and the status of the Saṭan in the Book of Job in *Guide* 3.45a–46a.

overexplicit about things that are beyond the masses, or things they are liable to imagine quite otherwise than we intended? Bear this, too, in mind.[120]

## Chapter 18

*Karov*, *nego'a*, *negosh*—nearing, touching, drawing nigh. The three terms may denote spatial approach or contact. But they are also used cognitively, by analogy with the physical. 'Nearing' has its basic spatial sense in *when he neared the camp* (Genesis 32:19) and *as Pharaoh drew nigh* (Exodus 14:10). Touching has the basic sense of physical contact in *She touched his legs* (4:25) and *He touched it to my mouth* (Isaiah 6:7). It has the basic sense of approaching or coming closer to someone in *Judah drew near him* (Genesis 44:18).

The derived sense of these three terms involves cognitive or intellectual rather than spatial nearing or contact. Thus Scripture says, *Her doom reacheth the heavens* (Jeremiah 51:9).[121] The idea of nearing is used in this way in *Any case that is too hard for ye, bring it to me* (Deuteronomy 1:17)—inform me of it. So it can have the sense of conveying information. Drawing nigh is used cognitively in *Abraham drew nigh and said . . .* (Genesis 18:23). He was in an inspired ecstasy, a prophetic trance, as I'll explain (I 21; II 41). Again, *since this people hath drawn nigh to Me and honored me with lip and mouth . . .* (Isaiah 29:13).

Any reference in Scripture to one of God's creatures nearing or approaching Him has **1.24a**
this latter sense, since God is not a body, as will be demonstrated in this work (II 4). He does not near or approach anything, and nothing can approach or near Him. Transcending physicality implies transcending space. It voids notions of proximity, approach, and distance, contiguity, separation, adjacency, and contact.[122]

I do not see you falling into a quandary or confusion over the words *The LORD is near to all who call upon Him* (Psalms 145:18), *They long for nearness to God* (Isaiah 58:2), or *To me the good is to be close to God* (Psalms 73:28). In all these passages, the nearing is intellectual; it regards knowing, not location. Likewise when it says *so near* (Deuteronomy 4:7), *draw nigh and hear* (5:24), and *Moses alone shall approach the LORD, but they shall not* (Exodus 24:2). You may, if you like, take this to regard Moses' nearing the place on the mountain invested with the light of God's glory. But remember, there is no difference

120. Even Greek thinkers, bound by no rabbinic constraints, use poetic indirection. All the more so must we. It is no mere nicety but a necessity, given the risks inherent in using human language to speak of God.

121. Babylon's guilt is immense, and God knows, but not perceptually, the judgment they deserve. Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12) is also said to reach (*magi'a*) the heavens. Here, too, the link is intellectual, being emanative; cf. Plotinus' use of the Greek *aphe* for intellectual contact. See Diamond, *Maimonides and the Hermeneutics*, 90–95.

122. Cf. Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, tr. Goodman, 150–55.

between being at the center of the earth or in the ninth sphere (were that possible): One would be no farther from God here and no closer there. One nears God by knowing Him. Distance is ignorance of Him. There are many degrees of nearness or distance in this way. I will explain how these planes of awareness differ in another chapter of this work (I 59).

When it says, *Touch the mountains and make them smoke* (Psalms 144:5), it means "Lay Your command upon them," as it were,[123] just as the Saṭan says to God, *Touch his person* (Job 2:5)—harm him directly.[124] 'Contact' and every inflected form of that word should be dealt with in this way wherever they appear: The sense can be physical, but
**1.24b** the contact may also be intellectual—connecting with an idea, as if one had neared and taken hold of something once remote. Do understand this.

## Chapter 19

*Melo'*—to fill. An equivocal term. It can denote repletion of one body by another: *She filled her jug* (Genesis 24:16) and *an omer-full each* (cf. Exodus 16:32–33). This is frequent. The term is also used for completing a span of time: *Her term was full* (Genesis 25:24) and *His forty days were full* (50:3). Or it may mean reaching consummate goodness or perfect virtue: *Filled with the* LORD*'s blessedness* (Deuteronomy 33:23), *He filled them with skill* (Exodus 35:35), and *He was full of skill, resource, and knowledge* [*of every kind of work in bronze*.] (1 Kings 7:14). It is in this sense that it is said, *All the earth is filled with His glory* (Isaiah 6:3), meaning 'All the earth attests to His perfection'—it gives evidence of Him. Likewise, *The glory of the* LORD *filled the Tabernacle* (Exodus 40:34). Every reference you find to God's filling something has this sense; it does not imply a body in space. But if you prefer to take *the glory of the* LORD here to be a created light, everywhere called glory, that *filled the Tabernacle*, there is no harm in that.[125]

## Chapter 20

*Ram*—high. This may mean elevated in space or in rank, majesty, dignity, or honor. It
**1.25a** says, *The ark was lifted high above land* (Genesis 7:17). Here the term is used in its original sense. It also says, *I raised up one chosen from the people* (Psalms 89:20), *since I raised thee from the dust* (1 Kings 16:2), and *since I raised thee from the midst of the nation* (14:7)—all

123. God's word of command represents His efficacy.

124. Job has lost his possessions and his children; the Saṭan challenges God: Touch him directly, *all that a man hath will he give up to save himself* (2:4); see *Guide* 3.45b.

125. The notion of the created light or glory of God—as expounded, say, by Saadiah—does help clear away troublesome anthropomorphisms: It was not God that filled the Tabernacle.

these are in the second sense. With God it is always the latter sense that is used: *Exalted be Thou, God, high above the heavens* (Psalms 57:6).

The term *naso'* (to lift) likewise can have the sense of elevation in place, rank, or fortune: *They lifted their grain onto their asses* (Genesis 42:26) in the first sense. The term often has that sense, since moving goods involves lifting them. In the second sense we have *His kingdom exalted* (Numbers 24:7), *He took them and raised them up* (Isaiah 63:9), and *Why bear ye yourselves so high!* (Numbers 16:3). Whenever God is said to be upraised, this is the sense. Thus, *Rise up, Judge of the earth* (Psalms 94:2), and *So saith the High and Exalted* (Isaiah 57:15)—exalted in majesty, dignity, and honor, not location.

You might see a problem in my saying majesty, dignity, and honor: "How can you draw multiple senses from one idea?" But the enlightened understand, as you will soon see, that God is not to be described by multiple predicates; all the many terms pointing to exaltation, majesty, might, perfect being, and so on regard His Identity and nothing else. Chapters about the names and epithets applied to God (I 31–64, 69–70) will reach you soon. But my point in this chapter is just that *high* and *exalted* regard rank, not location.

## Chapter 21

*'Avor*—passing. The base meaning is the same as that of 'pass' in Arabic, a change of place, typically said of a living being crossing ground: *He passed before them* (Genesis 33:3) or *Pass before the people* (Exodus 17:5). This is frequent. Later the sense was enlarged to include the spread of a sound through the air: *They passed the call through the camp* (36:6) and *The report I hear passing amongst the* LORD*'s people* (1 Samuel 2:24). It was applied metaphorically to the spread of light and to the Shekhinah beheld in a prophetic vision:[126] *Lo there was a smoking firepot and a flaming torch that passed between those pieces* (Genesis 15:17). This was in a prophetic vision. For it says at the outset, *Abram fell into a trance* (15:12). It is in this figurative sense that it is said, *I passed through the land of Egypt* (Exodus 12:12)—and so in all such cases. **1.25b**

In another sense, one who goes too far is said to pass the mark: *A man past his limit with wine* (Jeremiah 23:9). The term is also applied metaphorically to one who bypasses one goal and takes another: *He fired an arrow past him* (1 Samuel 20:36). It is in this figurative sense, as I see it, that it says, *The* LORD *passed his face* (Exodus 34:6). The antecedent of *his* here would be God, as the Sages take it in narratives not relevant here (B. Rosh

126. Arabic, *sakīnah*, immanence (cf. Qur'ān 2:248, etc.). By translating the Hebrew *shekhinah* (cf. Urbach, *The Sages*, 1.37–65), Maimonides presses his understanding that God's presence is not a hypostasis but, like God's glory, a created or a subjective reality. See I 10, 1.20a; cf. Onkelos' avoidance of hypostatizing God's name at Deuteronomy 12:11, 12:21, 14:23, etc.

ha-Shanah 17b) but confirming my view that *his face* is that of the Holy One, blessed be He.

The explanation, as I see it, is this: Moses sought to know God in a certain way, called seeing the face, as in *My Face shall not be seen* (Exodus 33:23).[127] But he was promised a lesser epiphany, called seeing the back: *Thou shalt see My back* (33:23). I noted this usage in *Mishneh Torah* (Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 1.10). What it says, then, is
**1.26a** that God masked His face and passed him on to something else, knowledge of the acts credited to Him, which are ascribed to multiple attributes, as I shall explain (I 54). By 'masked' I mean that such an experience is barred, impossible by its nature. If any enlightened man's mind grasps all that its nature permits yet longs for more, it is either undone or destroyed,[128] as I shall explain in a later chapter of this work (I 32)—unless divinely aided, as it says, *I shall cover thee with My hand while I pass* (33:22).

The Targum follows its usual practice in rendering this verse: Whenever it finds anything ascribed to God suggesting corporeality or any of its appurtenances, it shifts the reference to something else deemed understood. So when it says, *There was the* LORD, *standing atop it* (Genesis 28:13), Onkelos translates it as "The glory of the LORD stood above it." When it says, *The* LORD *stand between me and thee* (31:49), he has "The LORD's Word abide between me and thee." He consistently glosses in this way. So when it says, *The* LORD *passed by his face* (Exodus 34:6), Onkelos renders it as "The LORD caused His manifestation to pass before him, and proclaimed . . ." For Onkelos, what passed was surely something created. He took Moses to be the antecedent of *his*, giving *passed by his face* the sense of 'passed before him,' as in *The offering passed before him* (Genesis 32:22). This interpretation, too, is just fine.

Supporting Onkelos' approach, Scripture says, *As My glory passeth* (Exodus 33:22)—the reference explicitly being not to God Himself but to something associated with Him. It would be of God's glory, then, that it is said, *until I have passed* (33:22) and *The* LORD *passed by his face* (34:6). If one must presume an implicit referent, as Onkelos always does,
**1.26b** supplying God's glory, manifestation, or word, as context demands, I would supply 'voice' here, giving the sense of "The LORD's voice passed before him and called out." I have already explained the figure of a voice passing in *They passed the call through the camp* (36:6). The voice would be what called out. You should not think it far-fetched that a voice is said to call. For it is in just such words that God's address to Moses is described: *He heard the voice speaking to him* (Numbers 7:89). Speaking is ascribed to a voice the

127. When invoking the divine, the ancients, not atypically, "expected their gods to come" (Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 97). The God of Abraham, as Moses learned, did not just appear when summoned, even if called by His rightful name. It is He who does the summoning. God has no literal face, nor any essence in the usual sense. God "bypassed" His ipseity.

128. Looking straight at the sun causes blindness. Ben Zoma sought too much before he was ready and went mad.

same as calling. Sometimes a voice is directly said to speak or call: *A voice saith, "Call out!" And I said, "What shall I call out?"* (Isaiah 40:6). Our verse, then, would mean 'A voice from God passed before him and called, *LORD, LORD*' (Exodus 34:6). *LORD* is repeated, since this is a call in which God Himself is addressed, as in His calls, *Moses, Moses* (3:4), or *Abraham, Abraham* (Genesis 22:11). This, too, is a fine gloss.

Do not be troubled that this knotty and challenging issue bears multiple interpretations. That does not harm our project. Choose the view you like: (1) Moses' great epiphany was, of course, wholly within a prophetic vision. That is, all that he yearned for was intellectual: What he sought, what he was denied, and what he attained were all conceptual, not sensory at all, as I glossed it at first. Or (2) as Onkelos glossed it, there was something more that was seen visibly, his intellectual understanding complemented by something created—unless that, too, was within his prophetic vision, as with Abra- **1.27a**
ham: *Lo there was a smoking firepot and a flaming torch that passed . . .* (Genesis 15:17).[129] Or (3) his intellectual understanding was seconded by an auditory apparition. What passed before him, then, would be the voice—created, of course. Choose the view you please.[130] The whole point is that you should not believe that *passed* here means what it does *in pass before the people* (Exodus 17:5). God is not a body, and motion is not predicable of Him. So He cannot be said to pass in the term's original sense.

## Chapter 22

*Bo'*—to come. 'Coming' in Hebrew is applied to the arrival of a living being that approaches another person or place. Thus, *Thy brother came with deceit* (Genesis 27:35). The word is also applied to a living being reaching a place: *when Joseph came home* (43:26) and *when ye come to the land* (Exodus 12:25). Metaphorically, the term may be applied to the arrival of something not physical at all: *that we may honor thee when thy words come to pass* (Judges 13:17) or *what may come upon thee* (Isaiah 47:13). It is even applied figuratively to privations: *Evil came . . . darkness came* (Job 30:26).[131] Since 'coming' is predicated of

129. Both Onkelos and Saadiah read Genesis 15:12 as stating that the sun had set, suggesting that Abraham's *tardemah*, or trance, fell upon him in sleep. The *smoking firepot*, then, would have been within his prophetic vision rather than a created manifestation.

130. There are created expressions of God. The world itself is such. But created light and glory, voices, and other such manifestations are best seen as subjective phenomena, part of an experience. No one "perceives" God.

131. Evil is not a real thing but a lack, as darkness is an absence of light; see III 22. Scholem disparages the Maimonidean treatment of evil as privation, calling it "cold comfort to those who are genuinely plagued by fear and sorrow to be told that their troubles are but the workings of their own imagination" (*Major Trends*, 35). But that is to dismiss a philosophical

things not physical at all, it is also said figuratively of the Creator, whether of His immanent Word or His Shekhinah: *Lo, I shall come to thee in the thick of a cloud* (Exodus 19:9), *for the* LORD*, God of Israel, hath come through it* (Ezekiel 44:2). Any such passage refers to God's Shekhinah. But *The* LORD *my God and all the holy ones with thee shall come to thee* (Zechariah 14:5) means fulfillment of His word, keeping the promises He
**1.27b** made through His prophets: In effect, 'The word of the LORD, God of Israel, shall come to pass, as given through all the holy ones with thee'—meaning Israel.

## Chapter 23

*Yetzi'ah*—leaving, like coming, is used to signify an animate or inanimate body's departing one place for another: *They had left the city* (Genesis 44:4) or *when a fire goes forth* (Exodus 22:5). It is applied figuratively to things entirely nonphysical: *No sooner had the command left the king's mouth* (Esther 7:8) or *when the queen's conduct gets out* (1:17), meaning when word spreads. *From Zion shall the Law go forth* (Isaiah 2:3). Similarly, *The sun went out over the land* (Genesis 19:23)—dawn came. It is in this figurative sense that we should take every reference to 'going' applied to God: *Lo, the* LORD *goeth forth from His place* (Isaiah 26:21)—that is, His decree, until now hidden from us, has become manifest. This might apply to anything new. For whatever He brings to be is ascribed to His word: *At the word of the Lord the heavens were made, all their host at the breath of His mouth* (Psalms 33:6). The analogy is with the acts of kings, whose speech is their instrument in executing their will. But God needs no instrumentality by which to act. He acts by His will alone without speaking, as we shall see (I 65).

Since the manifesting of God's act is metaphorically called its issuance, as I explained in glossing *Lo, the* LORD *goeth forth from His place*, suspension of that act, at His will, is called 'return.' Thus, *I shall go and return to My place* (Hosea 5:15), meaning that God's
**1.28a** Shekhinah would no longer be with us. Providence over us would then be suspended. Thus, the warning *I shall hide My face from them, and they shall be consumed* (Deuteronomy 31:17). For loss of providence leaves one exposed to circumstance, one's weal and woe left to hazard. What an awful threat conveyed in *I shall go and return to My place*![132]

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account of the basis of evil with a rhetorical canard charging the philosopher, ad hominem, with failure to take others' sufferings seriously. Maimonides and others in the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions do not dismiss the fact of evil. They seek to account for the reality of sufferings, which they know all too well, without hypostatizing evil.

132. All order and understanding are gifts of God. Without general providence, nature would be chaos at best. Grace saves the world from that outcome (II 27–28). As for humanity, without God as a reference point, all real values vanish, leaving one unmoored, unable to order his priorities and act. Bereft and abandoned, having lost his bearings among life's goods

## Chapter 24

*Halikha*—to walk or go. This is another term specific to animal movements: *Jacob went his way* (Genesis 32:2). That is frequent. The same verb can be applied metaphorically to the movement of bodies more fluid than those of animals: *The waters gradually went down* (8:5) or *The fire streamed to the ground* (Exodus 9:23). In time it was applied figuratively to the appearance and spread of things not physical at all: *Her* [Egypt's] *sound goeth like a snake* (Jeremiah 46:22). It is in this sense that it says, *The voice of the* LORD *God went through the garden* (Genesis 3:8). The sound is what was said to travel.[133] When God is said to walk, it is always in this figurative sense. With nonphysical things, the image is one of diffusion; or with loss of providence, the analog would be an animal's leaving and going elsewhere.

Just as the withdrawal of providence is referred to as God's hiding His face, as in *I shall surely hide My face* (Deuteronomy 31:18), it is also called 'going' in the sense of leaving, as in *I shall go and return to My place* (Hosea 5:15). When it says, *The* LORD*'s wrath was kindled against them* [Aaron and Miriam]*, and He went* (Numbers 12:9), the two images are linked—withdrawal of providence, called a departure, and the spread or showing of the wrath that reached and touched them: *Her skin blanched white as snow* (12:10). **1.28b**

Leading a life of virtue is also metaphorically called walking, with no reference to bodily motion. Thus, *Walk in His ways* (Deuteronomy 28:9), *After the* LORD *your God shall ye walk* (13:5), and *Come, let us walk in the light of the* LORD (Isaiah 2:5).

## Chapter 25

*Shekhon*. It is well known that this verb means 'to dwell.' Thus, *when he was dwelling by the oaks of Mamre* (Genesis 14:13) or *It came to pass while Israel dwelt* [*in that land*] (35:22). This is the familiar sense. 'Dwelling' means staying somewhere. When an animal has a specific or general habitat, it is said to dwell there, even if it roams about in it, of course.

Figuratively, this language is applied to inanimate beings and indeed to anything fixed in or attached to something else. So the expression is applied even when what is "dwelt in" is not a place and what dwells there is not an animal. Thus it says, *Let a cloud dwell on it* [the day of Job's birth, which he consigns to darkness when he rues his fate] (Job 3:5). A cloud is not alive, obviously; nor, of course, is the day a body at all but a span of time.

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and ills, one becomes a butt of chance, in just the position that the Epicurean philosophers described (III 17–18).

133. The verse is usually translated as *They heard the sound of the Lord walking in the garden*.

It is in this metaphorical sense that the notion of dwelling is applied to God—referring
**1.29a** to His Shekhinah or providence, wherever that Presence or providence may abide. Thus, *The Glory of the* LORD *dwelt* [*on Mount Sinai*] (Exodus 24:16), *I shall dwell amidst the Children of Israel* (29:45), and *the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush* (Deuteronomy 33:16). Whenever this verb is applied to God, the reference is to His Shekhinah—that is, the light created in a place, or to His providence over something, as context requires.

## Chapter 26

You know the Sages' general thesis about any sort of exegesis in this domain: "Torah speaks in human language" (B. Yevamot 71a, Bava Metzi'a 31b).[134] That means that what applies to God is whatever people in general can absorb and conceive of without reflection. So He is described in physical terms to signify that He exists. For to the masses, at first blush, only bodies exist. What is not a body, or of a body,[135] to them is not real. Similarly, anything we take to be a perfection is ascribed to Him, so as to indicate His supreme and absolute perfection, unmarred by any defect; and nothing popularly thought a lack or defect is ascribed to Him: He is not said to eat, drink, sleep, fall ill, do wrong, or anything of the sort. But whatever the masses consider a perfection is ascribed to Him, even if it is such
**1.29b** only in us. For in Him our supposed perfections would be utter defects.[136] Yet if people fancied that He lacked such human perfections, they would think that a flaw in Him!

Motion, as you know, is a perfection in an animal and critical to its welfare. Just as it must eat and drink to restore what breaks down, it needs to move to pursue what is helpful and avoid what is not. There is no difference between saying that God moves and saying that He eats or drinks. Yet in "human language"—that is, in popular fancy—eating and drinking would be defects in God, but not motion, even though only dependence makes motion necessary.

134. The words are ascribed to Rabbi José in Sifra, Kedoshim 10 and Sifre Numbers, Shelaḥ; they reflect the debate between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael. Cf. Philo, *Questions on Genesis* 4.24, LCL Supp. 1.296–97; and Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, 2.189. Philo repeatedly cites Numbers 23:19, *God is not like man*, to show our need to transcend ordinary ways of thinking about God—although the Torah does accommodate human difficulties in rising beyond corporeal categories: "We creep within our covering of mortality, like snails into their shells, or like the hedgehog we roll ourselves into a ball, and we think of the blessed and immortal in terms of our own natures" (Philo, *On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 94–95, LCL 3.164–65). See Niehoff, *Philo*, 210–11.

135. Sc., as this whiteness is the whiteness *of* this paper. For those who believe nothing real but what they can grasp with their hands, see Plato, *Theaetetus* 155e.

136. Whatever finite minds conceive of as a perfection involves limitation.

It is demonstrated that whatever moves has a size and is, of course, divisible. We shall demonstrate that God does not have a size and so does not move. Nor can He be said to be at rest. For only what can move can be said to be at rest. So all the terms for various animal movements—and life as well[137]—are predicated of Him in the way I've explained. For motion is an animal trait. Without corporeality, of course, none of these applies: ascending, descending, walking, standing, shifting, sitting, dwelling, coming, going, passing, or any equivalent. It would be otiose to dwell on this but for the way ordinary people are used to thinking. That is why I must spell this out just a bit, as I have, for the sake of those reaching for human perfection and seeking to banish the delusions that have dogged them from childhood.

## Chapter 27

**1.30a** Onkelos the Proselyte was highly adept in Syriac and Hebrew. He made it his aim to purge corporealism, substituting fit glosses for any biblical predicate suggesting God's embodiment. Wherever he finds a term for motion of some kind, he takes it to mean an effulgence of created light manifesting God's Shekhinah or Providence. So he translates *The* LORD *will descend* (Exodus 19:11) as "The LORD will manifest Himself" and *The* LORD *descended* (19:20) as "The LORD revealed Himself." He does not say 'The LORD came down.' He translates *I will go down and see* (Genesis 18:21) as "I will now manifest Myself and see." And so on throughout his translation. But *I shall go down with thee to Egypt* (46:4) he translates as "I shall go down with thee to Egypt." What a wonderful mark of the man's mastery and exegetical insight! His treatment, moreover, discloses a major principle about prophecy. For at the start of the episode, it says, *God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, Jacob, Jacob! . . . I am God . . . I shall go down with thee to Egypt* (46:2–4). That opening situates God's promise within *visions of the night*. So Onkelos was not uncomfortable translating the passage literally. Rightly so. For it relates what Jacob heard, not some event like *The* LORD *descended on Mount Sinai* (Exodus 19:20), which speaks of an objective fact and so is paraphrased in terms of manifestation in order to bar any suggestion of God's moving. With things imagined—what Jacob was told—Onkelos kept the Torah's wording. Splendid!

**1.30b** We see here the great difference between what is said in a sleeper's dream, or in a waking vision or apparition (Numbers 12:6), and what is simply said—*The word of the* LORD *came to me, saying . . .* (Jeremiah 1:4; Ezekiel 3:16; Zechariah 4:8, 6:9) or *The* LORD

137. Aristotle's God is the ultimate cause of motion, although He does not move. His life is thought. See I 68.

*said unto me . . .* (Deuteronomy 1:42; Isaiah 8:1, 8:3; Jeremiah 1:7; Ezekiel 23:36; Hosea 3:1; Amos 7:8, 8:2; Zechariah 11:13, 11:15).

It is possible too I suppose, that Onkelos took 'God' here to mean an angel and so was not averse to translating the phrase as "I shall go down with thee to Egypt." You need not be troubled that he might take 'God' here to mean an angel, even though the speaker says, *I am God, the God of thy father* (Genesis 46:3). The same is said by an angel elsewhere in Scripture. You can see it, can you not, when Jacob says, *In a dream the angel of God said to me: 'Jacob!' And I answered, Here I am* (31:11)? For at the close of his account of the angel's address, Jacob reports that the angel said, *I am the God of Beth-El, where you anointed a pillar and took a vow to Me* (31:13). Jacob made his vow to God, of course, not to the angel. But when prophets report what an angel relayed to them from God, they regularly make God the speaker and elide the intermediary. In effect, the angel said, 'I am sent by the God of thy father' or 'I am sent by the God revealed to you at Beth-El' and so on. I shall have much more to say later on about prophecy and its degrees, and about angels, in keeping with this work's aim (I 43–44; II 32–36).[138]

## Chapter 28

*Regel* has multiple meanings. It is the word for a foot, as in [*an eye for an eye . . .*] *a foot for a foot* (Exodus 21:24). It can also indicate a following: *Go thou and all the nation at thy feet* (11:8)—your followers. It may have a causal sense: *The LORD hath blessed thee at my foot*
**1.31a** (li-ragli; Genesis 30:30)—my account, since that for the sake of which something is done is the basis or footing for it. This idiom occurs often, as in *for the sake* (li-regel) *of the herd before me and for the children's sake* (33:14).[139] So when it says, *On that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives* (Zechariah 14:4), it refers to the performance of what God has wrought, the wonders manifested by Him there on that day. So Jonathan ben Uzziel glossed, "On that day will His power be shown on the Mount of Olives." He translates every reference to a limb used for striking or for locomotion, likewise, in terms of power. For in every case these references point to the execution of His will.

When it says *under his feet, the like of a work clear as sapphire* (Exodus 24:10), Onkelos, as you know, took the feet to be those of the throne and renders the phrase "under the throne of His Glory." You can see and admire how far he kept from corporealism or anything even remotely suggesting it. He does not say 'under His throne.' For treating the throne as God's and taking 'throne' in its base sense would imply God's sitting on

138. For the Torah's elision of proximate causes, see II 48.

139. Often translated as "at the pace of," *li-regel* shows how a dead metaphor can take the more abstract sense Maimonides sees. Cf. the English idiom "in keeping with."

it, entailing His corporeality. So he makes it the throne of God's Glory, the Shekhinah, a created light. Thus, in his Targum, he renders *hand on God's throne* (17:16) as "before God, whose Shekhinah rests on the throne of Glory." You will find that phrase on all our nation's lips: *throne of Glory*.

I have digressed from my purpose in this chapter to mention a point to be developed in later chapters (II 26). Returning to the present chapter's aim, you have seen Onkelos' gloss. But that is as far as it goes. He excludes anthropomorphism but does not enlighten us about what the elders perceived or what it symbolized. That is what he does consistently. He does not explain a passage but simply bars anthropomorphism, since God's incorporeality is demonstrable and critical to belief. Sure of this, he translated accordingly. But symbols are contentious. They might mean this or that. It can be very obscure, and understanding these symbols is not critical to the faith, nor are they readily grasped by the masses. So he does not broach the subject. But in keeping with this work's purpose, I do need to offer a gloss. *Under his feet*, I say, means 'by His agency,' or 'on His account,' as I explained: What they apprehended was prime matter itself, which depends on Him, He being the Cause of its existence.[140] **1.31b**

Consider the words *the like of a work clear as sapphire*. If it meant white in color, it would say 'like the whiteness of sapphire.' It adds *a work* because matter, as you know, is always passive, inherently receptive. It does nothing, except *per accidens*—just as form is always naturally active. That is why it says *the like of a work*. But *clear as sapphire* means transparent, not white in color. Crystal is not white but perfectly transparent. Transparency is not a color, as is proved in the texts of physics. If it had a color, one could not see every color through it, and it would not take on other colors. It is because a transparent body has no color of its own that it takes all colors in turn—like prime matter, which has no form of its own and so can receive all forms in turn. What they beheld, then, was prime matter and its relation to God, as the first object of creation, calling for generation and corruption, which He initiates. On this topic, too, I shall have more to say (2.22b, 66a, 3.4a). **1.32a**

Even on Onkelos' rendering, "under the throne of His Glory," you need to read it in this way. For prime matter, too, is under the heavens, which are called God's throne (Isaiah 66:1), as we saw (I 9). What alerted me to this and led me to frame this striking gloss is a remark of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus that I saw, which you will hear in a later chapter of this work (II 26). But anyone with reason should bend every effort to deny God's corporeality and take any reference to awareness of Him as intellectual, not sensory. Do understand and reflect on this.

140. See Proclus, *Elements of Theology* §§56–57, 70–72, Dodds, 54–57, 66–69; Plato, *Philebus* 25b–26c.

## Chapter 29

*ʿEtzev* has multiple meanings. It is a word for pain or hurt: *In travail* (be-ʿetzev) *shalt thou bear children* (Genesis 3:16). It can also mean vexation: *All his life his father did not vex him* (1 Kings 1:6), meaning he never criticized him. Again, [*Jonathan . . . ate no food*,] *vexed for David* (1 Samuel 20:34)—aggrieved on his account.

The term can also signify recalcitrance and resistance: *They rebelled and opposed* (ʿitzvu) *His holy spirit* (Isaiah 63:10), [*How often did they defy Him in the wilderness*] *and grieve him in the waste* (Psalms 78:40), *if I have any untoward ways* (im derekh ʿotzev bi) (139:24), and *All the day do they torture* (yeʿatzevu) *My words* (56:6).

It is in the second or third sense that it is said. [*The* LORD *regretted that He had created man on earth*;] *it grieved Him at heart* (Genesis 6:6). Taken in the second sense, this would mean that God was troubled with them for their misdeeds. *At heart* is used the same way in Noah's story: *The* LORD *said in His heart . . .* (8:21). To explain:

**1.32b** When Scripture says that someone said something in his heart, or to his heart, it means he did not say it aloud or to someone else. Similarly, when God means to do something but does not foretell it to a prophet just then, it is said of Him, *He said in His heart*—anthropomorphically, as per the maxim "Torah speaks in human language." This is clear on the face of it. For the Torah relates not that any prophet was sent just then to forewarn or caution the rebellious generation of the Flood of their destruction but only that God was aggrieved with them at heart. Likewise with His intent that there should be no further Flood. No prophet was told then, "Go tell them this." So it says, *in His heart* (8:21, 9:11).

Taken in the third sense, *It grieved Him at heart* would mean that man had countered what God intended for him. For 'heart' can mean intent, as I shall explain in treating the senses of *lev* (I 39).

## Chapter 30

*Akhol*, to eat. Initially this word signified an animal's taking food. No illustration is needed. Language then looked to two aspects of eating: the destruction of what is eaten, loss of its original form, and the animal's growth, sustenance, survival, and health in all the bodily functions that nutriment sustains.

**1.33a** Based on the first sense, the term is applied metaphorically to any sort of ruining or destruction or general loss of form: *The land of your foes shall consume you* (Leviticus 26:38), *a land that devours its denizens* (Numbers 13:32), *By the sword shall ye be consumed* (Isaiah 1:20), *Must the sword consume* [*forever?*] (2 Samuel 2:26), and *A fire of the* LORD *broke out amongst them and consumed the outskirts of the camp* (Numbers 11:1). So *He is a*

*devouring fire* (Deuteronomy 4:24) means that God destroys those who resist Him, just as fire destroys what it overwhelms. This sense is frequent.

The second sense applies metaphorically to knowledge and learning and all intellectual mastery by which the human form is best sustained, much as food sustains the body in good health: *Come, buy and eat. . . . Hear me, and eat what is good* (Isaiah 55:1–2), *It is not good to eat too much honey* (Proverbs 25:27), and *Eat honey, my son, for it is good, its drops sweet upon thy palate; know that such is wisdom for thy soul* (24:13–14). The same usage is frequent in the discourse of the Sages too, calling knowledge food: "Come, eat rich meat at Rava's house" (B. Bava Batra 22a). "Every mention of eating and drinking in this book refers but to wisdom" (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 3.12)—or in some manuscripts, "to Torah." Similarly, they often call knowledge water: *Ho! Let all who thirst come for water* (Isaiah 55:1).

So frequent and familiar is this usage in Hebrew that it all but becomes the primary sense, with words for hunger and thirst used for want of knowledge and insight: *I shall loose a famine on the land, not a famine of bread or thirst for water, but for hearing the words of the* LORD (Amos 8:11) and *My soul thirsts for God, the living God* (Psalms 42:3). This, too, is frequent. Jonathan ben Uzziel translates *In joy shall ye draw water from the founts of salvation* (Isaiah 12:3) as "You shall receive new teaching from the righteous elect." He **1.33b**
reads *water*, you see, as the knowledge to be won in that age and takes *maʿayanei* (founts) as *me-ʿeynei*, as in *me-ʿeynei ha-ʿedah*, from the elite of the congregation (Numbers 15:24, where Jonathan takes *ʿeynei ha-ʿedah* to be *the eyes of the congregation*, thus its leaders)—that is, the learned—hence, "the righteous elect," since righteousness is true salvation. See how he glosses each word in the verse in terms of knowledge and learning. This you must understand.

## Chapter 31

The human mind, as you know, is naturally able to know certain things. Others are, by the very nature of the mind, completely closed to us. We have no means of grasping them. Still other things can be known in a certain state but not in others. Our ability to grasp some things does not mean we can know just anything. The senses perceive, but not at just any distance. The same is true of all our bodily powers: A man may be able to lift two hundred pounds, say, but not a thousand. It is obvious, and we all know, that human beings vary in sensory acuity, as in other physical capacities, but within limits. Our powers are not boundless. Intellectual acuity also varies greatly from one person to the next. This too is clear and evident to scholars.[141] One person might discover an idea

141. Maimonides rejects Rāzī's claim that all human beings are of equal intelligence.

**1.34a** independently that another might never understand, no matter how it was explained to him. Even if spelled out at length with all sorts of paraphrases and examples, his mind would not penetrate it but just miss it completely. Here again the range is not infinite. Human reason doubtless has a limit, at which it comes to a standstill.

Some things one knows are beyond his ken, and we do not find ourselves yearning to know them, realizing that they are beyond our reach—as we do not know the number of stars in the sky or whether it is odd or even, or how many species of animals or plants exist, or minerals and such. But there are things one finds oneself deeply longing to know. Reason, in thinkers of every stripe and in every era, longs to probe and penetrate the truth about these things. Here beliefs proliferate, disputes break out, and specious notions arise. For reason is bent on knowing these things, and everyone presumes he has found a route to truths beyond human reason's powers of proof. For truths known to be proven are not subject to controversy, scruple, or contention—unless by willful ignorance, resistance to proof, as they call it.[142] (There are those, you will find, who contest the earth's sphericity or the sphere's rotation and the like. But they do not concern us

**1.34b** here.) The subjects of such perplexity are quite numerous in divinity, few in the natural sciences, and absent in mathematics.[143]

Alexander of Aphrodisias lists three causes of contention: (1) a passion to win and dominate, which puts one off the scent of truth; (2) the intrinsic subtlety, profundity, and difficulty of the subject; or (3) ignorance and ineptitude that keep one from grasping what one might have. Thus Alexander.[144] But today there is a fourth cause that he does not list, since it did not obtain among them: custom and upbringing.[145] People are naturally attached to and fond of what is familiar—so much so that, despite their rough life,

142. "Some hold fast to their opinion and are called stubborn. They are hard to convince and not readily persuaded to change their minds. . . . The obdurate are opinionated, ignorant, or boorish—swayed by pleasure and pain. They enjoy winning when unpersuaded but are pained when refuted" (Aristotle, *NE* VII 9, 1151b5–16, tr. after Ross/Urmson, Ostwald, and Sachs).

143. Cf. Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, Jabre, 20–23; and Montgomery Watt, *Formative Period*, 33–37.

144. Alexander, *On the Cosmos*, Genequand, 125. Alexander, as Genequand notes, expands on Aristotle's famous remark, "As the eyes of bats are to the blaze of day, so is reason in our soul to the things most manifest of all" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* α 1, 993b7–11). Alexander adds contentiousness to Aristotle's concerns, as does Kindī, *Rasā'il* 1.103–4; cf. Fārābī, *K. al-Jamʿ*, ed. Dieterici (Leiden, 1890), 16. Alexander's *On the Cosmos* was widely read among philosophically inclined writers of Arabic and is cited often in the *Guide*. Davidson (*Moses Maimonides*, 110) calls the work "almost certainly" spurious. But fuller and better mss than the single Damascus manuscript Badawī used in preparing his 1947 *editio princeps* put such doubts to rest; see Genequand's introduction, 1–3.

145. Cf. Saadiah on tradition, *ED* Introductory Treatise v, Kafiḥ, 14–15, Rosenblatt, 16–18. Aristotle, in fact, makes a like point: "The impact of lectures on a hearer depends on his

meager diet, and lack of comforts, you will find Bedouins hate city life and do not pine for its pleasures. They prefer their familiar foul conditions to healthier but unwonted alternatives. They would not be at ease living in palaces, dressed in silk, or luxuriating in baths, unguents, and scents.[146] Just so, people grow attached to the familiar views they grew up with. They become partisans of those views and have no use for alternatives.[147] Bias toward the familiar can blind people to the truth. So the vulgar embraced corporealism and many another error in theology, as I will explain, being brought up in a culture based on texts of great authority, whose surface sense treats God corporeally and suggests all sorts of other groundless fantasies, although these revered texts spoke poetically and by indirection, for reasons that I will cite.

You should not assume that I bring up the limits of human reason just for the Torah's sake. The issue was well known and fully understood by the Philosophers regardless of school or sect. It is a truth that no one would doubt unless unaware of proven facts. I place this chapter here only to prepare for matters yet to come. **1.35a**

## Chapter 32

As you study this work, dear reader, do realize that our intellectual awareness, being linked to matter,[148] is just as vulnerable to disruption as the senses. Your eyes can see what is visible. But if you try to see something too distant, or to read very fine script or engraving, you may strain your eyes and not just fail to make it out but so injure and weaken your vision that you cannot see what you once could.[149] The same is true of thinking, as anyone pursuing a science will find:[150] By fixating on a topic and overtaxing the mind, one can grow muddled and fail to grasp even what he normally would. All bodily powers are alike in this way, and our intellectual apprehension is such as well. If you find yourself stumped by some puzzle and do not deceive yourself and convince yourself that there is proof of what cannot be proved or rush to reject any thesis not disproved—if you do not **1.35b**

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habits; for we demand familiar language. What is different seems ill suited, somewhat unintelligible and foreign because it's unfamiliar" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* α 3).

146. Ibn Khaldūn's Bedouins *do* come to prize the comforts of city life—although these can be their downfall. See Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah* chap. 2 §§16–17, Rosenthal, 1.284–87. Desert life, Maimonides holds, toughened Israel to fight for the Land (3.52, 70b).

147. Cf. Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, tr. Goodman, 163, citing Qurʾān 23:53, 30:32.

148. See Fārābī, *Ārāʾ* 4.13.1, Walzer, 198–99.

149. "Sensory excess can destroy the sense organs: If the motion an object stirs is too strong for an organ, the form that is its sensory capacity is disturbed, just as harmony and tone are destroyed by twanging too hard on the strings of a lyre" (Aristotle, *De Anima* II 12, 423a29–32).

150. Discursive thinking (*noesis*) is a temporal process, inherently linked to the physical.

hope to know what you cannot know, then you have done all that a human being can do, and you will stand alongside Rabbi Akiva, who "entered sound and emerged sound" when he pondered these matters of divinity (B. Ḥagigah 14b). But if you overreach or rush to discredit things not disproved but possible, even if remotely, you will have gone the way of Elisha Aḥer—you will not just fall short but turn wanting as can be, prey to delusions and prone to every sort of vice and ill, your mind distracted, its light doused, just as all sorts of illusions appear when one's vision is sapped by illness or by staring too long at bright lights or tiny objects.

It is about this that it says, *Hast thou found honey? Eat just enough, lest thou be glutted and vomit it up* (Proverbs 25:16).[151] The Sages applied that last to Elisha Aḥer.[152] What a marvelous image! Comparing knowledge to eating, as I mentioned (I 30), and citing honey, the most delicious foodstuff, but with a nature that makes one retch and vomit if one has too much. This kind of awareness, we are told, in effect—sublime, awesome,
**1.36a** and enlightening as it is—by its very nature turns harmful unless one is careful to stop at the right limit: Honey, in due measure, is nourishing and delicious, but all that is lost by overindulgence.[153] It does not say, 'lest you be glutted and find it cloying' but "lest you retch and vomit it up."

The thought recurs when it says, *It is not good to eat too much honey* (Proverbs 25:27), *Be not overwise lest thou be confounded* (Ecclesiastes 7:16), and *Guard thy step on entering the House of God* (4:17). David, too, touches on this theme: *Nor do I pursue things too great or wondrous for me* (Psalms 131:1). The Sages voice the same idea: "Do not pursue

151. Honey, consumed to excess, in summer, with certain other foods, the Talmud warns, "will snap one's heartstrings." Honey was deemed healthful Qur'ānically (16:69)—and by Dioscorides. But there can be too much of a good thing. Maimonides commends Aristotle (*Historia Animalium* IX 12, 588a3–6) for noting, as Galen does not, that in excess even mother's milk can cause spasms in an infant (Maimonides, *Medical Aphorisms* 9.127; cf. 24.42, Bos, 2.87, 5.93). Wisdom itself can harm the ill prepared. Hence the Talmud's cautionary narratives about the four who "entered the Pardes," probing the profundities of *Maʿaseh Bereshit* and *Maʿaseh Merkavah*.

152. The verse is, in fact, applied to Ben Zoma in Tosefta Ḥagigah 2.3; J. Ḥagigah 2.1, 77b applies it to Ben Azzai, as do the Midrash Rabbah on Song of Songs and Proverbs. We do not find the biblical warning applied explicitly to Elisha ben Avuya by the Sages, but Maimonides takes it to apply to all three of Rabbi Akiva's colleagues who entered the Pardes. Elisha, called "Aḥer," the Other, by the Sages, shunning even mention of his name, was said to have "nipped the young buds" (B. Ḥagigah 15a; cf. Plato, *Euthyphro* 2d). The Sages ascribe his apostasy to his pressing questions about the problem of evil.

153. Maimonides echoes the rabbinic aphorism *tafasta merubbeh, lo tafasta*—"Grasp too much, and you get nothing" (B. Yoma 80a). Rāzī warns, as Druart puts it, that excess "can breed melancholy and a tragic downfall in the overenthusiastic philosopher" (Rāzī, *K. al-Madkhal*, Vasquez de Benito, Arabic, 80–85; Spanish, 91–95; Druart, "Al-Razi's Conception of the Soul," 251).

things too wondrous for you or probe what is veiled from you. Explore what you may, but marvels are not your concern,"[154] meaning 'Do not dwell on matters beyond human ken.' Fixation on things beyond the grasp of human nature is highly dangerous, as I explained.

This is what the Sages meant by saying, "Whoever contemplates four things—[a pity he was born: What is Above, What is Below, What came Before, and What comes After.]"—and summing up, "Whoever slights his Maker's honor, [better he were never born.]" (M. Ḥagigah 2.1)—just the point I have been making: Do not chase a will-o'-the-wisp.[155] Faced with obscurities and unable to prove what you hoped to prove, do not just throw up your hands and careen into denial. Stand fast in deference to your Creator's honor, check yourself, and stop.[156]

The point is clear now. Our Prophets and Sages did not mean wholly to block the gateway to inquiry or bar the mind from grasping what we can, as the slack and ignorant presume, who love taking their own failings and density for wisdom and insight and the **1.36b**
wisdom and insight of others for folly and irreligion—*taking darkness for light and light for darkness* (Isaiah 5:20). The whole point is that human reason has limits. But do not just pick at the language I used regarding reason in this chapter or the rest. My aim here is to advise you about the point at issue, not to analyze the nature of the mind, a subject to be addressed in other chapters (I 68, 72).

## Chapter 33

To make this science of divinity one's starting point is extremely dangerous—as it is to start by glossing prophetic symbols and unwrapping the imagery pervasive in Scripture. We must nurture little ones and steady their steps as their ability permits. Those who seem able intellectually and ready to move on to the higher plane of rigorous thinking

154. Maimonides echoes B. Ḥagigah 13a, which quotes Ben Sira's cautions against probing *nistarot*, "mysteries," not *nifla'ot*, "marvels." But as Schwarz notes ad loc., Ben Sira does admonish, *Seek not things too marvelous for thee. . . . Mysteries are not thy concern* (3:21–22); cf. Genesis Rabbah 8.2 and Saadiah's introduction to *Sefer Yetzirah*, his anti-Karaite *Kitāb al-Iʿtibār*, and its Hebrew version, *Sefer Galui* ("The Open Book"). Maimonides conflates the two Ben Sira verses.

155. Maimonides trims the apparent obscurantism of the famous passage: Not that we should shun questions of creation or destiny, but just not bite off more than we can chew. We emulate Socratic wisdom if, like Akiva, we know our limitations.

156. Maimonides contrasts checking oneself (*kaffa*) against headstrong denial. Echoing Rabban Gamliel's advice, "Be quit of doubt" (M. Avot 1.16), he avoids the Skeptics' strategy of *epoche*, suspending judgment in the face of doubt. Doubt, he holds, does not demand denial. Faced with imponderables, one should stand one's ground (*bal yathbutu*) and defer to God and His Torah. Maimonides puts that counsel to work in II 13, 17, 22, 23.

and real reasoning should advance step by step toward intellectual maturity under another's guidance or on their own. One who hazards this divine science unprepared will not just muddle his beliefs but destroy them.

To me, that seems no different from feeding meat and bread to a nursling or giving him wine to drink. That would kill him, of course, not because such things are bad or
**1.37a** unfit for human consumption but because an infant's digestion is too delicate to benefit from them. Just so, these true beliefs were veiled—framed in riddles and artfully disguised by anyone who knew how to teach them indirectly and discreetly—not because they harbor some deep-seated ill or will harm religious principles, as the ignorant presume, who pretend to mastery as thinkers. These themes were introduced obliquely because a mind cannot absorb them right from the start. Only glimpses are afforded, to introduce them to the mature. That is why they are called mysteries and secrets of the Torah, as I shall explain.

The Torah "speaks in human language," as I said (I 26), because it is meant to be accessible and studied by young people, women, and ordinary folk without the capacity to understand things as they really are. Of them no more is asked than faith in whatever sound beliefs are best for them to hold, guiding their minds to some idea of what is real, even if not as it really is.[157] As one matures and "the Torah's mysteries are opened up to him" (B. Ḥagigah 13a), by another or by his own efforts—for some of these mysteries awaken one to more—one will be able to affirm these truths more properly, proving what can be proved or using the best arguments possible. At that point, one conceives and grasps as realities what were once just images and poetry for him.

Again and again you have heard me repeat their saying "And the chariot not even to one, unless he be wise and can grasp it of his own accord"—but even then, "only the rubrics are shared" (B. Ḥagigah 11b, 13a). So one should not begin to teach this subject to
**1.37b** anyone unless he is able and meets these two conditions: (1) he is wise—that is, educated in the sciences that afford sound foundations for intellectual inquiry—and (2) he is intelligent, insightful by nature and alive to ideas at a glance. That is what they mean by seeing things of his own accord.

I'll tell you why they bar introducing the masses to the avenues of real inquiry and shield them from conceiving things as they really are—and why this is necessary and proper. But that calls for another chapter. So I say as follows.

157. The Torah, in Maimonides' view, guides the faith of unsophisticates but does not tax them with its profundities. He relies here on Plato's distinction of knowledge from belief. For most practical purposes, true belief works as well as knowledge: True belief is as useful as knowledge in reaching Larissa (*Meno* 97ab). Yet true belief without knowledge (*episteme*) lacks the reasons that warrant sound judgments and is thus not ideal for teaching since it lacks sound explanations—hence Maimonides' discontent with those would-be teachers of Israel who lack the understanding that teaching and interpretation demand.

## Chapter 34

Five things keep us from making theology the entry point of education, highlighting the issues and broadcasting them to the masses.

First, the intrinsic difficulty, subtlety, and depth of the subject. As it says, *Far off it was, and deep, deep—who can plumb it!* (Ecclesiastes 7:24) and *Wisdom, where is it found!* (Job 28:12). Teaching should not start with what is most difficult and abstruse. One of our nation's best-known images likens knowledge to water (e.g., Jeremiah 7:13–15). The Sages develop the figure in several ways. One is that you can bring up pearls from the seabed if you know how to swim—but if not, you'll drown: Don't try swimming if you haven't learned how.

Second, the weakness of all human minds at first. One does not start out perfect and mature. At the start we are given only the raw potential: *Man is born a wild ass* **1.38a** (Job 11:12).[158] Nor are all potentials fulfilled inevitably; some remain unrealized, either because of some blockage or for lack of training to bring them to fulfillment. Clearly, *not many are wise* (32:9). The Sages say, "I have seen the worthy, and they are but few!" (B. Sukkah 45b, Sanhedrin 97b). Many an impediment bars the way, and distractions abound. When does one get the right preparation and the leisure it would take for the training needed to fulfill his potential?

Third, the preliminaries are extensive. People may have a natural passion to pursue a goal, but often they weary and neglect the groundwork. Yet if goals could be reached without the prerequisites, they would not be prerequisites but just busywork and otiose. If you roused someone, however thick, as you might wake up a sleeper, and asked him, "Would you like to know, the number and shape of the heavens and all that they hold, what angels are, how the whole world was made, why its parts are ordered as they are, what the soul is, how it arises in the body, whether a human soul can separate from the body, and if so, how and what becomes of it" and other such questions, "Yes!" he would say. "Of course!" Naturally he'd love to know the truth about all these things. But he'd want all the answers to sate his curiosity in just a word or two. If you asked him to drop everything for **1.38b** a week to master all this, he wouldn't do it. He would rest content with his comfortable delusions and resent being told that some subjects demand extensive inquiry and rest on many premises.

All these issues are intertwined, you see. For nothing exists but God and His creations—everything besides God. And there is no way of knowing Him but through His creations. They are the evidence of His existence and show us what to believe about Him—what to affirm and what to deny. So one must study all that is, all things

158. We translate as Maimonides reads this verse and the next; cf. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* III 2.

as they really are, to gather sure and solid premises in every domain, to aid us in our theological inquiries.[159] Many a premise based on the nature of numbers and geometrical figures can help show us what sort of things we must deny of Him; and that, in turn, can show us many things.[160]

In astronomy and natural science, I don't think you'll have much trouble seeing how the knowledge gained is critical to understanding how God's governance of the world works in fact and not in fantasy. But many intellectual inquiries yield no premises for theology. Yet they train the mind in reasoning, enabling one to reach the truth, to understand things as they really are and purge the confusions (and resultant distortions) that befuddle most inquirers' minds—taking the incidental for essential, say. Quite apart
**1.39a** from theology, it's worthwhile to conceive of things as they really are. Nor are these studies unhelpful in approaching this one.

So anyone hoping to perfect himself as a human being must train in logic first, then in mathematics in due sequence, then in the natural sciences in due order, and then in theology. Yet many, I find, stop growing intellectually at a certain point in their studies. And even if they do not, death may cut them off while they're still engaged in the preliminaries.[161] So if we did not receive some ideas somehow by faith, and with some guidance from poetry, rather than having to think purely conceptually, using only the definitions that capture the essences of things and affirming only what can be rigorously proved (as is possible only after mastering all these lengthy preliminaries), everyone would die before learning even whether God exists, let alone whether anything should be affirmed of Him or any defect denied.[162] No one would escape that fate—but *one in a city or two from a*

159. Cf. Maimonides, *MT* Laws of the Foundations of the Torah II 1–2. As his treatment of Ezekiel's vision will show, Maimonides raises his eyes to the heavens, seeing God's wisdom and grace there and in the fashioning of living beings, not least the human body, where his cares as a physician center. See I 54. Philo, too, pairs the study of Scripture with that of nature.

160. Solomon Maimon offers examples from his own Kantian and mathematical perspective. Maimonides' understanding of the asymptote and of irrational numbers and incommensurability can enrich one's theological understanding: "The nature of irrational numbers, for example, shows us that one can have no concept of what a thing is as an object and yet be able to define its relationship to other things. Thus, we have no concept of God as an object and yet we can define his relationship to us, which is the basis of morality. Algebraic formulas often bring us to the concept of the infinite as to a limit concept, which is not of constitutive, but rather of regulative use and as such, a concept that is of great importance in metaphysics" (Maimon, *Autobiography*, 144).

161. Saadiah remarks (as if responding to Rāzī, his contemporary) that reason might have taken ages to reach the same conclusions, even if not impeded by human fallibility—or distractions (*ED* Introduction, Kafiḥ, 27, Rosenblatt, 31). Cf. Ibn Ṭufayl regarding Ibn Bājjah, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, tr. Goodman, 98–99.

162. We follow Pines's rendering for the sense here rather than Munk's French, 1.123 *n.* 1.

*clan* (Jeremiah 3:14). That handful would be the remnant called by the LORD (cf. Joel 3:5). And even they would reach the end that is our goal only by way of these prerequisites.

Solomon spoke vividly of the need for these first steps and our inability to gain real wisdom without such training: *If the axe be dull, the edge unhoned, more force is needed; but wisdom asks yet more* (Ecclesiastes 10:10), and he says, *Take advice, accept instruction to win wisdom in the end* (Proverbs 19:20).

**1.39b** Something more is needed in mastering these preliminaries. For haste in inquiry breeds many a doubt. Objections crop up swiftly. Refuting a claim is like tearing down a building. But to lay a firm foundation or resolve a difficulty demands many premises anchored in these disciplinary footings. A thinker ill prepared is like someone traveling on foot who falls into a deep well and has no way to get out alive. Better for him had he stayed home. Solomon, in Proverbs, spells out poetically and at some length how the lazy fail, keen for the goal but neglectful of the prerequisites, the sciences. They have the appetite but not the effort: *The sluggard's craving slays him since his hands scorn work. All day doth he covet. But the just man giveth without stint* (Proverbs 21:25–26). Desire, he says, kills the lazy, since he will not work to satisfy his hunger. Of passion he has plenty, but not much beyond that. He sets his heart on what he has no means to win. Giving up this passion would have been safer.

Notice how the end of the analogy lights up the beginning: *The just man giveth without stint*. 'Just' is not the opposite of 'lazy,' unless on my reading: The just man gives all things their due. He devotes himself—that is, his time—wholly to his quest and wastes no time elsewhere. 'The just man,' Solomon says, in effect, 'devotes his life to wisdom and spares not a day.' This parallels his saying *Give not thy strength to women* (Proverbs 31:3).[163]

**1.40a** Most scholars—vaunted scholars!—have this disease. They want results to talk about but have no idea how to get them. Some are so ignorant, or so avid for primacy, that they disparage the prerequisites they cannot reach or were too lazy to pursue and paint them as useless or harmful. But the truth is all too clear when you think about it.

Fourth is natural disposition. It has been shown—proven, in fact—that the moral virtues are prerequisites of the intellectual virtues: One cannot win the rational truths that perfect one's reason unless one is calm, composed, and highly disciplined. Many a human character is unsuited by temperament for such fulfillment. A born hothead will not keep his temper even if he disciplines himself most stringently,[164] and a man with hot, humid testes and vesicles, highly productive of semen, rarely proves chaste,[165] even if he disciplines himself to the utmost. Similarly, you will find that some people are flighty

163. Maimonides glosses the verse at *MT* Ethical Laws 4.19.

164. Cf. *Eight Chapters*, 8. The hothead must alter his disposition if he is to master his temper.

165. Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 86d, underscoring his Socratic thesis that no one willingly does evil.

and frivolous, their erratic, disordered movements symptomatic of an unsound constitution that they cannot overcome. They never seem to reach fulfillment. Even to try with them is just misguided. For this science of divinity, as you know, is not medical science or geometry. Not everyone is suited to it in the ways I have cited. The moral foundations
**1.40b** are critical in reaching the peak—*For the* LORD *loathes the perverse; His counsel is with the upright* (Proverbs 3:32).

So it is frowned upon to teach theology to the young. Truth be told, they cannot absorb it. Their hearts are aboil, their minds astir with the flame of adolescence. Once that distracting fire is banked and they have gained calm and composure, their hearts less fractious and their temper quieter, they can advance to thoughts of God, to theology, the "Account of the Chariot," as we call it. As it says, *the* LORD *is near to the chastened heart* (Psalms 34:19);[166] *high and holy do I dwell, with the lowly and the humble of spirit* (Isaiah 57:15). That is why in the Talmud, commenting on the mishnaic dictum "one entrusts the rubrics to him," they explain, "One does not entrust even the rubrics to anyone but the Head of the Court—one whose heart within is self-possessed," having humility, balance, and piety besides learning.

In the same place (B. Ḥagigah 13a) it says, "The Torah's secrets are not entrusted to anyone but *a counselor, a wise craftsman, alert to a whisper* (Isaiah 3:3)." These subjects clearly demand talent. One person, as you know, of course, might have a fine mind but sorely lack judgment. Another has sound beliefs and is politically astute—as they say, a *counselor*—yet cannot master ideas, even if all but elementary. He might be rather dense, helpless intellectually: *What good is the price of wisdom to a fool with no heart for it?* (Proverbs 17:16). For another, insight and understanding come naturally. He can articulate the subtlest ideas precisely and succinctly. Such a person is *alert to a whisper*. But he might fail
**1.41a** to apply himself and not master the sciences. One who does master them is the *wise craftsman* (ḥakham ḥarashim)—as they say, "When he speaks, all are like mutes (*ḥershin*)" (B. Ḥagigah 14a).[167]

The Sages, then, found textual support for all three criteria: perfect mastery in politics and the rational sciences, along with the natural acuteness, insight, and articulacy in voicing ideas obliquely. Only to one who combines all of these does one confide the Torah's secrets. As the same passage says, "Rabbi Yoḥanan said to Rabbi Elazar, 'Come, I shall teach you the Account of the Chariot.' He answered, 'I am not yet old'"—that is, 'I still find in myself an effervescence of nature and the flightiness of youth.' As you see, they added maturity to the requisite virtues. So how could one probe this subject with the masses—or women and children!

166. The Psalmist, as Maimonides reads him, speaks not of the brokenhearted but of those in whom the wild spirit of youth is broken, calmed by maturity.

167. For the sense of *ḥ-r-sh*, see Buxtorf, *Lexicon Chaldaicum*, 837.

Fifth are our bodily needs. These come first, especially if responsibilities to a wife and children are added—let alone pursuit of comforts that one's predilections and bad habits can render obsessive. Even a paragon, as I said, the more involved he is with his physical needs—let alone luxuries—and the stronger his attachment to them, the weaker his intellectual yearnings, and the more are they sapped. His interest flags and loses its edge. So he fails to grasp even what he might have, or he absorbs things in a jumble, muddling what he knows with what he does not.

For all these reasons, these subjects are suited only to a handful of very special individuals, and not to most. That is why they are not introduced to beginners but kept from them, just as infants are not given solid food or heavy loads to lift. **1.41b**

## Chapter 35

You should not assume that all the caveats in these last chapters about how dark and deep this subject is—how hard to fathom and how rightly kept from the multitude—apply to God's incorporeality and impassivity. Not at all. Just as it should be instilled in small children and published to the masses that God is one and that He alone is to be worshipped, so should they take it on trust that He is not a body and utterly unlike His creatures—that His very being is not like theirs, nor His life, and that His knowledge differs from the knowledge one of us might have, not just in degree but in kind.

It should be settled in everyone's mind that His knowledge and ours and His power and ours differ not just in scope, strength, and such. For things stronger or weaker must be of a kind and share a definition. Similarly, only things of like kind bear comparison, as is clear, too, in the natural sciences. Anything ascribed to Him must differ in every way from human traits. So we and He can share no definition. He and all things else, likewise, **1.42a** are said *to be* in different senses, as I'll explain (I 52, 57–59). That should suffice to fix it in the minds of children and the masses that there exists a Perfect Being that is neither a body nor a physical force and that this is God, beyond all want and therefore beyond all passivity.[168]

But talk of attributes—how they are excluded in God's case and what is meant by the predicates that are assigned Him—and talk of the act of creation; of His governance of the world and how He exercises providence over other beings; what is meant by His will, awareness, and knowledge of all that He knows, as well as the meaning of prophecy and its degrees; and the import of His names and how, although many, they all signify the same one Being, all these are deep matters, the true mysteries of the Torah, the secrets

168. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.6, "The Impassivity of the Unembodied."

always mentioned in Scripture and the discourse of the Sages. These are the topics to be addressed only by their rubrics, as I said, and then only with one who is as described.

God's incorporeality and transcendence of all likeness and passivity, on the other hand, should be plainly discussed and openly explained to everyone, as his capacity permits, and instilled in the minds of women, children, the dull and deficient, just as they take it on faith that He is one and eternal and that none else is to be worshipped. For there is no monotheism without transcendence of physicality, since a body lacks unity, being a composite of matter and form, which are two by definition—besides the fact that bodies are divisible (cf. I 76).[169]

Once people accept this and are used to the idea, being bred and raised with it, when they face perplexity with biblical texts, their meaning can be explained to them. They can
**1.42b** be introduced to exegesis and alerted to the multiple meanings and metaphorical senses of scriptural terms, as discussed in this work, so as to safeguard their belief in God's unity and the veracity of Scripture. But if someone's mind is averse to glosses and cannot see how the same words might bear different senses, he should be told, "There are scholars who understand how to gloss this text. But you know that God is not a body and cannot be affected. For to be affected is to change, and He is untouched by change. He is unlike anything else and cannot share a definition with anything else. You know these inspired words are true and have their interpretation." Stop there—so long as no corporealism or any associated notion takes root in his mind, any more than atheism or polytheism or worship of anything but God.[170]

## Chapter 36

When I discuss divine attributes, I'll explain in what sense God is said to be pleased, displeased, or angered at something or someone. That is not the aim of the present chap-
**1.43a** ter, which is this: If you survey the entire Torah and all the Prophets, you will find the expressions *kindling of wrath*, *anger*, or *jealousy* applied only to idolatry. Only an idolater, you see, is called *the* LORD*'s foe* or *adversary*, or *hateful to* God (see I 54; III 41). It says *lest ye serve other gods* [*and the* LORD *be inflamed with wrath against you*] (Deuteronomy 11:16–17); [*Ye shall not follow other gods . . .*] *lest the* LORD*'s wrath burn against thee* (6:14–15); *to anger Him with the work of your hands* (31:29); *They roused Me to jealousy with a no-god, angered Me with their inanities . . .* (32:21); *a jealous God . . . lest the anger*

169. Matter and form constitute a unity in individual objects, Aristotle argues (*Metaphysics* H 6, 1045b17–21). But that, of course, is the unity of a composite, not the absolute unity God enjoys.

170. Cf. *CM* Sanhedrin 10; Hyman, "Maimonides' 'Thirteen Principles.'"

*of the* LORD *thy God be inflamed against thee* (6:15); *Why have they angered Me with their graven images* (Jeremiah 8:19); *furious at His sons and daughters . . . they incensed Me with no-gods . . . My wrath inflamed* (Deuteronomy 32:19–22); *taking vengeance on His enemies and exacting retribution from His foes* (cf. Nahum 1:2);[171] *requiting His foes* (Deuteronomy 7:10); *until He expel His foes* (Numbers 32:21); [*nor shalt thou erect any stele*] *that the* LORD *thy God hateth* (Deuteronomy 16:22); and *Every abomination hateful to the* LORD *did they perform for their gods* [*—even burnt their sons and daughters in fire to their gods*] (12:31). There are countless examples. But if you trace them in every biblical book, you will see that this is so.

Scripture speaks so strongly only because this false, pagan belief relates to God. To think that Zayd is standing when he is sitting is not as far from the truth as to believe that the sphere of fire is below that of air, or that of water below the earth, or that the earth is flat, or the like.[172] Nor is this error as remote from the truth as believing that the sun is made of fire, or that the sphere is a hemisphere, or the like. Nor is this third error as distant from the truth as believing that angels eat and drink or the like. Nor is this fourth as far from the truth as believing that something other than God should be worshipped. The greater the subject—the higher and more sublime—the greater the misbelief and benightedness. By misbelief, I mean believing that something is what it is **1.43b**
not; by benightedness, I mean ignorance of what one could have known. Not knowing the volume of a cone within a cylinder or the sphericity of the sun is not as misguided as not knowing whether God exists. And one who supposes a cone has half the volume of its cylinder or that the sun is a disk is not as benighted as one who supposes there are more gods than one.[173]

No pagan, you see, ever worshipped on the assumption that his idol was the one god. No one ever imagined, or ever will, that the form he cast in metal, or worked in wood or stone, created and rules heaven and earth.[174] Idols are served only as symbols of something that mediates between us and God, as is clear when it says, *Who doth not fear Thee, King of nations?* (Jeremiah 10:7) and *Everywhere is incense offered to My name* (Malachi 1:11)—meaning what they consider the First Cause, as I explained in my major work (*MT* Laws regarding Pagan Worship 1.1).[175]

171. Maimonides seems to quote from memory.

172. Ancient astronomers knew that the earth is a globe; no educated person in antiquity thought it flat. See J. Russell, *Inventing the Flat Earth*.

173. For culpable ignorance of divinity, see Arius Didymus, *Epitome of Stoic Ethics* 2.7 5b12; Diogenes, *Lives* 2.93; Marcus Aurelius, *To Himself* 9.1.2; and Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.8.14, 2.19.26.

174. See Isaiah 44:13–17, 45:16–18; and B. ʿAvodah Zarah 54b–55a.

175. Maimonides echoes Porphyry's Letter to Anebo—familiar to Rāzī, Masʿūdī, and Shahrastānī—and Iamblichus' response to Porphyry in *De Mysteriis*. Pagan idols were

No one of our religion disputes this. These pagans believed in God; they were heathens in giving another what is His due alone: worship and exaltation. As it says, *Worship the* LORD (Exodus 23:25)[176]—this to anchor His existence in popular belief. They thought this prerogative could be given elsewhere, and that led to atheism among the masses, who relate only to the ritual, not to its meaning or the rightful object of worship.

**1.44a** That is why those pagans had to be destroyed; as it says, *Let not a soul live* (Deuteronomy 20:16). The reason, clearly stated, is to efface this false belief, lest others be corrupted by it: *Lest they teach you to perform* [*all the horrors they committed for their gods*] (20:18). It calls them God's foes, His hated enemies, and says that such practices provoke His anger, wrath, and ire.

What, then, of one whose misbelief regards God Himself, whose belief is contrary to the truth about Him—who does not believe that He exists, or who believes Him dual, corporeal, passive, or lacking in any way? Such a person is surely worse than a pagan who takes idols for mediators or who deems them beneficent or maleficent. Be advised, then, that if you be such and believe God corporeal, or subject to any physical state, you "rouse His jealousy and anger, kindle His wrath," and become a worse "enemy and foe," far more "hateful to God" than an idolater.

If it occurs to you that a corporealist is excusable because he was brought up that way or was naive or ignorant, you must hold the same for a pagan. His worship, too, reflects his ignorance or upbringing:[177] "They keep their forebears' ways" (B. Ḥullin 13a). And if you say that Scripture, too, when taken literally, fosters corporealist delusions, you must admit that a pagan also was led to idolatry only by fantasies and faulty thinking. But one who cannot think for himself has no excuse for not following sound thinkers.[178] I would not call someone an infidel who cannot prove that God is incorporeal. But I would think that of one who does not believe it, not least because we have the glosses of Onkelos and

**1.44b** Jonathan ben Uzziel to keep us as far as can be from corporealism. That was the point of this chapter.

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"significant objects of power (*symbola* or *synthemata*) which the gods 'sow' in the physical cosmos in order that they may be employed by those with the technical, theurgic know-how in order to construct sacrifices such as will unfailingly attract the gods' attention" (Dillon, "Signs and Tokens," 101).

176. Maimonides elides mention of the material rewards the verse promises. At III 29–30, he will urge that the Torah accommodates primitive piety when, like ancient pagan priests, it promises worldly rewards and punishments.

177. Idolatry is forbidden to all mankind by one of the seven Noaḥide commandments.

178. Sound thinkers (*muḥaqiqūn*), then, are found in all nations. Maimonides, like other Arabic writers, uses the expression to signify theists.

## Chapter 37

*Face* has multiple senses, most of them metaphorical. It denotes the visage of any animal: *All faces turned pale* (Jeremiah 30:6) and *Why are your faces downcast?* (Genesis 40:7). This is common. It can also mean anger: *Her face was over* (1 Samuel 1:18). It is often applied in this sense to divine fury and wrath: *The LORD's face scattered them* (Lamentations 4:16); *The LORD's face is against evildoers* (Psalms 34:17); *My face shall depart, and I shall give thee rest* (Exodus 33:14);[179] and *I will set My face against that man and his kin* [who gives his seed to Molech] (Leviticus 20:5). This, too, is frequent.

*Face* can also mean presence or encounter: *He dwelt in the face of all his kin* (Genesis 25:18) and *In the face of all the people shall I be honored* (Leviticus 10:3), meaning in their midst; *Will he not curse Thee to Thy face?* (Job 1:11), meaning outright and directly. It is in this sense that it says, *The LORD spoke to Moses face to face* (Exodus 33:11)—that is, directly, without mediation, as in *Come, let us meet face to face* (2 Kings 14:8). It says, *Face to face did the LORD speak to you* (Deuteronomy 5:4), which is elsewhere explained: *The sound of words did ye hear, but no image did you see, only the sound* (4:12). That is what it means by "face to face." So when it says, *The LORD spoke to Moses face to face*, it treats God's words as a direct address: *He would hear the voice speaking to him* (Numbers 7:89). So it is hearing a voice unmediated by an angel, you see, that is called *face to face*. It is on this basis that it is said, *My Face shall not be seen* (Exodus 33:23)—My true Reality cannot be apprehended.[180] **1.45a**

179. God informs Moses that His anger over the Golden Calf will abate.

180. Sc., *face to face* implies no sensory link but only Moses' direct awareness of God's message. Some theists today compare mystical experience to perception. See Alston, *Perceiving God*. But can a perceptible God remain transcendent? And do human fallibility and subjectivity infect the experience, so often called irrefragable? The Sages confront such questions in their own terms: "All the prophets saw through nine lenses (*specularia*) . . . Moses, through just one . . . *not in riddles* (Numbers 12:8). . . . All other prophets saw through a clouded glass, as it is said, *I used many images* (Hosea 12:11). . . . Moses, through a pellucid lens" (Leviticus Rabbah 1.14). The glass in Paul's well-known phrase "through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12) is often pictured as a mirror. But the Sages spoke of lenses (hence the multiple layers). Maimonides explains: "*Specularium*, a barrier of crystal or glass or some other transparent material that does not show things in their true positions and proportions, as explained in the science of optics. The Sages call the highly transparent barrier that hid nothing from Moses a 'pellucid lens.' Moses, they said, apprehended God as perfectly as a mortal can, his mind still linked to matter. As God said: *a man cannot see Me and live* (Exodus 33:20)—as I explained in my Introductory Chapters to Avot (*Eight Chapters*, 7). They said: 'All the prophets saw in a glass unclear, but Moses in a pellucid lens' (B. Yevamot 49b)" (*CM* Kelim 30.2). Imagination was the veil but also the vehicle of their visions and the fount of their poesy, clothing their insights in images to be unriddled. But only reason stood between Moses and God. Since his vision was distorted by no flaw of mind or character and not wholly reduced

*Face* is also a spatial preposition, like the Arabic 'before . . . ,' 'facing,' 'to thy face.' It is often so used regarding God: *before the* LORD (Genesis 18:22). So Onkelos glosses, *My Face shall not be seen* as "those before Me are unseen"—alluding to the incorporeal intelligences, humanly imperceptible in fact, but pictured as awesome creatures ever standing before God, given His close and constant providence over them (III 2–3). For lesser beings, those of matter and form, which Onkelos presumes we do perceive as they are, he gives, "But thou shalt see what is behind Me" (at 33:23), treating them, poetically, as beings on which God's back, as it were, is turned, so distant are they from His Reality. Later you will hear my own gloss of what our Teacher Moses meant (I 54).

*Face* is also a temporal preposition or adverb meaning 'before' or 'of old': *Formerly* (*lefanim*) *in Israel* (Ruth 4:7) and *Of old* (lefanim) *didst Thou anchor the earth* (Psalms 102:26).

*Face* is also a term for care or concern: *thou shalt not favor* (tissa' fenei, literally, "raise the face" of) *the lowly* (Leviticus 19:15), *the favored* (nessu' fanim; Isaiah 3:3), and *shows favoritism* (yissa' fanim) *toward none* (Deuteronomy 10:17). This too is frequent. It is in this sense that it says, *The* LORD *lift up His face to thee and grant thee peace* (Numbers 6:26), meaning, 'May His providence be with us!'

## Chapter 38

*Back* is polysemous. It is a noun denoting the rear: *over the back of the Tabernacle* (Exodus
**1.45b** 26:12) and *The spear came out his back* (2 Samuel 2:23). But it can also be a temporal preposition meaning 'after': *After him there arose none like him* (2 Kings 23:25) and *after these things* (Genesis 15:1). This is frequent.

It can also signify emulation, following in someone's footsteps—*After the* LORD *your God shall ye walk* (Deuteronomy 13:5), *After the* LORD *shall they walk* (Hosea 11:10)—faithfully modeling one's life on His acts and ways, or *following after trash* (5:11). It is in this sense that it says, *Thou shalt see My back* (Exodus 33:23): You will grasp what heeds and follows Me and obeys My will—all creation, as I shall explain in other chapters of this work (3.5b).[181]

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to symbols, he was said to have spoken with God *face to face* (Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 34:10)—although, inevitably, his epiphany was scaled to the finitude of human reason. Imagination, Maimonides explains (I 73, 1.115), cannot grasp the infinite. Reason does grapple with such concepts. But its grasp is scaled to our humanity, as the projections of even the clearest lens will be.

181. Moses beheld (I 21, 37) the panoply of nature (cf. Plato, *Republic* 615a; Philo, *De mutatione nominum* 7–14, LCL 5.144–49; Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.3.14.1.8, which speaks of the "sequelae" that follow after the One), revealing the mercy and justice proclaimed in God's

## Chapter 39

*Lev* is a noun that has multiple senses. It can mean the heart, the organ basic to the life of every animal with a heart: *and plunged them into Absalom's heart* (2 Samuel 18:14). Since this organ is central in the body, the term is used metaphorically for the core of anything: *to the heart of heaven* (Deuteronomy 4:11) and *the heart of the fire* (Exodus 3:2).

*Heart* can also mean thought: *Did not my heart go with thee?* (2 Kings 5:26)—meaning I was with you in thought when this occurred. It is in this sense that it says, *that ye stray not after your own hearts* (Numbers 15:39)—following your own whims. Or *whose heart turneth away today* (Deuteronomy 29:17)—whose thoughts are inconstant.

It can also mean outlook: *All the rest of Israel were of one heart, to make David king* (1 Chronicles 12:39), being of one mind. Similarly, *Fools die for want of heart* (Proverbs 10:21), being thoughtless; *My heart shall not turn* (yeḥeraf) *all my days* (Job 27:6), my outlook will remain unshaken, I shall not falter. For the verse begins *I shall hold fast to my integrity and not let it go*, then *my heart shall not turn all my days*. I take the sense of **1.46a**
*yeḥeraf* (cognate to the Arabic *munḥarafah*) from *a handmaid* neḥerefet *to a man* (Leviticus 19:20), turned from a chattel to a spouse.

*Heart* is also a word for will: *I shall give you shepherds after My own heart* (Jeremiah 3:15) and *Is thy heart as right as my heart?* (2 Kings 10:15), meaning, 'Do you mean to stand fast, as I do?' Metaphorically, this sense may be applied to God: [*a priest*] *who will do what is in My heart and soul* (1 Samuel 2:35), meaning one who will do as I desire. Again, *Mine eyes and heart shall be ever there* (1 Kings 9:3)—My providence and will.

*Heart* is also a word for 'mind': *The witless shall get him a heart* (Job 11:12)—gain understanding. Similarly, *The wise man's heart turneth aright* (Ecclesiastes 10:2)—his mind turns toward higher things. This is frequent. This sense, too, is applied metaphorically to God, passim, meaning His mind, except in a few rare cases where it may mean His will, as context requires. That is the sense in *Lay it to heart* (Deuteronomy 4:39) and *None takes it to heart* (Isaiah 44:19), and all such cases where 'heart' means 'mind,' as in *The* LORD *hath not given you a heart to know*, [*eyes to see, or ears to hear, until this day*] (Deuteronomy 29:3), just as it says, *Thou hast been given to see* (4:35). But when it says, *Thou shalt*

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thirteen "attributes" (Exodus 34:6–7), centered on life and love, as singled out by the Psalmist: *With Thee is the fount of life. By Thy light do we see light* (Psalms 36:10). Life is God's gift, and mind, linking God to humanity, brings the gift to its fullest fruition. Moses' vision was a consummate intellectual insight. In Maimonides' view, we ascribe what we understand in nature to God's wisdom; what we cannot, to His will. But in God's perfect unity, the division dissolves. Moses saw God's work in all things, will and wisdom as one—as an artist's work unites creative intent with caring design—with wisdom in nature's provision for the lives of all species; will, in nature's diversity and fecundity. In the background here is Galen's teleological tour de force in *De Usu Partium*, a scientist's hymn to the Creator; 17.2–3.

*love the* LORD *thy God with all thy heart* (6:5), I take it to mean 'with every power of your heart'—all your bodily powers. For they all stem from the heart. The sense, then: Devote all that you do to knowing Him, as I explained in my Commentary on the Mishnah and in the Mishneh Torah.[182]

## Chapter 40

**1.46b** *Ru'aḥ* has multiple meanings. It can mean 'air,' one of the four elements: *God's air brooding over the waters* (Genesis 1:2). Or it can mean the wind that blows: *The east wind brought locusts . . . the west wind* [*. . . bore them off*] (Exodus 10:13, 10:19). This is frequent.

It is also a name for the animal spirit: *A fleeting wind that returneth not* (Psalms 78:39) and *all that have the breath of life* (Genesis 7:15).

Or it may name what survives uncorrupted after one's death: *The spirit returneth to God who gave it* (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

It is also a name for the divine intellectual emanation shed upon Prophets, by which they prophesy, as I will explain to you when I say what one may about prophecy in this work (II 12, 32, 36–37, 45). Thus, *I shall share the spirit that is upon you and lay it upon them . . . and lo, when the spirit rested on them* [*they prophesied*] (Numbers 11:17, 25) and *The spirit of the* LORD *spoke through me* (2 Samuel 23:2). This, too, is frequent.

*Ru'aḥ* is also a word for 'will' or 'purpose': *A fool bares all his spirit* (Proverbs 29:11)—his aim or intent. Thus, *Egypt shall be drained of spirit; I shall bring her counsels to naught* (Isaiah 19:3)—its plans will be foiled; its strategy, undone. Analogously, *Who hath plumbed the* LORD*'s spirit, what man can tell us His plan?* (40:13). He says, 'Who knows what God's will has in store or grasps what He intends for the world? Let him tell us'—as I will explain in chapters yet to come regarding God's governance (III 17–18, 22–23, 51).

Whenever spirit is ascribed to God, it is in the fifth sense,[183] or sometimes in this last sense, that of will, depending on context, as I explained.

## Chapter 41

**1.47a** *Nefesh* (soul) has multiple meanings. It is a name for the animal soul common to all sentient beings: *in which there is a living soul* (Genesis 1:30). It also denotes the blood: *Thou shalt not eat the soul with the flesh*, [*for the blood is the soul*] (Deuteronomy 12:23). And

182. We are called to devote all our energies to the quest for God. See 3.124b–125a; *Eight Chapters*, 5; *MT* Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 2.2; Ethical Laws 3.2.

183. Sc., the flow of inspiration to prophets; III 2, 5.

it may mean the rational soul, the human form: *as the* LORD *liveth, who made this soul of ours* (Jeremiah 38:16). This word, too, names what survives of a man after death: *My lord's soul shall be bound up in the bond of life* (1 Samuel 25:29).

*Soul* is also a name for the will: *to bind his princes to his soul* (Psalms 105:22)—to his will. Similarly, *deliver him not to the soul of his foes* (41:3)—don't surrender him to their will. This is analogous, as I see it, to *if it be to your soul that I bury my dead out of my sight* (Genesis 23:8)—meaning if such be your desire and intent. Similarly, *Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My soul would not incline toward this nation* (Jeremiah 15:1)—My will does not favor them, I do not wish them to endure.

Whenever applied to God, *nefesh* has the sense of will, as we saw (I 39) in the phrase *who shall act after My heart and soul* (1 Samuel 2:35)—'in keeping with My purpose and intent.' It is in this sense that one should gloss, *His soul was to put to an end Israel's travail* (Judges 10:16)—'He meant to end Israel's suffering.' This verse was not translated by Jonathan ben Uzziel at all, for he took *nefesh* in its basic sense, as if to suggest passions on God's part. That kept him from rendering it. But if 'soul' is taken in our last sense, it's quite clear how to gloss it. For it was already said that God's providence had left them, and they were perishing. They begged for succor, and He did not aid them (10:6–14). But when they were greatly humbled and oppressed by foes and had well and truly repented, He had mercy on them and suspended His intent to prolong their agony and abasement. Notice the preposition, since it is unusual: The *to* in *put an end to* stands for *of*—in effect, **1.47b**
to make an end *of* Israel's suffering. Linguists count numerous cases of that shift: *what remains to the bread and meat* (*ba-basar u-va-leḥem*; Leviticus 8:32), meaning *of* the bread and meat; [*if few*] *in years remain* (*ve-im meʿaṭ nish'ar ba-shanim*; Leviticus 25:52), meaning *of* years; and *by stranger or by homeborn* (*ba-ger uve-ezraḥ*; Exodus 12:19), meaning *of* foreign or homeborn stock. This is frequent.

## Chapter 42

*Ḥai* is a word for anything that grows and is sentient:[184] *all that lives* (Genesis 9:3). It also denotes one recovered from a grave illness: *He revived from his illness* (Isaiah 38:9) and [*Once all the nation were circumcised, they remained*] *in the camp until revived* (Joshua 5:8). Similarly, *quick flesh* (Leviticus 13:10).

*Mavet*, similarly, can mean 'death' or 'grave illness': *His heart died within him; he turned to stone* (1 Samuel 25:37)—he was that ill. So in the case of the son of the woman of Zarephath, it explains, *He turned so ill that he had no breath left in him* (1 Kings 17:17).

184. Aristotle so defines 'animal.' Plants take nutriment, grow, and reproduce. Animals are sensitive as well. Human beings add rationality. See *De Anima* II 2, 413a23.

Had it said he died, it might also have meant he was mortally ill, like Nabal on hearing the news [that his wife Abigail had succored David] (1 Samuel 25:37–38). Some Andalusians took it to mean that the boy's breath stopped and was undetectable, as in apoplexy or failure to breathe at birth. Sometimes one cannot tell if a patient is dead or alive and the doubt persists for one or two days.[185]

But 'life' often means intellectual growth: [*Do not lose sight of wisdom and discernment*,] *they are life to thy soul* (Proverbs 3:21–22); [*Doth not wisdom declare . . .*] *who findeth me findeth life?* (8:1, 35); and [*Heed my words . . .*] *they are life to those who find them* (4:20–22). This is frequent: Sound views are called life; unsound ones, death. So God says, *Lo, I have set before thee this day life and good*, [*death and evil*] (Deuteronomy 30:15),
**1.48a** plainly equating life with good and death with evil. It is in this sense that I gloss God's words, *that ye may live* (5:30), as in our traditional reading of *that it be well with thee*, [*and thy life be long*] (22:7). The imagery is so familiar in our language that they say, "The righteous are called living even in death; and the wicked are called dead even while alive" (B. Berakhot 18ab).[186] This you must understand.[187]

## Chapter 43

*Kanaf* (wing) has multiple meanings, most of the variance being metaphorical. The original sense denotes a flying animal's wing: *every winged bird that flieth in the sky* (Deuteronomy 4:17). Later it was applied figuratively to the flaps or corners of a garment: *on the four wings of thy garment* (22:12); then to the earth's extremities, the farthest reaches of settlement: *Take the earth by the wings* [*and shake off the wicked*] (Job 38:13) and *From the wings of the earth have we heard singing* (Isaiah 24:16).

The word, Ibn Janāḥ says, like its Arabic cognate, can also indicate concealment. We say *kanaftu al-shay'*, I hid something. So he reads the verse *Thy Guide shall no more*

185. The Andalusians naturalized his revival (cf. Elisha at 2 Kings 4:8–37): His breath had stopped, but he was not really dead, although the idiom allows him to be so described. Nabal, for his part, was so stricken that he nearly died. Saladin's Jewish physician Ibn Jumayʿ (d. 1198) revived a man thought dead after a cataleptic fit, noticing that the feet, protruding from the bier as it passed his clinic, were not flat but erect; Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 213.

186. Cf. Philo, *De Fuga et Inventione* 56, LCL 5.40–41.

187. On the premise that Scripture is not redundant or pleonastic, the well-being promised on releasing the mother bird is taken at B. Kiddushin 39b to refer to this life; length of days, then, would mean the world to come. For Maimonides, to touch divine wisdom is already to transcend mortality, as the Sages suggest. The mitzvot prepare one to win that higher state. Real life is presence with God, won through contemplation of His works in nature and through study and ever-deepening practical and intellectual commitment to the norms and principles of His law.

*be under wraps* (yikkanef; Isaiah 30:20) as "Do not mask or shroud Him who lights thy way." A fine gloss! Similarly, *He shall not breach his father's skirts* (kanaf; Deuteronomy 23:1) I take to mean 'Do not violate his privacy.' So *Take thy handmaid under thy wing* (Ruth 3:9), as I read it, means 'Extend your protection to your servant.' It is in this sense, as I see it, that wings are ascribed metaphorically to the Creator—and to angels. For we take them, too, to be incorporeal, as I shall explain (I 49; II 6). Thus it says, [*The* LORD *requite thy deeds . . .*] *beneath whose wings thou hast sheltered* (2:12)—under whose protection you have taken refuge. **1.48b**

Along these lines, whenever 'wing' relates to angels, it indicates concealment. Just consider *With two did it cover its face, with two did it cover its feet* (Isaiah 6:2): The basis of an angel's existence is concealed, deeply hidden. That would be its face. Its effects, too—its "feet," as I explained in treating the senses of *foot* (I 28)—are hidden.[188] For the work of these Intellects is unseen. Only with training is their impact seen, for two reasons, on their side and on ours: our limited awareness and the elusiveness of the incorporeal. As for *With two did it fly* (6:2), I will explain in a separate chapter (I 49) what is meant by saying that angels fly.

## Chapter 44

*ʿAyin* has several meanings. It can mean a water source: *a spring in the desert* (Genesis 16:7). It is also the word for the eye: *an eye for an eye* (Exodus 21:24). It can also mean care: *Take him and keep your eyes on him* (Jeremiah 39:12), said of Jeremiah—meaning 'look after him.'[189] Whenever applied to God, it has this figurative sense: *Mine eyes and My heart shall ever be there* (1 Kings 9:3)—God's care and concern, as I explained (I 39). Likewise, *The eyes of the* LORD *thy God are ever upon it* (Deuteronomy 11:12)—His care. *The eyes of the* LORD *ranging o'er the earth* (Zechariah 4:10)[190]—God's providence embracing everything on earth,[191] as will be noted in later chapters on providence (III 12 ad fin., 17–18, 54). But when sight or vision is predicated of God's eyes, as in *Open Thine eyes and see* (2 Kings 19:16) or *His eyes shall behold* (Psalms 11:4), it is always intellectual awareness **1.49a**

188. For the spiritual source and physical functioning of Ezekiel's four creatures, see 3.4a.

189. Nebuchadnezzar's words continue: *Do him no harm, but do as he asks.*

190. For *ranging*, Maimonides has *meshoṭeṭot*, evidently quoting from memory and unself-consciously "correcting" the grammar of the verse, which has *meshoṭeṭim*, although paired body parts in Hebrew are feminine in grammatical gender.

191. The previous citation, regarding rainfall in the Land of Israel, is generalized here: Providence reaches all the earth.

that is meant, not sense perception. For sensations, as you know, are passive, and God is active, never passive, as I will explain (I 55).[192]

## Chapter 45

*Hearing* has multiple senses. It can mean listening or accepting. It signifies listening in *Neither shall they be heard on thy lips* (Exodus 23:13) and *The news was heard in Pharaoh's palace* (Genesis 45:16). This is frequent. But so is the sense of accepting: *They did not listen to Moses* (Exodus 6:9), *if they hearken and serve* (Job 36:11), *Shall we listen to you?* (Nehemiah 13:27), and *doth not hearken to thy words* (Joshua 1:18).

It can also mean knowing and understanding: *a nation whose tongue thou hearest not* (Deuteronomy 28:49)—whose speech you do not understand. Whenever hearing is ascribed to God biblically, seemingly in its first sense, the reference is to awareness, the third sense: *The* LORD *heard* (Numbers 11:1) and *He hath heard your plaints* (Exodus 16:7). All such passages refer to God's awareness.

When the second sense is the overt meaning, the reference is to God's granting (or denying) a prayer: *I shall surely heed their cry* (Exodus 22:22); *I shall hear, for I care* (22:26); *Incline Thine ear and hear* (2 Kings 19:16); *But He would not heed your voices or give ear to them* (Deuteronomy 1:45); *Though ye pray at length, I will not listen* (Isaiah 1:15); and *I will not hear you* (Jeremiah 7:16). This, too, is frequent.

Understanding these metaphors and anthropomorphisms should quench your thirst, clear your doubts, and illuminate the meanings of all like expressions, leaving no puzzles about them unresolved.[193]

## Chapter 46

**1.49b** In an earlier chapter (I 33), I mentioned the immense difference between having a sense that something exists and truly knowing what it is and that it is real. One might infer that something exists from its accidents, its effects, or its relations to something else, even if quite remote. If you wanted, say, to acquaint someone with the ruler of his land, whom he did not know, there are many ways of doing so and showing him that there is one. You could say, "He is that tall, fair skinned, white-haired person," identifying him by

192. Maimonides has already said (I 35)—but has not yet shown—that God is in no way passive.

193. Moving beyond his lexical format, Maimonides opens larger questions of God's "attributes."

accidental features. Or you might say, "He is the one surrounded by the great throng you see, on foot and on horseback, brandishing their swords, with pennants flying overhead and trumpets blaring before him."[194] Or you might say, "He is the one who lives in the palace in such and such city" in that land, or "who had this wall built, or that bridge"—or other such acts or relations to other things.

But you might adduce subtler evidence. If someone asked you, say, "Has this land a ruler?" you might reply, "Certainly." The evidence? You could say, "You see this moneychanger, this frail little man, with that great pile of dinars before him, and that hulking fellow standing there, gaunt and poor, begging so much as a carob seed, and the moneychanger not only refuses but drives him off with a torrent of words? If not for fear of the ruler, the poor beggar would hardly stick at killing him or shoving him aside and taking the money. That proves this city has a ruler!"[195] It is shown by civic order, which depends on respect for the government and fear of punishment.[196] Yet nothing in the example shows anything about the ruler himself or his essence as a ruler.[197] **1.50a**

Every scripture, the Torah included, faces the same problem in acquainting the masses with God. Everyone had to be led to see that He is real and perfect in every way. And not just real like the earth or the sky but alive, aware, active, and powerful—and all the rest that one should believe about Him, as I will explain.[198] So the popular mind was led to

194. Is the king best known by his appanages? "Rava said, 'Isaiah saw all that Ezekiel saw. . . . Ezekiel was like a villager who saw the king. . . . Isaiah, like a townsman.'" Rabbenu Hananel explains, "Ezekiel was like a villager who saw the king's entourage with its chariots and foot soldiers and was awestruck; Isaiah, like a man of the capital who sees such an entourage every day" (B. Ḥagigah 13b; cf. *ARN* A chap. 47). Rav Sheshet, although blind, knew the king had arrived, not from the clamor of passing throngs, but from the silence (B. Berakhot 58a).

195. Cf. Plato, *Republic* VIII 556d; Halevi, *Kuzari* 1.19–24. Pines (Introduction, *Guide*, cxxxiii) sees here a response to Halevi's claim that reports of good order and good morals in India do not prove that India has a good ruler—as would gifts unique to India and a letter explaining their origin. Maimonides, by contrast, does not appeal to revelation and providential miracles. That would make premises of what more properly should be proved. He grounds his case in nature.

196. "Rabbi Ḥanina, the Vice-High Priest, said, 'Pray for the welfare of the state. But for fear of it folk would eat each other alive'" (M. Avot 3.2).

197. The example does not require even that the ruling authority be a person. One readily imagines a monarch who rules by threat of punishment. But Maimonides uses the word *sulṭān*. If the *sulṭān* is a king (*malik*), the argument has loopholes: Order does not entail monarchy, although it supports the hypothesis that there is a king. Other forms of rule might explain what we see. Maimonides does hold that nature shows the world has a ruler, but he does not presume the ruler to be a person in the usual sense. We know the effects of God's governance. We have no access to His ipseity.

198. We shall learn in I 53 that God should not be thought of as acting through distinct powers, traits, or attributes. In all His acts, it is His very Self that acts.

realize that He exists by picturing Him as a body and that He is alive by picturing Him as moving. For the masses regard only bodies as concrete realities unquestionably real. Anything not a body but present in a body, they presume to be real but, in a weaker sense, being dependent on a body. But whatever is not a body or of a body, on the face of it, does not exist at all, especially to the imagination.

Ordinary folk, similarly, cannot conceive of life without motion. What does not move freely, to them is not alive—although motion is not essential to life but accidental.

**1.50b** Awareness as we know it likewise comes through the senses of sight and hearing. We do not know and cannot conceive of ideas being conveyed from one human mind to another without speech—sound modulated by lips, tongue, and the other speech organs. So to give us a notion of God's awareness and of prophets' receiving ideas from Him, to convey to us in turn, God is described as seeing and hearing—meaning that He knows and is aware of what is seen or heard—and is said to speak since prophets do receive ideas from Him, for that is what revelation means, as will be made abundantly clear (II 32).

Since we have no idea how to bring anything to be unless we fashion it physically, God is described as fashioning things.[199] And since the masses cannot conceive of anything being alive without a soul, He is said to have a soul (Leviticus 26:11). True, 'soul' has many senses, as we have seen (I 41). Here it is used to mean that He lives. And since we perceive none of these functions in ourselves without our bodily organs, all the organs needed are figuratively ascribed to Him: feet and soles for locomotion; the organs by which we hear, see, and smell (ears, eyes, and nose); the organs and the medium of speech (mouth, tongue, and voice); and those for making and doing things (arms, hands, palms, and fingers).

God, in short (exalted be He above all lack), is figuratively assigned bodily organs

**1.51a** to signify His acts. And those acts, in turn, are ascribed to Him figuratively to signify some perfection distinct from that act. So He is said figuratively to have eyes, ears, hands, mouth, and tongue, to signify hearing, acting, and speaking. But seeing and hearing are assigned to Him figuratively to represent His awareness. For Hebrew, you'll find, may substitute one mode of perception for another: The text says *See God's word* (Jeremiah 2:31) for 'hear it.' For the idea is 'Grasp the meaning of God's words.'[200] Similarly, *See! My son's scent* (Genesis 27:27). In effect, Isaac said, 'The scent I smell is my son's.' The point is that he recognized his scent. On the same lines, it is said, *all the nation seeing the sounds* (Exodus 20:15)—even though this epiphany was within a prophetic vision,[201] as is well

199. E.g., *And God made the firmament* (Genesis 1:7), as if hammering out metal; *The* LORD *God formed man of clods of earth and blew into his nostrils the breath of life* (2:7).

200. Synesthesia, as a trope, is ancient and multicultural.

201. Maimonides takes seriously the assertion of Mekhilta to Exodus (152) that at Sinai even the handmaids of Israel were on the level of the prophet Ezekiel; see *Eight Chapters*, 4.

known among our people (see II 33). Acts like making or like speaking are figuratively ascribed to Him to signify emanation, as I shall explain (II 12).

The only bodily organs assigned to God in Scripture are those of locomotion, to signify life; perception, to signify awareness; touch, to signify making; and speech, to signify the emanation that flows to Prophets from the Intelligences, as I will explain (II 12). All these metaphors serve to convey to us that there is a living Being who is the Author of all things else and knows His work. When we turn to the denial of attributes, I will explain how all these reduce to one, which is God Himself (I 53).[202] But my point in this chapter is just to make clear that when any bodily organ is ascribed to Him (exalted be He above all defect), the reference is only to the action of those organs. To us, such **1.51b**
acts are perfections. So in ascribing them to God, we point to His being perfect in ways known to us. The Sages alert us to this when they say, "Torah speaks in human language."

Organs of locomotion are ascribed to Him when it says *My footstool* (Isaiah 66:1) and *the place for the soles of My feet* (Ezekiel 43:7). Organs of touch, when it says *the hand of the* LORD (Exodus 9:3), *by the finger of God* (31:18), *the work of Thy fingers* (Psalms 8:4), *Thou layest Thy palm on me* (139:5), *to whom the* LORD*'s arm is revealed* (Isaiah 53:1), and *Thy right hand, O* LORD . . . (Exodus 15:6). Organs of speech when it says *The mouth of the* LORD *hath spoken* (Isaiah 1:20), *and open His lips to you* (Job 11:5), *the* LORD*'s voice in its power* (Psalms 29:4),[203] and *His tongue, like consuming fire* (Isaiah 30:27). Sensory organs are ascribed to Him in *His eyes behold, His gaze tries the sons of man* (Psalms 11:4); *the eyes of the* LORD *ranging o'er the earth* (Zechariah 4:10);[204] *incline Thine ear, O* LORD*, and hear* (2 Kings 19:16); and *ye have lit a flame in My nostril* (Jeremiah 17:4).

No internal organ is poetically assigned to Him but a heart, since 'heart' has multiple meanings, being a word for the mind as well as the seat of life in animals (I 39). When it says, *My innards are troubled for him* (Jeremiah 31:20) and *the troublement of Thine innards* (Isaiah 63:15), here, too, the heart is intended. The word *meʿai* has a general and a specific sense. Specifically, it means the bowels; generically, all the inner organs, including the heart, as shown by its saying, *Thy Law in my innards* (*meʿai*; Psalms 40:9), equivalent to 'my heart.' That is why it says, *My innards are troubled for him* and *the troublement of Thine innards*. For only the heart, not the other organs, is said to be anxious, as in *My*

202. Some see a contradiction between Maimonides' negative theology and his positive descriptions of God as the highest reality or ultimate value on a scale oriented by the contrast between matter and intellect. Hannah Kasher, in "Self-Cognizing Intellect," sees an inevitable tension between reliance on human categories and affirmations of transcendence that discount such categories. But if the physical to intellectual axis *orients* us toward God's absolute perfection, the same axis can point higher if we can know higher perfections or, as Maimonides puts it, "negate more" of God; see I 53, 58–59.

203. As Saadiah translates the line, cleaving to the Hebrew syntax.

204. Maimonides repeats the slight misquotation he had in I 44.

*heart troubleth me* (Jeremiah 4:19). God, likewise, is not figuratively assigned a shoulder, since the shoulder is commonly used for carrying—and because it is in contact with one's burden. Still less is He metaphorically assigned any digestive organ, since these obviously involve deficiency.

**1.52a** All organs, internal and external, are on a par, in fact, as tools the soul uses to perform its varied functions. Some, including all the internal organs, are necessary to the individual's survival. Others, like the organs of procreation, are needed for the survival of the species. Still others serve in improving one's life and acting effectively—as the feet, hands, and eyes help one move, work, and perceive. Animals need to move to pursue what is helpful and avoid what is untoward; they need senses to tell the difference. And man, beyond that, needs productive arts to secure food, clothing, and shelter. This is part of our nature: We must prepare what we need. Certain other animals, too, rely on crafts to secure their needs.[205] But I do not see anyone who doubts that God needs nothing to sustain Him or improve His condition. Not being a body, He has no organs. He acts simply of Himself, without any instrumentality. But faculties, too, are instruments, of course. So He has none, no powers beyond Himself, by which He acts, knows, and wills.[206] Attributes are just faculties by another name—although that is not the point of this chapter.

**1.52b** The Sages have a general thesis ruling out anything that might be suggested to the imagination by the bodily traits the Prophets speak of and showing that they were never for a moment misled or confused by such usages.[207] That is why, all through the Talmud and Midrash, you find them preserving the Prophets' overt sense: They saw no risk of misreading or misconstrual here: It was all symbolism, directing the mind toward this One Being. So when an image is used consistently, likening God to a king who commands and forbids, punishes and rewards the folk of his realm, and who has servants and ministers to do his will and execute his commands, the Sages sustain the conceit, speaking, as the imagery requires, of petitions granted or denied, and other such royal acts, confident that this will cause no error or confusion.

The general thesis comes when they say, in Genesis Rabbah (27.1), "How powerful of the prophets, to liken creature to Creator!—as it says, *On the likeness of the throne, the likeness of the image of a man* (Ezekiel 1:26)." They acknowledge clearly here that

205. Cf. Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *AvM*, 275–82.

206. Maimonides broaches his promised thesis: God has no essential attributes. His word for 'a faculty' also means 'a power' (Arabic, *quwwa*; Greek, *dynamis*). Powers must not be reified lest they be hypostatized. Cf. Philo, *Legum Allegoria* 3.36, 206, LCL 1.324–25, 440–41; Philo, *Quod Deus Immutabilis Sit* 55–56, LCL 3.36–39; Philo, *De Cherubim* 67, LCL 2.48–49; Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, 2.101–9.

207. "The sheer audacity involved in describing God corporeally is sufficient proof" that the Sages were innocent of corporealism (Diamond, *Maimonides and the Hermeneutics*, 23). Cf. *Guide* 1.4a.

every image beheld in a prophetic vision is God's work—as it is. For all such images are created.[208] But what a marvelous phrase: "How powerful!" as though awestruck. They always speak this way when struck by words or acts overtly shocking. They say, "Rabbi So-and-So performed *ḥalitzah* alone, with a slipper, and at night. Rabbi So-and-So said, 'How bold, to have done it alone!'"[209] (B. Yevamot 104a). "How powerful!" meant 'How bold!' They said, in effect, 'What a bold turn the prophets were pressed to, referring to **1.53a** God Himself by way of what He created!' Mark this well. They clearly eschewed corporealism, treating every form and figure seen in a prophetic vision as created. But they did say, in so many words, that the Prophets likened the Creator to what He created. If, despite all this, someone would rather think ill of them and spitefully demean men he does not know and has never met, that will hurt them not at all.

## Chapter 47

I have said several times that nothing popularly fancied a defect or deemed inconceivable in God is ascribed to Him figuratively in Scripture, even if it is equivalent in principle to something that *is* figuratively ascribed to Him. What is predicated of Him is what suggests some perfection or imagined perfection. On this basis, we should explain why hearing, sight, and a sense of smell are assigned to Him metaphorically, but touch and taste are not. For He transcends all five senses alike: All five are imperfect modes of apprehension, even in those that have no other. For all five are passive and can be blocked, distorted, or strained, like any organ.

When we say 'God sees,' we mean that He knows what can be seen. 'God hears' means that He knows what can be heard. So taste and touch might have been predicated of **1.53b** Him, too, and glossed in terms of His knowing their objects. For all five senses are on a par: What excludes any one of them should exclude the rest, and to affirm any one of them of Him on the grounds that He knows its objects should apply to all five. Yet we find Scripture saying, *The* LORD *saw*, *The* LORD *heard*, and *The* LORD *smelled* but not 'The LORD tasted' or 'The LORD felt.' The reason: No one imagines that God touches

208. The Sages marvel at the boldness of Ezekiel's seeming to say that he saw the divine in human lineaments (1:26). Maimonides will stoutly deny that Ezekiel's vision was of God: "Everything symbolized in all of Ezekiel's epiphanies was but the LORD's Glory: He beheld the Chariot, not the Rider!" (3.11a). But long before addressing the climax of Ezekiel's vision, he finds a key point in the Sages' speaking of creature and Creator. Ezekiel's vision was authentic. So what he beheld was inscribed in his imagination by God, as accommodated to his mind's capacity.

209. Ritual release of a man from the ancient obligation to marry his childless brother's widow (Deuteronomy 25:5–10).

bodies. That is unheard of. These two senses, taste and touch, do not perceive an object without contact, whereas sight, hearing, and smell perceive their objects and their properties at a distance.[210] So popular imagination found these terms acceptable.[211] Besides, the point of the imagery assigning Him these senses was to signify that He knows our actions. But sight and hearing suffice for that, since they can perceive whatever someone else says or does, as the Sages say in cautioning restraint: "Know what is above you: a seeing eye and hearing ear" (M. Avot 2.1).

Given that all the senses are on a par, sight, hearing, and smell should be denied of Him the same as touch and taste. For all five are passive, physical, and mutable. But with
**1.54a** some, the flaw is obvious, while the others are deemed assets. The weaknesses of imagination, similarly, are obvious,[212] while those of discursive thinking and reflection are not.[213] So fancy, that is imagination, is not poetically ascribed to Him; but *maḥshavah* and *tevunah*, thinking and reflecting are: It says, *what the* LORD *hath devised* [ḥashav] (Jeremiah 49:20), and *with insight* [tevunah] *unfurled the heavens* (10:12).[214] Internal and external apprehensions alike, then, are or are not ascribed to Him figuratively based on the usages of human language: What is deemed a perfection is; what ostensibly signals a defect is not. But truth be told, He has no real attributes proper to Him over and above His Identity, as will be demonstrated (I 50–54).

## Chapter 48

Whenever hearing is ascribed to God, you will find that Onkelos avoids saying that and glosses in terms of apprehension or awareness—or, in the case of prayer, His accepting it or not. When it says, *The* LORD *heard*, he always glosses "In the LORD's presence was it heard"; with a prayer, he translates *I shall surely hear their cry* (Exodus 22:22) as "I shall surely grant it." This is his consistent practice without exception. But when vision

210. See Aristotle, *De Anima* II 7, 419a25–30; 10, 422a8–10; 11, 423b12–26.

211. Maimonides interprets the "sweet savor" of animal sacrifices as an olfactory metaphor signifying God's acceptance of the moral purification that such offerings attest.

212. The framing of images requires spatial mapping, so it is clearly a corporeal activity. Locating the inner senses in a specific "ventricle of the brain," long ascribed to Galen, is now known to have arisen much later. In *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* 7.3, Galen placed imagination, memory, and thought in the brain, but it was Rāzī who situated the imagination specifically "in the two anterior ventricles of the brain" (Rāzī, *K. al-Manṣūrī* in *Trois Traités*, ed. De Koning, 9). Cf. Avicenna, *Canon* liber I, fen 1, doctrina 6, cap. 5. See also Green, "Ventricular Localization"; Harry Wolfson, "Maimonides on the Internal Senses" and "Internal Senses in Latin."

213. The temporality of discursive thinking binds it to physicality. See *Guide* 1.35b.

214. Cf. Isaiah 55:8–9, where human thinking is contrasted with God's.

is ascribed to Him, he shifts strikingly, with an object and intent unclear to me. Sometimes he glosses *The LORD saw* as "The LORD beheld"; sometimes as "It was plain to the LORD." Apparently, 'beheld' in Aramaic is polysemous, denoting either intellectual or sensory apprehension. But if Onkelos thought so, I wish I knew why he sometimes avoids the term and glosses "It was plain to the LORD." **1.54b**

Reviewing the manuscripts I could find of his Targum and what I had heard as a student, I noted that when he found what God "saw" was connected with harm, hostilities, or wrongdoing, he glossed "It was plain to the LORD." 'Beheld' in Aramaic, of course, means awareness, discerning what is the case. So when he found that what God "saw" involved wrongdoing, he said not 'beheld' but "It was plain to the LORD." So when seeing is ascribed to God anywhere in the Torah, I found he gives 'beheld,' except in the passages I'll list for you: *The LORD hath seen my affliction* (Genesis 29:32) he renders "My suffering is plain to the LORD." With *I have seen all that Laban doeth to thee* (31:12), he uses "plain to Me . . ." Even though the speaker was an angel, Onkelos does not speak of his seeing, showing how consistent he was in this. For the issue was wrongdoing. *God saw the Israelites* (Exodus 2:25) he renders "The bondage of the Israelites was plain to God." *I have surely seen the suffering of My people* (3:7) he renders as "The bondage of my people is plain to Me"; *I have also seen their oppression* (3:9) as "Their oppression too is plain to Me"; *that He had seen their plight* (4:31) as "that their bondage was plain to Him." *I have seen this people*, [*and lo they are stiff necked*] (32:9) he renders "plain to Me is this people," since the reference is to their fractiousness—just as *God saw the Israelites* (2:25) means their suffering. With *The LORD saw and was incensed* (Deuteronomy 32:19), he uses "It was plain to the LORD." *When He seeth that their might is fled* (32:36), he again uses 'plain to Him.' For this too involves a wrong—Israel's subjection by their foes. In keeping with the verse *Thou canst not look on evil* (Habakkuk 1:13), he consistently renders every reference to enslavement or wrongdoing as "It was plain to Him" or "to Me."[215] **1.55a**

Yet this fine, far-ranging, and sensible reading is undercut for me by three passages that should have been glossed accordingly as "It was plain to the LORD," whereas in the manuscripts we find "The LORD beheld." They are as follows: *The LORD saw how wicked man had become on earth* (Genesis 6:5); *The LORD saw the earth, and lo it was corrupt* (6:12); and *The LORD saw that Leah was unloved* (29:31). Most likely, I suspect, these are errors that have crept into the manuscripts. For we do not have Onkelos' holograph here. When he glosses *God will see to the sheep* (22:8) as "The lamb will be plain to the LORD,"

215. "Are there not some things that it would be better not to see?" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Λ 9, 1074b33). Maimonides' hypothesis fits nicely with his treating evil as lack (III 10–16, 22–23): God would know what is real. His knowledge projects reality and does not just reflect it (III 21)—thus the double edge of his saying "making out something" (Arabic, *iqrār al-shay'*). Roslyn Weiss argues that Onkelos' nuance depends on the difference between mere seeing and seeing *that*, where the apprehension is evaluative and thus intellectual ("See No Evil," 62).

it may be to avoid suggesting that God had to look for a sheep or create one—or perhaps because it was unseemly in Aramaic to make a dumb animal the object of His attention. The manuscripts should be checked carefully for this in case they need correcting. But if the passages prove to be as I quoted them, I just do not know what Onkelos had in mind.

## Chapter 49

Angels, too, have no bodies. They are incorporeal minds but just creatures, made by God,[216] as I shall explain (II 4). Genesis Rabbah (21.9) says, "*The glittering spinning*
**1.55b** *sword* (Genesis 3:24) refers to angels: *flaming fire His ministers* (Psalms 104:4), ever swirling—now men, now women, now spirits, now angels." The Sages are clear here that angels have no matter of their own and no fixed bodily form outside the mind. They belong entirely to a prophet's vision, being dependent on the work of his imagination, as we shall see in discussing the true nature of prophecy (II 34, 36).[217] They say "now women," for in their visions prophets may see angels in the form of women. They allude to Zechariah (5:9): *Lo two women issued, the wind in their wings*.

It is very hard, as you know, for human beings without serious training to grasp the idea of anything free of matter, wholly incorporeal—especially for those who do not distinguish concepts from images and depend chiefly on sheer imagination. They take to be real or possible anything imagined; and anything that eludes imagination's net, to be impossible or nonexistent. Such people—most thinkers, in fact—never have a real idea or think through a problem. It is because this is so hard that Scripture says things about angels that, if taken literally, suggest that they have bodies and move about in human form, charged by God to do His will and execute His orders—all to convey that they are real and alive and to give some idea of their perfection, as I explained regarding God (I 46).

If one stopped there, on the plane of imagination, angels would be just like God as
**1.56a** vulgarly imagined. For of Him, too, things are said that, taken literally, make Him out as having a living body moving about in human form. But to convey the angels' lesser rank in the order of being, a feature of animal anatomy is added, marking God's greater perfection—just as man is more perfect than an irrational animal. Wings are the added feature. For flight is inconceivable without wings, as walking is without legs—these

216. Unlike the eternal gods of Neoplatonism, the angels are God's creatures.

217. Angels at large in nature are the forms and forces by which God governs (II 6). But the angels that prophets see are subjective, created by God in the medium of a prophet's imagination.

powers being dependent on those means.[218] Flight was chosen to convey that angels are alive, since flight is the highest, noblest form of locomotion in irrational animals. People think it a splendid attainment and wish they could fly, the better to escape all harm and the quicker to reach whatever they desire, even if far off. So angels are said not just to move but to fly. Besides, what flies may appear and then vanish, approach and then suddenly fly off. These, too, are features rightly associated with angels,[219] as I'll explain (II 42).

Although thought of as a perfection, flying is never ascribed to God, since it belongs to irrational animals. Do not be confused by its saying, *He mounted a cherub and flew* (Psalms 18:11). It was the cherub that flew. The image just means to convey how swiftly God's command was executed. In the same vein, *Lo, riding a swift cloud, the* LORD *cometh to Egypt* (Isaiah 19:1) indicates how swiftly disaster overtook them. Nor should you be misled by what you see, in Ezekiel in particular, about the *face of an ox*, *face of a lion*, *face of an eagle* (1:10), or *calf's hoof* (1:7). These have their own interpretations, which **1.56b**
you'll hear (III 1).[220] I'll have ample suggestions to clarify what the descriptions of these creatures mean.[221]

Flight is ascribed to angels in all our texts, and flight is unthinkable without wings. So angels are assigned wings to suggest their status as beings, not to announce their real character. Anything that moves at great speed, as you know, is said to fly, to suggest its speed. It says, *as an eagle swoops* (Deuteronomy 28:49). No bird flies and swoops more swiftly than an eagle, so [the foe's onslaught] is likened to it. Now, flight calls for paired

218. Scripture is parsimonious. It assigns no bodily organs to angels beyond those suggesting their reality and the motion indicative of their office.

219. Maimonides sets belief here on a lower plane than knowledge. The rapid appearance and disappearance of angels bespeak the subjectivity of their appearances in dreams and visions.

220. The creatures seen in Ezekiel's vision were of human form, Maimonides holds; see 3.3a.

221. Maimonides' frequently used the terms *nabbaha* (to alert or awaken one) and *ishārāt* (hints, pointers, or allusions) to echo the title of Avicenna's celebrated *Ishārāt wa-'l-Tanbīhāt*, or *Hints and Pointers*. Ibn Ṭufayl, too, echoes that title, strikingly applying the words to Ghazālī, whom he labors to reconcile with Avicenna: "Most of what he said was in the form of hints and intimations, of value to those who hear them only after they have found the truth by their own insight, or to someone innately gifted and primed to understand. Such men need only the subtlest hints" (*Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, tr. Goodman, 101). In teaching by hints and intimations, Maimonides respects the Sages' admonition that even the topic headings regarding *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* should be shared only with one who is primed to understand.

wings.[222] So the wings in Ezekiel's vision match the paired causes of motion.[223] But that was not the topic of this chapter.

## Chapter 50

Bear in mind, as you study this work of mine, that belief is not what you say but what you think when you hold something to be as you conceive it. If you are of the sort who are content with true opinions, or opinions that you presume to be true and just mouth without thought or conviction, let alone seeking certainty, that is very easy[224]—just as there are plenty of dolts who have their creed by rote with no idea of what it means. But
**1.57a** if you aspire to rise to the higher rung of thinking and to gain certainty that God is truly one—so truly as to be utterly incomposite and indivisible in every way—you must realize that He has no proper attributes of any sort. Just as He cannot be a body, He cannot have attributes.

One who believes that He is one but has multiple attributes calls Him one verbally but mentally believes Him many.[225] This is like Christians saying, 'He is one but three, and the three are one.' That is no different from saying 'He is one but has many attributes, He and His attributes being one' while denying His corporeality and affirming His perfect simplicity—as if we were seeking not what to believe but what to say. There is no belief without thinking. For to believe is to hold that things beyond the mind are as we think them. And if we reach a belief that is incontestable and cannot be gainsaid or contradicted, its falsity being inconceivable, we have reached certainty.

If you think dispassionately, free your mind of hidebound habits, and assay my case against attributes in the chapters to come, you are sure to gain such certainty and join those who conceive of God's unity and do not just speak about it with no inkling of what

222. Cf. Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *AvM*, 76, 79, 88, 95–98.

223. The creatures in Ezekiel's vision will prove to symbolize the intelligences that move spheres, through which God governs the world. Their paired wings, Maimonides proposes, suggest the four causes of the celestial revolutions: the sphere's shape, the world soul, the intellect, and the love of God—corresponding to Aristotle's material, efficient, formal, and final causes. See II 4, 10; III 1–7.

224. It is not enough to know how to answer an *apikoros* (M. Avot 2.19). Beyond knowing what to say (as in kalām), serious inquirers need to know how to think. Like Ghazālī, Maimonides tends to look down on *taqlīd*, or faith dependent on dogma—although he admits it has its uses. Building on Saadiah's pressing beyond faith to critical conviction (*iʿtiqād*), he urges a quest for certainty reliant on *burhān*, or proof. See *Guide* 1.56b–57b, 96b, 3.48b, 53a, 124a.

225. To radical monotheists, God's unity means not just that there is no other deity but that God is simplex; cf. Plato, *Republic* 382e; Philo, *Legum Allegoria* 2.2, LCL 1.224–25.

it means—the sort of whom it says, *Thou art near to their mouths but far from their reins* (Jeremiah 12:2). Better to conceive of the Truth and grasp it, even without talk of it, as He charged the best of us: *Speak in your heart upon your bed and be still. Selah* (Psalms 4:5).[226] **1.57b**

## Chapter 51

Many things in the world are clear and evident, including sensations and primary ideas.[227] Others are nearly so and would need no proof, if one were left alone: that motion is real, say, and that human beings can act.[228] Likewise, the phenomena of generation and decay and the plain sensory properties of things, like the heat of fire and coldness of water.[229] There are many more examples. But since various bizarre beliefs have sprung up, through error or because someone with an agenda at odds with the facts denied what we perceive or wished to press a delusion that things are real that are not, scholars have had to defend the plain facts and rebut such delusions.[230] So we find Aristotle proving that motion is real, since it had been denied, and refuting atomism, since it had been affirmed.[231]

That God has no proper attributes is of this class: It is a prime truth of reason that an attribute is not the thing itself but a feature of it. That makes it an accident. Were it the same as the thing, its predication would be a mere tautology, like 'Man is man,' or an analysis, like 'Man is the rational animal.' For that is what man is, his essence: rational animal. There is no third thing beyond 'rational' and 'animal' that is 'man.' 'Man' is the being of whom 'rational' and 'animal' are predicated. The description just analyzes the noun 'man,' as if you said, 'What is called a man is what combines animal and rational.' **1.58a**

226. Cf. Philo, *De Fuga et Inventione* 92, LCL 5.58–61.

227. Maimonides' provides examples of primary ideas in his *Treatise on Logic*: "Our awareness that the whole is greater than its part, that two is an even number, and that equals of the same thing are equal to each other" (§8, Efros, Arabic, 17, English, 47).

228. Monists like Parmenides and Zeno of Elea denied that motion is real. The kalām occasionalists denied human agency. Al-Ashʿarī allowed a capacity to act, but it was monovalent and did not precede the action. Al-Āmirī quotes Aristotle as calling the denial of change a belief akin to madness. See Ghorab, "Greek Commentators," 81.

229. Pyrrhonian Skeptics made a point of *not* questioning immediate sensations like those of heat and cold; Sextus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.13, LCL 1.8–11. Such sensations are Maimonides' first example of truths needing no proof: "Our awareness that this is black, this is white, this is sweet, and this is hot" (*Treatise on Logic* §8, Efros, Arabic, 17, English, 47).

230. Galen defends the reality of qualitative changes as hardly needing argument. *On the Natural Faculties* I 2.5, 14.45; III 10.178–79, Brock, 9, 71, 277–79.

231. Aristotle argues against atomism at *Physics* VI; at the outset of the *Categories* (1), he shows that Parmenides' denial of change and the resulting Eleatic denial of motion rest on an equivocation on the verb "to be."

A predicate, clearly, must be either essential to what it describes, analyzing the term—which we exclude in God's case not on this but on other grounds, as I will explain (I 52)—or name a feature distinct from the subject, some added notion, making it an accident. To deny accidents of the Creator nominally is not to deny them in fact. For any notion added to the idea of a thing pertains without being constitutive—and that is just what 'accident' means. Besides, if God had multiple attributes, many things would be eternal. There just is no monotheism apart from belief in one simplex Being, without complexity or multiplicity, one from every standpoint and perspective—indivisible causally and conceptually, objectively and subjectively—as will be proved in this work (II 2).[232]

Some thinkers have gone so far as to say, 'His attributes are not He but are none other.' This is like others' saying, 'Modes'—meaning universals—'are neither real nor unreal,'[233]
**1.58b** or still others' saying, 'The atom does not occupy space but does have location,'[234] or 'A

232. Plato pictures Parmenides arguing that God is infinite (*apeiron*), indivisible, unchanging, beyond motion and rest, timeless, and beyond even being and unity (*Parmenides*, 137c–142a; cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.3, 9.5.35–46, 5.4.1.34–39, 7.32). As Aristotle explains (*Metaphysics* A 5 986b 18–25), Parmenides was the first to identify the One with God. Maimonides avoids placing God above being (cf. Plato, *Republic* 509b6–10), lest that koan-like claim (pointing to God's transcendence of the limitations of mere definiteness) suggest nonexistence. Instead, Maimonides says that being, in God's case, does not mean what it does for other things, relying on Avicenna's division of contingent from necessary being: Existence, for a necessary being, is not "an added predicate" (I 57, 1.69b). In today's language, in God's unique case, existential propositions are *not* synthetic. Like Plotinus, and boldly against the backdrop of Aristotle's understanding 'being' in terms of definiteness, Maimonides regards God as infinite and thus undefined by any of the features that delimit other beings.

233. The notion of "modes" (Arabic, *aḥwāl*; sing. *ḥāl*), condemned here as equivocal, was proposed by Abū Hāshim, son and disciple of the Muʿtazilite al-Jubbāʾī. The notion, responsive to trinitarian apologetics (1.57a), was adopted by leading Ashʿarites, including al-Juwaynī and *his* disciple al-Ghazālī. It aimed to reconcile real attributes with God's unity by calling attributes like life and wisdom one with God's essence but conceptually distinct. Juwaynī, indeed, calls his *aḥwāl* neither existent nor nonexistent (*K. al-Irshād*, ed. Luciani, 48). See Harry Wolfson, *Kalām*, 147–205; and Altmann, *Studies*, 111–12. Universals, for Maimonides, exist in the mind and in the species of things but not in themselves (II 12; III 18). His conceptualism, between nominalism and realism, may itself seem to leave universals in a twilight of sorts, hanging between being and nonbeing.

234. For the kalām, all finite being was radically contingent. So kalām atoms had no duration, no essential properties (lest their natures float free of God's act), and no causal efficacy, since causal power belonged to God alone. Unlike Democritean or Epicurean atoms, as Richard Frank explains, "the 'atoms' of the early kalām play no real role in the explanation of the physical properties of things." The bodies we see are "constituted by the 'accidents' of composition (*taʾlīf*), conjunction (*ijtimāʿ*), contiguity (*mumāssa*), etc." (R. Frank, *Metaphysics of Created Being*, 40–42). Kalām atoms had no size, lest more be entailed in the sheer posit of "being" than God momentarily imparts. They have position but no extension. Yet they

person cannot act but can "acquire" actions.'[235] All this is mere talk—real enough in words but not in the mind, let alone beyond the mind. But it is shielded, as you and all who do not deceive themselves know, by a flood of words and images and defended by shouting, vituperation, and a motley mix of dialectical ploys and sophisms.[236] If the one who holds such views and tries to shore them up in these ways went back and thought over his convictions, he would find only helpless confusion. He is trying to conjure up something that does not exist, to invent a middle between opposites where there is none. Or is there a middle ground between being and nonbeing, or between things' being the same and their being different?

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do *exclude* one another. As Jurjānī explains, kalām atomists called position, *al-ḥayyiz*, the place a body *might* have occupied. So atomic solidity is curiously preserved, as is the void posited by ancient atomists—although, in truth, the atoms of the occasionalist kalām do *not* move through space but are simply re-created in new positions at each instant. "The earliest Arabic doxography that we have," Wolfson writes, "the *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn* of al-Ashʿarī (d. 933), quotes the opinion of a number of Muslim theologians, all dating from the ninth century. . . . With the exception of one, all of those quoted by him are for the unextendedness of atoms. . . . By the time of Maimonides . . . the denial of the extendedness of the atoms seems to have become the prevailing view of the Kalām" (Harry Wolfson, *Kalām*, 472–73, citing *Guide* I 73, 1.135 *ll.* 19–21). See also Dhanani, *Physical Theory* and "Impact of Ibn Sīnā," 79; cf. Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism*, 33–48. Avicenna's critique of kalām atomism may have led Ghazālī to drop the doctrine, for Ghazālī's *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa* follows Avicenna's *Dānesh Nāmeh Alā'ī*, which mounts a telling critique of it.

235. Ashʿarite theologians denied that we "create" our actions. Acts become ours because we appropriate them. See *Guide* 1.110b; al-Ashʿarī, *K. al-Lumaʿ*, McCarthy, chap. 6; and Pines and Schwarz, "Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's Refutation," which includes the text of Yaḥyā s work, discovered by Kraemer in Tehran. The kalām doctrine of "acquisition," rooted in Stoic theories of appropriation, resonates curiously with Harry Frankfurt's resort to "second-order desires." See Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will." The approach reflects the tension between determinism and notions of responsibility, ownership of one's choices, and accountability for one's actions. Frankfurt's posit is more retrospective compared to the Stoics' prospective perspective—or that of the Ashʿarites, which may reside in the specious present and leave open the question of who or what "created" the capacity to appropriate an act.

236. Of the rhetorical excesses of Kalām, Kraemer writes, "A primary objective of the theologians was to make the world dangerous for philosophy and for philosophers; for they were dead set and hell bent on philosophy bashing and defending religion with an arsenal of eristic devices, *ad hominem* arguments, *reductio ad absurdum* reasoning, and sophistical fallacies—all this *ad gloriam fidei* and *ad maiorem dei gloriam*" ("Maimonides' Use," 112). Such Kalām vehemence reflects their motivating agenda, where all natural powers, including (or especially) human agency and independence of mind, were viewed with alarm as setting limits to God's omnipotence. Maimonides, like Rabbi Akiva (M. Avot 3:15), holds that God delegates to His creatures their natural powers, including the human capacity for choice.

What drives him to this is mere fondness for the fancies I mentioned (I 49) and the fact that we always think real bodies must have essences and thus properties. Every body has features; we never find one without them. So based on this way of picturing things, he presumes God, too, has constituents: an essence and various added attributes. Some pressed the likeness so far as to believe Him a body with attributes. Others, loath to take that route, got rid of the body but kept the attributes. All this came from hewing to the literal sense of Scripture, as I shall explain in later chapters on these themes (I 53–54).

## Chapter 52

**1.59a** Any predicate affirming a subject to be thus-and-so must be of one of these five types:

1. A definition may be predicated of a subject, as man is called the rational animal. Such predicates, signifying the essence or "whatness" of a thing,[237] as I explained (I 51), only analyze a term. Predicates of this sort are inapplicable to God, as all agree. For there are no factors prior to His existence by which He might be defined.[238] Hence it is a commonplace among all thinkers who understand what they say that 'God' is undefinable.

2. A thing might be characterized by part of its definition, as man is called 'rational' or 'animal.' This grounds an implication: If we say, 'Every man is rational,' it means that wherever you find humanity, there must also be rationality. Such predicates, too, everyone agrees, are excluded in God's case. For if He had part of an essence, that essence would be composite. So attributes of this sort, like those of the last, are inapplicable to God.

3. A thing might be described by something over and above its essence or identity, not critical to or constitutive in its being what it is. That would be a quality. Quality is one
**1.59b** of the accidental categories.[239] If God had such characteristics, He would be a substrate of

237. Aristotle defines *ousia*, essence, as the "what it is for a thing to be." In an important sense, then, the essence (or form) of a thing is what it is, its substance, what makes it what it is.

238. What is defined must be explained, historically or analytically, by reference to the causes or constituents necessary to its existence, as sodium and chlorine are compounded to make table salt—or, in the Aristotelian scheme, as matter and form are conjoined in any body. The need for combination renders all composites contingent. Contingency, if applied to God, would preclude His being the first cause, a necessary being.

239. Aristotle's ten categories are ways in which things are or are said to be. They include substance, quality, quantity, time, place, position, possession, action, passion (sc., passivity), and relation. Since the categories are ways in which things are said to be, they class the basic types of predicates. So Maimonides uses the list to signpost his survey of predicates that might seem applicable to God. God, as the ultimate reality, is *the* substance par excellence. Terms denoting "secondary substance" reflect the essence of a thing, telling "what a thing is" by naming its type, usually its genus (its general kind) and differentia (the specific traits distinguishing it from others of its kind). So definitions point to the terms that single out a species:

accidents. That should show you how far His true Identity is from having qualities.[240] Yet surprisingly, those who affirm attributes deny that He can be likened to anything or qualified in any way. What do they mean by 'not qualified' if not without qualities? Every attribute predicated of a subject either is constitutive, and thus of the essence, or is a quality of it.

Qualities are of four kinds, as you know. I will give you examples of each kind to show you why it cannot apply to God:

a. You might describe someone by his mental or moral traits or psychic dispositions—as when you say So-and-So is a carpenter, or chaste, or ill. It makes no difference if you say 'carpenter' or 'knowing' or 'wise.' Each term names a psychic disposition. It makes no difference if you say 'chaste' or 'merciful.' Every art, science, or moral trait is a psychic disposition. All this is plain to anyone with the least exposure to logic.

b. You might predicate physical capacities or incapacities of a thing, like 'soft' or 'hard.' There is no difference between saying 'soft' or 'hard' and 'weak' or 'strong.' They are all physical traits.

c. You might predicate moods or affects of someone: So-and-So is angry, nervous, frightened, or pleasant, where the trait is not fixed. Colors, flavors, odors, warmth, cold, aridity, and moistness are also of this class. **1.60a**

d. You might describe a thing in quantitative terms—'long' or 'short,' 'crooked' or 'straight,' and so on.

If you consider all these predicates and others of the type, you will find that none are applicable to God: He has no quantity that would allow quantitative terms as such to apply. He is not passive so as to be subject to affects. He has no dispositions so as to have capacities and such. Nor does He have a soul so as to form habits like clemency, shame, and the like—nor any other concomitant of having a soul, like health or sickness. So you can see plainly that He has no trait falling under the category of quality.

These three classes of predicate, then—those denoting an essence, part of essence, or a quality dependent on an essence—are clearly inapplicable to Him. They all imply compositeness, which I will prove is impossible in God (II 1).

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'Man' is defined under his genus, 'animal,' and by specifying 'rational' to distinguish humans from other animal species. All the categories besides those that name or define a substance are called accidental, since they do not signify what makes a thing what it is: A man may be musical (quality), six feet tall (quantity), late (time), present (place), standing (position), dressed (possession), walking (action), overheated (passion—i.e., affected in a certain way), or married (relation).

240. If God had accidents, He would be corporeal (I 51 ad fin.), for it is matter that allows accidents to differentiate essences. Neoplatonically, materiality grounds all differentiation.

4. A thing might be characterized by linking it to something else—a time, perhaps, or a place or another individual—as when you call Zayd So-and-So's father, So-and-So's partner, the man who lives in such and such, or who lived at such and such time. Such
**1.60b** predicates do not imply plurality or change in the subject. Zayd may be ʿAmr's partner, Bakr's father, Khālid's client, Zayd's friend, living in so-and-so, born in such and such year. Relations[241] of this kind are not of the essence of a thing or dependent on it like qualities.[242]

It might at first seem acceptable to characterize God in such terms. But closer, stricter scrutiny shows that it is not. God has no connection[243] to time or space, plainly. For time is an accident of motion viewed in terms of before or since and made quantitative, as the texts on the subject explain.[244] Motion pertains to bodies, and God is not a body. So He is not linked to time—nor, likewise, to space.[245]

241. With relations, Maimonides nears the end of his survey of the categories. As Munk notes (1.200 *n.* 1), he avoids the Arabic *iḍāfa* here, the usual term for a relation (see Georr, ed., *Les Catégories d'Aristote dans leurs Versions Syro-Arabes*, 332–38), reserving that term for correlatives, where terms imply each other: If there is a half, there must be a double. Here Maimonides chooses the word *nisbah*, a link of kinship or, more abstractly, a ratio or proportion—on which see Nicomachus of Gerasa, *Arithmetike Eisagoge*, Hoche, 1.22–23. Nicomachus flourished at the end of the first century of the Common Era, and his *Arithmetic* came into Arabic in the early ninth century. It became well known in the translation of the pagan Ḥarranian scholar Thābit b. Qurrah (cf. Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *On Arithmetic*, El-Bizri, Arabic, 14, English, 48). Maimonides, as Munk explains, rejects any kinship or proportion between God and other beings. He does not deny any relation between the Creator and His creatures; see 1.21a, 32a.

242. 'Rational' is essential to 'man,' but 'laughing' is not, for a man is still a man if not laughing. However, laughter does depend on the human essence: Beets and carrots do not laugh.

243. Ibn Tibbon translates *nisbah* here as *yaḥas*, underwriting Pines's rendering it as 'relation.' Buxtorf (1629) seems more sensitive to the Arabic: "Nulla etenim est comparatio vel proportio inter Deum et Tempus vel Locum" (p. 80).

244. "Time is not sheer process but the measurable aspect of a process. One indication: As we discriminate more or less by number, we discriminate more or less movement by time. So time is a kind of number. . . . But time is what is counted, not what we count by. . . . Just as motion is perpetual succession, so is time. . . . And the 'now' divides time into before and after. . . . So time is the number of motion in terms of before and after. It is continuous since it applies to what is continuous"—that is, to motion (Aristotle, *Physics* IV 11, 219b5–220a26, tr. after Hope and Hardie/Gaye).

245. "Quocirca inter Ipsum et inter Tempus nulla est comparatio. Sic nulla quoque proportio est inter Ipsum et inter Locum" (Buxtorf, loc. cit.)—there is no spatial or temporal connection or proportionality between God and nature.

The issue we must probe and consider is whether there is any real link, by which He might be characterized, between Him and any substance of His creation.[246] That He is not the correlate of any of His creatures is evident at a glance: Correlatives are interdependent. But He exists necessarily, and all else is contingent, as I will show (II 1).[247] So they are not counterparts.[248]

Some kinship[249] between Him and other things might seem to make sense. But it does not. Mind and color cannot conceivably be compared, although they exist in the same way on our account.[250] So what, conceivably, is comparable to One who has nothing in

246. "Res tamen consideratione digna hoc loco est; An nulla planè sit proportio inter Deum Benedictum et Creaturas eius, à qua Deus denominari possit?" (Buxtorf, 80–81).

247. Maimonides takes aim here at arguments like those mounted by Proclus and others, that if God is the Cause and the world is the effect, then God's activity requires the existence of the world and vice versa. Maimonides, however, sees an asymmetry here, announced by the world's contingency, as contrasted with God's necessary Being: The world's existence may allow one to infer the reality of God as its cause, but God's reality does not imply the existence of the world. Maimonides relies on Avicenna here for the asymmetry between necessary and contingent being. The consequence he presses is foregrounded in the opening lines of *MT*, where Maimonides argues that God would still exist even if the world did not.

248. Here, Buxtorf does give *relatio* for *iḍāfah*, as Aristotle's *Categories* would lead one to expect. Aristotle writes, "All relatives have correlatives. By 'slave' is meant the slave of a master, and the master is master of a slave" (*Categories* 7, 6b27–29). Maimonides digs his heels in: God is the world's Creator. In *our* broad sense, that is a relation. But God's existence does not entail that of the world. God was under no necessity to create. Creation was an act of grace, and God gave the world its nature at His pleasure and as His wisdom chose, for, in God, will and wisdom are one. We can see why Maimonides refuses to characterize God in terms of relations *in Aristotle's sense*. Newton fathered the calculus, but its existence does not entail his. Someone else might have devised it, as Leibniz did in fact. The relations that concern Maimonides are those of proportion, likeness, time, and place. He does not bar 'Creator of . . .' but does reject Proclus' contention that God and the world imply each other and his inference that if God is the eternal Creator, the world is His eternal counterpart. *This* relation is not symmetrical. We see the roots of Maimonides' concern when we recall that for Aristotle, the world is divine. Abraham Ibn Ezra (at Genesis 1:1 and Isaiah 40:28) sustains Maimonides' approach from another angle, relying on his philological strengths. He derives *bara'*, 'created,' from a root meaning 'to cut or sever': God gave the world *being of its own*. It is not self-sufficing, nor is it swallowed up in God. One consequence of Maimonides' stand against any symmetry between God and creation is this: his inference from the world to God is inductive, explanatory, not deductive (III 19, 21). Hence his recognition that creation cannot be proven apodeictically: The world might have had other causes—or none at all. Creation is a compelling hypothesis but not a logical necessity.

249. The term is *nisbah* again. Buxtorf uses *relatio* but follows Maimonides in ruling out any *comparatio*.

250. Sc., both exist contingently, "on our account"—unlike that of the eternalists, for whom mind, at least, was a necessary being. In calling the human soul immortal, Platonists

**1.61a** common with anything else? For even existence, we hold, is said of Him and of all else in wholly different senses. There is no real kinship of any kind, then, between Him and any of His creations.

Things are comparable only if they are of the same, necessarily proximate, species. If they are just of the same genus, there is no basis for comparison. That is why we do not say, 'This red is redder than that green'—or less so, or as red—even though they fall under the same genus, color. With things of different genera, anyone can see at a glance that there is no basis of comparison, even if both fall under some higher grouping. There is no comparing, say, a hundred cubits with the hotness of peppers: This is a quality; that, a quantity. And there is no comparing knowledge with sweetness, or clemency with bitterness, although they all count as qualities. So how can He be compared to any of His creatures, given the vast, unequaled gulf between His reality and theirs? Any kinship with them would attach an accident of "likeness" to Him, not essential to Him but still, broadly, an accident. So even comparisons afford no way of describing Him as He really is, although they are preferred ways of characterizing divinity tolerably, since they entail no multiplicity in the Eternal and no change in Him when the things change to which He is compared.

5. The fifth type of positive predicate characterizes a thing by what it does.[251] I do not **1.61b** mean a craft or trade—like 'carpenter' or 'smith.' Those terms belong to the category of quality, as I said. What I mean is what a subject produces—as you might say, 'Zayd framed this door,' or built that wall, or wove this robe.[252] Such descriptions stand apart from the subject itself. So they may be applied to God[253] once it is understood that these varied acts imply no variance or multiplicity in the Subject, as will be shown (I 53). For all His varied acts are done by Himself alone and no added entity, as I explained (I 46).

To summarize this chapter: He is one in every way, without internal complexity and with nothing added beyond His Identity. The many and varied descriptions pointing to Him in Scripture regard His many works and presume no multiplicity in Him—although

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understood that to imply its divinity. For them, unlike adherents of scriptural ideas of creation, the world and all its species were not contingent. But unlike the *mutakallimūn*, Maimonides also does not consider mind an "accident"—as if awareness might be placed, say, in a single atom.

251. Of Aristotle's ten categories, only action remains. Maimonides has ruled out passivity along with the relations that concern him. Some actions do involve relations. But the relation of creature to Creator is not symmetrical: God does not depend on what He creates.

252. Rabbi Akiva uses analogies of a door and a garment in mounting an argument from design. Midrash Temurah in Midrash Aggadot Bereishit.

253. For Baḥya, too, God is characterized by His acts (*K. Farā'iḍ al-qulūb*, Tawḥīd 10, Yahuda, 72–74, Mansoor, 134–36). At Exodus 3:14, Saadiah, in his long commentary, takes God to say, "I will be known by names that reflect my acts: Merciful when I am merciful, Avenger when I exact retribution." Ed. Haggai Ben-Shammai.

some point to His perfection by way of our notions of perfection, as I explained (I 26, 46–47). How a single, simplex subject, in whom there is no multiplicity, can perform diverse actions will now be clarified with examples.

## Chapter 53

Much like the belief that the Creator is a body, the belief that God has attributes is prompted not by reason but by hewing to the surface sense of Scripture. Finding God described in the revealed books, those who took such descriptions literally believed that God has the traits described. They shunned corporealism but not, in effect, its concomitants, accidents like psychic states, all of which are qualities. Any attribute that they believe pertains to God Himself, you will find, is in fact a quality. Scripture does not say so outright, but the features it usually assigns to God have their counterparts in any sentient animal. That is part of what it means to say, "Torah speaks in human language." The point, in every case, is to ascribe perfection to Him, not the particular trait deemed a perfection in some animal. **1.62a**

Most of these descriptions cite His diverse works. But manifold works do not make their author manifold.[254] Here is an everyday example of a single cause that has diverse effects, although it lacks volition—all the more would this be so in a voluntary agent! The example: Fire melts some things, hardens others, cooks, burns, bleaches, and blackens.[255] If someone described it as what bleaches and blackens, burns and cooks, hardens and melts, he would be quite right. But a person unaware of the nature of fire might presume it had six different "principles"—one to blacken, one to bleach, a third to cook, a fourth to burn, a fifth to melt, a sixth to harden. For these effects are opposites. No two are the same. But one who knows the nature of fire understands that it produces all these effects by a single causal quality, heat. If this is so with things that act by nature, all the more is it so with a voluntary agent—let alone with Him who transcends all description. **1.62b**

We relate to God in diverse ways. For knowledge in us is not the same as power, and power is not the same as will. But how can we infer from this that there are diverse essential "principles" in Him—for knowing, willing, and agency? That is what their attributes amount to. Some of them openly admit it and actually number the attributes over and

254. God does not need "faculties" to act (1.27b).

255. Maimonides may know the example from Ghazālī. Ghazālī, like the Philosophers, cites the varying dispositions of matter to explain the varied effects of emanation: "A shiny body takes the sunlight and reflects it, lighting up another object, but mud does not; the air lets light pass, but stone does not. The sun softens some things, hardens others, whitens the fuller's gown but blackens his face" (*TF* 17 §9, Marmura, 172–73); see Sextus, *Against the Physicists* 1.246, LCL 3.122–23.

above His Identity. Others do not, but their creeds confess it, even if they do not articulate it intelligibly—as when some of them say, 'Powerful by His essence, knowing by His essence, living by His essence, willing by His essence.'[256]

I can illustrate my point for you in terms of human reason: By one and the same simplex faculty, one masters the arts and sciences but also sews, does carpentry, weaves, builds, learns geometry, and governs a state. All these diverse actions spring from a single faculty, simple and unaugmented.[257] The effects are quite different, virtually infinite, given the varied arts that reason spawns. So it need hardly seem far-fetched in God's
**1.63a** case that such diverse acts issue from a single, simplex Being, undifferentiated and unaugmented—that every predicate applied to God in His Scriptures describes not Him but His acts or points to His absolute Perfection.[258] That does not make God a composite of disparate "principles," as believers in attributes take Him to be. For avoiding the word 'composite' does not eliminate the compositeness implicit in their notion of attributes.

But a problem remains to be cleared up, the problem underlying their claim: They do not hold that God has attributes because His acts are many. 'Yes,' they say, 'one identity can do many things, but God's essential attributes are not something that He did or made. For one can hardly suppose that He made Himself.'[259] They differ as to which attributes to call essential and offer various numbers, all following some scriptural text. But I will give you four on which they all agree, calling it a matter of reason and not based on revelation: 'living,' 'powerful,' 'knowing,' and 'willing.' These, they say, are distinct—perfections that God cannot lack and that are not conceivably among His acts. That is their view in a nutshell.

256. At issue here are not just efforts toward realism about God's attributes by Jews and Muslims but the penchant of Christian apologists to hypostatize divine attributes in support of trinitarianism. See Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 51, 64, 74.

257. Were reason multiplex, the mind that rules would not know how to judge or plan or study, or even know itself as the same mind that wove a garment or ordered dinner.

258. The analogy of God's acts to our own allows talk of God as a mind, albeit with some looseness (*tasāmuḥ*). Mind, as Lobel argues (citing I 53, 57, and 58), is, for Maimonides, an attribute of action. So its ascription to God need not vitiate God's ultimate transcendence (Lobel, "Silence Is Praise to You"). In truth, of course, God transcends even the idea of intellect that orients the hierarchy of predicates Maimonides finds in Scripture. *Nous*, Plotinus urges, Aristotle's God, is not the highest deity, for mind is not the best of things (*Enneads* 6.7.25). Yet the negative theology prompted by thoughts of God's transcendence need not strip away every positive affirmation, yielding only emptiness. For only limitations are denied. The identity of reality with perfection bars dissolution of the idea of God. And as Benor explains, "The unity of the intellect can be a symbol for the unity of God" ("Meaning and Reference," 357).

259. Essential attributes would be constitutive in God's being. But God is not a product of His acts.

But in God, as you know, knowledge is the same as life.[260] For any subject conscious of itself is at once knowing and alive—so long, of course, as its knowledge is self-knowledge, making the knower and the known identical. For God, to us, is not a composite of **1.63b** two things—one conscious, the other not—as a man is made up of a soul that is conscious and a body that is not. But by 'knowing,' we do mean self-aware. So God's knowledge and His life are identical.[261] They miss that idea, being focused on God's knowledge of His creatures.

Power and will, as ascribed to the Creator, similarly, are not reflexive, of course: He does not exercise His power over Himself. Nor is He said to will Himself. And no one thinks that He does. They think of these attributes only in terms of His varied relations to His creatures: He has the power to create what He does, the will to give being to things as He did, and knowledge of what He has brought to be. So these predicates, as you can see, regard not God Himself but His works.[262]

Just as we true monotheists do not say that God has some added principle by which He created the heavens, another by which He created the elements, and a third by which He created the Intelligences. We do not say that He has some further principle by which He is powerful, another by which He wills, and a third by which He knows what He created. He is one simplex Being, nothing more. He Himself created and knows all that He created, by no further principle at all.

It makes no difference, as I explained, whether these terms regard His diverse acts or His relations, real or notional, to His works.[263] This is what one should believe about **1.64a** the predicates used in Scripture—unless, as I will explain (I 59), they point to perfection itself, by analogy with the human perfections known to us.

260. Cf. *NE* X 8, 1178b7–24.

261. Intellect realized is awareness of the intelligible: "So if God enjoys eternally what we enjoy at times, how wonderful! And, if better, all the more so. But it is in this better state that God has life and being. For the mind's activity is its life, and God is that activity: God's self-sufficient activity is life eternal at its best. So we say that God is the eternal best living being—life unending, unbroken and eternal" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Λ 7, 1072b15–30; tr. after Hope and Ross; cf. 1074b35). Cf. Augustine: "In God, being is no different from life, as if He could be without living; nor is life any different from intelligence, as if He could live without understanding; nor is understanding other than happiness. For Him to be is to live, to understand, and to be happy" (*City of God* 8.6).

262. Cf. Philo, *Legum Allegoria* 3.97–99, LCL 1.366–69.

263. A real relation is that of the Creator to His creatures. A notional relation is one reflecting familiar distinctions between, say, God's knowledge and His power. Neither the objective nor the subjective differences entail any compositeness in God.

## Chapter 54

Moses our Teacher, master of all who know,[264] made two entreaties, both of them answered: first, that God acquaint him with His true Reality; and second (although asked first), to inform him of His attributes. God answered by promising him knowledge of all His attributes and revealed that they are His acts—but taught him that His true Godhead cannot be known in Itself. He did, however, awaken him to an intellectual level (see I 8), at which he won the highest awareness humanly possible, a peak that no one before or since would reach (Deuteronomy 34:10).

Moses sought to know God's attributes when he said, *Cause me, pray, to know Thy ways that I may know Thee . . .* (Exodus 33:13). Consider the striking implications of those words. *Cause me, pray, to know Thy ways that I may know Thee* shows that God is known by His attributes: To know Him is to know His ways. His further words, *that I may find favor in Thine eyes*, show that he who knows Him wins His favor. It is not one who just fasts and prays but anyone who knows Him that "pleases" God and draws near Him.[265]

**1.64b** One who fails to know Him is "far" from Him and "displeasing" to Him. The more one knows or fails to know God, the more "pleasing" or "displeasing," the "closer" or the more "remote" (See I 36).

Well, I have digressed from the point of the chapter. But to return, when Moses sought to know God's attributes, he was seeking forgiveness for the nation, and it was granted (Exodus 33:17).[266] He then sought to know God Himself: *Show me, pray, Thy glory* (33:18).[267] Only then was his earlier request granted: *Cause me, pray, to know Thy ways* (33:13). He was told, *I shall pass all My good before thee* (33:19). But in answer to his second

264. Maimonides pointedly uses a term for knowledge here meant to include rational and scientific understanding. As Friedländer observes in commenting on this passage, Maimonides cites Moses' wisdom and not simply his prophetic prowess, since the true enlightenment that underwrote Moses' prophetic gift meant God's giving him the insight and the method needed for "solving the most difficult metaphysical problems" and showing him "the limits of human reason."

265. See I 18, 2.74b–75b, III 51; cf. Porphyry, *To Marcella* 17; and see Kellner and Gillis, *Maimonides the Universalist*, 2 and passim.

266. The suggestion opened up by the "digression" is that God's favor toward Moses, the basis of the forgiveness he sought for Israel, rested on his knowledge of God.

267. Cf. *MT* Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 1.10. It is misleading to translate *dhātahu* here as "His essence," for God, as Maimonides aims to make clear, has no essence distinct from His existence. Al-Ḥarīzī, rightly translates it as *ʿatzmo* (Himself): Moses sought to know, beyond God's attributes, God's ipseity. This is the "face" that human beings cannot see.

request, he was told, *Thou canst not see My face* (33:20).[268] The words *all My good* allude to the panoply of things, of which it is said, *God saw all that He had made, and lo, it was very good* (Genesis 1:31).[269] By the panoply of things, I mean that he grasped the nature and interdependence of things and thus saw how God governs nature at large and in its particulars.[270] That is why it says, *He is truest in all My house* (Numbers 12:7)—that is, 'he has a firm and true understanding of all My world.'[271] For unsound views are not solid. To know God's works, then, is to know the attributes in terms of which He is to be known.

That what God promised was knowledge of His acts[272] is shown by the fact that all the attributes proclaimed were purely practical: *merciful*, *gracious*, *long-suffering* (Exodus

268. Maimonides has already explained that God has no corporeal features but is scripturally assigned those commonly thought of as perfections. Since *face* here meant God's ipseity, what does it mean for the Torah to report that God would speak with Moses *face to face, as one man speaketh to another* (Exodus 33:11)? Maimonides sees here a reference to the uniquely intellectual character of Moses' converse with God; see II 35.

269. This epiphany showed Moses the panoply of nature. Only so could he see "Him who spoke and the world came to be." See Sifre to Deuteronomy 11:22, Piska 49, tr. Hammer, 106; cf. Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.41–50 (LCL 7.122–27), *De Confusione Linguarum*, 94–95 (LCL 4.60–61), and *De Ebrietate* 152 (LCL 3.308–10). Cf. the Cynic Heraclitus' letter to Hermodorous 4. The Cynic letters falsely ascribed to Heraclitus, written probably in the first century of the Common Era, are edited and translated in Malherbe, *Cynic Epistles*.

270. Providence works through the emanation of form. General providence is seen in the constancy of natural cycles. Particular providence acts through the emanation of intelligence to rational beings; III 17–18; 51, 3.127ab.

271. The core sense of *ne'eman*, 'faithful,' is trustworthy. Love of God grows through our knowing Him, sparked by our recognizing His grace and wisdom in creation. Only knowledge grounded in science and sound reasoning can anchor firm belief. God's trust in Moses reflects his unique qualities as a prophet, warranting Maimonides' thesis that the Torah will not be superseded. Later prophets and sages of Israel must work within its framework; 1.73b, II 35, 39.

272. The Muʿtazilites distinguished essential (or proper) attributes from those pointing to God's acts. Saadiah, too, used the distinction: "Grace and mercy are ascribed to Him when He is named *a merciful and gracious God* (Exodus 34:6). So are punishment and retribution, when He is named *a jealous and avenging God* (Nahum 1:2). But these thoughts relate to His creatures, as it says, *exacting retribution on His foes and reserving His wrath for His enemies* (1:2)—*preserving His covenant and favor for a thousand generations for those who love Him and keep His commandments* (Deuteronomy 7:9). All such epithets relate to creatures. That is the difference between essential names and those that regard God's acts" (*ED* II 12, Kafiḥ, 109–10, Rosenblatt, 129; tr. here is Goodman's). Saadiah spells out his point in his long commentary on Exodus 3, as Haggai Ben-Shammai has shown. We can place that commentary in the hands of Abraham ben ha-Rambam, who takes it up in treating his father's reading of *I AM THAT I AM*. Our thanks to Diana Lobel, who alerted us to these texts; see Lobel, "*Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*."

34:6–7). The *ways* Moses sought to know, by which he came to know Him, clearly are the acts that issue from Him. The Sages call them attributes (*middot*) and speak of thirteen attributes, their term for traits of character. They say, "The charitable have four traits. . . .
**1.65a** Those who frequent the study house have five" (M. Avot 5.16–17). This is frequent. Not that God has psychic dispositions. But His acts are like those that express our good traits and dispositions. Moses saw *all His good*, all His works, but Scripture confines itself to these thirteen "attributes," since they reflect the acts by which He creates and governs mankind. For that was the ultimate object of Moses' request. Accordingly, it ends, *and know Thee, that I may find favor in Thine eyes. For this nation is Thy people* (33:13)—whom I must govern, modeling my ways upon Yours.

So you see, God's ways and His "attributes" are one and the same: the acts that issue from Him in the world. Whenever we recognize an act as His, the trait such actions express is predicated of Him, and He is assigned a corresponding epithet. We see His care in regulating embryos as they develop—for example, how He fosters their powers and the powers of those who rear them to protect the young from death and injury, preserve them from harm, and help them meet their needs. In us, such actions express our tender feelings. That is what 'mercy' means. So He is called merciful, *as a father shows mercy toward his children* (Psalms 103:13); *I shall treat them tenderly, as a father does his son* (Malachi 3:17). Not that He is affected by tender feelings. He treats His beloved as a father
**1.65b** does, whose acts show pure affection, tenderness, and care—although He Himself is unchanged and unaffected. Again, in our tongue, we call it grace when we give someone something to which he has no claim on us—as it says, *Treat them graciously for our sakes* (Judges 21:22), and *that God gave me in His grace* (Genesis 33:5), and *God hath been gracious to me* (33:11). Such usages are frequent. So because He gives being and guidance to those who have no claim to these on Him, He is called gracious.

We find, likewise, that some of the actions that issue from Him and affect human beings are terribly harmful, besetting and destroying some or engulfing whole populations and regions in a general disaster that dooms children and grandchildren (cf. Exodus 34:7), not sparing soil or stock, as when the earth opens up,[273] or earthquakes or devastating thunderbolts strike,[274] or whole nations move against others to put them to the

273. Using the Arabic word for sinkholes here and at I 72 and III 12, Maimonides suggests that God used natural causes to punish Korah and his followers (Numbers 16:31). Although their fate was preordained, as the Sages held (I 67, 1.85b), their transgression was their own. The sinkhole, Maimonides argues, was indeed a miracle. For the earth closed up on the malefactors: "Had the earth opened up and the rift remained, the miracle would be rather lessened." Letter on Resurrection, Shailat, *Igrot ha-Rambam*, 1.337 *l.* 24 = Hebrew, 372. *ll.* 8–9.

274. The terms for earthquakes and thunderbolts here echo Qur'ān 4:152, 99:1. God's governance, as Maimonides conceives it, is mediated through the heavenly bodies and the

sword and destroy them, and many more such acts that no human would commit against another unless moved by fierce anger, deep malice, or implacable vengeance. It is by reference to such acts that He is called *jealous*, *avenger*, *angry*, *wrathful* (Nahum 1:2), suggesting acts like those expressing human jealousy, ire, spite, or vindictiveness. The acts, in His case, regard the deserts of those punished. They involve no passion whatever on His part. (Exalted be He above all Imperfection!) These actions resemble those that express human passions and emotions, but here they spring from God Himself and no further "principle."

One who governs a state, if a prophet, must emulate His "attributes" and govern judiciously, as is deserved, and not just follow his emotions. A prophet must not vent his anger or let any passion get the better of him. For every passion is a bane and should be **1.66a**
reined in as best one humanly can.[275] Toward some he should be kind and gracious, not from sheer tenderheartedness but as is due. Others, he should treat with disdain, disopprobrium, and dudgeon, not from anger but by their deserts. He may even order someone burnt, not out of anger, spite, or malice, but as he deserves, looking to the greater good of many more. Just consider how the Torah relates the command to destroy the seven nations: *Save alive naught that breathes* (Deuteronomy 20:16), following that immediately with *lest they teach you all the horrors they committed for their gods and ye stand guilty before the* LORD *your God* (20:18). Do not assume that this was cruel or vengeful, it says; it is what human prudence orders, to weed out all who cause others to swerve from the ways of Truth and to remove every barrier to perfection, which is to know God.

Still, in governing a state far more compassion, forbearance, kindness, and benevolence than retribution are called for. For all thirteen attributes evince mercy—save only *visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children* (Exodus 34:7). When it says *by no means clearing* (nakkeh lo' yinakkeh) *the guilty* (34:7), it means not wiping them out, as in *desolate*

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elements. "Plato never doubts for a moment," Runia writes, that such influences are benign. But partly through the influence of astrology, astral influences could also be seen as sinister. So Philo "strongly emphasizes that such powers are secondary and subordinate" (Runia, *Philo*, 251). The well-known hymn *El Adon*, ascribed to the eighth-century *Yordei Merkavah* mystics, aims to calm the anxieties roused by thoughts of the planets' malign influences: "Goodly are the luminaries that our God created. He formed them with knowledge, insight, and wisdom, assigning them power and might, to preside over our world. Filled with splendor, shining down on all the earth . . . they rejoice as they rise and exult as they set, in awe doing the will of their Maker . . . all the celestial host paying homage to Him."

275. Maimonides alludes to Moses' losing his temper at Meribah (Numbers 20:12; Deuteronomy 32:51); see *Eight Chapters*, 8; *MT* Ethical Laws 1.1–4. And see D. Frank, "Humility as a Virtue"; D. Frank, "Anger as a Vice"; and Safran, "Maimonides on Pride and Anger." Passions like anger and arrogance, the Sages say, are tantamount to idolatry (B. Soṭah 4b, Shabbat 105b).

(nikkatah) *shall she sit on the ground* (Isaiah 3:26).[276] The words *visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children*, you see, apply only to heathen worship and no other sin—as shown by
**1.66b** its saying in the Decalogue, *to the third and fourth generation of My foes* (Exodus 20:5)[277] Only an idolater is called God's foe—*For every horror hateful to the* LORD [*have they done for their gods*] (Deuteronomy 12:31).

Their doom stops at the fourth generation. For that generation, the fourth, is as far as one can see of his posterity.[278] So when the folk of a heathen city are slain, the old idolater is slain, as are his son, grandson, and great-grandson—the fourth generation. In effect, God's commands (counted, of course, among His acts) include slaying idolaters' offspring, even if small, along with their parents and grandparents in the melee, as the Torah repeatedly commands everywhere (e.g., Deuteronomy 7, Joshua 6–7), as with the paganizing city: *Destroy it and everything in it* (Deuteronomy 13:13–19)—all to efface every influence of such depravity, as I said.

Again, I have digressed from the aim of the chapter. But I have explained why Scripture confines its talk of actions here to those required in governing a state.

The summit of human virtue is to emulate Him, so far as one can, by modeling our actions on His, as the Sages explained in glossing *Ye shall be holy* (Leviticus 19:2)[279]—"As He is gracious, so do you be gracious; as He is compassionate, so do you be compassionate" (Sifre to Deuteronomy 10:12).[280] The point is that the attributes ascribed to Him describe His actions. He does not have qualities.

276. As Munk notes, Maimonides here parts with Onkelos, the Talmud (B. Yoma 86a), and every traditional commentator. All give the verse its familiar sense: God will not clear the guilty. Maimonides, as if to offset the harsh commands of *ḥerem* just cited, presses thoughts of God's justice tempered with mercy: God will not obliterate the guilty. Even the command to destroy the Canaanite nations is locked in deep antiquity and "justified" prudentially.

277. See I 36 and III 41. God's wrath toward later generations is reserved for those who persist in rejecting Him. See Exodus 34:6–7; Leviticus 26:39; Deuteronomy 5:9; B. Sanhedrin 27b; the Targum and Ibn Ezra to Exodus 20:5; and Saadiah at Job 21:19. Cf. Goodman, *On Justice*, 129.

278. Job and Joseph are among the biblical figures who live to see four generations of offspring.

279. Cf. *Eight Chapters*, 5. Maimonides' phrase "so far as one can" echoes Plato's language in *Theaetetus* 176b and *Phaedrus* 252e–253a. We are called not to become gods but to perfect our humanity. As in Plato, cultivation of the moral virtues is the critical pathway.

280. Maimonides intertwines several rabbinic passages to link the life of the mitzvot with emulation of God's holiness; see B. Shabbat 133b, glossing Exodus 15:2 and 34:6–7; B. Soṭah 14a, glossing Deuteronomy 13:5; Sifre to Deuteronomy 11:22 and 34:6; Leviticus Rabbah 24.1.

## Chapter 55

I have said several times in this work that anything implying corporeality must be denied of Him. So must any passivity. For to be affected is to be changed by a cause, different, of course, from the effect: If He were affected in any way, it would have to be by some external agent. We must also exclude any lack in Him and any perfection now lacking and now present, making Him only potentially perfect. For potentiality inevitably entails lack, and when any potential is realized, something must already be realized that effects the change. So all His perfections must be fully actual: Nothing about Him is potential in any way. **1.67a**

One must also deny any resemblance between Him and anything else. Everyone has some sense of this, and Scripture plainly affirms His uniqueness: *To whom wilt thou compare Me, by what shall I be measured?* (Isaiah 40:25); *To whom wilt thou liken God? What likeness wilt thou hold up to Him?* (40:18); and *None is like Thee*, LORD (Jeremiah 10:6). This is frequent.

The upshot: Any characterization of God involving corporeality; passivity and change; lack, including lack of something later gained; or likeness to any of His creatures must be clearly excluded, demonstratively.

Knowing these things is among the ways that natural science supports our knowledge of God. For unless one has studied the natural sciences, he does not realize that passivity is lack. Nor does he understand 'actual' and 'potential' and how potentiality implies privation, or that what is potential is more lacking than what advances toward realization, or that the latter, in turn, is lacking relative to its goal. And even if one does know such things, he does not know them demonstratively and thus does not know the specific implications of these general principles—and thus does not have proof of God's existence or the need to exclude such notions in His case. **1.67b**

Having laid out this groundwork, I will start a new chapter to show why the suppositions of those who believe that He has essential attributes are untenable. This will be understood only by those acquainted with nature and logic.

## Chapter 56

Likeness is a form of kinship between things, and if no kinship can be traced between two things, they cannot conceivably be compared. Correspondingly, if things cannot be compared, they are not akin. This heat, say, is not said to be like that color; nor is this sound said to be like that sweet flavor. This is self-evident. So since any kinship between us and God (or between Him and anything else) is out of the question, we must rule out any comparison.

**1.68a** Now, if two things are of the same kind—share the same essence, even if one is big and the other small, or one strong and the other weak—they must be comparable, despite the differences. A mustard seed, say, and the sphere of the fixed stars[281] are alike in having three dimensions. One is as large as can be and the other extremely small. But they are alike in having three dimensions. Similarly, wax melting in the sun and the element of fire are alike in being hot, although in the one, heat is at its peak; and in the other, weak as can be. Heat, the quality shown in both, is the same.

Those who believe that the Creator has essential attributes—'existence,' 'life,' 'power,' 'knowledge,' and 'will'—need to understand that these notions are not applied to Him and to us in the same sense. They allow for differences in magnitude, perfection, stability, and duration in these notions as applied to us and to God. So His being would be stabler; His life, longer; His power, greater; His knowledge, fuller; His will, more universal than ours—but always, as they hold, with the same definitions in His case and ours. But that is all wrong. For comparisons apply only to things that stand on the same footing: Terms must apply in the same sense to make things comparable.

Those who believe in essential attributes hold that just as His "essence" must be incomparable to any other, the essential attributes they ascribe to Him should be unlike any others and have no common definition with them. But they do not follow through. They do presume a shared definition. Yet it is clear to anyone who knows what 'like' means that He and everything else that exists are said *to be* in wholly different senses—and thus that knowledge, power, will, and life are ascribed to Him and to anything else that has knowledge, power, will, or life in senses wholly different and utterly incomparable.

Do not assume that these terms are used analogically. Analogies presuppose a likeness—some common ground between two things, some shared accident not of the essence in either. But no thinker holds that the notions applied to Him are accidents, although human traits, in the kalām account, are all of them accidents. I wish I knew where they found the likeness that allows them to join man and God under a common definition and put them on the equal footing they presume.

This is proof positive that the predicates applied to God have nothing at all in common with the ones familiar to us. They share only a name, nothing more.[282] So you should not believe that He has any "principle" apart from His identity like our various human traits. Only the names are shared. This idea is immensely, sublimely important to the aware. Hold it fast and bear it in mind so as to be ready for your next advances in understanding.

281. The outermost bound of the universe, hence the largest possible magnitude.

282. Since God exists in a wholly different way from all contingent beings, God and the rest must differ radically as well in terms of any more specific predicate.

## Chapter 57

On attributes, deeper than that last. Existence is known to be an accident of what exists. So it is distinct from the essence of a thing.[283] This is obviously necessary for anything whose existence has a cause: Its existence is distinct from its essence. But in a being that has no cause—God alone, for that is what we mean by calling Him necessarily existent—existence is His essence. His Identity and essence are His existence. Existence is not an accident He has that gives Him being, making it something apart from His essence. As a necessary and eternal Being, God does not just happen to have existence; it is not an accident of His. He exists, but not by having existence. Just so, He lives, but not by having life; is powerful, but not by having power; and knows, but not by having knowledge.[284] All of these reduce to One, with no multiplicity, as we shall see (I 58–60).

Unity and multiplicity, too, must be seen as accidents of what is one or many, as was shown in the *Metaphysics* (Δ 6). Just as number is not the same as what is numbered, oneness is not the same as what is one. All these are accidents in the class of discrete quantity, applied to things subject to such accidents. But to ascribe oneness to the Necessary Being, who is truly simplex and utterly incomposite, is as impossible as to predicate the accident of multiplicity to Him. Oneness is nothing separate from Him: He is one, but not by **1.69b** way of oneness.[285]

These ideas, so subtle that they all but elude the mind, cannot be expressed in ordinary language—a major source of confusion. For any language affords scope so very, very narrow that this idea cannot be conveyed without some latitude of expression. So when we hope to indicate that God is not many, all we can say is 'one,' even though both 'one' and 'many' apply to quantity.[286] We suggest the idea and prompt the mind by saying

283. Any ordinary being might exist or not exist. So Avicenna saw existence as normally distinct from essence: To ask what a thing is, is not to determine whether such a thing exists. Only in God are essence and existence alike. See Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt* I 6.5, Marmura, 31; and Altmann, "Essence and Existence in Maimonides," *Studies*, 108–27. For 'exists' as a predicate, see Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, chap. 10.

284. Origen makes God's wisdom "a wise living being"—His son, in fact (*De Principiis* 1.2.2).

285. "How shall we speak of unity and fit it to our thinking? Its oneness must not be made small like a unit or a point, where the soul takes away size and multiplicity and stops at the smallest or comes to a rest at something indivisible. A point is *in* what is divisible, and a unit is *in* something else. But the One is not in something else. It is not in the divisible, and not indivisible by being smallest. For it is the greatest of all things, not in size but in power. . . . It must be seen as infinite, not because its magnitude cannot be measured, or its number counted but because its power is beyond comprehension" (Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.6).

286. If 'one' is the opposite of 'many,' Aristotle asks, is it therefore "few"? Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I 6, 1056b5.

'one, but not by way of oneness'—just as we say 'eternal' (*qadīm*, lit., old) to suggest His timelessness, using the word loosely. For 'old' applies to temporal things, and time is an accident of motion, which depends on bodies and falls under the category of relation. To say 'old' in a temporal sense is like calling a line long or short. What is timeless is no more properly 'old' or 'new' than sweetness is straight or crooked—or a sound is salty or bland.

These points are not obscure to one trained to understand ideas aright, naked as reason finds them and not dressed up in words. So whenever you find Scripture calling God *the first and the last* (Isaiah 44:6, etc.), that is like saying He has eyes and ears. The
**1.70a** point is that He is utterly invariant, untouched by change—not that He is subject to time and comes first or arrives last like some temporal being. All these expressions are "human language." And in just this way, when we say 'one,' we mean unique, not having an essence with unity attached to it.

## Chapter 58

Deeper still. Negative predications are the sound way of characterizing God. Here, language is not applied loosely and does not entail any lack in Him, general or specific—whereas positive descriptions do link God to other beings and do connote imperfection, as I explained (1.53a; cf. 75a). What I should clarify for you now is (1) how negations can, in a way, describe, and how they differ from positive descriptors, and then (2) how we have no other way to describe Him.

1. A predicate may or may not single out a subject uniquely. It might apply but be shared and not distinguish a thing from something else. If you see someone in the distance, say, and ask, "What is that I see?" and are told, "An animal," that term does apply to what you see, of course, but it does not distinguish it from everything else. It does distinguish it
**1.70b** somewhat: It says that what you see is not vegetable or mineral. Similarly, if someone were in the house, and you knew some body was there, but not what kind, if you asked, "What is in the house?" and got the answer "Not a mineral or a vegetable," there has been some specification. You would know it was an animal, although not what kind. So negative descriptions, like positive ones, do pick things out to some extent, if only by excluding what they negate from what we assume is not excluded. They differ from positive predicates in that positive terms, even when nonspecific, tell us something about the subject asked after, whether by naming some accident or some part of its essence. Negative predicates tell us nothing about the thing itself, unless indirectly, as in our example.[287]

287. 'Not mineral or vegetable' implies animal if all bodies must be animal, vegetable, or mineral. When the universe of discourse is unknown, negative predicates disclose nothing positive.

2. Given the foregoing, I say that God is proven to be Necessarily Existent and incomposite, as will be shown. We know only His thatness, not His whatness.[288] So He cannot be described in positive terms: His "that" is not separate from His "what" for any predicate to signify either. Still less does He have a composite essence, part of which a predicate might designate, or any accident for a predicate to denote. So no positive predicate at all applies to Him.

Negative predicates are the ones to use to convey what to believe about Him. They imply no multiplicity but guide the mind toward the highest awareness of Him humanly possible. To illustrate: We have proof that something must exist beyond the beings perceived by the senses or grasped by reason.[289] Of this Being we say, "He is," meaning, that He cannot fail to exist. We find this Being to be unlike the elements, which are lifeless bodies. So we say, "He is alive," meaning not lifeless. We find further that He is unlike the heavens, which are living bodies (II 4). So we say, "He is not a body." We learn further that He is not like the mind, which is deathless and incorporeal but has a cause. So we say, "He is eternal," meaning that He owes His being to no cause. We then recognize that this Being, whose essence is His existence, suffices not only to itself but also to give being to many things more, not as heat flows from a flame or light from the sun, of necessity,[290] but in a flow ever sustaining and wisely ordering and governing the rest, as I will show. **1.71a**

On this basis, we call Him powerful, knowing, and willing—meaning not powerless, ignorant, heedless, or indifferent. By 'not powerless,' we mean that His being suffices to give being to other things; by 'not ignorant,' that He is aware and thus alive, for all that is conscious is alive. By 'not heedless or indifferent,' we mean that all things issue in due order, not at hazard or unregarded but governed by the will and purpose of a voluntary agent. Finally, we realize that this Being is unique. So we call Him one, meaning that there is none other. **1.71b**

288. Cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 400d.

289. The proof is Avicenna's argument from contingency: If anything exists, there must be a necessary being. For all beings are either necessary or contingent. But any contingent being owes its existence to some cause, and there can be no infinite regress of causes. So ultimately, there must be a necessary being. Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt* I 6, Marmura, 29–34; see Goodman, *Avicenna*, 61–83.

290. Maimonides carefully excludes eternalist readings of emanation, true to his defense of creation—which is, for him, a free act of grace. Plotinus favored Plato's imagery of the radiance of the sun as a metaphor for emanation (*Enneads* 5.1.6.31–38). By treating it as necessitated, like the heat from fire or fragrance from aromatic substances, he purged the sense of divine arbitrariness, partly to preempt Gnostic stories of creation as a disaster precipitated by conflict in the pleroma and partly to exclude any mutability that might breach the absolute simplicity of the One (*Enneads* 5.1.6.26–28). Plotinian emanation reflects divine overabundance (*hyperpleres*). It was not an act of will. See *Enneads* 5.2.1; cf. 4.8.8.14–18, 2.9.11.

Every predicate we assign to Him, then, as you can see, either describes His act or, if it regards Him rather than His work, denies a privation. And even these cases apply only in the sense that you know negations can have, to deny a trait not even pertinent—as we say, 'A wall cannot see.'[291]

You know, dear inquirer, that although heaven above is a moving body whose dimensions we can gauge to the yard and the inch (and we do know the sizes and courses of its parts in most cases), our minds remain utterly ignorant of its nature.[292] We know it must have matter and form. But since its matter is unlike ours, we cannot describe it in any definite, positive way. We can only say it is 'neither light nor heavy,'[293] 'impassive and thus unaffected,' 'tasteless,' 'odorless,' and so on—all these negations reflecting our ignorance of its matter.

How, then, can a human mind hope to comprehend One who is free of matter, supremely simple, necessarily existent, uncaused, and unqualified by anything beyond His
**1.72a** own perfection—which transcends all lack, as I have made clear? We know only His thatness: that there is a being unlike any of the rest, to which He gave being, that has nothing at all in common with the rest—no multiplicity and no incapacity to give being to others. Were the world a ship, He might be likened to its captain. But that is no real comparison or sound analogy. It is but a way of suggesting that He governs and sustains all things and preserves their order, as I will explain more fully (I 70; II 17, 30).

Praised, then, be He, before whom minds fail when they seek to contemplate His Godhead, their insight turned to ignorance when they ponder how His will accomplishes His acts, all eloquence turned vapid stammering when tongues aspire to exalt Him with their predications.[294]

291. Not as the blind are said to be sightless; Maimonides, *Treatise on Logic*, Efros, chap. 11, English, 56.

292. Aristotelians claimed some knowledge of the "fifth substance" that made up the heavens. But Maimonides avoids saying much more about it than that many familiar terrestrial physical concepts do not apply. The radical distinction of celestial from terrestrial matter, questioned by Philoponus, was overthrown by Galileo; Newtonian physics accounts for both "worlds" in the same economy. Maimonides' theological point remains: If God is unique, He transcends natural categories. The difference between terrestrial and celestial phenomena, he might say, is only relative; that between God and creation is absolute.

293. For the heavenly bodies do not rise or fall.

294. "Reason cannot rise to God, who nowhere can be touched. It ebbs away, at a loss for words to use as steppingstones to disclose not just the Real Himself. For even if the whole Heaven became an articulate voice it would fail to find the words even to disclose His attendant powers" (Philo, *Legatio* 6, LCL 10.5).

## Chapter 59

Someone may ask, "If there is no way of knowing God Himself, and there is proof that we know only that He is and that positive predicates do not apply, how can anyone know Him better than anyone else? Moses and Solomon knew no more than any seeker, and no one has anything to learn about Him! Yet it is well known to those who follow the Torah, and to the Philosophers as well, that there is a wide range of differences here."

Yes, that is so. The disparities among those who have such knowledge are vast. For with anything we can describe, the more descriptors, and the more specific and precise **1.72b**
the predications, the more circumstantial is the knowledge and the closer we come to the truth about what we seek to describe. But with God, the more you negate, the closer you come to the truth—closer than one who does not negate terms that you can prove inapposite. So a man may work for years to gain a body of knowledge and master its foundations so as to win certainty and finally know, by proof positive, that a certain notion is inapplicable to God. A lesser thinker, lacking that proof, might remain uncertain whether that notion is or is not applicable to God. A third blindly assigns to God the same demonstrably inapposite character.

To illustrate: I will prove that God is not a body (II 1). But someone might be in doubt, unsure if He is or is not. Another, convinced that He is a body, tries to relate to Him as such. What a difference! The first is closer to God, of course; the second, further; the third, yet further. Suppose a fourth person has proof of God's impassivity, and our first, who denies God's corporeality, lacks that proof. This fourth would be closer to God, surely, than the first—and so on down the line. So anyone who can prove inapplicable to God much that we thought possible (or even necessary!) in Him is doubtless more advanced than we.

Clearly, then, the more you can prove inapplicable to God, the better; and the more **1.73a**
you affirm of Him, the more you anthropomorphize and the further you stray from real knowledge of Him. Accordingly, one comes to know God better by probing and seeking to see how inapposite to Him is every inapposite notion, not by adding positive traits as if they were embellishments, treating each as a perfection in Him because you deem it a perfection in us. For every perfection is a trait, and not every trait belongs to everything. In God's case, you see, every added affirmation removes you further in two ways: first, because what you predicate is a perfection relative to us, and second, because He does not "have" traits. His perfections are what He is, as I explained.

Everyone has a sense that it is beyond our powers to know Him unless through negations—although negations do not give us the true character of a thing at all. So all mankind, past and yet to come, freely confesses that God eludes our minds: Only He knows what He is. To know Him is to fail to know Him fully. All philosophers say, "We are dazzled by His beauty" and "He is hidden to us by His brilliant manifestness, just as

our weak vision cannot see the sun."[295] Much has been said about this, so there would be no profit in rehearsing it here. Fairest are the words of the Psalms: *To Thee silence is praise* (65:2)—meaning 'By silence are you praised.' What awesome eloquence! For whatever
**1.73b** we say meaning to exalt and praise Him, applies in some way, granted, yet plainly falls short in another. So silence is best, stopping at reason's bourne, as the enlightened enjoin: *Speak in your heart upon your bed and be still. Selah* (4:5).[296]

You know the Sages' famous teaching (I wish all their words were like it![297])—but I shall quote it for you to point up its meaning, although you must know it by heart: "Someone prayed in Rabbi Ḥanina's presence, 'O God, great, mighty and awesome, majestic and powerful, terrible and magnificent.' . . . 'Have you finished praising your Master?' said Rabbi Ḥanina. 'Even those first three epithets[298] could not be used by us had not our Teacher Moses uttered them in the Torah (Deuteronomy 10:17) and the men of the Great Assembly come and set them in the Prayer (B. Megillah 17b; Yoma 69b).[299] Yet you say all this! It is as though a king of flesh and blood who had millions in gold were lauded for having silver. Would that not be demeaning to Him?'" (B. Berakhot 33b). So much for the great man's words.[300]

295. See Fārābī, *Ārā'*, Walzer, 79 *l.* 13: "Its overwhelming perfection dazzles us." Kasher notes the echo in "Self-Cognizing Intellect," 471. Cf. Plato, *Republic* VII 515b; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* α 993a: "As the eyes of bats are to the blaze of day, so is reason in our soul to those things that are by nature plainest of all." Cf. Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, tr. Goodman, 151.

296. See B. Megillah 18a, citing Psalms 106:2; Philo, *De Fuga et Inventione* 92, LCL 5.58–59; *Quis rerum Divinarum Heres* 71, LCL 4.316–19; and Augustine, *Confessions* 9.10. Psalms 65:2 is typically read to mean *Praise befits Thee*. But Maimonides, like the Sages, takes the verse to mean *Silence is praise to Thee*; cf. Rabbi Abin, citing Jacob of Nevoriah: "Like a priceless gem, undervalued no matter how high you appraise it" (J. Berakhot 9.1). See L. Jacobs, *Jewish Theology*, 47–48; and Vlad, "Damascius and Dionysius."

297. Maimonides freely voices his readiness to criticize the Sages—as he does frontally in rejecting their doctrine of the Sufferings of Love, III 17. Such criticism is rare but not unprecedented. Of the Aggadah, Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1167) remarks, "Parts are fine as silk, others coarse as burlap" (Prologue to his commentary on Lamentations). For the general deference of the rabbis to the Aggadah, see Kellner, *Maimonides on the "Decline of the Generations,"* 107 *n.* and 114.

298. The established liturgy: *ha-Gadol*, *ha-Gibbor*, *ha-Nora*—"Great," "Mighty," "Awesome."

299. *The* Prayer is the Amidah, which opens with these words, introduced liturgically by Ezra and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 9:32), who are called Men of the Great Assembly and accounted proto-rabbis for their formative work in reinstituting Jewish worship when Israelites began their return from the Babylonian exile; see Nehemiah 8–9.

300. Maimonides opposed supplementing the Hebrew liturgy with *piyyutim*, poetry meant to elaborate God's praises. As a communal authority in Egypt, he tried, without success, to eliminate such embroideries, a change advanced ultimately by his son; Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 149.

Just think how he deplores and disparages proliferating positive predicates and plainly states that were it left to reason, such terms would never be applied or even cited.[301] Only the need to preach and give people some idea made it necessary to describe God in terms of human perfections—as they say, "Torah speaks in human language." We could not go beyond these words or even apply them to Him, except in reading the Torah, had not the men of the Great Assembly (who were themselves prophets[302]) ordained their use liturgically. We may not apply these words beyond our prayers. The clear import of Rabbi Ḥanina's statement is that two exigencies meet when we use such words in prayer: that they are used in the Torah and that prophets ordained them in the liturgy. Without the first, we should not utter them at all; without the second, we could not extract them from their context to use in prayer. **1.74a**

As you reflect further on attributes, you will see, in light of Rabbi Ḥanina's words, that not every biblical characterization of God may be applied by us or used in prayer. He does not just say that we could not use these epithets "had not our Teacher Moses said them in the Torah" but stipulates further "and the men of the Great Assembly come and set them in the Prayer," allowing us to use them in our prayer.

We do not practice as the truly ignorant do, who tax their wit inventing prayers and homilies supposed to bring one closer to God, assigning to Him traits that would be defects in Him, since they fail to grasp what sublimity means. It is foreign to a vulgar mind. So they make God a schoolhouse for their eloquence, describing and addressing Him in any terms they suppose acceptable. They wax so prolix as to make Him passive,

301. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.5.6–13. Pseudo-Dionysius writes, "We must not dare to speak or even form any conception, of the hidden, super-essential Godhead, except in those things revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures" (*Divine Names* 1.1; cf. 1.2 and 5.8, tr. after Rolt). Proclus calls the Good "nothing else but good"; lesser beings' desire for it shows they do not have it (cf. Plato, *Symposium* 200–206), although, in some measure, they "participate in it." For Proclus, as Dodds explains, "all definition involves denial" (Proclus, *Elements of Theology* §8, Dodds, 195).

302. The Sages have the authority of prophets. Their work, too, is divinely mandated; cf. *CM* Introduction and at M. Avot 1.1, 1.3. Thus he calls the lighting of Sabbath candles a mitzvah ordained by the Sages, giving specificity to the more general prophetic mandate (Isaiah 58:13) to honor and delight in the Sabbath day (*MT* Laws of Shabbat 30.1–4). The present aside is barbed, for Karaites contested the talmudic ranking of a Sage above a Prophet (B. Bava Batra 12a). See Qirqisānī, *K. al-Anwār wa 'l-Marāqib*, ed. Nemoy, 1.116–17; and Kreisel, *Sage and Prophet*. The Great Assembly is credited with establishing the liturgy (B. Megillah 17b) and with shifting authority in Judaism from priests to scholars. In living legal systems, precedent may be privileged, but later decisors win precedence, since they establish how a law is read and applied in practice. Maimonides honors the rabbis, respecting their more articulate access to the Active Intellect and their more explicit reasoning processes and the open dialectic among them that hones their arguments. But the Sages work within the framework of the Torah, their Constitution.

especially when they find some biblical passage to cite that calls for exegesis but seems to them, when taken literally, to give them grounds for building elaborate edifices of inference, tier upon tier. Poets, preachers, and poetasters often take such liberties.[303] Some of their ejaculations amount to sheer irreligion or grow so preposterous, delusional, and
**1.74b** depraved as to make one laugh—or cry, since it is God of whom they speak.

If I did not feel sorry for these authors, I might have quoted something for you, to show you just how far they go. But the astute can see pretty plainly how deeply flawed their screed is. We should, however, bear in mind and note that if libel and slander are serious offenses, all the worse is ungoverned speech about God, assigning Him traits that He transcends. This, I say, is no mere offense. It is unwitting blasphemy and obloquy in the ears of the masses who hear such things and the ignoramus who repeats them. One who sees how wanting such words are but uses them even so, to my view, is of the ilk of those of whom it is said, *The Israelites invented things of the* LORD *their God that were not so* (2 Kings 17:9), *speaking wrongly of God* (Isaiah 32:6).[304]

If you care for your Maker's honor, you should not listen to such things, let alone repeat them, and least of all invent more like them. You know how grave a sin it is to "disparage God on High" (B. Sukkah 53a, Taʿanit 25a). Do not expatiate on God's attributes in positive terms at all, thinking to exalt Him. Stay with what the men of the Great Assembly set out in our prayers and blessings. That will meet the need—all too well, as Rabbi Ḥanina said. Any other terms applied to God in Scripture may be read out as we study those books but should be taken, as I explained, to describe God's acts or negate
**1.75a** some lack. But that is not for broadcast to the masses. Theorizing of this sort best suits the few, to whom exalting God does not mean speaking as one should but thinking as one must.[305]

To complete my thought regarding Rabbi Ḥanina's words and underscore them: He does not say, 'As though a king of flesh and blood who had millions in gold were praised for having hundreds,' as if to suggest that God's perfections differ in degree from those

303. Because poetry charms, it can also deceive. But literary beauty is not literal truth. Philo warns against being "beguiled by beauties of mere phrasing" that may obscure "the true beauty of a message" (*De Migratione Abrahami* 2.12, LCL 4.138/39). Maimonides loathes the high-flown rhetoric he finds in kalām works, where stylistic preening masks weakness in thought. Galen's *De Captionibus* calls sonority and calligraphy inessential to the work of language, since they add nothing to sense. But there is a complementary risk of dismissing profound truths elegantly voiced as mere poetry, robbing art of its seriousness.

304. On such misprision, see *MT* Laws of Leprosy 16.10; and Diamond, *Converts*, 33–39.

305. Philo, in a similar spirit, distinguishes "soul lovers" from "body lovers." The former have learned to dissociate God from any predicate or trait and exalt His ultimate blessedness and felicity by conceiving of Him as "sheer being." But the latter, having made a truce with the body, cannot divest themselves of their "garment of flesh" and so think of the Cause of all "in the same terms as of themselves" (Philo, *Quod Deus Immutabilis Sit* 55–56, LCL 3.36–39).

assigned Him but are of the same order. No. As I pointed out (1.41b), the wisdom of Rabbi Ḥanina's allegory lies in his saying "who had gold and were praised for having silver," signaling that God has nothing of the sort that we deem perfections. In Him, any such traits would be defects, as he makes clear by capping his analogy: "Would that not be demeaning to Him?"[306] As I explained, in Him any trait you deem a perfection would be a defect, being of a kind with the traits we have. Solomon guides us well here when he says, *God is in Heaven; thou art on earth. So let thy words be few* (Ecclesiastes 5:1).

## Chapter 60

I would like to give you some examples in this chapter to help you see the need to rely more on negations in speaking of God and to avoid believing in positive attributes.

Suppose someone knows there is such a thing as a 'boat' but does not know what that word means, even whether it names a substance or an accident. Someone else might **1.75b**
realize that a boat is not an accident, another that it is not a mineral, another that it is not an animal, another that it is not a plant still growing in the ground. Another learns that it is not a continuous natural body,[307] another that it is not flat like a door or a board, another that it is not spherical, another that it is not conical, another that it is not cylindrical, another that it is not a regular polygon, another that it is not solid. Clearly, this last person practically does have an idea of a boat, based on these negations—virtually the same idea as one who thinks of it in positive terms as a long, hollow body made up of multiple wooden planks. Each earlier person in my example is further than the next from conceiving of a boat, all the way back to the first, who knows only the word.

306. Maimonides avoids calling God's differences from creatures mere differences of kind, for God belongs to no kind and differs from His creatures even in His mode of being, since His existence is necessary; 1.60b–61a. Cf. the mind's speech in Philo: "I emigrated from the body when I ceased to hold the flesh in regard; from sense when I came to view all its objects as without true reality and denounced its canons of judgment as spurious and corrupt, and steeped in false opinion, its judgments equipped to ensnare and deceive and ravish truth away from its place in the heart of nature; from speech, when I condemned it to long speechlessness, despite all its pride and self-exaltation. Great indeed was its audacity to attempt the impossible and try to use shadows to point the way to substances and words to show me facts. And amid all its blunders, it chattered and gushed about, unable to present with clarity those differences in things that baffled its vague and general vocabulary. So I learned by experience, as a silly child learns, that it is better to give up all three but devote and attribute all these faculties to God, who compacts the body in its bodily form, equips the senses to perceive, and extends to speech the power of speaking" (Philo, *Quis rerum Divinarum Heres* 71, LCL 4.316–19).

307. Sc., like a mass of air or water.

This is how negative predicates can bring you closer to knowing God. So bend every effort to negate more of Him—demonstrably, not just verbally. For whenever you can prove that some notion supposedly applicable to God does not in fact apply, you doubtless come a step closer to Him. Some come very close in this way; others remain as distant
**1.76a** as can be—not spatially, of course, as some blindly, suppose. Understand this well. Make it your own and relish it. For it shows you the path that will bring you closer to Him. Do follow it.

Positive descriptions, by contrast, pose grave dangers. For we have proof that whatever we deem a perfection—even if He did have it, as those who assign Him attributes presume—would not be akin to the perfections we know. It would be said of Him in quite a different sense, as I explained (I 56). So you would still have to shift to negation. For if you said that God knows multiple, changeable, ever new things with a knowledge that is constant, undivided, unchanging, and never new—and that He knows a thing before it exists, once it does exist, and after it exists no more with the same unchanging knowledge—you have already admitted that His knowledge is unlike ours. By the same token, He exists, but not in the same sense that we do. So you still come back to negations, inevitably. You have not real attributes but just multiplicity, believing in a subject with multiple unknown attributes. For you have admitted that the positive predicates that you applied are not like the ones we know but completely different in kind. You were waylaid, in effect, by your positive predicates. You say God is a subject with certain attributes but utterly unlike them! The most we can make of that is that it amounts to
**1.76b** polytheism (I 58). For, of course, any subject that has attributes is a duality, by definition, even if it is one thing, since the idea of the subject is not that of the predicate. But later in this work (II 1), you shall see it clearly proved that He cannot be composite but is absolutely, consummately simplex.

I do not say that someone who assigns God positive predicates falls short in his knowledge of Him, or is a polytheist, or thinks Him other than He is. I say he is an unwitting atheist. To explain: To fall short in one's understanding is to grasp one aspect of a thing but not another—to see, say, that 'man' implies 'animal' but not that it implies 'rational.' But there is no multiplicity in God, leaving one part to be grasped and not another. A polytheist, similarly, may have a right idea but apply it where he thinks it belongs. But these attributes are not mistaken for God by those who posit them; they are supposed to name something that God has. One who misdescribes a thing must still know something of what he is talking about. But if someone thinks taste is a quantity, I would not say that he has a poor understanding of 'taste' but that he has no idea of taste or of what the word means. That is a fairly subtle thought, so do master it.

You can see from this that someone who has not seen how to deny something of
**1.77a** Him that others can prove must be negated does not know God. The less one can negate of Him, the less one knows Him, as I explained at the start of this chapter. One who

assigns Him a positive predicate knows only the word and nothing of the Being to whom he fancies it applies. He applies it to something that does not exist, a false figment, and in effect, to nothing at all.

A person might hear the word 'elephant' and know that an elephant is an animal but want to learn its shape and nature. Someone who is deceived or who is a deceiver says, "An elephant is a beast with one leg and three wings that lives deep in the sea. It has a transparent body, and a broad face like a man's in shape and features. It talks like a man and can fly through the air or swim like a fish." I would not call this a poor or mistaken description of an elephant. I would call it a false figment. There is no such thing. The name of something real has been applied to something nonexistent, like a centaur or the fabulous 'Anqā'—fantasies or fancied combinations given the name of something real.[308] Just so in this case, except that God does exist and is proved to exist necessarily. Necessary existence implies absolute simplicity, as I will prove (II 1). But a simplex, necessary being that supposedly has attributes and other features demonstrably does not exist at all. So if we say, for instance, that an entity with various describable features shall be **1.77b** called God, we have applied that name to something that does not exist. You see how risky it is to assign Him positive predicates. What we should believe about the characterizations found in revealed or prophetic books is that they all point only to His perfection or describe the acts that issue from Him, as I explained.

## Chapter 61

All of the names for God found in Scripture derive from verbs, as is hardly obscure—save only YHVH,[309] a name devised for Him, and thus "the explicit name," since it clearly denotes God Himself without etymological connotations.[310] All His other sublime names

308. The 'Anqā', a fabulous bird, often called 'the marvelous 'Anqā',' in time assimilated to the Simurgh of Persian legend, was said, like the Phoenix, to dwell in Arabia. Attested in the *ḥadīth* and assigned various mystical and magical properties by Shī'ites of the Shumayṭiyya sect, it was at times thought to be a natural but extinct bird. The Fāṭimids in Egypt showed off specimens in their zoo, perhaps those of a type of heron. In *'Ajā'ib al-Maḫlūqāt wa-Gharā'ib al-Mawjūdāt* (Wonders and Marvels of Creation), Zakariyā' b. Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (ca. 1203–1283) tells of birds with three wings and mentions the 'Anqā' and Simurgh. Birds prove, he argues, that God could create flying creatures—and thus angels. Maimonides, by contrast, sees God's wisdom not in creating fabulous creatures but in setting nature on its wisely and generously ordained course. Wings, he notes, are paired (1.56a). And angels are not corporeal. Their images are symbols seen by prophets in their instructive dreams or visions; see I 49; II 6.

309. The Tetragrammaton, or quadriliteral name of God.

310. Cf. Philo, *Embassy* 6, LCL 10.4–5.

are equivocal, since they are based on actions like our own, as I explained (1.60b–61a). Even the title we substitute for YHVH (*Adonai*, "Lord") stems from a term for mastery: *Then spoke the man who was lord of the land* (*adonei ha-aretz*; Genesis 42:30). The difference between *adoni* (my lord) and *Adonai* (Lord) is like that between *sari*, my captain, and Sarai, Abram's wife (12:17). The vowel change is honorific, but the word is still a common noun. Thus, the angel is welcomed, *Pray, my lord*, [*pass not by*] (18:3). I spell
**1.78a** this out about *adoni* specifically only because *Adonai* is so prominent among the epithets commonly applied to Him.

Others, like Judge, Righteous, Kindly, Compassionate, and the word God itself are clearly generic and derived. But the name spelled YHVH has no accepted etymology and is applied to Him alone. This awesome name, which you know is not to be pronounced except in the priestly blessing in the Temple, by *sanctified Priests of the* LORD, and by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement (Nehemiah 12:47; 2 Chronicles 26:18; M. Soṭah 7.6) must signify something He shares with nothing else. Perhaps in spoken Hebrew, of which we have but the merest fraction today, it conveyed the idea of necessary existence. The majesty of this name and the restrictions on pronouncing it, in short, may reflect its denoting God Himself and no created being—as the Sages put it, "The name that is Mine alone" (B. Soṭah 38a).

All other names, being derived, signify attributes, denoting not God directly but the One who bears those attributes. So they suggest multiplicity by conjuring up the notion that the attributes are real and belong to a subject with attributes distinct from it. That is how any derived term works: It signifies some notion and implies a subject to which that notion applies. But since there is proof that God is not a subject with attributes, we know that these derivative terms must serve either to point to some act ascribed to
**1.78b** Him or to guide one to the recognition of His perfection. That is why Rabbi Ḥanina balked at saying even *Great, Mighty, and Awesome* on the two grounds he gave. For these words do suggest real properties—perfections—in Him. Adding epithets based on His acts would suggest to some that He has as many attributes as acts. Hence the promise that people will overcome that delusion: *On that day will the* LORD *be one and His name one* (Zechariah 14:9). Just as He is one, so will He be called by just one name referring to Himself alone and tied to no other notion.

In *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, the Sages say, "Before the world's creation there existed only the Holy One, blessed be He, and His name."[311] Just think how clearly this tells you that all these derived names arose only after the world's creation. And that is true. All these names were coined to reflect His actions in the world. But if you consider God Himself, apart from any act, He has no derivative name but just this name coined to

311. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. 3, p. 8.

signify God Himself. We have no other underived name, only YHVH—the explicit, absolute name.[312]

Do not think anything else or even entertain the ravings of amulet writers and the "names" you hear from them or find in their idiotic books—names they concocted that mean nothing at all.[313] They call them names and pretend they bring purity and holiness and can work wonders—fictions unfit for a grown man to hear, let alone believe![314] **1.79a**

Nothing is called the explicit name but the Tetragrammaton, which is not read as written. Sifre (to Numbers, Naso 39) makes this clear in glossing the verse *So shall ye bless the Children of Israel* (Numbers 6:23): "*So*—in these words, with the explicit name." There, too, they say, "In the Temple, one does read it as written; elsewhere one pronounces its substitutes." In the Talmud it says, "*So*—with the explicit name. Not its substitutes? No. It says, *They shall set My name* [*upon the Israelites*] (6:27)—My name unique to Me" (B. Soṭah 38a). The explicit name, then, is clearly the Tetragrammaton. Only this name refers to God exclusively. That is why the Sages say, "My name unique to Me."

In the next chapter, I will tell you what led people to believe as they do about "names." I will expose and lay bare the root of the problem so as to leave no doubt about it, unless you would rather delude yourself.

312. See Halevi, *Kuzari* 2.2; cf. Spinoza, *TTP* 13, Gebhardt, 3.169 *ll.* 7–24. Faur writes, "God, too, is not manifest in His creations: they only point towards Him. . . . Neither the Temple in Jerusalem nor the Universe nor the Tora that He created can manifest God. . . . A Name manifesting God would be indistinguishable from an icon or an idol. We can now better appreciate the wisdom behind the 'ineffability' of God's Name (the Tetragrammaton). . . . The rule can best be understood in the light of Wittgenstein's seminal distinction between what can be said and what can only be indicated. . . . 'What can be indicated by words cannot be manifest in words' (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 4.21). The Tetragrammaton (as well as the Cosmic Book) can only point toward God" (Faur, *Horizontal Society*, 1.18–19).

313. Maimonides alludes to the mystic names and alphabets proposed in works like the pseudo-Abrahamic *Sefer Yetzirah*. See B. Berakhot 55a; and Urbach, *The Sages*, 1.124–34, 197–213. As Scholem shows, the symbolism can be profound; see Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, 36–45, 136–37. Yet too often the ideas implicit in such names are overshadowed, and the rituals and other symbolic usages degenerate into mere magic. Hence Maimonides' acerbic tone.

314. Maimonides rejects the use of Hebrew script and biblical verses for talismanic or merely decorative purposes (Maimonides, *Teshuvot*, Blau, #268, 2.510–15). As Faur writes, "Scripture is a *literary* work—not a totem" (*Horizontal Society*, 1.20). For the word 'ravings,' *hadhyān*, see *Guide* 2.51a, 85a, 3.18a, 65a, 66a; and Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, 138–49.

## Chapter 62

In the Priestly Blessing (Numbers 6:22–27), we were commanded to use the Name as written, the explicit name. Not everyone knew how to pronounce it—how to vocalize the consonants and whether any are doubled. The learned passed this down to a worthy
**1.79b** disciple "once in seven years." In my opinion, when it says, "The Sages passed down the Tetragrammaton to their sons and disciples once in seven years" (B. Kiddushin 71a),[315] it means not just the pronunciation but the meaning this name was devised to convey. So this too was a divine secret.

They did have a twelve-letter name of lesser sanctity. Most likely, I think, it was not one word but a compound of two or three, with letters totaling twelve, substituted for the Tetragrammaton in recitation, just as today we substitute *Adonai*. The twelve-letter name doubtless had a more specific sense than *Lord*, and this was not restricted or concealed from any learned person but taught to anyone who sought to learn it. Not so the Tetragrammaton. One who knew it would teach it only to a son or disciple and only once in seven years.

But when slackers learned the twelve-letter name, they were soon corrupting people's beliefs by the use they made of it—as any unreliable person might on finding that things are not as he had fancied[316]—the Sages hid this name, too, and taught it only to the "discreet among the priesthood," to use in blessing the people in the Temple. For they had already stopped uttering the explicit name there, given the declining probity of the people. As they say, "After the death of Simon the Just[317] his fellow priests no longer blessed the
**1.80a** people with the Tetragrammaton" (B. Yoma 39b, Menaḥot 109b). They used the twelve-letter name.[318] "At first," they say, "they entrusted the twelve-letter name to all. But when reprobates grew more numerous, they entrusted it only to the discreet among the priesthood, who muffled it in the chanting of their fellow priests. Rabbi Ṭarfon said, 'Once I mounted the dais[319] behind my mother's father and pricked up my ears to hear the priest. But I only heard him muffling his words in the chanting of his fellow priests'" (B. Kiddushin 71a).

They also had a forty-two-letter name. But anyone with any sense would know that a single word cannot have forty-two letters. It must have been a compound of several

315. See *MT* Laws of Prayer and the Priestly Blessing 14.10.

316. The men, disenchanted, became charlatans and preyed upon the credulous, pretending the name they knew held mystical and magical powers.

317. Simeon the Just, High Priest in the Second Temple period, fl. third century BCE.

318. Cf. M. Soṭah 9.15 for the decline of the generations and the mounting losses with the death of each great scholar of an age, but contrast B. Soṭah 49b.

319. The *dukhan*, from which priests blessed the congregation.

words, with forty-two letters in all. These words doubtless had senses meant to bring one closer to a true idea of Him, as I indicated (I 46, 49).[320]

These multiletter words were called names only because, like any coinage, they were devised to signify an idea by combining words to make that idea intelligible. For multiple words can convey a single idea. What you need to see is that what was taught was not just how to pronounce the bare syllables but the meaning of the words themselves. The twelve-letter and forty-two-letter names were never called the explicit name,[321] the name that is His alone, as I explained. But they, too, must have conveyed some knowledge of divinity, as shown by the Sages' saying, "The forty-two-letter name is holy and should **1.80b** be treated as such. It is entrusted only to one who is discreet, in mid-life, even-tempered, sober, unassuming, and fair spoken to all. He who knows it, uses it judiciously, and keeps it pure is beloved on high and esteemed here below, revered by all. His learning lives within him, and he wins this world and the next" (B. Kiddushin 71a). Thus, the talmudic text. What a gulf between this understanding and the notion that so many presume, that just uttering these sounds with no thought of their meaning raises one to great heights, at which splendid goods are to be had.[322] The preparation called for was instruction in the mysteries of the Torah that I have been expounding, knowledge of divinity, as set out in the literature on theology. Such knowledge clearly cannot be forgotten. For it links one to the Active Intellect.[323] That is why it says, "His learning lives within him." But wicked and ignorant people, finding that those texts left ample room for fraud and forgery, paraded any combination of letters they pleased, calling it a name that could do things and produce effects if written or spoken just so. Once recorded, the lies invented by the first ignorant charlatan were passed on in books to people good and pious but simple, who had no test to distinguish true coin from false. So they hid away these works.[324] But when found among their belongings, the spurious books were presumed sound. In short, *A* **1.81a** *simple soul will believe anything* (Proverbs 14:15).

320. The words must have pointed toward God's Perfection, perhaps in terms of His goodness, oneness, truth, necessary being, and ultimate reality.

321. They did not, like the Tetragrammaton, refer to God directly.

322. The mystical use of "names," as distinguished from their magical use, dismissed at 1.78b, is condemned here for pretending to elevate the consciousness of the adept, as if real spiritual growth were passively attainable without moral and intellectual effort and preparedness.

323. These special words help convey the Torah's hidden teachings. To pronounce them with no thought of their meaning is to eat the peel and ignore the fruit.

324. Maimonides presumes a lost literature that opened pathways to sound theological understanding, although its texts were exploited and corrupted by unprincipled opportunists and hence withdrawn by more responsible teachers, although sound thinkers, few though they might be, never lost an intellectual bond with the truths that the lost and corrupted literature sought to convey through its focus on the divine names.

I have digressed from my higher aim and subtler theme, to debunk some nonsense that any novice thinker would see through. But that was called for by the need to speak of divine names and their meanings and the vulgar notions attached to them. I return now to my purpose. Having noted that every way of naming God uses derivative terms, except the explicit name, we should speak now of that name in a chapter of its own: *I AM THAT I AM* (Exodus 3:14).[325] For this relates to the subtle idea we've been addressing—the exclusion of attributes.[326]

## Chapter 63

I'll say this by way of preface. Moses says, *"They will ask me, 'What is his name?' What shall I tell them?"* (Exodus 3:13). Why did Moses need an answer to this question? He says, *"They will not believe me. They will not listen to me. They will say, 'The LORD did not appear to you!'"* (4:1). It is very clear that this is how anyone claiming to be a prophet should be met until he offers proof. But if, as it seems, it was just a matter of giving a name, either Israel already knew that name or they had never heard of it. If it was familiar, Moses proved nothing by relating it. They knew it the same as he. But if they had
1.81b never heard of it, what showed that it was God's name—assuming that knowing His name would count as proof?

After teaching Moses this name (Exodus 3:14), God tells him, *Go and gather the elders of Israel. . . . They will hearken to thy voice* (3:16, 18). That is when Moses says, *"They will not believe me. They will not listen to me"* (4:1). God had already said, *"They will hearken to thy voice."* So He goes on to say, *"What is that in thy hand?" Moses answered: "A staff"* (4:2). You will see how to clear up the whole question from what I tell you now.

Pagan doctrines, as you know, were widespread in those days. All but a handful of people were heathens, believers in spirits, familiars, and talismans. Every religious teacher in those days, like Abraham, affirmed that his own reasoning had shown him that there is one God of all the world or that some spirit—angel, star soul, or such—had come down to him. Claims to prophecy in the sense of a God-given mission were unheard of before our Teacher Moses. You should not be misled by the mention of God's appearing to the Patriarchs and addressing them. Their prophecy, you'll find, was not a charge to lead others or give guidance to mankind, as if Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or any of their predecessors had told people, "God told me: 'Thou shalt,' or 'Thou shalt not,'" or "God sent me

325. Hebrew, *Ehyeh asher ehyeh*, seen here as the full form of the Tetragrammaton. See I 63.

326. If we follow our natural bent, Leibowitz writes, we think of God in terms of things we can perceive or imagine. But one who takes that seemingly easy path "is worshiping the creature of his own senses or imagination." In effect, "he is worshiping himself" (Leibowitz, *Faith*, 41).

to you." That never happened. The patriarchs were addressed only as private persons, with guidance as to their own lives and personal enlightenment, and tidings about the destiny of their progeny, nothing else—although they did appeal to others by their own reasoning and teaching, as is clearly seen when it says *and the souls they had won in Haran* (Genesis 12:5).[327] **1.82a**

When God revealed Himself to our Teacher Moses and charged him to bring this message to the people, Moses said: 'The first thing they ask me will be to prove to them that there really is a universal God. Then I will say that He sent me.' For in those days, only a handful had any sense of God's reality. Their thinking went no further than the sphere and its powers and effects. Their minds were undeveloped and had not moved beyond the sensory.[328]

So God taught Moses what he would need to impart[329] to convince them that God exists: *I AM THAT I AM*.[330] This name derives from the verb to be (*h-y-h*), to exist. For *hayah* signifies existence. There is no difference in Hebrew between 'is' and 'exists.' The key is the repetition in the predicate of the word for existence. For *asher* (*that*) is a relative pronoun, the same as 'that' in Arabic. It calls for a predicate complement. But here the first term, in the position of the subject, is *I AM*; and the second, which should characterize the *I AM*, is again *I AM*—as if it said right out: This Subject is its own predicate, clearly conveying the idea that He exists but not by way of existence[331]—in a word, the

327. See 2.84; B. ʿAvodah Zarah 9a. The Sages take *the souls they had won in Haran* to be those whom Abraham and Sarah had taught (Genesis Rabbah 39.14 and Onkelos). The verb *ʿasu* here, like its counterpart, *kanu*—literally, 'made'—does not mean 'created' here but is used analogously to the English 'make a friend' (M. Avot 1.6). As the Midrash explains, "If all mankind joined forces to create a single insect, they could not do so. The word must refer to the converts Abraham and Sarah had won" (Song of Songs Rabbah 1.3). "Whoever has taught someone has made him in effect, wrought him, brought him into the world . . . his mouth, like God's that breathed a soul into the first man" (Tosefta Horayot 2.7; cf. B. Sanhedrin 19a, 99b; Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, 129–30).

328. The higher powers that pagans imagined were vested in the heavenly bodies; see III 29.

329. The idea of God giving His prophet an argument finds echoes in Islam, where God gives Muḥammad an argument to convince doubters of resurrection: "He will revive them who first raised them up" (Qur'ān 36:79).

330. Knowledge is propositional, and proof must frame an argument. So what God gave Moses was no mere bundle of syllables.

331. Existence, Maimonides holds (I 57), is normally an "accident," as Avicenna taught—that is, an added notion not presumed in the idea of a subject. But that is true only of finite beings. They are contingent, dependent on external causes. God, the ultimate reality, is a necessary being. His essence is His existence. So He "does not exist by way of existence"—that is, existence is not a further notion over and above His identity or separable from it in principle.

Real that is the Real, the Necessarily Existent.[332] That is what the proof inevitably comes down to: There is a Necessary Being, one that cannot fail to exist and never will[333]—as I will prove later (II 1).

Once God has taught Moses the arguments to convince the learned of Israel that
**1.82b** He exists—for He then tells him, *Go and gather the elders of Israel* (Exodus 3:16)—and promises that they will understand and accept what He had imparted, Moses renews his question: 'And once they have accepted God's existence based on these rational proofs, what evidence have I that this God sent me?' It was then that he was given his miracle (4:1–9).[334]

Evidently, in anticipating the question *What is His name?* Moses just meant 'They will say, "Who is it that you claim sent you?"' But out of reverence and deference, he phrased it as *What is His name?*—as if to say, 'No one is so benighted as to be unaware of You and Your Reality. But if I am asked Your name, what manner of being does it signify?' He thought it unseemly to address God in terms of anyone's ignorance of His

332. Maimonides parses God's *I AM THAT I AM* on the pattern of sentences like 'She is the girl that I met.' The word 'that' here functions as a relative pronoun; the verb 'is,' used as a copula, promises some characterization by a predicate complement. 'She is the girl . . .' begins to identify a subject but leaves one asking, 'Which girl? What sort?' 'The one I met' proposes an answer. One might have said, 'The girl with the red hair.' But in God's case, any mere descriptor is inapplicable, since such a term would normally imply class membership and connote limitations, compositeness, and contingency, so it would inevitably mislead and misrepresent. The only adequate completion of God's *I AM* is a complement restating it and thus pointing to God's absoluteness.

333. Saadiah collates several readings of *I am that I am*, some historical, affirming the immediacy of God's saving and sustaining presence; others metaphysical, focused on God's eternity. See Lobel, "*Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*." God's *I AM*, as Maimonides understands it, connotes not the mere willfulness that some of our own contemporaries have projected onto the phrase but eternity conceived as timelessness rather than mere sustained duration. He folds his own version of Saadiah's thoughts of God's omnitemporality into his metaphysical reading of the explicit version of the explicit Name: The Necessary Being, for him, is no abstraction but a Reality who unites presence and perfection.

334. Maimonides never denies miracles, but he prefers to keep them secondary, lest general providence in God's sustaining the natural order be impugned. So he takes the lengthening of the battle day at Gibeon to have been subjective (2.77b) and ascribes the absence of pushing and shoving when worshippers prostrated themselves in the Temple to their consideration for one another and reverence for the place (*CM* Avot 5.5). A further reason to be wary of excessive reliance on miracle tales: Muslim mutakallimūn were trained to ask Jews why they held to the laws of Moses. Expecting an appeal to miracles, they could respond that Muḥammad's prophethood was confirmed by miracles. See Baqillānī, *K. al-Tamhīd*, McCarthy, 141–59; Ibn Ḥazm, *K. al-Fiṣal wa 'l-Milal*, 4.163ff., 204–26; and Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 179–85.

existence, so he put it in terms of their not knowing His name rather than not recognizing the One named.

The name *Yah*, similarly, signifies eternal reality. *Shaddai* is based on *dai*, 'sufficient,' as in *The material sufficed them* (*dayyam*; Exodus 36:7); the letter *shin* stands for *asher*, 'that,' as in *she-kevar* (*that are already*; Ecclesiastes 4:2). The sense of *Shaddai*, then, is Self-sufficient—He who depends on nothing else in giving being or in sustaining His creation but suffices to Himself in doing so.[335] *Ḥasin* (Psalms 89:9), similarly, stems from a word for strength, as in *though he were strong* [ḥason] *as oaks* (Amos 2:9)—just as He is called a Rock figuratively, as I explained (I 16).

Every name for God, then, as you see, is either derivative or polysemous like *Rock* and such. No name refers to Him directly but the Tetragrammaton, the "explicit name," since it signifies no attribute but His sheer reality alone.[336] Implicit in His absoluteness is His eternity—that is, His necessary existence. You can see how the argument unfolds.

## Chapter 64

The word YHVH, you know, sometimes just means His name—thus, *Thou shalt not take the name* YHVH *in vain* (Exodus 20:7), and *he that blasphemeth the name* YHVH (Leviticus 24:16), and countless other examples. But it can also refer to God Himself, as in *They will ask me, 'What is his name?'* (Exodus 3:13). Or it may mean His command.[337] So saying "the LORD's name" says, in effect, the LORD's word or speech, as in *My name is in him* (23:21)—that is, 'My word or speech is in him, as an instrument of My will and pleasure.' I shall explain that when I address the various senses of 'angel' (2.76a). **1.83a**

Similarly, *the glory of* YHVH may mean the created light that God miraculously lodges in a place to exalt it: Thus, *The glory of* YHVH *settled*[338] *on Mount Sinai, and the cloud enveloped it . . .* (Exodus 24:16), and *The glory of* YHVH *filled the Tabernacle* (40:34). Or it might mean Himself, His Reality, as in *Show me, pray, Thy glory* (33:18), which was answered, *Man shall not see Me and live* (33:20)—showing that 'glory' here meant God

335. God is the truest being, immutable and eternal. All lesser beings are temporal and contingent. See *MT* opening paragraph; cf. D'Ancona, "Platonic and Neoplatonic Terminology." God's uniqueness rests on the necessary being that sets Him beyond all other beings, whose essence is not identical to their existence. All contingent beings are dependent. But God, their Creator, is Self-sufficing; cf. Leibowitz, *Faith*, 30–39.

336. Cf. Philo, *The Embassy to Gaius* 5–6, LCL 10.4–5.

337. Cf. 'In the name of the Crown'—or the People, meaning state authority.

338. Both the Hebrew *yishkon* and the Arabic Maimonides chooses to stand in for it, *yuḥilluhu*, connote the immanence of God's manifestation.

Himself, called *glory* out of deference, as I explained anent *They will ask me, 'What is his name?'* (I 63).

*Glory* may also mean His exaltation by all mankind and, indeed, by all else. For what truly exalts God is recognition of His greatness and perfection. So whoever apprehends God's greatness and perfection does exalt him, so far as his apprehension allows. Man, specifically, exalts God in words, expressing what we grasp intellectually and sharing it with others. But beings without consciousness, such as lifeless beings, also exalt Him,
**1.83b** as it were, since their natures bespeak the wisdom and power of Him who gave them being.[339] For they inspire those who contemplate them to glorify Him verbally—or wordlessly if they cannot speak. In Hebrew, that too can be called speech.[340] So even beings without awareness are said to praise Him: *All my bones say, 'Lord, who is like Thee!'* (Psalms 35:10). They prompt this conviction as if they spoke, since it was learned from them.[341]

It is in this sense of *glory* that it says, *All the earth is filled with His glory* (Isaiah 6:3)—paralleling *His praise fills the earth* (Habakkuk 3:3). For praise is called *glory*, as in *Render glory to the* LORD *your God* (Jeremiah 13:16) and *In His Temple all say: Glory!* (Psalms 29:9). This is frequent. Understanding the senses of *glory* and how to read them in context will save you from many a grave confusion.

## Chapter 65

Now that you have reached this stage and realize that He exists, but not by "having" existence, and is one, but not by partaking in unity, I do not think you need me to explain why speaking is not predicable of Him—especially since our nation is of one accord that the Torah was created.[342] The speech ascribed to God was itself created, called His

339. "The clearer divinity shines in a being, the plainer is its servitude" (Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *AvM*, 124; for divine design, see 190, 200, 298, 308).

340. As Friedländer notes, the Intelligences glorify God wordlessly; cf. Psalms 19:2–5.

341. Medieval exegetes often tie thoughts of discovering God's wisdom in the body's design to Job 19:26, *In my flesh shall I see my God*, reading the verse not as voicing Job's hope of vindication while yet alive but as affirming that God's handiwork is manifest in the body—thus endorsing medical study. See Altmann, *Studies*, 198–222; and Tanenbaum, *Contemplative Soul*, chap. 7, "The Motif of Self-Knowledge: From My Flesh I Behold God," 160–61.

342. The Muʿtazilite doctrine of the created Qurʾān was condemned as heretical by the Ashʿarites: They held the Holy Book eternal, like Christ, conceived as God's Word by Christians. For Maimonides, the Torah's creation implies its historicity (II 33–34), underwriting his appeal to its cultural context in explaining many mitzvot, especially those meant to efface or replace pagan practices and beliefs; III 29–30. Consensus (*ijmāʿ*) was a prominent legal standard in Islam.

speech only because He created the words that Moses heard. God brought them into existence like everything else He created and gave being. Later on, I shall have much to say about prophecy (II 32–47). My point here is just that God is described as speaking in the same way that He is assigned any other act like ours: to guide one to understand, in this case, that prophets have a divine sort of knowledge said to be addressed to them by God in spoken words, giving us to know that the ideas prophets bring us from God are not just their ideas or opinions, as I will explain (III 24)—a thought I have already touched on (I 46). **1.84a**

My point in this chapter is just that terms like 'speaking' and 'saying' have multiple senses. They may signify an utterance, as in *Moses spoke* (Exodus 19:19) or *Pharaoh said* (5:5). But they may also signify nonverbal, mental acts, as in *So I said in my heart . . . and my heart said . . .* (Ecclesiastes 2:15), *Your heart will tell you* (Proverbs 23:33), *To Thee my heart says . . .* (Psalms 27:8), and *Esau said in his heart . . .* (Genesis 27:41). This is frequent. The reference is to intent: *He said he would smite David* (2 Samuel 21:16) means it is as if he had said, "I mean to kill him!"—he was in a passion to do so—and *Do you say that you will slay me . . . ?* (Exodus 2:14) means "Do you mean to kill me?" *All the assembly spoke of stoning them* (Numbers 14:10). This too is frequent.

Whenever saying or speaking is ascribed to God, it is in one of these last two senses: alluding to His will and intent or to something known to issue from Him, whether in created sounds or by some other avenue of prophecy, as I will explain. Not that He utters sounds and syllables or has a soul in which thoughts are registered, as if in something apart from Himself. Rather, when saying and speaking are ascribed to Him, they relate to Him like any other act.

To refer to will or intent as saying or speaking is just to use one of the senses I have shown that these words have, another anthropomorphism like those that I have already noted (I 46). It is not easy to grasp how something might be done just by willing it. One who wants something done, it seems at first blush, must either do it or ask someone to do it. So God is said, figuratively, to order what He willed to exist, to be: 'He commanded it to be so, and it was.'[343] The anthropomorphism builds on using the words 'say' or 'speak' to indicate intent, as I explained. **1.84b**

343. Maimonides alludes to the divine word of command (*amr Allāh*, a phrase he uses at I 12; III 45, 46). Rabbinic texts, from the earliest, call God "He who spoke and the world came to be"; see Tosefta Yoma 1.4; B. Bava Kamma 7.10; and so on. Also see the morning liturgy, "Blessed be He who spoke and the world came to be," found as early as the *siddur* of Rabbi Amram Gaon (d. 875), *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, 2. Cf. "When God creates a thing, He has but to tell it *be!* and it is" (Qur'ān 2:117; cf. 3:47, 3:59, 4:47, 6:73, 11:43, 33:37, 65:5, 82:19). And see Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy*.

Whenever *God said* occurs in the Account of Creation, it means He willed or intended it. Others have noted this; it is quite well known.[344] The proof that God's commands were not words but intentions is that words are addressed only to something real and responsive. *At the LORD's word were the heavens made* parallels *And all their host by the breath of His mouth* in the same verse (Psalms 33:6). *Mouth* and *breath of His mouth* are metaphorical here, and so are *word* and *speech*. The sense is that the heavens came to be at His will and by His intent. None of our acknowledged sages was unaware of this. I need not explain that in Hebrew 'say' and 'speak' have the same sense: *For it heard all that the Lord said when He spoke* (Joshua 24:27).

## Chapter 66

**1.85a** *The tablets were God's work* (Exodus 32:16) means that they were natural, not artificial. For everything natural is called the LORD's work: *They saw the works of the LORD* (Psalms 107:24). Having cited all things natural—plants and animals, winds and rains, and the like—it says, *How manifold are Thy works, O LORD!* (104:24). And more poetically, *The cedars of Lebanon that He planted* (v. 16). Since they are natural, not artificial, God is said to have planted them.

It says *the writing of God* (Exodus 32:16), having already intimated that writing can be ascribed to Him, by saying *writ by the finger of God* (31:18). It says *by the finger of God* just as it calls the heavens *the work of Thy fingers* (Psalms 8:4), having said explicitly that they were made at His command: *At the word of the Lord were the heavens made* (33:6). So you can see that Scripture metaphorically calls creating 'speaking' or 'saying.' For the same thing that is called the work of His fingers is said to have been made at His word. Thus, *writ by the finger of God* means the same as 'at God's word,' which resolves to 'written at His will and pleasure.'

Onkelos introduces a strange gloss here. He gives "writ with a finger of the LORD's," as if this finger were something apart from God, treating *finger of the LORD* like *mount of the LORD* (Genesis 22:14) or *rod of the LORD* (cf. Exodus 4:20, 17:9), making it a created instrument that etched the tablets at God's will. I do not know what led him to do this. It would have made more sense to say "written at the LORD's word," as in *At the word of the LORD were the heavens made* (Psalms 33:6). Do you find it stranger that writing appeared on the tablets than that stars appeared in the heavens? Just as the stars were made at His
**1.85b** will and by no tool, the writing was engraved at His will and with no tool. You know the mishnaic text about the ten things created in the twilight (M. Avot 5.8).[345] They included

344. Saadiah is among those who interpret *God said* in Genesis as referring to God's will.
345. Avot treats the twilight of the sixth day as a liminal prelude to world's creation.

the *script* and the *writing*, reflecting the popular consensus that the writing on the tablets was created by God—as was everything else, as I explained in my Commentary on the Mishnah.[346]

## Chapter 67

Since speaking is the metaphor for His willing all that He brought to be in the six days of creation—as it says *and He said . . . and He said* (Genesis 1:6, 1:9, etc.)—God is said to cease on the Sabbath day. For on that day, there was no creating: *He ceased on the seventh day* (2:2). To stop speaking is one way of ceasing, as in *So these three men ceased to answer Job* (Job 32:1). To cease speaking can also be called 'to rest,' as in *They said all this to Nabal in David's name and rested* (1 Samuel 25:9), meaning, as I see it, they stopped to hear his answer. It does not say that they were tired, and even if they were, that would be beside the point. It only describes how they delivered their message, as civilly as possible, and then that they waited, saying or doing nothing to provoke the kind of response Nabal made—the point being to show how very at fault he was.[347]

It is in this sense that it is said, *He rested on the seventh day* (Exodus 20:11). The Sages and other exegetes took *rested* here transitively. The Sages say, "He rested His world on **1.86a**
the seventh day" (Genesis Rabbah 10.9)—creation was complete on that day. The verb *va-yanaḥ* may have a weak first or third radical, giving it the sense of "He settled the world," or gave it stability on the seventh day. On each of the six days of creation, things came to be beyond what is now the settled natural order everywhere. On the seventh day, the natural order was set, as it is today.

Our gloss is not refuted by the fact that this verb is inflected differently from others with a weak first or third radical. Verbs can be irregular and have patterns of their own,

346. God's work is called His handiwork. The Sages freely resolve the anthropomorphism: God's hand or finger, understood as His word, denotes His creativity. At Avot 5.8, Maimonides writes, "As I said in Chapter 8 (of *Eight Chapters*), the Sages did not hold that God changes His intent from moment to moment. Rather, at the outset He gave things the natures they would manifest, whether in natural events or rare portents. . . . The *script* is the Torah written in His presence, we know not how—as He says, *I shall give thee the tablets of stone and the Torah and command that I have written to instruct them* (Exodus 24:12). The *writing* is what was inscribed on the tablets, as it says, *and the writing was God's* (32:16)."

347. David's messengers had courteously sought Nabal's aid as ordered. His callous response was unprovoked: *Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? Many a slave these days has escaped his master. Am I to take my bread, my water, and the meat I slaughtered for my shearers and give it to people coming from who knows where!* (1 Samuel 25:10–11).

especially weak verbs. Dispelling a delusion[348] is not to be stymied by a rule of grammar. Our knowledge of Hebrew grammar today is hardly comprehensive, and rules in any language hold true only for the most part.[349] Besides, we find that this same root, with a weak *middle* radical, can mean 'to fix or settle,' as in *There shall it be set* (Zechariah 5:11), *She did not let the birds of the sky settle on them* (2 Samuel 21:10), and also, I think, in *I stand fast against the day of trouble* (Habakkuk 3:16).

When it says *va-yinnafash* (was refreshed; Exodus 31:17), this is a passive verb based on *nefesh*. I have already discussed the senses of *nefesh* and explained that it can mean 'will' or 'intent' (I 41). Here it would indicate the fulfillment of God's purpose: His will was done.

## Chapter 68

**1.86b** You know the Philosophers' famous dictum that God is Thought, Thinker, and the Act of Thinking, the three being alike and undifferentiated in Him.[350] I said this in my major work too (*MT* Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 2.8). For it is central to our religion, as I explained there, that He is one absolutely and without addition: Nothing else is eternal. That is why it says *as God lives* (1 Samuel 20:3), not 'by God's life.'[351] For God's life is Himself, as I explained in rejecting attributes (I 53).

Someone unversed in the literature on the mind and unfamiliar with the mind's nature and character—who thinks reason can be understood on the same lines as, say, 'black' or 'white'—will doubtless find this very hard to grasp. To him, our saying that God is Thought, Thinker, and Thinking will sound like saying that white, what turns white, and what whitens it are alike. Many an ignoramus has rushed to challenge me

348. The simple delusion is that God needs rest. Beyond that comes denial of nature's stability. Maimonides welcomes the Sages' trope of the twilight of the sixth day, since it leaves room for miracles as "stipulations" in nature's fabric: With the setting sun, nature's order was fixed. Read transitively, *rested* has that force: God settled the laws of nature.

349. Linguistic rules reflect usage, which can shift. Maimonides contests the Sages' grammatical worries about this verb in *CM* Terumot 1.1; see Septimus, "Maimonides on Language," 43–44.

350. See Aristotle, *De Anima* III 4; *Metaphysics* Λ 9; Alexander, *On the Cosmos* §§99–119, Genequand, 97–107; and Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.3.5. Maimonides' "undifferentiated" seems meant to bar trinitarian glosses.

351. Hosea 4:15 cautions against swearing *by the* LORD*'s life*. Rashi, taking a hint from Jeremiah 12:16, reads the admonition as a rebuke of Israel's faithlessness: When they were serious, Rashi writes, they swore by Baal. But Maimonides sees a caution against hypostatizing God's life. He has no difficulty with the asseveration *as the* LORD *lives!* (1 Samuel 25:26, 28:10; 2 Samuel 15:21). See *MT* Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 2.10.

with this or comparable examples, and many who lay claim to learning have trouble with this idea and find it hard to see how this could be. But it is a clearly demonstrated truth, as theistic philosophers have shown.[352] I shall explain here for you just what they proved.

Before one has the idea of a thing, you see, one is a potential knower. Once he knows something (has grasped the form of this piece of wood, say, apart from its matter and has the abstract idea of it), his reason is active as such, and he is an actual knower.[353] His intellect, realized in this way, *is* the form of the piece of wood laid bare and now in the mind.[354] **1.87a**
For reason just is the idea it knows! You can see clearly now how what is conceived is the sheer form of the piece of wood and that this form is the mind that thinks it. They are not two separate things, the mind and the form of the piece of wood as known. The intellect in act just is what it knows. And that by which the form of the piece of wood was abstracted and understood, the knower, is, of course, the mind in action. For the act of any mind is what it knows. The mind in action and its act are not distinct from one another. For the reality and essence of a mind is its awareness.

Do not assume that a mind that thinks is something on its own, without awareness, and that awareness is something further that it has. The mind itself, its very being, is its awareness. When you posit a mind in action, that mind is the consciousness of the idea that it knows. This will be very clear to anyone who tries the experiment.

352. "Intellect is realized in awareness of the intelligible. For it becomes itself intelligible by contacting and knowing its object, making thought and its object one. What can receive the object of thought is mind, the subject, actual insofar as it *has* its object. So having knowledge, not capacity for knowledge, is what is divine in the mind" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Λ 7, 1072b20–24; cf. *ll.* 25–31 and *n.* 260 above). Maimonides treads carefully here, since Aristotle's idea of the identity of thought, thinker, and the act of thinking was a favorite trinitarian device, deployed by Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī and four other Christian thinkers and dismissed in a work circulated under Ghazālī's name. Lasker writes, "Even if absolutely no diminution in God's unity was implied by such a description of God, still the Aristotelian Jewish polemicists were uneasy about its use. It appeared to be too close to the trinitarian doctrine." Narboni in his commentary underscores Maimonides' point here and at I 50. The proper notion, he says, is to say that what is one in reality is called by three different names, for God just is His Self-Knowledge. See Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 77–80; and Narboni, *Commentary on the Guide*.

353. "If thinking is like perceiving, it must be either a process in which the soul is acted upon by what can be thought, or some analogous process. The thinking part of the soul, then, while impassable, must be capable of receiving the form of an object. That is, it must be potentially identical in character with its object, without *being* the object. Thought must be related to what is thinkable as sense is to what is sensible" (Aristotle, *De Anima* III 4, 429a13–17).

354. Our idea is limited and temporal. So *we* never fully comprehend even the piece of wood. Maimonides has offered a *pedagogical* simplification, generating a "contradiction" of the fifth type; see *Guide* 1.10a.

You can see, then, that the mind's act, which is its awareness, is just what it is, its very being. That by which the form of this piece of wood was abstracted and grasped—namely, the mind—is the knower. For it was this mind that abstracted and grasped that form. That is the act in virtue of which it is said to know, and that act is what it is. Nothing more was presumed in positing a mind in action than the form of that piece of wood. Clearly, then, whenever a real mind is active, that mind is the idea it grasps, and the act of any mind, as a knowing subject, is its identity. So the mind and the subject and object of its thinking are always one and the same when anything is actually thought.

**1.87b** With potential knowing, however, the mind and what it knows potentially must be separate things. This material intellect—in Zayd, say—is a mind potentially aware, and this piece of wood, for its part, is a potential object of thought. The two are distinct, of course. But when this mind is realized as a thinking subject and the form of the piece of wood is actually grasped as an idea, its form, as understood, is the mind that understands it; and that mind, now an actually thinking mind, is the one by which that form was laid bare and made an object of thought. For anything that realizes its potential is now actual.

A potential intellect and a potential object of understanding, then, are separate things. But any potential must belong to something—a person, say. So there would be three things: the person with this potential, who is a potential knower; the potentiality itself, which is the intellect *in potentia*; and the intelligible object, which is potentially known. In our example, these would be the man, the material intellect, and the form of the piece of wood—three separate things. Once the mind gains the idea, the three become one. You will never find a mind that is one thing and an idea that is something else, unless both are deemed potential.

Once it is proved (as clearly is the case and will be demonstrated) that God is a knowing mind, with no trace of potentiality to make Him now aware and now unaware, but a mind ever *in actu*, it follows that He and what He knows are identical: It is Himself. The awareness for which He is called a knowing subject is the thinking that is He. So He is ever the knower, the act of knowing, and the known.[355]

355. If a mind is what it knows, does God's knowledge make Him identical to His creatures? Mendelssohn reflects on the problem in considering the charge that his friend Lessing was "a 'Spinozist" and "pantheist." Deeply sympathetic to his recently deceased friend, Mendelssohn pictures him defending his view by arguing, "Even a theist must ascribe a kind of ideal existence within the divine understanding to the series of things that has become real. . . . Who says that we, as well as the world around us, have anything more than an ideal existence in the divine understanding; that we, as well as the world around us, are anything more than God's mere thoughts and modifications of His primal power?" Lessing's critic saw a Spinozistic monism in his talk of individuals as "modifications" of God—despite the overlay of idealism, transforming Spinoza's "modes" into ideas. Mendelssohn's Lessing preserves

**1.88a** The identity of thought, thinker, and the object of thinking clearly holds not just for the Creator but for any mind. In us, too, thought, thinker, and the object of thinking are one—when our mind actually thinks.[356] But only at certain times do we advance from potency to act. Even the incorporeal Active Intellect might suffer some occlusion of its act, not intrinsic to it but external, some accidental shift affecting it. But we need not go into that now. Our present focus is on what is unique to God: that He is a Mind ever actual, aware without obstruction, intrinsic or extrinsic. He is the Thought, the

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God's transcendence but risks submerging nature in God. Speaking on Lessing's behalf, Mendelssohn echoes Maimonides' Aristotelian point: "Thoughts; that which thinks; that which is thought. These are the three faces of cognition . . . as long as thinking is still merely a capacity. . . . But as soon as thinking actually occurs, subject and object conjoin in the most intimate union . . . and as long as the thought is a faithful representation of that which is thought, it is indistinguishable from it." God's thoughts, Mendelssohn's Lessing persona goes on to argue, must be true and thus perfectly represent every feature of what God knows. So the world as known to God is contained in God's thought and inseparable from God's being. "Of course, I would interrupt my friend here," Mendelssohn writes, explaining that the truth of God's thoughts must represent every feature of the objects of God's knowledge, with the obvious exception of those features that make them objects and distinguish the Knower as a subject: "The most faithful image must not cease to be an image. . . . There are unmistakable marks that distinguish me as an object from me as a representation in God. . . . The consciousness of myself combined with complete ignorance of all that does not fall within my sphere of thought is the most telling proof of my substantiality outside God. . . . To be sure God has the most exact concept of the magnitude of my powers, and thus of the extent of my consciousness. But this image of my consciousness is not separated within God from the consciousness of His infinitude" (Mendelssohn, *Morning Hours*, tr. after Gottlieb, 147–49). If a mind is what it knows, does a mind that knows God somehow become God? Ibn Ṭufayl addresses the problem posed by *ḥulūlī*, or immanentist Sufis, at the start and near the end of *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān* (tr. Goodman, 95, 150–55). He offers a Plotinian answer: Sameness and difference apply properly only to bodies, not to incorporeal minds. Maimonides affirms only a human *affinity* to God, our creation in God's image. There are no fused identities: Finite minds approach but never engulf the Infinite. But note Maimonides' curt rhetorical question: Is there a middle between same and different (I 51, 1.58b)?

356. After urging that God moves the spheres by their love of Him, Alexander argues that the first mover of the spheres must move itself and know itself. It is, in fact, not only the cause of the motion and perfection of the divine body of the sphere it rules but, indeed, the reason for human life—in today's terms, in it is found the meaning of life. For ultimate happiness, embracing every real good, is found in rational awareness of it, the philosophical contemplation that fulfills our nature and our destiny. See Alexander, *On the Cosmos* §98.

Thinker, and the Object of His thinking ever and always.[357] He Himself is the subject, object, and act of thinking, as any mind must be when actually thinking.[358]

I have gone over this point repeatedly in this chapter, since our minds are hardly at home with this idea. Still, I do not think that you might confuse conceptual thinking with imagining or with imagination's taking in a sensory image. For this work was written only for someone who has done philosophy and is familiar with what we know of the soul and its diverse faculties.

## Chapter 69

**1.88b** The Philosophers, as you know, call God the First Cause and ultimate Ground.[359] Those known as mutakallimūn shun those terms assiduously. They call God the Maker (*fāʿil*) but presume a great difference between 'Cause' or 'Ground' and 'Maker.' 'Cause,' they say, 'implies the existence of the effect, and that leads to eternalism and the world as God's necessary concomitant—whereas 'Maker' does not imply the existence of what is made. For a maker might antedate his work.' They cannot conceive of a maker making anything unless the maker exists first. But that is what someone would say who fails to distinguish the actual from the potential.

As you can see, there's no difference here between a cause and a maker. If you take a cause to be potential, it does antedate its effect. But with a cause *in actu*, the effect inevitably coexists with it. The same is true with a maker *in actu*: What it makes is right there with it. Before a builder builds a house, he is a builder only potentially, not in actuality—just as the materials, before the house is built, are a house only potentially. But when actually building, the builder is a builder in actuality, and that does imply

357. "God and His knowledge are one in every way. . . . The Knower, the Known, and Knowledge itself—all is One" (*MT* Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 2.10; cf. Aristotle, *De Anima* III 4; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Λ 9). Maimonides parries Trinitarian readings of Aristotle's principle, affirming that the subject and object of knowledge are distinct only when knowledge is potential, not actual, as in God's knowledge, which is eternal. Lloyd Gerson writes, "The crucial difference between God and human beings is not that God thinks of nothing, but we think of something; rather it is that God is not in potency to his thinking, while we are" (*Aristotle and Other Platonists*, 198).

358. Maimonides lays a groundwork for his account of divine knowledge (III 16): God knows through His very being, not some separate faculty. He knows particulars through the forms by which He gives them being.

359. The Philosophers call God the Author, Cause, Ground, or Maker of the world, although coeternal with it, since a cause can be ontically prior to its effect, as a lamp is to the light it sheds. For the Philosophers, God grounds the world's reality, although not preceding it in time. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Δ 1–2, 11–12.

the existence of what he builds. So we gain nothing by favoring 'Maker' over 'Cause' or 'Ground.'

The point is that the two expressions are equivalent: We can call God a Maker even when what He makes does not yet exist, since nothing bars or hinders Him from doing so when He pleases. But we can call Him Cause or Ground in exactly the same way, even **1.89a**
when His work does not yet exist.[360] What led the Philosophers to call God a Cause or Ground and not a Maker was not their widely bruited eternalism but other considerations that I will outline for you here.

The natural sciences make it clear that there are four causes behind every effect: matter, form, end, and agent (or maker, *fā'il*).[361] Each of these may be proximate or remote,[362] and each is called a cause or ground. One view of the Philosophers with which I have no quarrel is that God is the Agent, Form, and End.[363] That is why they call Him Cause and Ground, to cover these three: His being the world's Form, Goal, and Maker.

My object in this chapter is to show you how God can be called the world's Formal and Final Cause as well as its Maker. Don't worry at this point about whether the world was created or, as they would have it, "entailed" by Him. There will be plenty to say about that later on. My point here is just that He is the efficient cause of all things in the world, and of the world at large. Natural science, I argue, shows that for any of the four types of cause, a further cause must be sought: Whatever comes to be has four proximate causes, and these too have causes, as do those, until the series ends at first causes. This effect, say, has such and such a cause, and that cause, too, has a cause, and so the series goes until it **1.89b**
reaches the Prime Mover, the true Cause of all these intermediates. If A is moved by B, and B by C, and C by D, and D by E, this cannot continue ad infinitum. Let us stop, say, at E. So E, of course, is what moves A, B, C, and D; and A's motion is rightly ascribed to it. In this way, every event in the world is ascribed to God, although it does have proximate causes, as I'll explain (II 48). He is the ultimate efficient Cause.

Likewise with the natural forms of things that come to be and pass away: If we trace the sequence, we find there must be a prior form that prepares the matter of a thing to accept its form. This prior form is preceded by another, and so on, until we reach the final Form, on which all the intermediate forms depend. The final Form of all that exists

360. One of Proclus' eighteen arguments against creation: If God is by essence a creator, He must eternally create. So the world, as His work, must be eternal.

361. See Aristotle, *Physics* II 7; cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Δ 2, E 4, 1044a 33–1044b 3. Maimonides uses the term *maker* here for the active or efficient cause.

362. Maimonides, *Treatise on Logic* §9, Efros, 50–51.

363. Maimonides, of course, does not call God a material cause. Solomon Maimon does add that further step; Maimon, *Autobiography*, 154. Maimonides nods in that Spinozist direction when he associates God's will with the material aspect of things; see Goodman, "Matter and Form."

is God. You should not assume that in calling God the ultimate form of all the world, I intend the final form that Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* (Λ 3) calls ungenerated and incorruptible. He is speaking of a natural form, not an incorporeal mind. In calling God the world's ultimate form, I am not comparing Him to the form of some physical thing,
**1.90a** making Him a bodily form in effect. I say this not in that sense but in the sense that all that is and has a form is what it is only through that form, whose loss is the thing's destruction; without it, the thing would not exist. Such is God's relation to every remote cause. It is because the Creator exists that the universe exists: He sustains it by what is called emanation, as I will explain in a later chapter of this work (II 12). Were it possible that He did not exist, there would be nothing: Gone would be the essence of every remote cause, every ultimate effect, and everything in between. So He plays the role of form to everything in the world that has a form to make it what it is and give it its essence and stability. It is in this sense that He is called the Ultimate Form, the Form of all forms, on which the existence and persistence of every form in the world ultimately depends and by which all are sustained, just as all things with forms persist by virtue of their forms. That is why, in our tongue, He is called *Ḥey ha-ʿOlam* (see Daniel 12:7; J. Berakhot 6.1),[364] Life of the Universe, as we will see (I 72, 103b).

The same holds true with every final cause: When a thing has a purpose, you can seek the purpose of that purpose. If I say, for example, 'This throne has wood as its matter, a carpenter as its maker, a certain foursquare[365] shape as its form, and sitting as its purpose,' you might ask, 'What is the purpose of sitting on a throne?' You could be told,
**1.90b** 'To raise the sitter off the ground.' You might then ask, 'Why should he be raised off the ground?' The answer: 'To make him look dignified.' You could then ask, 'Why give him dignity?' The answer: 'To instill respect and awe.' 'Why,' you might ask, 'should he be respected?' You would then be told, 'So that his orders are followed.' 'And why should his orders be obeyed?' you might ask. The answer: 'To keep people from harming each other.' You might go on to seek the purpose of that and be told, 'So they can live a civilized life.'

364. The thought is echoed in the morning prayers *Barukh She'amar* and *Yishtabaḥ*. See also Saadiah's *Siddur* and *MT* The Book of Love; cf. Philo, *Legum Allegoria* 1.91, LCL 1.206–7.

365. By speaking of the foursquare shape of a throne, Maimonides allusively anticipates his treatment of the throne (the "chariot") of Ezekiel's vision and the four creatures the prophet beheld, where Maimonides will seek to account for the spiritual nexus of God to the world as mediated by the four "orbs" to which he seeks to reduce the ten celestial spheres and their emanative nexus to the four elements. The reader is not yet ready, of course, for this bold reading of *Maʿaseh Merkavah*. Hence Maimonides' advice that one must study the *Guide* closely and read it recursively to plumb its meaning fully. Iconographically, a throne's boxy shape represents stability and thus the legitimacy of a monarch's rule, making it emblematic of the justice that Maimonides declares inseparable from God. For God's justice and its counterpart in the ḥesed on which the world is built is no mere attribute; it is who God is. See 1.13a, 19a, 1.93a, 2.21ab, 3.35a, 131a.

With any temporal purpose, the sequence continues until it reaches God's sheer will, on one view, as I shall explain, making the final answer 'Such was God's will' or, on others' view, His wisdom, as I shall also explain, making the final answer 'So did His wisdom decree' (II 20–21). Either way, the chain of purposes always ends at His will or wisdom—which, for us, is Himself. For His will or pleasure and His wisdom are what He is, not something separate from Him. He is the ultimate Final Cause: The goal of all things is to emulate His perfection, so far as in them lies. That is what is meant by His will, which is Himself, as we shall see (III 13). That is why He is called the End of all ends.[366]

I have shown you, then, in what sense God is called the Maker, Form, and End and why the Philosophers called Him a Cause and not just a Maker. Some mutakallimūn, you see, grew so rash and harebrained as to say that if (*per impossibile*) the Creator did not exist, it would not follow that what He gave being—the world—would not exist. For **1.91a**
the loss of the maker does not imply the loss of his work once made. That would be true if God were just the Maker and His work did not depend on Him to endure. When a carpenter dies, the chest he made does not vanish. For it does not depend on him to last. But, as I explained, God is the world's Form too, sustaining and preserving it. It is impossible for the Sustainer to vanish and for what has no staying power of its own to persist without Him to sustain it. So much for the delusion that God is just a Maker and not an End or Form.

## Chapter 70

To ride: The term has multiple meanings. The first refers to riding a beast in the usual way: *He was riding his she-ass* (Numbers 22:22). Later it was given the metaphorical sense of mastery, since a rider controls his mount. Thus, *raised him up to ride the heights of the earth* (Deuteronomy 32:13) or *I shall raise thee up to ride the heights of the earth* (Isaiah 58:14)—you will hold the high ground. *I shall make Ephraim the rider* (Hosea 10:11)—this I gloss as 'I will give him mastery.' It is in this sense that we read of God *riding the heavens to your aid* (Deuteronomy 33:26)—controlling them. Similarly, *who rides the ʿaravot* (Psalms 68:5) means ruling the *ʿaravot*,[367] the topmost sphere, which embraces all that is.

The Sages always speak of seven heavens, with the *ʿaravot* as the highest, contain- **1.91b**
ing everything. Do not fault them for counting seven when there are more. An orb may count as one, although holding several spheres, as the theorists of the subject have shown

366. In an Aristotelian cosmos, all things seek divine perfection in their own way, by seeking their own perfection. So God is the ultimate telic cause. For the fusing of divine will with divine wisdom, see Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.8.13.

367. Literally, the vast expanses. God exercises His power through His rule of the heavens.

and as I will explain (II 4, 9–10). My point here is just that they always call the *ʿaravot* the highest. The reference is to the *ʿaravot* when it says *riding the heavens to your aid*. Thus in Ḥagigah (12b) they say, "The *ʿaravot*, above which dwells the High and Exalted—as it says, *Extol Him who rides the ʿaravot* (Psalms 68:5). How do we know the heavens are called the *ʿaravot*? Because here it says, *rides the ʿaravot*; and there, *riding the heavens* (Deuteronomy 33:26)" (Ḥagigah 12b)—referring clearly to the one sphere that contains all the rest. You will be hearing more about this (I 72; III 3). Note that they say He dwells above it, not in it. For *in it* would imply His being located there or being a force within it, as pagan sects fancied God to be the spirit of the sphere (see 3.63). By saying 'above it,' our Sages stressed that He transcends the sphere and is not a power within it.

*Riding the heavens*—a marvelous and striking image. A rider is superior to his mount, but in a loose sense. For horse and rider are not of a kind. The rider spurs his beast and directs it as he pleases, making it serve his will. But he does not depend on it and is not in direct contact with it but separate. Just so, God moves the highest sphere, by whose motion all within is moved, yet He is apart from it, not a force within it. So in Genesis
**1.92a** Rabbah (68.9), glossing the words *A refuge is God eternal* (Deuteronomy 33:27), they say, "He is the place of His world, the world is not His place." They follow this by saying, "The horse serves the rider, not the rider the horse, as it is written, *Thou drivest Thy steeds* (Habakkuk 3:8)." Their words.

Reflect on this, and you will see how they explain God's making the sphere His instrument in governing the world. For whenever you find the Sages saying, 'This is in this heaven, that in that,' it does not mean that each heaven contains additional bodies but that the powers that spawn and oversee that item stem from that heaven. This is confirmed when they refer to "the *ʿAravot* in which Justice, Right, and Righteousness, reside, the treasuries of life, peace and blessedness, the souls of saints, the souls and spirits of those not yet created, and the dew the Holy One, blessed be He, will use to revive the dead" (B. Ḥagigah 12b). Clearly, none of the things they list here is a body that would need a location. For this 'dew' is not literally dew.[368]

Note how they say "in which," placing these things *in* the *ʿaravot*, not *above* it, telling us, in effect, that these things are in the world, but only via the powers that stem from the *ʿaravot* of God, who first set them there and fixed them in place—including "the treasuries of life." True, absolutely: All life springs from that Life, as I shall explain (I 72; II 10).

Note, too, how they include the souls of saints and the souls and spirits yet to be cre-
**1.92b** ated. What a sublime thought for one who grasps it! For what survives death is not the

368. As Friedländer notes, Efodi (Profiat Duran) and others take Maimonides to see 'dew' here as alluding to the Active Intellect's role in helping us realize our affinity to God and pursue immortality. Andrew Marvell's "On a Drop of Dew" opens up the poetic potential of this Neoplatonic image.

soul we are born with. That is a mere capacity.[369] What is incorporeal and immortal is the realized and fulfilled soul. Nor is the soul we are born with the same as our inborn (animal) spirit. Hence they list both souls and spirits. But only one soul is incorporeal.[370] I have already explained the several senses of 'spirit' (I 40, 1.46b), and at the end of the Book of Knowledge, too, I analyzed these senses.[371] See how these ideas, striking but true, and attained by the best philosophers, are sown all through the midrash. A scholar not free of bias might laugh on first sighting them, so wrongheaded do they seem if taken literally. But as I have said so often, that impression reflects only the indirection needed in presenting ideas so foreign to a vulgar understanding.[372]

Now to complete my thought: The Sages sought to show, from scriptural texts, that the things they list are in the *ʿaravot*. Thus, "justice and right, as it is written, *justice and right anchor Thy throne* (Psalms 89:15)" (B. Ḥagigah 12b).[373] They also sought to link those things with God. Do understand this. In *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (18) they say, "Seven firmaments did the Holy One, blessed be He, create; but of them all He chose but one, the *ʿaravot*, as throne of His sovereign glory, as it is written, *Exalt Him who rideth the ʿaravot!* (Psalms 68:5)." Their words! This, too, you must understand.

A carriage team, you know, is called a chariot. This is frequent: *Joseph hitched his chariot* (Genesis 46:29), *on his second chariot* (41:43), and *Pharaoh's chariotry* (Exodus 15:4). That the term denotes a team is confirmed by God's saying, *A chariot from Egypt went for six hundred in silver, one horse for a hundred fifty* (1 Kings 10:29)—showing that 'chariot' meant four horses. So I say, when it says that the Throne of God's Glory was borne by four **1.93a**

369. Cf. Fārābī, *Ārāʾ*, Walzer, 198–99.

370. What is immortal for Maimonides is the incorporeal rational soul, fully realized or "acquired" as one gains the knowledge that cements one's contact with the Active Intellect. The soul or spirit we are born with is the life principle or "animal soul" and seems also to include the material or potential intellect, itself a mere capacity: It can gain real knowledge, but it is realized only when it grasps pure ideas; see I 68.

371. Maimonides refers here to *MT* Laws of Repentance 8.3. At *MT* Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 4.8, he explains that *ruʾaḥ*, spirit, can refer to the soul; but when it means the vital spirit, it denotes something physical that cannot survive the body as does the soul proper (*neshamah*), which he takes to be the rational soul, God's image and likeness; I 1.

372. See 1.6a and I 33, 37a. Bias as well as unfamiliarity (and even familiarity!) blinds superficial readers to the subtleties of scriptural indirection and the riddling tropes of the Sages. Readers who pride themselves on their modernity, today as in Maimonides' time, often presume earlier thinkers naive—and readily miss the deeper truths Maimonides aims to illuminate.

373. At Isaiah 59:17, God girds Himself in justice. Is justice, then, something apart from God? The Sages in Ḥagigah draw upon the verse from Psalms to show that the justice here is God's own. See III 17, 3.35a. At I 9, Maimonides anticipates his thesis: God's justice is His (inalienable) "throne."

creatures, the Sages call it the Chariot, likening it to a four-horse chariot. That should be enough for this chapter, but there is much more to point out on this subject.[374]

My point in this chapter, however, to which the argument keeps returning, is that *riding the heavens* (Deuteronomy 33:26) means moving and turning the outermost sphere by His will and power. So the verse concludes *by His majesty, the skies*—by His sovereignty, He makes the heavens turn, He moves the first sphere, "riding" it (as I explained in glossing that word) and the rest by His sovereignty, as 'majesty' implies. For all the rest is moved by the motion of the outermost sphere, its diurnal rotation, as parts within a whole (cf. 2.2b). Such is the vast power that moves the all and is thus called majesty. Bear this in mind as we move on. For this, the sphere's rotation, is the strongest argument for God's existence, as I will prove.[375] So do understand this.

## Chapter 71

**1.93b** The many sciences once current in our nation, probing the truth about these matters, were lost to time, given our subjection to the nations of the pagan age[376]—and because these topics were not open to all, as I explained (I 34). Only Scripture was accessible

374. Maimonides will link the four creatures of Ezekiel's vision with these horses and the four elements and four spheres to which he reduces the heavens. See III 2–4. For the significance of the Empedoclean (and Aristotelian) scheme of four elements in Philo's cosmological speculations, see Runia, *Philo*, 227. What matters at present is that the chariot mentioned in the phrase *Maʿaseh Merkavah* is the throne of Ezekiel's vision.

375. Averroes disparages Avicenna's argument from contingency—and Ghazālī's creation argument, preferring Aristotle's Prime Mover (*Physics* VIII; *Metaphysics* Λ). See Averroes, *TT*, Bouyges, 331: "Existence," he argues, "is not a predicate distinct from essence," so it cannot be used, as motion is, to argue for God as a first cause. He brands as a kalām premise Avicenna's assumption of the contingency of all finite being. As Gilson notes, Avicenna's reasoning brings his metaphysics, despite its eternalism, into line with scriptural visions of the world's radical dependence on God's act. Although Aristotle and Averroes regard all true being (the heavenly bodies, the species of things, and the cosmos at large) as eternal and necessary, Maimonides, strikingly, favors Averroes' Peripatetic purism to Avicenna's approach. He explains why at 1.96ab. See Goodman, *Avicenna*, 85; Goodman, "Ghazālī's Argument from Creation"; and Gilson, *Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, 80. But despite his appeal to the Prime Mover idea, Maimonides holds fast to the creationist/voluntarist thesis that God's will/wisdom determines the direction of the spheres' rotation and the placement of the stars—and he calls the placement of the stars our best evidence for the more voluntaristic approach that he favors. See 2.44a; cf. 49ab.

376. Maimonides uses the term *Jāhiliyya*, the Age of Ignorance, the standard Islamic term for the pre-Islamic era. That age, in Maimonides' view, was hardly without science and philosophy, but the pagans among whom the rational sciences flourished were not in

to everyone. Even the Oral Law, as you know, was not recorded of old, in keeping with the norm promulgated in our nation: "The precepts that I gave you orally you may not commit to writing" (B. Giṭṭin 60b). Religiously, this was the height of wisdom. For it avoided what happened in the end: the proliferation of doctrines and factions, problems with the language of the record and concomitant neglect,[377] sectarianism, and muddled practice. In matters of practice, however, all was entrusted to the Great Court, as I explained in my juridical writings[378] and as the Torah itself reveals (Deuteronomy 17:8–12).

If matters of law were so closely sequestered and not preserved in writing for broadcast among the people at large, given the harm that might result, still less were any of the Torah's inner mysteries recorded and published to the people. They were passed on from one select group to another, as I told you (1.40b), based on their saying, "One does not entrust the Torah's secrets to any but *a counselor and wise craftsman*" (B. Ḥagigah 13a, citing Isaiah 3:3). That is why these vital ideas were lost to our nation, leaving only faint hints **1.94a**
and echoes in the Talmud and midrash, scattered kernels sheathed in many a husk[379] that engrossed the attention of people who assumed there was no kernel within.[380]

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tune with biblical wisdom, if aware of it at all. And the powers of that age, whether pagan or Christian, were generally, and often severely, oppressive of Jewish thought and spirituality. Al-Jāḥiẓ, the ninth-century Muslim essayist, blames fear of heresy for the "dearth of science among the Jews." See Baron, *Social and Religious History*, 8.67–68. Maimonides denies that the sciences undermine piety; he blames exile and oppression for the intellectual poverty that he hopes to help heal. Citing Maimonides' impressive mathematical treatment of the Laws of Sanctifying the New Moon in *MT*, Solomon Maimon writes, "The high council had to undertake difficult astronomical calculations, bringing into account such things as the geographical length and width of a given area, the centerpoint and true location of the sun and moon in eclipse, the parallax and distance of the moon from the earth, and so on. Maimonides precisely and comprehensively illustrates how this method was most likely used to perform these calculations" (*Autobiography*, 130). The Sages, then, did not lack scientific skills. But their lost arts still needed reconstruction and rebuilding.

377. Beyond textual issues, Maimonides sees a heedlessness (*sahw*) bred in confidence that the laws are "on the books"—but perhaps not engraved in human hearts.

378. "The Great Court in Jerusalem grounded the Oral Law; they were the pillars of halakhic guidance, from whom came the laws and statutes for all Israel, as the Torah promised: *by the Law which they shall show thee* (Deuteronomy 17:11). This is a positive commandment" (*MT* Laws concerning Rebels 1.1). See *SM*, Principle 1; cf. *CM* and *MT* introductions. The Oral Law, Maimonides is saying, demarcated in ancient judicial practice, framed the living organism of Halakhah, as the Torah itself envisioned.

379. Using the imagery of husks and core, Ghazālī finds the heart of monotheism in those who see God in all things. See Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* 35.2; 4.305; and *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, tr. Buchanan, 20.

380. Halakhists, engrossed in externals, missed the Torah's deeper, subtler subtext; see 1.6b–7a.

The scant talk of the meaning and implications of monotheism that you find in some of the Geonim and Karaites is borrowed from the Muslim mutakallimūn. But such discussions are thin indeed alongside the literature amassed on this in Islam. The first Muslims to travel this road, as it happened, were of a sect, the Muʿtazila, whose outlook our coreligionists followed. Later a different Muslim sect arose, the Ashʿarites. They took a different tack, but you will find no trace of it in our authors. Not that they preferred the former view; they just encountered it first and adopted it, thinking it proven.[381]

The Andalusians among our people all hold to the Philosophers' tenets and favor their views, so long as they do not contradict biblical principles. You will not find any who follow the Mutakallimūn on any point. So on many issues, you'll find they hold positions like mine in this work, on the rare occasions when the moderns among them touch on these issues. But in Islam, all the positions, Muʿtazilite or Ashʿarite, on these
**1.94b** questions are built on premises drawn from the books of Greeks and Syrians who hoped to counter the Philosophers' views and refute their doctrines.

The reason: When the Christian religion, with its familiar message, became dominant in those nations, the Philosophers' views were already current among them. For it was in those nations that Philosophy was born. The new monarchs zealously supported the new religion, and the learned Greeks and Syrians of the day saw that the Christian message was plainly, massively at odds with the Philosophers' views. So this science of kalām sprang up among them. They took to positing premises to bolster their faith and to counter views that sapped its foundations. When Islam came and the works of the Philosophers were translated, so were these refutations. Discovering the arguments of John Philoponus, Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī, and others on these topics, they embraced them and felt they had scored a great victory.[382] They also selected any views of the ancient philosophers that

381. Altmann demurs: "It is hardly the result of mere historical chance, as Maimonides suggested, that Jews were attracted to the rationalism of the Muʿtazila and shunned the fierce realism of the Ashʿariyya" (*Essays*, 36). Maimonides may be modest in behalf of Israel, perhaps suspecting that some may have felt attracted by the theistic subjectivism and determinism of the Ashʿarites (see 3.34a). Baḥya, for one, does lay out arguments that may have drawn some Jews in that direction (*K. Farā'iḍ al-qulūb*, III 10, ed. Yahuda, 163–65; tr. Mansoor, 210–13). But Maimonides' attribution of early Jewish innocence of denials of human agency does seem a slur, minimizing Saadiah's affirmation of human freedom and responsibility, as if to imply that Saadiah was too much the mutakallim to see just how to defend human agency by philosophical reasoning.

382. The *Guide* shares key desiderata of Philoponus (ca. 490–570) and Yaḥyā (893–974), as Pines notes ("Some Traits," *Works*, 3.79–99). But Maimonides does not build his world around his desiderata, so he keeps his distance. Yaḥyā and Philoponus were more philosophically acute and astute than the *mutakallimūn*. They did not use ad hoc posits but aimed to leverage Aristotelian premises and truths of reason in behalf of their scriptural monotheism. But Fārābī's distaste for Christian apologetics survives in muted tones in Maimonides'

they thought useful, even when modern philosophers had refuted them decisively—like atoms and void.

They saw these views as common ground, premises that any religious person must hold. As kalām spread, they fell into curious byways not taken by Greek or other theologians, who were practically philosophers. Issues distinctive to Islam arose that needed **1.95a** vindicating. Sectarian disputes broke out, each party positing premises to favor its doctrine. There are commonalities to all three communities, of course—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—creation among them, on which miracles depend. But other issues arose where those two communities differed internally—the Christians, over the meaning of the Trinity, and some Muslim sects, over issues that led them to posit ad hoc premises in which they invested themselves.[383] These matters, peculiar to those two religions, need hardly concern us. But in general, the early mutakallimūn—Muslims and Christianized Greeks—in framing their premises, did not follow the plain facts about the world but pondered what the world must be like to support their view, or at least not contradict it. If they could imagine something that served, they posited that it was so and set about to prove the claims built on such assumptions, so as to validate their dogma, or at least not contradict it.

Such was the practice of the founders of the approach. But in their books, they pretended that reason alone had brought them to these conclusions, not prejudice or bias. Later comers, however, who study these books, know nothing of that. So when they see **1.95b** the great effort and strenuous argumentation in those old books to support (or refute) a thesis, they assume that no proof (or disproof) is needed for such central tenets of religion and presume that their predecessors were just trying to throw sand in the Philosophers' eyes and make them doubt their supposed proofs. Those who say this are in the dark. They have no idea that their forerunners so labored to prove the point they hankered for (or disprove another) just to stave off some rank belief, even if it took a hundred posits. For the old mutakallimūn hoped to nip the rot in the bud.

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appraisal; see Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, 26–29. Citing his own works against the eternalism of Aristotle and Proclus, Philoponus had argued for creation in a work now lost but surviving in summary. He held that no physical force can act eternally, that the finite durations of temporal beings cannot add up to an infinite span, and that no infinite series can reach the present; see Pines, "An Arabic Summary of a Lost Work of John Philoponus," *Works*, 2.294–308.

383. Maimonides skirts parochially Islamic issues like disputes over the imamate or the inlibration of the Qurʾān; see Harry Wolfson, *Kalām*. Al-Ashʿarī had included such issues in *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*.

But I say, as Themistius did, that reality does not conform to our beliefs; true beliefs must conform to reality.[384] Studying the works of these mutakallimūn that I could access, just as I studied those of the Philosophers that I could, I found that, with all their diversity, the mutakallimūn all use the same method: They pay no mind to facts. "Facts," they say, "are just what is familiar, and reason allows that things might be different." Often, they rely on imagination but call it reason. Then, positing the premises you will soon
**1.96a** hear, they marshal their "proofs" that the world began. If it did, of course it had a Maker to create it. They go on to prove that this Maker is one; then, that He is not a body. This is the path that every Muslim mutakallim takes toward this goal—as do their imitators in our own religion, who follow their method. The arguments and assumptions invoked to show that the world began, or is not eternal, may differ. But they all start with the world's origination and ground God's existence there.

When I reflected on this approach, my soul recoiled violently, and rightly so. Their supposed proofs that the world began were deeply flawed, seeming cogent only to those who cannot tell proof from persuasion or sophistry.[385] To one who knows the arts of logic, it is obvious that all these suasions are riddled with flaws and rest on unproved premises. The best a scriptural theist can do, as I see it, is to refute the Philosophers' arguments for eternity. A fine achievement, if it can be done! Any astute theist who does not deceive himself can see that this question of creation versus eternity will not be settled by proof positive. Reason reaches an impasse here.[386] I shall have much to say about that later (II 15). For now, suffice it to say that philosophers have debated this question through the ages for three thousand years down to our own time, as we can see from their writings
**1.96b** and the accounts of them. So how can we rest our proof of God's existence here? That would make God as problematic as the world's origin: If the world began, God would exist, but not if it were eternal.[387] We could stop there, or we could pretend to have proof

384. "Facts do not depend on our decisions; our decisions must depend on the facts if we are to understand things as they really are" (Saadiah, *ED* I 3, Kafiḥ, 68–69, Rosenblatt, 78–80; on Job 18:4, Kafiḥ, 111–12, tr. Goodman, 282).

385. Demonstrations reach certainty by valid inference from undeniable premises. Dialectical arguments use stipulated premises. Among the four types of propositions for which no proof is asked, alongside sensations and primary ideas, Maimonides lists conventions and traditions. These reflect attitudes or accepted authority. So they cannot anchor sound demonstrations: "When one or both premises of a syllogism are conventional, we call it dialectical . . . When one or both premises are traditions, we call the argument rhetorical" (Maimonides, *Treatise on Logic* §8, Efros, 48). Sophistry, of course, uses fallacies, misleading the unwary and the ill prepared; 3.32a.

386. Creation versus eternity is the first of Kant's Antinomies of Pure Reason: The arguments seem persuasive on both sides, leaving the issue unresolved (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A426/B454).

387. Eternalists, Ghazālī claims, cannot avoid atheism; *TF* §4.

that the world began and lay on with the sword to support our proof of God. But that would only take us further from the truth.[388]

The right tack, in my view, is the demonstrative one, since it leaves no room for doubt. First establish God's existence, unity, and incorporeality using the Philosophers' methods, premised on the world's eternity—not because I think the world is eternal or would grant them that but because their approach offers us sound proof and gives us perfect certainty on these three points: God's existence, unity, and incorporeality, whether or not the world is eternal. Once we have real proof of these three sublime and crucial theses, we can revisit the question of the world's origin and say all that can be said for it.

If you are persuaded by what the Mutakallimūn say and you think there is sound proof that the world began, wonderful! Or if you have no proof but take it on faith, following the Prophets, there is no harm in that. But do not ask how prophecy can be true if the world is eternal until you have heard what I have to say about prophecy in this work—not yet the matter at hand (see 3.98b). But you should know that the premises posited by these radical mutakallimūn to support the world's genesis turn the world upside **1.97a**
down and breach the order of creation,[389] as you soon will hear. For I must state those premises for you and tell you how they used them.

My own approach, in a nutshell: I say that either the world is eternal or it began. If it did begin, something doubtless gave it being. For it is self-evident that what began could not create itself but must have been produced by something else. What gave the world being would be God. But if the world is eternal, it follows of necessity, by several proofs, that there is something apart from the physical whole, something that is neither a body nor a force in a body and is one, enduring and everlasting, unchanging and uncaused. And this is God. You can see clearly here why the proofs of God's existence, unity, and incorporeality should start from the posit of the world's eternity, making the argument complete, whether or not the world began.

That is why you will find that whenever theological principles came up in my juridical writings, I framed my arguments for God's existence in eternalist terms. Not that I thought the world eternal but because I wanted to anchor our credal proof of God's existence on demonstrative, irrefragable foundations and not rest this vital and momentous truth on footings that anyone might shake or hope to topple—and that some claim never held—especially since the Philosophers' arguments for our three desiderata are based on the nature of the world as we know it, which no one would deny unless to pro- **1.97b**
tect some bias.

388. "Wherever the wind of argument blows, as it were, thither must we follow" (Plato, *Republic* III 394d).

389. Maimonides echoes B. Sanhedrin 93a and Exodus Rabbah 38.4.

The arguments of the Mutakallimūn, by contrast, rest on premises contrary to nature as we know it—they even deny that things have a nature. I will have a chapter for you in this work specifically on my own argument that the world began (II 19). I go as far as any Mutakallim could hope, but without discarding nature or opposing anything that Aristotle proved. For the case that some Mutakallimūn make for the world's origin—their strongest, in fact—is not complete before they have dissolved nature and contradicted everything the Philosophers have shown. I can reach like results without clashing with nature or quarreling with the senses.

I should like now to state the premises the Mutakallimūn share in support of the world's genesis and the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God. I will lay out their arguments for you and explain the implications of each premise. I shall then state the key premises the Philosophers use and show you how they work. But you should not expect me in this work to give the proofs of the Philosophers' premises that I will outline for you. That would draw in most of physics and metaphysics. Nor should you expect me here to
**1.98a** air everything the Mutakallimūn posited on behalf of *their* premises. They wasted their lives on that—as their successors still do. The books pile up, yet all but the most trivial of their premises provoke misgivings and contradict what we know of nature by experience. They blather on, fighting for every premise to dispel those doubts, and they dismiss experience itself where it belies their posits, if no other ploy seems possible.

The assumptions of the Philosophers that I will outline for you, grounding their proofs of these three theses—the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God—are mostly such that you can be sure they are sound once you have heard them and grasped their meaning, although in some cases I shall cite the passages where they are proved in works on natural science and metaphysics. You can turn to those texts to validate what calls for confirmation.

As I've made clear, nothing exists but God and this world, and there is no proof of God's existence without arguing from this world or its particulars.[390] So one must study the world's character and draw one's premises from our experience of nature. Only when we know the world and its nature by experience can we make inferences about what lies beyond it. So I think I should begin with a chapter relating what we know of the world as proven and beyond doubt. Then I will send you some chapters stating the premises of the

390. Is the Tetragrammaton, then, as Maimonides suggests, an ontological argument writ small? Maimonides seems not to regard the argument he sees in it as wholly a priori. If the proof implicit in God's I AM THAT I AM rests on analysis, the analysis reaches beyond the idea of God itself. Its springboard is the contingency of determinate being, as contrasted with God's absolute perfection. A perfect being must exist not just because perfection cannot exclude existence but because no contingent being can explain itself: A relative good, as in Plato, presupposes the absolute. See Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.9.1; cf. Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments"; and Goodman, "Ehyeh."

Mutakallimūn and analyzing their methods of supporting our four desiderata.[391] After that, I will send you some further chapters outlining the Philosophers' premises and their **1.98b** arguments for our desiderata. And then, as promised, I will spell out my own approach to reaching these four goals.

## Chapter 72

The whole world is just one being: The topmost sphere and all that it holds is without a doubt one individual, just as Zayd or ʿAmr is one. There are different substances in it just as a person's organs are different substances. Zayd, for instance, is one person made up of different organs—flesh, bones, and his various humors and animal spirits. In the same way, this entire orb is made up of the spheres, the four elements, and their compounds. There is no void in it; it is solid all through. At the center is the sphere of the earth. Water surrounds the earth, air surrounds the water, fire surrounds the air, and the fifth substance surrounds the fire. The spheres are nested, each in the next without a gap, no void between them. Each is flush with the next, and they rotate constantly, not accelerating or decelerating. None, that is, speeds up or slows down, but each moves at the speed and **1.99a** in the sense required by its nature, although some move faster than others. Swiftest is the outermost sphere: Its daily movements move the rest as parts within a whole. For all of them are parts of it.

The spheres revolve on diverse centers—some on the world's center, some eccentric to it. Some move steadily east to west, some west to east. Each star in the heavens is part of the sphere in which it is set and has no independent motion. The motion we observe is that of the body to which the star belongs. Matter of the fifth kind, with its rotary motion, is unlike the matter of the four elements within. The number of spheres surrounding the world cannot on any account be less than eighteen, but in theory, there may be more. And there is a theory that there are epicycles, spheres that do not revolve about the world.[392]

391. The four theses: (a) the world began, (b) it was created by God (I 74), (c) God is one (I 75), and (d) God is incorporeal (I 76). Maimonides is also committed to these views but declines to rest his case on the world's genesis, since he holds God's existence, but not creation, to be demonstrable (II 2, 2.11a). The Philosophers, too, defend the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God, but their argument for God's existence presumes the world's eternity. Hence Maimonides' disjunction: If the world began, it needs a Creator; if not, the Philosophers prove nature's eternal dependence on God (II 2); cf. Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, tr. Goodman, 130–31.

392. Maimonides, in the end, will reject both eccentrics and epicycles (II 24; cf. II 11).

Within the lowest sphere, the one nearest to us, there is a type of matter unlike the fifth kind. It takes four basic forms, by which arise earth, water, air, and fire.[393] Each of these four elements has its natural place and is not found elsewhere if undisturbed. All
**1.99b** four are lifeless, inert, and insensible. They do not move of their own accord but remain at rest in their natural places, and if one is displaced by some force, it returns when that force abates. For each element has something in it that makes it return directly to its proper place and nothing that would allow it to remain at rest in the place to which it was shifted, nor to move in any but a straight line.[394] All the bodies of these four elements have two such rectilinear motions in returning to their places: fire and air move toward the outermost sphere; water and earth, toward the center. Once back in their natural places, they come to rest.

The rotating celestial bodies, however, are alive. Their souls keep them moving, and they have no proclivity to come to rest. They are untouched by change, except change of position, since they do rotate. Whether they have minds that think is unclear without some subtle theorizing.

The constant rotation of the fifth body displaces the elements, propelling fire and air toward the water. They pierce the earth and penetrate its depths, scrambling the elements. As they return to their places, some earth is borne along with the water, air, and fire. In the process, the elements interact. The resulting changes, as they mingle, first
**1.100a** yield vapors of varied sorts, then the diverse minerals, every kind of plant, and many animal species, depending on the mix.

All that comes to be and passes away arises from the elements and, in decay, resolves into them. The elements, too, spring from one another and degrade into one another. For all are of the same matter. But matter cannot be without form, and no natural form of things here that come to be and pass away can exist without matter. So generation and corruption run in cycles like those of the sphere itself: The give and take of forms, as form-bearing matter changes, is like the sphere's motion in place, with each part returning to where it was.

Just as the human body has organs that rule and others that are ruled, dependent for their survival on the governing organ, the world as a whole has ruling parts, those of the fifth body that surround the lesser parts, with the elements and their compounds dependent on its rule. The heart, the body's ruling organ, is ever in motion and initiates every motion in the body, the other organs being ruled by it and receiving from its motion the powers they need to do their work. In the same way, the motion of the sphere governs the other parts of the cosmos and gives their powers to all things that come to be. All

393. Earth, cold and dry; water, cold and wet; fire, hot and dry; air, hot and wet.

394. Maimonides foreshadows his thesis that the elements are symbolized in Ezekiel's vision (III 2).

motion in the world stems from its motion, and the soul of every being in the world that has a soul stems from the soul of the sphere. **1.100b**

The forces reaching this world from the sphere are known to be four: One causes mixing and compounding, doubtless sufficient to generate minerals. One gives every plant its vegetative soul. One imparts the animal soul to every animal. And one gives the power of reason to every rational being. All this is mediated by the light and darkness, as the heavenly luminaries circle the earth. Just as a person would die and his every bodily movement and function would fail should his heart stop for a moment, so if the spheres stood still it would be death for all the world and ruination for everything in it. And just as the motion of the heart keeps the whole animal alive—although parts of it, like bones, cartilage, and such, are immobile and insensate—so is this whole world one living organism, sustained by the motion of the sphere playing the role of the heart in an animal that has one, although many of the bodies in the world are static and inert.

This is how you should think of the entire globe: as one living, moving, ensouled being. To conceive of the world in such terms is critical, or most helpful, in proving that God is one, as you will see (2.9b–10b), and it helps, in turn, in showing that the One created but one world.[395] Just as organs cannot be apart and remain real organs—liver, heart, or flesh by themselves—the world's parts cannot exist without one another in the world as a whole: fire without earth, earth without sky, or sky without earth.[396] And just as a **1.101a** human being has a certain capacity to order and coordinate his organs, giving each what it needs to protect it and keep it in health—the capacity acknowledged by physicians as

395. "Are we right in saying there is one world? . . . There must be only one if the copy is to match the original. For what embraces all other known beings can have no mate. Otherwise, there would have to be another living being that included both and in which they were parts, and our world would be more truly said to be not like them but like the larger whole that includes them. Accordingly, so that this world might be like the complete living being in its singularity, the creator did not make two worlds or an infinity of them. Rather this world is and will always be unique" (Plato, *Timaeus* 31a, tr. after Jowett and Cornford). Cf. *Epinomis* 982–86; Aristotle, *De Caelo* I 5–9; and Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Λ 8, 1074a31. According to Plutarch, "Pythagoras was the first philosopher to give the name *kosmos* to the world, from the order and beauty of it. . . . Thales and his followers say that the world is one. Democritus, Epicurus, and their disciple Metrodorus affirm infinite worlds in infinite space, for that boundless void, in its vastness, contains them" (*On Isis and Osiris* 381–82, LCL 5.176–79). The atomists' multiple worlds have no Creator. For thinkers in Plato's tradition, that premise would leave the world without beauty, goodness, or order; see Guthrie, *History*, 5.275. Lest one presume that the one-world idea serves only monotheistic aspirations, bear in mind that the same thesis underwrites the idea of a uniform, universal natural law, which Maimonides sees as divinely ordained at the creation.

396. Things were different at the creation, but the stability of the natural world depends on the four Aristotelian elements' constant recycling; see Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* I 3, 318a25–33.

the body's "master faculty," or often just its nature—so does the world have a coordinating power that preserves species from extinction, protects their members over their general span of life, and safeguards certain individuals.[397] Regarding this capacity, there is speculation as to whether or not it is mediated by the sphere.

In a human body, some parts are meant to sustain the individual, like the nutritive organs; some, to preserve the species, like the organs of generation; some, to meet both nutritive and other needs, as do the hands and eyes. Some features, not needed for their own sake, reflect the makeup of other organs needed if the body is to have the form necessary for the organs to function. These organs reflect the demands of matter. So features like body hair and coloration are not so uniform. Unlike other organs, some of these may well be lacking or highly varied from one person to the next. You will not find anyone
**1.101b** whose liver is ten times the size of another's, but you may meet a beardless man, or one without hair in certain places, or one whose beard is ten or twenty times the length of another's. This is true more often than not with features like hair and coloration.

Likewise in the world, the species meant to be are stable and uniform and show but slight individual differences, qualitative or quantitative, accidental to the species. Those kinds not intended for their own sake, however, but just reflecting the general nature of generation and corruption—the various species of worms that arise in dung, the animals bred in rotting fruit or putrid liquids, the worms arising in the gut, and such (anything lacking the capacity to reproduce its kind, I think, is of this sort)—although they must exist, you will find they are not so uniform,[398] just as people vary in their hair and coloring.[399]

Just as human beings have certain parts, like the vital organs, that are stable as particulars, while others, like the four humors, persist as species, not particulars, the world contains bodies that last as individuals—the fifth substance in all its parts—and others that endure only as species: the elements and their compounds.[400]

397. As Pines remarks, Maimonides probably means the heavenly bodies.

398. Like other scientists before Pasteur, Maimonides is unaware of the reproductive cycles of various worms and insects, and like others before Darwin, he does not know how critical individual variation is in the fate of living species and their lineages. The worms and such, thought to arise by spontaneous generation, do not seem to Maimonides and the naturalists of his day to fall as neatly into a systematic taxonomy as the species known to reproduce their own kind.

399. Racial differences, then, are not essential.

400. Anatomical organs persist as particulars (cf. 1.111b); the humors only in their species, being subject to constant replenishment. The stars and spheres, likewise, endure as individuals; the elements and compounds, including living beings, endure only as species.

Just as the same forces that foster a human being's development and survival through the life-span also bring about his dissolution and demise,[401] so the causes of generation in the world at large are identical to those that bring decay in the world of coming to be and passing away.[402] A case in point: Were the body's four nutritive powers—ingestion, **1.102a**
digestion, retention, and excretion—like the powers of reason, able to avoid things untoward in timing or in measure, one would be safe from many diseases and great harm. But since this is not possible and these faculties function naturally, without thought or awareness or any sense of their own work, we contract grave diseases and debilities. Yet these are the very faculties that allow an organism to live and grow.

To explain: If one took in only what is entirely wholesome, and only in due measure, one would escape much harm and many an illness. But that is not how ingestion works. It takes in any matter that seems desirable, even if somewhat wrong in quantity or quality. So one ingests what is too hot, too cold, too dense, too thin, or simply too much. This clogs the blood vessels and leads to blockage and rot. The balance of humors is upset, their qualities awry, causing ailments like scabies, mange, and warts or grave diseases like cancer, leprosy, or prurigo, ravaging one organ or several. The same is true of all four of these faculties.

Likewise in the world: Things develop and endure while they may, given the mingling **1.102b**
of the elements caused by the celestial forces that stir them. But the same cause brings ill effects[403] like flash floods, cloudbursts, snow, hail, hurricanes, thunder, lightning, and fetid air or highly destructive events that can ravage a city, land, or region, like earthquakes, landslides, lightning, ocean surges, and deluges.[404]

Still, when we compare the world to a human being, it is not for these reasons that we call man a little world. Such a comparison might be made to any animal with sound organs. But you do not hear the ancients calling a horse or an ass a microcosm. Only of man is that said,[405] based on what is distinctively human—the power of reason, the mind,

401. For the Galenic concept of a natural life-span and the impact of the material composition of the body, see Kupreeva, "Galen's Theory of the Elements."

402. The generation of one thing is the corruption of another. So matter's mutability explains natural evils like death and disease—but also the preservation of the cosmos by the recycling of its materials and the preservation of its species by way of procreation.

403. Miracles like the one that destroyed Korah and his crew are rare. Natural disasters more typically result from the same forces that are otherwise constructive. So natural evils are typically the effects of a more general providence than we may readily welcome.

404. For the calamities, Maimonides uses Qur'ānic terms: 2:19–20, 2:264, 13:12–13, 13:17, 21:81, 24:43, 25:40, 28:81, 34:16, 99:1; cf. 1.65b. These echoes reflect Maimonides' distaste for apocalyptic readings of the Messianic era; see II 29.

405. "Man is a little universe (microcosm)" (Democritus, frag. 34). The Hippocratic *De Victu* applies the idea in terms of diet; cf. 1.102a; see Schuluderer, "Imitating the Cosmos." The analogy is also used by Empedocles and Heraclitus; Plato, *Timaeus* 30d, 44d; Aristotle,

the material intellect—something found in no other animal.[406] For no other animal depends for its survival on thought, ideas, and self-governance. An animal just goes along as its nature directs, eating what it finds agreeable, sheltering where it can, and mounting any female it finds in heat, if it is of the kind that comes into season. It lives its life and
1.103a perpetuates its kind, not needing others of its kind to help it survive by making things

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*Physics* VIII 2, 252b24–27; Theophrastus; the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo*; and Proclus. See Alexander's *On the Cosmos*, Genequand's introduction, 17–19. Aristotle did apply the thought to any animal; cf. Philo, *Quis rerum Divinarum Heres* 155–56, LCL 4.360–61; Galen, *De Usu Partium* 3.10, May, 191; Galen, *On Problematical Movements* 4.12, Nutton and Bos, Arabic, 196, English, 139. Philo elaborates the trope with panache: The cosmic images on the High Priest's robe bespeak his cosmic charge (*Life of Moses* 2.135, LCL 6.514–15; cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.3.10; *ARN* 31; Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae* III 2, 58; Halevi, *Kuzari* 4.3; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, esp. risālah 34). Of the discoveries of Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān, Ibn Ṭufayl writes, "Ḥayy understood that the heavens and all that is in them were one being, whose parts are all interconnected. All the bodies he had known before such as earth, water, air, plants and animals were enclosed within this being and never left it. The whole was like an animal. The light-giving stars were its senses. The spheres, articulated one to the next, were its limbs. And the world of generation and decay within was like the juices and wastes in the beast's belly, where smaller animals often breed, as in the macrocosm" (*Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, tr. Goodman, 130). Wolfson found the macrocosm idea alive and well in Spinoza, where "this old analogy" that man "epitomizes, as it were, the whole of nature" anchors the first thirteen propositions of the *Ethics*, Part II (*Philosophy of Spinoza*, 2.7–8).

406. The cosmos is not just alive but rational: "Let us say why the creator made this world of generation. He was good . . . and being free of jealousy, he desired all things to be as like himself as they could be. That this is the highest truth about the world's origin we shall do well in believing on the testimony of the wise. . . . Taking thought, he found that among things by nature visible no unintelligent creature could be fairer overall than the intelligent, and that intelligence could not be present in anything without soul. So when framing the universe he put intelligence in soul and soul in the body, that his work might be by nature as fair and perfect as could be. This, then, is how we must say the world came to be most probably, but definitely as a living creature given soul and reason by God's providence" (Plato, *Timaeus* 29d–30c, tr. after Jowett and Cornford). Cornford notes in *Plato's Cosmology*, 34 *n.* 1, that Plato means that "it is literally true (not merely 'probable') that the world is an intelligent living creature." Cf. 39e. Philo calls the realm of ideas the *kosmos noetos*, the intelligible world. But for Maimonides, as for Aristotle, thought, thinker, and the act of thinking are one and the same if the thought is actual, as it is timelessly in God. So the rational animal that is Maimonides' macrocosm tracks the pattern not only of the world but of God's governance. See Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, 1.226–40; and Runia, *Philo*, 162–71. The mind of the world does not regard the fortunes of terrestrial individuals. Celestial mechanics sustain the cosmos, and the spheres sustain terrestrial species, but individual providence, Maimonides will argue, regards only human beings, by way of the rational soul that links us with God. See III 16–17. As Seneca wrote, "Providence presides over the universe, and God concerns Himself with us"—but "he does not guard the good man's luggage" (*De Providentia* 6.1, LCL 42–43).

that it can't make for itself. But a human being, alone and unguided, would live like a beast and soon perish. He could not last a day unless he chanced upon something to eat.[407]

For the foods that sustain us call for arts and extensive organization that cannot be achieved without planning and thought, many tools, and many people, each with his own job. So we need someone to govern and unite us in a society in ongoing cooperation. Protection from heat when it is hot and from cold when it is cold, as well as shelter from rain, wind, and snow, likewise demand extensive preparations, none of which can be done without planning and thought. That is why we have this power of reason, to think, plan, and prepare, using varied arts to get our food, clothing, and shelter, and to direct our bodily organs so that the chief of them can function and those that it governs can do as it directs. A human being stripped of this faculty, if that could be, and left with his animal nature alone would soon waste away and die.

This reasoning power of ours is very noble, the highest of all the faculties possessed by living beings. It is also quite hidden, its true nature not grasped, as other natural powers are understood at once by common opinion.[408] So is what rules the world and sets its chief organ in motion, imparting the power that animates and rules the rest. Were it **1.103b** conceivably to fail, the cosmos as a whole would perish—ruler and ruled alike. The world and all its parts endure because of something unseen—namely, God. It is only for this reason that man is called a microcosm: We, too, have something in us that governs all the rest. That is why, in our tongue, God is called the Life of the world; as it says, *He swore by the Life of the world* (Daniel 12:7).[409]

Our comparison of the world to a man needs just three qualifications.

1. The chief organ in any animal with a heart benefits from the organs it governs in return for the good it gives. Not so in the world. What empowers or directs things takes nothing in return. All that it bestows it gives like one who acts out of sheer benevolence

407. In God's garden, Adam and Eve did not get their bread by the sweat of their brow. The tale of Eden's loss silhouettes the human condition against the backdrop of that virtual alternative. Ibn Ṭufayl's thought experiment, too, posits exceptional conditions, partly to show why society, with its familiar strengths and deficits, is necessary for (most) human beings.

408. Common opinion knows at a glance that eyes are for seeing and ears for hearing, although it does take deeper study to know just how that is done. But thinking, even of the most basic sort, requires depth of study before it can be understood.

409. See I 69, 90ab. The signs of design in nature teach us, Maimonides holds, that ours are not the only minds and foster human hopes of realizing our affinity with a kindred spirit, wise and loving but infinite. Halevi, too, cites the prooftext from Daniel (Halevi, *Kuzari* 4.3, Baneth, 156, Hirschfeld, 209).

and grace, natural nobility, and inherent generosity, not for any return but solely to emulate God.[410]

2. The heart of every animal with a heart is at the center, surrounded by the organs it rules so as to benefit from them all and to be protected and preserved by them and not readily harmed by any external threat. In the world the opposite is true: Its noblest part surrounds the baser ones, being immune to external impact. Even were it not immune, there is no body beyond it to affect it. It sheds its influences on what lies within
**1.104a** it, untouched by any force or effect from any other body. But here, too, there is another likeness: In an animal, the farther an organ is from the ruling part, the baser it is. In the world, too, the closer bodies lie to the center, the darker and denser they are, the more inert and less luminous and diaphanous, as their distance increases from the brilliant, diaphanous, simple and subtle, supernal moving body of the sphere. And the closer to the sphere a body is, the more it takes on some measure of its character and some degree of exaltation over what lies below.

3. This reasoning power of ours is a capacity in the body, not separate from it. But God is not a power in the body of the world but separate from every part of it. His governance and providence care for all the world in a manner hidden from us, its true character beyond our mortal ken. There is proof that He is independent and apart from the world but also that the impact of His providence and governance reaches every part of it, however low or minute.[411] Glory, then, to Him whose perfection dazzles us.[412]

I could have compared God's relation to the world to that of the acquired intellect in a man. For it, too, is not a bodily power but apart from the body and sheds its emanations upon it. Or I might have compared our reasoning power to the minds of the spheres,

410. Charity, for Maimonides, means generosity (III 53). The higher charity of God and the celestial intellects that mediate God's governance asks no repayment. It is acknowledged not by return of its gifts but by sharing them. We emulate God's holiness (Leviticus 19:2) and walk in His ways (Deuteronomy 11:22) by grace (*ḥesed*) toward others (B. Soṭah 14a). Teaching and writing are also ways of sharing (I 15; II 37), in which, as Plotinus argues, the giver loses nothing (*Enneads* 6.9.9 ad fin.). For Maimonides, the highest charity is to make another self-sustaining (*MT* Laws regarding Gifts to the Poor 10.7, following Resh Lakish, B. Shabbat 63a). The finest teaching or writing, similarly, enhances another's intellectual self-sufficiency. In both cases God is the model, sustaining the world by imparting being and capacities—life, thought, and freedom. For there is no such thing as mere existence.

411. For God's providence over the least of His creatures, see 3.32a.

412. See I 59; III 29, 45; Diamond, *Converts*, 116–17; and Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, 54. As Langermann notes, the ancient macrocosm idea breaks down at three points where the pagan roots of astrology surface: (1) Maimonides presses "the futility of any attempt to propitiate or influence the astral bodies," (2) he eliminates the glorified role of the sun, and (3) he scrubs pagan notions of a divine 'spirit of the orb' (*rūḥ al-falak*) (Langermann, "Maimonides' Repudiation of Astrology," 144).

which are in bodies. But the topic of the sphere intelligences and incorporeal intellects, and just how to think about the acquired intellect, which is also incorporeal, are matters demanding much thought, inquiry, and argument, sound but arcane, leaving much room **1.104b**
for doubt, cavil, and dissent. For now, I would rather give you a straightforward idea that only two sorts of person would dispute: someone unaware of the plain facts, as one innocent of geometry might carp at proven mathematical theorems, or someone who deceives himself, clinging to some bias. But one who wants to do some real thinking can study and see clearly that all that I have reported is sound. He will realize, without doubt or disquiet, that this is the form of this abiding Reality, whose existence is beyond doubt or dispute. If one can accept this from someone who is able to prove all that we can have proof of here, he should do so and build his arguments and inferences on that. But if he would rather not take even such basics on faith, he should study. In the end, he will see that this is true: *Lo, we have probed it, and it is so; listen, and you will know!* (Job 5:27).

So much for preliminaries. Now for the treatment I promised.

## Chapter 73

Despite their many disparate views and approaches, the Mutakallimūn share twelve premises needed for their intended proofs of our four desiderata. I will list them here and then explain to you the sense and implications of each:

1. Atomism. **1.105a**
2. The existence of the void.
3. That time is made up of instants.
4. That a substance must have certain accidents.
5. That the atom has the accidents I will describe and cannot be without them.
6. That no accident lasts beyond an instant.
7. That having and lacking are on a par: Both are real accidents needing a cause.[413]
8. That nothing (created) exists but substance and accident—even natural forms are accidents.
9. That accidents have no accidents.
10. That possibility is not to be judged by the facts about the world.
11. That any infinity is impossible, be it actual, potential, or accidental: It makes no

413. See Harry Wolfson, *Studies*, 2.338–58; and *Repercussions of the Kalam*, 359–72.

difference whether an infinity is simultaneous or is deemed to include items existent and no longer existent or is accidental.[414]

12. That the senses are prone to error, and many objects elude them. So sensory judgments are unreliable and afford no sure grounds of proof.

Having listed these shared premises, I will now explain the meaning and implications of each of them.[415]

**1.105b** 1. This means that they regard the entire world (all physical things) as composed of tiny particles, too fine to be divided. Each one, in fact, has no size at all; but if several are conjoined, the aggregate has magnitude and becomes a body. Some of them say that if two are aligned, each becomes a body, making two bodies. All these particles are alike, not different in any way. And no body, they say, exists, unless as an aggregate of these identical particles. So generation, for them, is aggregation; destruction is dispersal. But they do not call it destruction. They say only that what happens is aggregation and disaggregation, motion and rest.[416]

These particles, they hold, are not stable in their existence, as Epicurus and other atomists held.[417] Rather, they say God creates atoms constantly at His pleasure, and their annihilation, too, is possible. Further on I will let you hear their views about the annihilation of substances (1.109b).[418]

2. The void. These radicals[419] also believe that a void exists, a space or spaces with nothing at all in it, devoid of all bodies, containing no substance.[420] They must hold this,

**1.106a** given their belief in Premise 1: Were the world full of atoms, how could anything move? The mingling of bodies would be inconceivable. But aggregation and dispersal of these

414. See 1.116ab.

415. For the kalām premises, see M. Schwarz, "Who Were Maimonides' Mutakallimūn?"

416. The occasionalist Mutakallimūn, in the last analysis, do not take even motion to be real. Aggregation and disaggregation result from God's constant creation of new atoms.

417. Epicurean and Democritean atoms would be eternal and indestructible. As Langermann explains in "Islamic Atomism and the Galenic Tradition," Galen's *On the Elements according to Hippocrates*, a core text in late ancient medical education, opens with a refutation of the atomism of Democritus. The "other atomists" Maimonides mentions would include Asclepiades and his school, targets of Galen's polemic in *On the Natural Faculties*.

418. Defining a substance as what is unquestionably (and unalterably) real, Aristotelians deem it contradictory to speak of the annihilation of a substance, just as they hold the existence of a void logically impossible, since that would mean the existence of nonbeing.

419. Maimonides has already called kalām extremists radicals (1.96b ad fin.), explaining in rabbinic language that their views upset the order of nature.

420. Aristotle mentions two types of atomists. Both affirm the reality of the void, but some, like the Pythagoreans, place it beyond the cosmos; others locate vacua throughout nature (Aristotle, *Physics* IV 6). Maimonides alludes to both types; see Harry Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, 400–401.

atoms are impossible without motion. So they must resort to the void to allow the atoms to aggregate and disaggregate and let bodies move through the vacuum with no atoms or bodies in it.[421]

3. Their doctrine that time is composed of instants, moments too brief to be divided. This assumption, too, is forced on them by Premise 1.[422] They must have seen Aristotle's proofs of the parity of time, space, and motion, showing that if any of these is divisible, the rest must be as well. So they saw that if time is continuous and infinitely divisible, their supposedly indivisible particles must be as well. By the same token, if space were deemed continuous, it would follow necessarily that their presumed temporal instant is divisible, as Aristotle shows in the *Physics* (VI 4, 235a13). So they make space discontinuous, made up of indivisible quanta.

Time, then, for them, would be composed of indivisible instants: The hour, say, of **1.106b**
sixty minutes; the minute, of sixty seconds; the second, of sixty "thirds"—and so on, until the series ends at, say, "tenths" or some briefer interval that, like extension, cannot be split or divided. So time acquires arrangement and position.[423] They have no idea of the character of time, then—hardly surprising when the most acute philosophers were baffled by time, and some had no concept of it. Even Galen called time something divine and beyond our ken.[424] So what can one expect of the likes of these, who pay no mind to the nature of anything![425]

Listen to the consequences they faced on account of these three premises: Motion became the shift of an atom from one atomic locus to the next. So no motion was faster than another. Accordingly, they claimed that when you see two objects cover different

421. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* I 7, 275b30. Strictly speaking, the atoms of the occasionalist kalām do not move. New atoms are constantly created at God's pleasure and in the positions that He pleases (see Premise 6). But the void may still seem necessary as the locus of the atoms.

422. Time atomism may be a lingering result of a seeming Megarian heritage in the background of kalām occasionalism: Atoms, it seems, must be what they are and are therefore presumed unchanging. They are created with their accidents, and any change we see must result from the creation of new atoms with new accidents.

423. Arrangement and position, Aristotle explains, distinguish space from time, which has only order. Aristotle, *Categories* 6, 5a15; cf. Averroes, *TT*, Bouyges, 77 *ll.* 13–16, Van Den Bergh, 44.

424. Ibn Bājjah finds Galen confused about time and dislikes the notion that time is something divine (*ilāhī*). Galen does think time absolute, as does Rāzī, whose view some have linked to the divinization of time in Zurvanism. Quoting Alexander, Ibn Bājjah writes that Galen really said nothing here since he did not know what he was talking about; see Lettinck, *Aristotle's* Physics *and Its Reception*, 374, 694 *ll.* 13–19. Maimonides is rather kinder to Galen; see II 13, 27b.

425. Kalām occasionalists, Maimonides finds, negate nature altogether; 1.109a, 114a, 125a, 127a.

distances in the same time, it is not because one travels faster but because the "slower" motion was interrupted by more rests and the "faster" by fewer.[426] Faced with the objection of an arrow shot from a powerful bow, they still claimed its motion was broken by moments of rest. Only sensory error makes its motion seem continuous. For objects often elude the senses (per Premise 12).

**1.107a** Asked, 'Have you seen a millstone turn full circle? Does a part at the rim not traverse a large circle in the same time as a part near the center covers a smaller one? The rim must move faster than the interior. You cannot say that this part's motion was interrupted more than the other's. The whole stone is one continuous body!' Their answer: The stone disintegrates as it turns, allowing more rests to the inner than the outer parts. Asked why we perceive the millstone as a solid rock that hammers cannot break—'Does it crumble while turning and knit up again when it comes to rest? If so, why do we not perceive its disintegration?'—again they resort to Premise 12: 'The testimony of reason, not perception, is the test.'[427]

Do not suppose that I have told you the most preposterous implications of these three premises. Stranger and more bizarre consequences follow from the doctrine of the void. What I cited as regards motion is hardly more absurd than making the diagonal of a square equal to its side,[428] a view that led some of them to deny the reality of the square! In short, Premise 1 would void all geometrical proofs in one of two ways: Some would become simply inconsistent, like those specifically addressing commensurable and in-

**1.107b** commensurable lines and planes, rational and irrational lines—everything in Book X of

426. The atomist Muʿtazilite al-Naẓẓām (775–845) held that bodies do not move smoothly, as Aristotle held, but in a "leap" (*ṭafra*) from one place to the next; Harry Wolfson, *Kalām*, 514–17.

427. The millstone's solidity belies kalām notions of its fragmentation (*tafakkuk*) as it turns, posited to allow parts at the perimeter to move farther in an instant than parts near the center. A galloping horse, despite its momentum, and a flying arrow, despite its speed, belie notions that the course of either is broken by imperceptible moments of rest. See Avicenna, *Physics of the Shifāʾ*, ed. McGinnis, 200–201, 295–96; and Avicenna, *Dānesh Nāmeh Alāʾī*, Achena and Massé, 1.141–50.

428. Were kalām atomism true, Ibn Ḥazm argues, the diagonal of a square of one hundred atoms in a ten-by-ten grid would not exceed its side (*K. al-Fiṣal fī ʾl-Milal* 5, 2.103–4). Ghazālī, too, holds that kalām atomism yields a square whose diagonal equals its side (*Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa*, Metaphysics, article 6, proof 4, ed. Dunya, 151–52). Avicenna proves in the *Physics of the Shifāʾ* that the diagonal and the side cannot be equal. And following Alexander and others, he uses the Pythagorean theorem to show that the diagonal and the side are incommensurate. See Avicenna, *Physics of the Shifāʾ* III 4.5–6, ed. McGinnis, 2.284–87; and McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 77. Maimonides cites the argument against commensurability at 2.28a.

Euclid and the like.[429] Other proofs would no longer be unconditional, as when we say we want to bisect a line: If the line had an odd number of atoms, this would be impossible on their assumptions. And do not forget the famous *Book of Ingenious Devices* of the Banū Shākir, which details some hundred machines, all tested and put to work:[430] If the void were real, not one would pass the test, and many types of pumps would not work either. Yet lives have been wasted defending these and similar premises.

Returning to the analysis of the remaining premises:

4. Their doctrine that accidents attach to a substance and that no body is without one. If it stopped here, this would be a clear, sound, unquestionable assumption. But they say that every substance lacking the accident of life must have that of death: With every pair of opposites, a subject must have one of them.[431] Likewise, it must have color, taste, motion or rest, aggregation or separation. And if it has life, it must have other sorts of accidents, like knowledge or ignorance, will or its opposite, power or impotence, perception or one of its contraries[432]—in short, every trait an animal might have or its opposite. **1.108a**

5. Their thesis that these accidents subsist in the atom, which cannot exist without them. To explain this assumption, every atom that God creates, they say, must have certain accidents, like color, scent, motion, or rest—but not size, since no atom has magnitude. Quantity, for them, should not be called an accident; they fail to see that quantity is accidental.[433] In line with this premise, they hold that no accident belongs to a body as a whole; it must belong to each of its atoms: The whiteness in this lump of snow, say, belongs not just to the whole lump. Each of its atoms is white, and that is why the aggregate is white. In the same way, they say of a body in motion that each atom is what moves; that is why the whole moves.[434] So life, in their view, belongs to each atom of a living body. And with the senses, each atom of a sentient whole perceives. For life, sense, **1.108b**

429. The existence of irrational quantities, Proclus explains, distinguishes geometry from arithmetic (Proclus, *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's* Elements, tr. Morrow, 5, 48).

430. The Banū Mūsā Ibn Shākir (early ninth century), three wealthy Baghdad brothers, devised the machines described in their *Book of Ingenious Devices*, commissioned by the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Maʾmūn. Their automatic controls, self-limiting valves, and timing and delay systems, inspired by Greek, Persian, Indian, and Chinese examples and by the brothers' own ingenuity, often relied on pneumatic and aerostatic principles and would not work, Maimonides argues, if a void were real.

431. The overstrict reading of the law of the excluded middle suggests a Megarian background.

432. Sc., sight or sightlessness, hearing or deafness, and the like.

433. Quantity for an Aristotelian is clearly an accidental category, for the essence of a thing does not reveal how many such things exist, if any.

434. The Muʿtazilite al-Jubbāʾī (d. 915), as Pines explains, held that "when a body moves it has as many motions as atoms, one motion in each atom" (*Studies in Islamic Atomism*, 26). See al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. Ritter 319–20.

reason, and knowledge are accidents in their view, like blackness or whiteness, as I will explain (Premise 8).

About the soul, they differ. Most call it an accident of one of the atoms composing, say, a man. The whole is said to be ensouled since it contains that atom. Others have it that the soul is a body made up of subtle atoms. But these, mingled, as they say, with the atoms of the body, must have some accident that makes them a soul. So they still end up making the soul an accident. Reason, they agree, is an accident of an atom among those that make up a rational being. With knowledge, they cannot decide whether it is an accident of each atom of the knower or just one. But either view has absurd implications.[435]

Faced with the objection that we find that most minerals and stones lose their bright color when finely divided (for when we pulverize a brilliant green emerald, it becomes a white powder,[436] showing that the accident belonged to the whole, not the parts) and, more plainly still, that the severed parts of an animal are not alive, showing that life belongs to the organism, not its organs,[437] they answer that accidents do not last but are constantly created, as I shall explain in treating the next premise.

**1.109a** 6. Their doctrine that no accident lasts beyond an instant: God, they claim, creates each atom along with any accident He pleases. He is not to be described as able to create an atom with no accident, since that is impossible. It is part and parcel of the very idea of an accident that it cannot endure: It cannot last for two instants, by which they mean two "nows." No sooner is it created than it is gone without a trace, and God creates another like it, which vanishes in turn, then a third, and so forth, as long as God wills such an accident to persist. But if He chooses to create an accident of a different sort in this atom, He does; and if He stops creating accidents there, the atom vanishes. That is the view of some of them—the majority, in fact—on the creation of accidents. Some Muʿtazilites do hold that certain accidents last for a time, although others last no longer than an instant. But they have no rule to distinguish the sort that lasts from those that do not.

435. If knowledge were an accident of one atom, it would be hard to say how the whole subject knows. One part of a subject might be ignorant of what another part knows. But positing knowledge in all the atoms of a subject would seem contrary to the premise that all accidents belong only to atoms, not their aggregates.

436. "Filings of goat horn appear white when seen by themselves and not in combination but black when combined in the substance of the horn" (Sextus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.129, LCL 1.76–77). As a treatment for diarrhea caused by poisons, Maimonides prescribes "nine grains of emerald pulverized and filtered in a mouthful of water, on an empty stomach" (*Medical Aphorisms* 22.36, Bos, 11).

437. The Mutakallimūn had fallen into the fallacy of division, as the emerald example shows.

What led them to this view was refusing to say that there is any such thing as nature or that a body might be such by nature that it must have such and such accidents. They wanted to say that God creates these accidents instantly, with no nature or anything else involved. That, to them, implied necessarily that an accident cannot last. If you said **1.109b**
that it lasts for a time and then vanishes, you would have to look for what caused it to vanish. If you said God did, at His pleasure, they would rule that unsound since nonexistence needs no cause but just results when a cause is no longer active: without a cause, the effect is gone. That is true in a way (See 1.89b–90a, 103b–104a). But so carried away were they by wanting to eliminate nature's requiring the existence or nonexistence of anything, they had to posit the constant re-creation of accidents. Some of them held that if God wills an atom to cease existing, He gives it no accident, and it vanishes. Others said that if He wished to destroy the world, He would create the accident of "nonbeing" in no substrate, and that would end the world.

Based on this premise, they say that when we claim to dye a robe red, we are not really dying it at all. God creates the color in it on contact with the red dye. We say the dye permeates the fibers. "Not at all," they say. "It is just God's wont to create, say, black just when a fabric contacts indigo. But the black created at that moment does not last. It vanishes instantly, and God creates another. For God's wont is to create not red or yellow but a like black when the first is gone."

On this basis they imply that the things we know now are not the ones we knew yes- **1.110a**
terday. Even our knowledge of them is gone, and new knowledge like it was created in its stead. It must be. For knowledge is an accident. And for those of them who say that the soul, too, is an accident, the implication is that, say, a hundred thousand souls must be created every minute in every being with a soul. For time, to them, as you have seen, is composed of indivisible instants.

Based on this premise, too, they say that when a man moves a pen, it is not he who moves it. Its motion is an accident created by God, as is the motion of the hand we presume moved the pen. But it is God's wont to coordinate the motion of the hand with that of the pen. The hand itself has no effect; it does not cause the motion of the pen.[438] For an accident, as they have it, is confined to its substrate. When this white robe is dipped into a vat of indigo and turns black, they all agree that it is not the indigo that turns it black. The black is in the indigo and cannot get out. No body has any effect at all. God, ultimately, is the only cause: He created the black in the robe when it touched the indigo, as is His custom. And in general, one should never say 'This caused that.' That is the view of most of them. Certain of them did uphold causality, but that was thought outrageous.

About human actions they differ. Most, including most Ashʿarites, hold that when this pen moves, God creates four accidents, none causing or dependent on another but

438. See Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 35, Burrell, 16–22.

1.110b simply coexistent: my will to move the pen, my capacity to move it, the human motion itself—that is, the motion of my hand—and that of the pen. When one wants to do something and does it, as he supposes, the volition was created in him, so they hold—as was the capacity to act and the act he willed. He does not act *by* that created capacity; it does not affect the act at all. The Muʿtazila do say he acts by the created capacity, and certain Ashʿarites say it has some impact or connection to the act. But that, too, was deemed outrageous.[439]

The created volition and capacity that they all affirm and the created act that some of them allow are transient accidents. God creates and re-creates motion in the pen as long as it moves. It cannot come to rest until God creates rest in it, which He continues to re-create as long as it remains at rest. So at every instant, in every atom of time, God constantly creates accidents in everything, from angel and sphere on down. This, they say, is true faith in God's agency; to disbelieve it is, in their view, to deny that God acts at

1.111a all. It is of such beliefs, to my mind or that of any sensible person, that it was said, *Will ye mock Him as a man is mocked?*[440] (Job 13:9). For this is sheer mockery.[441]

7. Their belief that privations are real, something added to a body and really present in the substance of an atom, another constantly created when one vanishes: To explain, they do not see rest as a lack of motion, death as a lack of life, blindness as a lack of sight, or any other such privation as lack of a trait that something might have had. Rather, they treat motion and rest the same as heat and cold: Just as heat and cold are accidents existing in things hot or cold,[442] motion is an accident created in what moves; rest is another, created

439. Bāqillānī, as Wolfson showed, was the Ashʿarite outlier. Ghazālī's teacher al-Juwaynī was the harsh critic of Bāqillānī and of any who accepted his view, which Wolfson links to the Stoic Chrysippus' saying that although a top does not set itself in motion, its nature does affect its spin (Harry Wolfson, *Kalām*, 692–93). A stronger analogy, pled by Chrysippus (and Zeno) to support the Stoic idea of appropriation, is preserved by Hippolytus: Fate is like a heavy wagon, and a man is like the dog tied on behind; we can trot along willingly or tug against it helplessly. Seneca distills the thought in a typically Stoic dichotomy that he credits to Cleanthes: "Ducunt volentem fata, nolentum trahunt" (Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, ed. Reynolds, 2.450 *l.* 9; see *SVF* 2.975).

440. Like the 1917 JPS translation (but unlike most recent versions), Maimonides takes the verb *le-hatel* to signify not deceit but mockery—as in 1 Kings 18:27.

441. The charge is more than mere abuse: By denying the natural properties and dispositions of things, the occasionalist undercuts the very idea of creation, the first focus of his concern. The mockery: God is said to create things (the act and the capacity in the case of Ashʿarite doctrine) that are affirmed to be without effect.

442. Cold, for Maimonides, as in I 72, is one of the four basic natural properties, along with hot, wet, and dry. It is not lack of heat, as in modern physics. The ancient classical view rests on the sensation of cold. Aristotle wrote, "It is plain that cold is not a mere privation, but a fact of nature" (*On the Parts of Animals* II 2, 649a18–20). Plutarch disagreed.

by God in an object at rest, lasting no more than an instant (per Premise 6). God, in their view, created rest in every part of this body at rest, and as soon as one "rest" is gone, He creates another as long as this body remains at rest. Knowledge and ignorance, for them, follow the same pattern: Ignorance, to them, is something real, an accident, ever perishing and re-created as long as a subject does not know some fact.[443] Likewise, life and death: Both are accidents. Life, they maintain, vanishes and is re-created as long as a living being lives. When God wills its death, He creates the accident of death in it, on the heels of that of life, which lasted but an instant. All this they stoutly affirm. **1.111b**

It follows, on their assumptions, that the accident of death that God creates must also vanish as soon as its moment is past; God must create another, or the dead would not stay dead. Just as a new accident of life must be created constantly once the last is gone, God must create one death after another. I wish I knew how long God keeps creating death in the dead. As long as the body remains intact—or a single atom? For the accident of death, on their account, is created only in the atom. Yet we find molars of the dead thousands of years old. Evidently, God did not obliterate those atoms. He must have been creating death anew in them through all those millennia every time it lapsed.

This is the position that most of them hold. One Muʿtazilite does say that some privations are not realities: Powerlessness is lack of power; ignorance, lack of knowledge. But he does not apply this consistently to all privations: He does not call darkness a lack of light, or rest motionlessness. Some privations he treats as real, others as the lack of a trait, as suits his credo—much as they do with other accidents: Some last for a while; others, no longer than an instant. The whole point is to force the world to fit our doctrines and beliefs.

8. Their thesis that only atoms and accidents exist, even natural forms being acci- **1.112a**
dents: To explain, all bodies, in their view, are made up of identical atoms, as I indicated under Premise 1. Atoms differ only in their accidents. So 'animal' or 'human,' 'sentient' or 'rational,' to them, are just accidents like 'white' or 'black,' 'sweet' or 'bitter'—and the members of different species differ no more than members of the same species: The body of the heavens, or even an angel's body, or God's supposed throne (I 9), and the body of any insect or plant you please are all of the same substance and differ only in their accidents. For atoms are the substance of everything.

9. Their thesis that accidents have no accidents: One accident, for them, cannot be said to belong to another accident of a substance. All accidents alike are borne directly by a substance. They avoid saying otherwise since that would make the presence of one accident dependent on that of another. They shrink from that idea, wanting to say that certain accidents can exist in any atom, with no specific precedent, in keeping with their

443. Thus, God must repeatedly create infinite "ignorances" to match every fact one does not know—for example, every digit of $\pi$.

**1.112b** view that any accident can distinguish a thing.[444] Again, the substrate that gains an accident would have to be stable and last for a time. How could an accident do that if, as they hold, none lasts beyond an instant?

10. Their doctrine of possibility: This is the linchpin of kalām. Hear what it means: that anything imaginable is rationally possible. The globe of the earth, say, might become one of the surrounding spheres, and the sphere might become the earth. Reason allows that. Or the sphere of fire might move toward the center and the earth toward the periphery. There is no rational reason, they say, why either belongs more here than there. Similarly, anything we see might be larger or smaller or differently shaped or situated than it is. For a man to be the size of a mountain whose peaks graze the sky, or an elephant the size of a gnat, or a gnat the size of an elephant—all this, they say, is within the bounds of reason. The whole world, they say, works this way, and whatever they posit along these lines they say is possible and cannot be excluded: There is no reason why it should not be such rather than otherwise—regardless of the facts. For the world we know, they say,
**1.113a** with its familiar forms, the scale of things, the stable, fixed, necessary, and invariant conditions of things, are just a matter of familiarity—"The sultan traverses the city markets normally only on horseback; he is never seen to so do otherwise. But it is not inconceivable that he walk through the city on foot. It is quite possible, of course. It could happen. In the same way," they say, "earth falls and flame rises. Fire normally burns, and water cools. But it is not inconceivable for what is familiar to be different, for fire to cool and fall and still be fire, or for water to heat and rise while still water."

Their whole scheme rests on this. Yet they all agree that for opposites to unite at the same moment in the same substrate is inconceivable and impossible, just as a substance without an accident or (for some) an accident without a substrate is rationally inconceivable and impossible[445]—or for an accident to become a substance or a substance an accident or for one body to penetrate another. This, they are sure, is rationally impossible.

Now it is true that everything they deem impossible is utterly inconceivable and that what they call possible is conceivable. But the Philosophers say, "What you call possible or impossible is only what you can or cannot imagine. Your possible is possible for the imagination, but not for reason. This premise of yours treats possibility, necessity, and impos-
**1.113b** sibility now in terms of imagination, rather than reason, and now in terms of common

444. The Aristotelian distinction of essential properties from accidents is a prime target of kalām occasionalism: God might create knowledge in a rock without first imparting the "accident" of life. These mutakallimūn leave room for no distinction between species differences and individual differences, a foundation of naturalism and scientific understanding. If one accident depended on another, there would be necessities in the intrinsic natures of things, a seeming limitation to the power of God.

445. Regarding the examples of Abū 'l-Hudhayl and al-Jubbā'ī, see Harry Wolfson, *Repercussions*, 198.

opinion"—as al-Fārābī states in discussing what the Mutakallimūn call reason.[446] For them, clearly, what is possible is what can be imagined, whether or not it fits the facts, and anything unimaginable is impossible.

This premise cannot survive without the other nine, and it was doubtless for its sake that they invoked the rest. I can bring out the issues for you by way of a debate between a Philosopher and a Mutakallim:

M: 'Why do we find this iron body so hard, strong, and black and that butter so soft, white, and yielding?'

P: 'Every natural body has two kinds of accidents: those involving its matter, like a man's sickness or health, and those pertaining to its Form, like his laughter or surprise. The underlying matter of bodies differs greatly in its specific Forms. So iron is quite different in substance from butter, and the contrasting accidents you see reflect those differences: The hardness of this body and the softness of that are accidents based on their different Forms: Black and white are accidents reflecting differences in the underlying matter.'

The Mutakallim rejects this answer completely, relying on his premises:

M: 'There are no such Forms as you claim distinguish substances. There are only accidents' (per Premise 8). 'There is no difference in substance between iron and butter,' he continues. 'Everything is composed of identical atoms' (per Premise 1, which implies 2 and 3 necessarily, as we have seen, plus 12 to secure atomism). **1.114a**

The Mutakallim does not agree that certain accidents give a substance a specific nature that fits or suits it for other, secondary accidents. For accidents have no accidents (as I explained in Premise 9) and do not persist (Premise 6).

So the Mutakallim gets just what he wanted from these premises. The upshot: Iron and butter are alike in substance; either is the same relative to any accident. No substance is more suited to this accident than that. Just as this atom is no more apt to move than to remain at rest, none is more fit than another for the accident of life, sentience, or reason. It makes no difference whether the atoms be many or few. For accidents subsist only in individual atoms (as I explained regarding Premise 5).

It follows, on these assumptions, that man is no more fit to think than a beetle. But their doctrine of possibility follows too, and that was the object of the entire exercise. For it is the key to all that they hope to establish, as I will explain. **1.114b**

N.B. If you know something of the psyche and its powers, dear reader, and you think realistically, you know that imagination is found in most animals, including all higher

446. See Fārābī, *Risālah fī 'l-ʿAql* (Essay on the Intellect), Bouyges, 11–12.

animals, those with hearts.[447] It is not this faculty that distinguishes man, nor is imagining the work of reason. Quite the opposite. Reason analyzes complexes, teasing out their elements, abstracting and forming concepts of things in terms of their essences and causes. In one thing it can find quite a variety of ideas as distinct to reason as two persons are to the imagination. Reason distinguishes universals from particulars, and no proof is valid without universals.[448] It is by reason that we distinguish the essential from the accidental features of things. The imagination can do no such thing. It apprehends composites only as wholes, just as the senses do, or it combines representations of bodies or bodily powers that are separate in nature, as one might picture a man with wings and a horse's head, and so on. That is what is called a false figment, since nothing real corresponds to it. Regardless of how abstractly it schematizes, imagination cannot free itself from matter.[449] That is why the imagination is no criterion.[450]

**1.115a** Listen to what we learn from mathematics. What a fine foundation it gives us! There are things one's imagination finds quite unthinkable, as absurd as uniting opposites. Yet the unimaginable may be demonstrated and prove real.[451] Picture a large globe, as large as you like, even as big as the all-encompassing sphere. Now imagine the diameter through its center and two men standing on opposite sides of that globe, their legs aligned with that diameter, which may or may not be horizontal. If it is horizontal, imagination would picture both men falling off; if not, the lower one falls, and the other remains upright. But the earth is proven to be a globe, and the antipodes are peopled. Those living on opposite sides all have their heads up toward the sky and their feet pointing toward those

447. See Avicenna, *Shifāʾ* Psychology 3, ed. Rahman, 182–83; and *Fī ʾl-Nafs* of the *Najāt* 3, tr. Rahman, 30–31. Bear in mind that imagination here means the ability to form images. It has not yet acquired the sense modern Romantics gave it, as a name for creativity. Maimonides' stress on the need to know things as they really are means to shield one's understanding from the siren call of an agenda.

448. For an Aristotelian, the soundness and explanatory power of a scientific syllogism rests on the universal quantification of its major premise. See Goodman, "Syllogisms."

449. See Aristotle, *De Anima* I 1, 403a9.

450. See Aristotle, *Physics* III 2, 202a2–3.

451. All men, Aristotle writes, "begin by wondering at the way things are, as automatic marionettes are amazing to those who do not know how they work, or the solstices, or the incommensurability of a square's diagonal with its side. It seems odd that there is something that cannot be measured even by the smallest unit. But, in the end, as our knowledge advances, quite the opposite, and as they say, the better state is reached, as it is by those who have accepted instruction. For nothing would surprise a geometer more than the diagonal's turning out to be commensurable" (*Metaphysics* α 2, 983a13–20, tr. after Hope and Ross). See 2.28a.

on the other side. No one falls off. It is impossible, unthinkable. Neither is "higher" or "lower." Each is at once "above" and "below" the other.[452]

Again, it is proved in *Conic Sections* II (14) that two lines a set distance apart at their origin may extend to infinity, the distance between them ever diminishing, without their ever meeting. That cannot be pictured; it completely eludes the imagination. One line is straight; the other, a curve, as that text explains.[453] So something **1.115b**

452. We might imagine an objective up and down, so one or both of the men might be pictured as falling. But astronomy (a branch of mathematics) shows that the earth is spherical; all heavy bodies tend toward its center. Up and down are relative to that center: "If you could travel round the earth, you would repeatedly come to a place at your own antipodes and call the same part of it now 'above' and now 'below'" (Plato, *Timaeus* 63a; cf. Aristotle, *De Caelo* IV 1, 308a13–23; *TF* 1, Marmura, 34). Solomon Maimon writes, "I once tried to teach a Talmudist that the earth is round, and that we have antipodes. He raised the objection that the people at the antipodes would fall off! I set about showing him that bodies do not fall in a certain direction into empty space, but rather toward the center of the earth; our ideas of above and below really correspond to farther from or closer to this point. None of it helped. The Talmudist stuck to his position and insisted that my claims made no sense" (*Autobiography*, Reitter, 60; at p. 159 Maimon paraphrases the present passage from the *Guide*).

453. See Apollonius of Perga, *Treatise on Conic Sections*, tr. Heath, 154. Maimonides has simplified the wording, as Freudenthal notes in "Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and the Transmission of the Mathematical Tract 'On Two Asymptotic Lines' in the Arabic, Latin, and Hebrew Medieval Traditions." For manuscript glosses on the work ascribed to Maimonides, see GAS, 141; and Langermann, "Mathematical Writings," 57–65. Freudenthal traces the epistemic application of Apollonius' argument to Geminus (first century BCE), whose work was "known to mathematicians writing in Arabic in the 10th and 11th centuries" (Freudenthal, "Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and the Transmission of the Mathematical Tract," 36). Geminus addressed not the asymptote but, more radically, Euclid's parallels postulate, which Proclus argued, citing Geminus and earlier geometers, should not be treated as a postulate, since it relies on imagination: "This should be stricken from the postulates altogether. For it is a theorem—one that invites many questions . . . and the converse is proved by Euclid himself. . . . Some might mistakenly think this proposition merits ranking among the postulates. . . . To them Geminus rightly answered that we have learned from the very founders of this science to pay no attention to specious imaginings in determining what propositions are to be accepted in geometry" (Proclus, *Commentary on the First*, tr. after Morrow, 150–51). For the Arabic afterlife of the idea and its epistemic implications, see Rashed, "Al-Sijzī and Maimonides." Maimonides' concern here is not whether Euclid's thesis that parallel lines never meet is a postulate or a theorem but that reason, not imagination, must guide our inferences. Imagination may balk, but it is demonstrated that a curve (the hyperbola) can draw ever closer to a straight line but fail to reach it even if extended to infinity. Proclus quotes Geminus' view that the idea of asymptotes' converging without ever meeting "is one of the most paradoxical theorems in geometry, proving as it does that some lines exhibit a nonconvergent convergence" (Proclus, *Commentary on the First*, tr. Morrow, 139). Proclus cites *NE* 1094b *l.* 26 f., where Aristotle rejects accepting probable reasoning in

unimagined—imagined impossible, in fact—is proven real. Similarly, it is proven that something deemed necessary by the imagination, God's being a body or a physical force, is, in fact, impossible. For to the imagination, nothing exists but bodies and things that subsist in bodies. Clearly, then, there must be something besides imagination to assay possibility, necessity, and impossibility. What a fine, grand thought for one who wants to wake from imagination's trance.

Do not assume that the Mutakallimūn are completely unaware of this. They have a certain sense of it. They call what is imagined but impossible, like God's being a body, fantasies or delusions and often denounce delusions as deceptive. That is why they resort to the nine premises I stated, to validate this Premise 10, licensing the imagination to posit what they desire for the sake of their identical atoms and uniformly accidental accidents, as I explained.

Give it some thought, dear inquirer. You can see what a thorny path this opens up: One person calls rational ideas what another calls fantasies. We need a way to distinguish concepts from mental pictures. If a philosopher says, as he will, that reality is his witness and we must judge necessity, possibility, and impossibility by its testimony, the religionist
**1.116a** replies, "But that is just the question at issue. This world, we claim, was made by an act of will; it was not an entailment. So it might have been made quite differently—unless reason determines that to be impossible, as you claim." I shall have more to say on this topic of possibility, as you will hear later on in this work. It is not something to be slighted or shrugged off.[454]

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geometry. Simmias remarks in Plato's *Phaedo* (92d): "I know they are impostors who make proofs of probabilities." Rhetoric and persuasion remain critical for Maimonides: Prophets use rhetoric to convey higher truths to those unversed in conceptual thinking, and Maimonides himself uses dialectical argument, the hallmark of kalām, in behalf of creation, where apodeictic arguments are wanting. But his premises are not ad hoc; they are meant to be anchored in reality.

454. See 1.22ab, 1.26a, 2.5a, 2.30b, 2.34ab, and above all II 17. Maimonides takes his stand between the extreme voluntarism of the kalām and the extreme intellectualism of the Philosophers: By distinguishing natural from logical possibility and impossibility, he agrees with the *Mutakallimūn*, or at least with his Ashʿarite predecessor al-Ghazālī, that some things are possible that the Philosophers deem impossible. For the Philosophers pressed toward a stringent logicism, taking anything that is impossible in nature to be logically impossible as well, since all things must act in keeping with their essences. The *Mutakallimūn* pressed to the opposite extreme, treating anything imaginable as possible. Recognizing, with al-Fārābī's help regarding hypothetical necessities, that not everything impossible in the ordained natural order is logically impossible, Maimonides leaves room for miracles woven into the fabric of nature. That saves nature from kalām voluntarism *and* from the Philosophers' logicism, which bids it fair to turn the cosmos into a block universe, where all changes are written in the eternal natures of things, and change itself is vulnerable to the (Megarian) claim that a thing must be (and remain!) what it is.

11. Their excluding as impossible any sort of infinity: To explain, the impossibility of an infinite magnitude, or of finite magnitudes infinite in number, is demonstrated, but only for simultaneous infinities.[455] An infinite causal sequence, too, is impossible: one thing causing another that causes a third; and that, another still; and so ad infinitum, implying the existence of an infinity of actual things, corporeal or incorporeal, each causing the next. It is such an infinite sequence of natural causes or essences that is proven impossible. But a potential or accidental infinity is in some cases demonstrable—as with the infinite *potential* division of a magnitude or of time. Other cases remain open for discussion—infinite succession, for instance, a so-called *per accidens* infinity, where one thing arises once another is gone, and that, in turn, is succeeded by another, and that by **1.116b**
a third, and so ad infinitum. The reasoning here grows rather abstruse: Those who hold the world's eternity to be proven say that time is infinite but escape inconsistency, since each new moment comes when the last is gone. Accidents would succeed one another in matter ad infinitum in the same way, without inconsistency on their part, since these accidents are not simultaneous but successive, and that has not been proven impossible.

But the Mutakallimūn do not distinguish calling an existing magnitude infinite from saying that time or a body is infinitely divisible potentially. Nor do they distinguish the existence of an infinity of things arrayed simultaneously (like saying the number of human beings now alive is infinite) from saying that an infinity of things has arisen, although each, successively, is gone—like saying Zayd is the son of Omar, who is the son of Khālid, who is the son of Bakr, and so ad infinitum. To the Mutakallimūn the latter is absurd the same as the former. They treat all four sorts of infinity alike. Some try to prove this, the impossibility of that last type, using a method I shall explain in this work (I 74.2). Others say it is self-evident and needs no proof. If it is clear that an infinite sequence is impossible even if only a finite number exist at once, the world's eternity is plainly impossible, and no further **1.117a**
argument is needed. But this is not the place to go into that.

12. Their thesis that the senses do not always give us certainty: The Mutakallimūn charge perception with two failings: (a) The senses, they say, miss many things, either because the objects are too small (they cite the atoms and their features, as we saw) or because the objects are too far from the observer (one can neither see nor hear nor smell beyond a few miles'

455. Aristotelians consider the notion of an infinite magnitude incoherent, since a magnitude is a size and therefore bounded. They allow *potential* infinities, as in the number series or the divisibility of a Euclidean line—and thus, the infinite divisibility of time and space, which they see as continuous. But infinite things existing simultaneously would amount to an *actual* infinity, deemed logically contradictory, since its reality would imply that an infinite series had ended—as if we could name a highest number. The infinite revolutions of the spheres are similarly treated by Aristotelians as a potential infinity, since they are incomplete. Infinite time is no contradiction in their view, since its moments are not coexistent and thus present no *actual* infinity.

distance, nor do we perceive the motion of the heavens). (b) The senses misjudge things: A large object looks small at a distance; a small one seems large under water; what is crooked looks straight if partially submerged. To one who has jaundice, everything looks yellow; to one with yellow bile on his tongue, sweet things taste bitter. They adduce many examples of this sort and conclude that the senses cannot be trusted in grounding an argument.

Do not assume that the bulk of the Mutakallimūn posited this premise idly, as most of their modern counterparts assumed their predecessors' hope of vindicating atomism was dispensable.[456] Every thesis that I have listed was essential. To omit even one would
**1.117b** wholly frustrate their purpose. This last premise is crucial. For if perception counters their posits, they say, "There is no point in turning to the senses when reason itself," so they aver, "has testified and the truth is proven"—that continuous motion is interrupted by moments of rest, that a millstone disintegrates as it turns, that the white of this garment vanishes and is replaced by a new white, despite what we can plainly see. Many of the implications of the existence of a vacuum are belied by the senses. But they answer, wherever they can, "This is just another error of the senses."[457]

All these, as you know, are ancient ploys of the Sophists, as Galen relates in *On the Natural Faculties*, where he tells of those who sought to discredit the senses and reports all the facts that you already know.[458]

456. Al-Ashʿarī does not affirm atomism. Ibn Kullāb rejects it. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī at first seems to hope to proceed without it but later in life strives to reclaim it. See Setia, "Atomism vs. Hylomorphism," 113–14. Ghazālī, reliant on Avicenna's *Dāneshnāmeh*, knew the paradoxes latent in the idea of dimensionless atoms. He drops the notion, and *TF* does not criticize the Philosophers for rejecting the atoms of the occasionalist kalām.

457. For Avicenna's critique of Kalām atomism, see his *Physics of the Shifāʾ*, McGinnis, 295–96.

458. Galen, *On the Natural Faculties* I 2.4, ed. Brock, 6–7. The work survives in Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq's Arabic translation, Ms Leiden Or 433. Maimonides cites folio 2b. The work argues against physicians of the atomist school of Asclepiades (first century BCE), objecting to their mechanistic reductionism for denying qualitative physiological changes and failing to credit the specific powers (*dynameis*) of organs and tissues. Following Aristotle's classification of changes (alteration, growth/diminution, translocation, and generation/corruption), Galen sees alteration as qualitative change, like the bleaching of a fabric; *MM* 1.6.46K. Generation and corruption are *essential* changes like birth or death. Here Maimonides cites Galen on a seeming hybrid case—"total alteration," as Galen calls it—following Aristotle and the Stoic Chrysippus. An example was transformation, say, of bread into living tissue such as blood. More than mere accidents change here, yet it seemed extreme to call the change destruction. Galen takes these atomists to task for treating all types of change in quantitative terms, reducing their causes to aggregation or disaggregation of atoms. "The sophists," he writes, "when foodstuffs change to blood, although granting that the change is evident to sight, taste, and touch, will not allow that the change is real. Some deem the effect a mere error of the senses, which shift over time and are variously affected, the substance itself remaining unaltered by

Having set out these premises, I will now detail their ways of securing our four desiderata.

## Chapter 74

In this chapter, I'll recap for you the arguments the Mutakallimūn use to show that the world began. Do not ask me to do it in their words or at the same length. I will just report how each of them goes about trying to prove that the world had an origin or is not **1.118a**

any of these changes" (Galen, *On the Natural Faculties* I 2.5–6, Brock, 9–11). Others, Galen adds, hold that blood, say, was already present in the bread and just teased out from among constituents already present. Harking back to the ancient speculations of Anaxagoras, Asclepiades' atomism reflects a discomfort with change itself, finding a paradox in a thing's becoming what it is not. Maimonides calls the *Mutakallimūn* sophists, since they, too, seem to deny the evidence of the senses in rejecting qualitative change, reliant on the notion that things are already what they will become. The mutakallim al-Naẓẓām, for example, held a doctrine of *kumūn* (latency), which reflected a Megarian discomfort with change that preserved Anaxagoras' misgivings. Al-Naẓẓām relied here on the Stoic theory of *krasis*, or intermixture—interpenetration (Arabic, *mudākhala*)—to avoid acknowledging real change: Latent traits that come to the fore were already present among the atoms. See Harry Wolfson, *Kalām*, 498–514; Pines, *Studies in Islamic Atomism*, 165–66; and Eichner, "Ibn Rušd's Middle Commentary," 283. Maimonides, adopting Galen's more Aristotelian approach, rejects *kumūn*: Things change qualitatively as well as quantitatively, as the senses reliably report. Foodstuffs are *potentially* what they presently are not. Their matter does not "conceal" what they will become. Living beings have capacities to transform the materials needed for their life and well-being. A prisoner fed only bread, Galen argues, will yet have blood in his veins (*On the Natural Faculties* I 2.6, Brock, 11). Maimonides knows that kalām atomism is not Asclepiades' post-Epicurean atomism (although Avicenna does brand kalām atomists latter-day Epicureans). What motivates kalām occasionalism is not the mechanistic naturalism of Epicurus but denial of natural causality in favor of God. But Maimonides rightly sees in kalām atomism an aversion to Aristotle's account of change. Like Galen, he is not averse to mechanical explanations, as his critique of kalām atomism plainly shows. But for Maimonides, physical and formal causes work in tandem. The issue is hardly trivial for him. For by erasing essential forms in nature, kalām atomism severs the world's emanative link to God. So despite the kalām insistence that God causes all things, the occasionalists leave God no intelligible means of creating, governing, or sustaining the natural world. Creation thus becomes, in essence, a magical act. The same kalām surgery, we note, renders all physical things unintelligible to us—and, in principle, unknown by God. Maimonides' citation of Galen's *On the Natural Faculties* places the Arabic text of this key work in his hands. We see its impact elsewhere in his thoughts about change, not least in living beings. He cites the work also in *Medical Aphorisms* 2.8, Bos, 1.28. Our thanks to Gerrit Bos for pinpointing Maimonides' citation and forwarding the Arabic passage from the Leiden manuscript of this Galenic classic.

eternal. I will summarize the premises each uses. But if you read their voluminous tomes and celebrated works, you will find not a thought in their would-be proofs on this score beyond what you'll find in my treatment here—although you will find prolixity, fine phrases, and high-flown style. For they often use rhyme, parallelism, verbal niceties, or obscure jargon meant to impress the hearer and awe the novice. You'll also find plenty of redundancy, along with objections and their supposed resolutions, and much polemic against adversaries.

Method 1. One of them claims it can be shown from a single event that the world began: If you say Zayd was a drop of semen and developed gradually, he could not have done this by himself. Someone must have done it, some external agent that brought him from stage to stage. Clearly, then, he needed a maker to frame his anatomy and advance him from one phase to the next. Likewise, this palm tree and other things. The same reasoning holds for the world at large. As you can see, he believes that whatever holds true of one body must apply to all.

**1.118b** Method 2. The birth of a single person, they say, proves that the world began. To spell it out, Zayd here once did not exist; now he does. That must be because of his father, Omar. But he, too, came to be; and that could not be without Zayd's grandfather, Khālid. But Khālid, too, did not always exist—and so ad infinitum. Yet such an infinity, to them, is impossible, as we've seen (Premise 11). So when the series ends, say, at a first man, Adam, who had no father, one would still have to ask where he came from. The answer might be earth. The question then would be where earth comes from. The answer might be water. And where did this water come from? The series, they say, must either extend infinitely, which is impossible, or end at something that comes from nothing. "Just so," they say: "Here the questions end," proving, so they say, that the world came from nothing.

Method 3. The world's atoms, they argue, must be either separate or conjoined. But some are now separate and now conjoined. Obviously, they cannot join or separate themselves. For if their nature required them to be separate, they would never join, and if they were essentially conjoined, they would never separate. There is no more basis, then, for them to be together than apart. So having some conjoined, others separate, and others shifting—now together, now apart—shows that they need someone to join and separate them. This, they say, shows that the world began. The exponent of this approach, you can see, relies on Premise 1, with all its implications.

**1.119a**

Method 4. 'The whole world,' they say, 'consists of substances and accidents. Every substance must have some accident or accidents, and all accidents arise in time. So the substance bearing them must arise in time as well. For whatever is inseparable from things that arise in time must itself arise in time. The world, then, did begin.' If someone objects that substances might not arise in time, although accidents do succeed one another in them ceaselessly, they answer that this would imply an infinite series of events, which

they posit is impossible. They see this as their best and sharpest argument. Many of them even take it as proof.[459]

It rests on three assumptions, as will hardly be obscure to thinkers: First is that an infinite series is impossible, and second is that every accident arises in time. But our eternal- **1.119b**
ist adversary disagrees regarding one accident: cyclical motion. For Aristotle claims that this does not begin or end. So what moves in this way never began and will never end. It does us no good, then, to show that other accidents begin and end. Our adversary does not dispute that. He claims that accidents succeed one another cyclically in something that did not begin. One accident, he holds—the sphere's rotation—did not begin. It is different in kind from those accidents that have a temporal origin. So only this accident must be investigated and shown to have begun. The third assumption made by the author of this approach is that nothing is perceived but substance and accident—atoms and their accidents, as they would have it. But if bodies are composed of matter and form, as our adversary has demonstrated, what needs to be proved is that prime matter and ultimate form arise and perish. Then the proof that the world began would be sound.

Method 5. The argument from determination: This approach, much favored by them, rests on Premise 10 as I analyzed it for you. Directing his thoughts to the world at large or any part of it, the Mutakallim says, 'This might have had the size, shape, and accidents it **1.120a**
has; it might have been where it is in time or place; it might have been larger or smaller or had a different shape or other accidents. It might have existed earlier or later or elsewhere. Its having the particular size, shape, time, location, or accidents it has, any of which might have been different, shows that Someone chose the alternative. The world's dependence, in whole or part, on such determinations shows that it began. For there is no difference between 'Determiner' and 'Maker,' 'Creator,' 'Originator,' or 'Universal Intender.' These all mean the same.'

They apply this approach in many ways—some specific, some general. They say, 'Earth is no more suited to be beneath the water than above it. Who gave it this position?' 'The sun is no more fit to be round than triangular or square. A body might have any shape. Who gave the sun this shape?' They treat every feature of the world in this way. If they see flowers of different colors, they are thrilled and take it to confirm their case: 'The soil is the same, the water is the same, so why are these blossoms yellow and those red? How could that be, unless someone specified it? God must have! And the world, too, needs someone to make the choices for it in toto and in each part.' All this springs from assuming Premise 10. Yet there are eternalists who do not disagree with us about the need **1.120b**
for determinations, as I will explain (II 21). Overall, I think this method is their best, and I have some thoughts about it, as you will hear (II 19).

459. The argument is based on Plato's notion that what is temporal must have begun; see Plato, *Timaeus* 27d; Galen, *Compendium Timaei*, Kraus and Walzer, Arabic, 4, Latin, 36.

Method 6. One modern Mutakallim claims to have found an exceptionally fine argument, the best yet known, based on the preponderance of being over nonbeing: 'The world's existence,' he argues, 'is contingent, as everyone admits. If it were necessary, it would be God. But our dispute is only with those who hold that God exists yet think the world eternal. Now, a contingent being is one that might or might not exist. In itself, it is no likelier to exist than not. That *this* contingent being exists, which might just as well not have existed, shows that someone must have tipped the scale in favor of its being.'

This is quite a plausible argument, a special case of that last determination argument, substituting 'preponderance' for 'determination' and existence itself for its various states. The exponent of this argument, however, is either confused or trying to confuse us about what is meant by 'The world's existence is contingent.' For our eternalist adversary applies the term 'contingent' in a sense different from that used by the Mutakallim, as I shall explain (II Introduction).[460] Besides, the claim that the world needs a cause to favor its existence over nonexistence is awfully suspicious. To determine or give preponderance applies only to something that already exists and might equally go this way or that, so
**1.121a** one can say, 'Our finding it to be so rather than otherwise shows that someone must have meant it to be so.' Thus, you can say, 'This brass was no more fit for a lamp than it was for a pitcher. Since we find it is a lamp (or a pitcher), we know that someone must have chosen this alternative.' The brass clearly exists, and no alternative is realized until one is chosen. But if it is disputed whether a thing has always been or has come to be from nothing, this approach will not work. It cannot be said, 'Who favored its existence over nonexistence?' until it is settled that it did come from nothing. But that is the question at issue.

Taking existence and nonexistence merely notionally, we come back to Premise 10, which looks to what is fancied or imagined, not to what is conceivable or real. To our eternalist adversary, our ability to imagine the world's nonexistence is no different from our ability to imagine any impossibility. My aim here is not to crush these arguments but just to show you that this approach, supposedly unlike the last, is invalid. It stands on the same footing regarding the possibility of what does not exist.[461]

Method 7. One creationist claims to settle it that the world began by using the Philos-
**1.121b** ophers' doctrine of immortal souls. 'Were the world eternal,' he argues, 'infinite persons would have died in the infinite past. So infinite souls would coexist. But the simultaneous existence of infinite beings is, of course, demonstrably false.'[462]

460. Avicenna's world is contingent but necessitated by its Cause. Its eternity reflects God's timeless emanative act.

461. We read *al-maʿdūm* here rather than *al-maʿlūm*. The sixth method, like the fifth, presumes that things need not have been as they are (Premise 10). Since we can imagine the world's nonexistence, the claim is that it need not have existed. But that was the question at issue, so the kalām argument is circular.

462. For Saadiah's attempt to parry this objection, see *ED* VII 8, Rosenblatt, 285, 431.

Marvelous! *Obscurum per obscuriora*—truly worthy of the Aramaic barb, "What seals your bond?" (B. Sukkah 26a, Giṭṭin 28b, Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1.4.1)—as though this fellow had in hand proof of the soul's immortality and knew just what survives and in what form so as to make a premise of it!

Assuming his aim was just to implicate his adversary in the problems of holding both the eternity of the world and the immortality of the soul, the unwelcome consequences would follow only if that adversary granted his fancied version of immortality. Modern philosophers solve the problem by saying that immortal souls are not bodies that take up space and have positions and so cannot be infinite. Incorporeal beings, as you know, being neither bodies nor physical forces but minds, are not to be conceived as plural at all—unless as cause and effect, differentiated by one's being the cause of another. But what survives of Zayd is neither the cause nor the effect of what survives of Omar. So they would all be one, as Ibn Bājjah and others explained, who ventured to address such dark topics.[463] But as a rule, it is not from such murky areas, where our minds fall short of clear conceptions, that premises should be drawn. **1.122a**

463. The dark topic: Are disembodied souls individuated? Platonic souls are immortal insofar as they are like ideas (*Phaedo* 80–84). But ideas are universals. Do disembodied souls, then, lack individuation—a major stumbling block for those who crave personal immortality? Avicenna argued that personal awareness and a temporal history can individuate souls even once they are free of the body. Plato did suggest a kind of fused individuality (*e pluribus unum*, as it were), having Socrates hint as much by speaking of meeting great men in the afterlife (*Apology* 41a). The twenty-four books of the *Iliad*, although distinct, do form a single work, "by continuity," Aristotle held (*Metaphysics* Z 4, 1030b9). So Ibn Bājjah, citing the many volumes of al-Ṭabarī's history, thinks immortal souls might be united yet distinct, each retaining its unique identity (Ibn Bājjah, *Fī Ittiṣāl al-ʿAql bi-'l-Insān* [On Contact of the Intellect with Man] and *Tadbīr al-Mutawaḥḥid* [The Regimen of the Solitary], ed. Fakhry in *Opera Metaphysica*, 85, 155–56; cf. Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, tr. Goodman, 152–55; Goodman, *Avicenna*, 127–28; Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, 184; and Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes*, 70–71, 145–46). Maimonides vehemently denies a "middle" between same and different (I 51, 1.58b). He may see disembodied souls as one, but like Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Bājjah, he holds out for their rather qualified individuality. See Ivry, "Getting to Know Thee." For the Arabic *ittiṣāl* (cf. the Greek *aphe* and the Hebrew *devekut*), some scholars use the term *conjunction*. What the aspirant seeks is contact or communion, not "union" (*ittiḥād*) with the divine. As Ivry notes, *MT* Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 4.6 applies the term *ishim* to the Active Intellect, our source of conceptual knowledge. For Maimonides, a modicum of such contact does not impart immortality—*pace* Rāzī, who makes the sanguine claim that "if the masses, who now ruin their souls in neglect of inquiry, looked into philosophy in the least, that would save them from this world's turbidity, even if they understood only a little" (*Munāẓarāt al-Rāziyayn*, in *The Marks of Prophecy* by Abū Khātim al-Razi, in Kraus, ed., *Abi Bakr Mohammadi Filii Zachariae Raghensis* [Razis] *Opera*; tr. Goodman in "Rāzī vs. Rāzī," 91).

As you can see, whoever hopes to prove that the world began or to disprove its eternity by these kalām methods inevitably uses one or both of these assumptions: either Premise 10, allowing that anything imaginable is possible, to lay the basis for a Determiner, or Premise 11, ruling out an infinite series.

They press for the latter premise in several ways. They cite a species whose members come to be and pass away, then mentally single out a moment in the past: Belief in the world's eternity implies that there have been infinite members of that species from eternity until then. But the members of that species that have existed from eternity to a moment, say, a thousand years later are infinite as well. Yet the latter group exceeds the first by the number born in that millennium, implying, they say, that one infinity exceeds another.[464]

They do the same with the rotations of the sphere, claiming here too that one infinity of revolutions would exceed another. They also consider the ratio of revolutions of one sphere to those of another, slower sphere—both being infinite. Likewise, with every temporal accident. They count nonexistent accidents, too, and treat them as if they were
**1.122b** real, then adding or subtracting items, always relying on fantasy, not fact.[465] Al-Fārābī demolished this approach and exposed its dependence on imagination in every variant, as you will find spelled out clearly if you study the argument dispassionately in his well-known book *On Changeable Beings*.[466]

These, then, are the main methods the Mutakallimūn use to show that the world began. Once that is settled, it follows necessarily that there exists an Author who gave it being by His will, choice, and purpose. They go on to show that He is one, using the methods I'll explain in the next chapter.

## Chapter 75

In this chapter I'll lay out for you the kalām arguments for God's unity. They say, 'The being that the world reveals as the Maker who gave it being is one.' They have two main ways of establishing God's unity: difference and interference.

Method 1. Interference: This is the approach that most of them favor. In essence, the Mutakallim says, 'If there were two gods, a substance that must have one or the other of two opposite accidents might either lack both, which is impossible, or have both at once
**1.123a** in the same substrate—also impossible. An atom or a group of atoms, for example, that

464. The arguments are laid out by Ghazālī in *TF*, First Discussion, Marmura, 18.

465. The infinites the Mutakallimūn find problematic would not be simultaneous but successive. So they would not seem problematic to the Philosophers.

466. The work is no longer extant, but cf. Fārābī's response to Philoponus, "Against Philoponus."

one god willed to warm now and the other to cool, would be neither, since the effects would block each other—which is absurd. For every body must be either warm or cool. Or it would be both warm and cool at once. Similarly, if one god wanted to move this body, the other to keep it still, it would be neither moving nor at rest, or both at once."[467]

This line of argument assumes their atomism (Premise 1), that accidents are created (Premise 4), and that privations are real and need a cause (Premise 7). But someone might say that matter here below (where generation constantly alternates with corruption on the Philosophers' account) is demonstrably different from the supernal matter of the spheres. So one of the two gods might govern this lower matter, leaving the spheres unaffected, while the other governs the spheres with no effect on ordinary matter—as dualists claim. There would be no "interference" on this view. If someone objected that this would imply a defect in both gods, since neither controls what the other affects, he could be told that this would not be a defect in either. For what each could not do would be impossible for it, and inability to do the impossible is not a defect—just as we monotheists do not think it a defect that the One cannot unite opposites in the same substrate. God **1.123b**
has no power to do that or any such impossibility. Sensing the weakness of this approach, attractive as it seemed, they tried a different tack.

Method 2. If there were two gods, they argue, they would have to have something in common and something found in one and not the other, to make them different. This is a philosophical approach, apodeictic if its premises are clearly drawn and the argument duly laid out. I will explain it when I discuss the Philosophers' views about this (2.9b).[468] But this approach is not open to anyone who believes in attributes. For it assigns to the Eternal diverse features—His knowledge different from His power, say, and His power different from His will. So it would not be impossible for two gods to have some features in common and others that distinguish them.

Method 3. Here is another approach, again dependent on one of their premises: Some Mutakallimūn of the old school believe that God's will is none other than Himself and subsists in no substrate. Using this assumption, which I explained (under Premise 6, **1.124a**
1.109b) and which they affirm in the sense that you will see, they say that this one will without a substrate cannot belong to two different subjects. 'For one cause,' they say, 'cannot frame judgments in two different subjects.' This, again, I would say is *obscurum per obscuriora*. The will they speak of is inconceivable. Some of them do call it impossible. But those who appeal to it face countless difficulties yet rely on it to show God's unity.

467. Saadiah sketches an argument along these lines, minus the atomism, in *ED* II 2; he also makes his own appeal to the idea of impotence cited here in Method 5.

468. Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics* Part I, Prop. 5.

Method 4. 'The existence,' they say, 'of any act or work argues, necessarily, for a doer or maker but says nothing of the number. It makes no difference whether you say two gods or three, or twenty, or any number at all.'

Obviously. But if you say, 'This does not prove multiple gods impossible but only that we do not know the number; it might be one or possibly quite a few,' the Mutakallim completes his proof by saying, 'There is no contingency in God's being; it is necessary. So the possibility of plurality is null.'

That is how he framed the argument. But this is a gross error, plainly. God's existence is what is not contingent. Our knowledge of it is contingent. Contingency in knowledge is not the same as contingency in being. Perhaps, as Christians think Him three, although He is not, we wrongly think Him one. This should be clear to anyone trained in the logic of inference.

**1.124b** Method 5. One modern Mutakallim claims to have found proof of God's unity based on dependence: 'If one god independently can make all that is, another is redundant. But if the world cannot be ordered and complete without two gods' collaboration, both are powerless, since each needs the other and neither is self-sufficient.' This is just a variant of the argument from interference.

The objection to arguments of this sort: Not everyone who does not do what is beyond him is to be called powerless. We do not call someone weak because he cannot lift five hundred tons. Nor do we call God powerless because He cannot give Himself a body, create His like,[469] or make a square whose side equals its diagonal.[470] In the same way, one need not call God powerless because He does not create alone. It might be necessary to the existence of both these gods that they both exist. That would be not dependence but necessity. Any alternative would be impossible. We would not call God powerless because (in their view) He cannot create a body without creating atoms and affixing the accidents He creates in them. We would not call that impotence or dependence if the alternative is impossible. Just so, a dualist can say, 'It is impossible for either god to act alone; that is not impotence. For the existence of either requires that of both.'

One of them came to find these tricks so tiresome that he said monotheism is simply
**1.125a** the received religion. The Mutakallimūn hated this and scorned him for saying it. Yet I think he was sensible and averse to sophistries. Hearing no real proof in all their arguments and dissatisfied with what they called proof, he said that monotheism should be accepted as a matter of religious tradition. For these schools had left the world no stable nature on which to ground sound inferences and left the mind no capacity for

469. The familiar example implicitly targets trinitarianism, at least of an Arian kind, where the Son was created; see Eusebius, *Historia Ecclestica* 1.5.

470. See 1.107a, 2.28a, 3.29a.

sound reasoning.[471] All this was intentional, to yield a world that allowed us to prove what cannot be proved but left us powerless to prove what can be. We can only appeal to fair thinkers and to God.

## Chapter 76

The Kalām denial of corporeality. The methods the Mutakallimūn use in arguing against God's corporeality are weak indeed, weaker than their arguments for His unity. For they make incorporeality a corollary of unity.[472] Body, they maintain, is not one. If someone based incorporeality on the fact that a body must be composed of matter and form and is thus composite, as the Deity clearly cannot be, I would not call him a mutakallim. For this argument is not built on kalām premises. It is a sound proof based **1.125b** on belief in matter and form as rationally conceived. That is the Philosophers' approach, which I shall discuss and explain in treating their proofs of this thesis. But my aim in this chapter is to discuss only the case for incorporeality that the Mutakallimūn make based on their arguments and assumptions.

Method 1. They say, 'If God were a body, His divinity would have to subsist either in its every atom or in just one. If in one, what good are the rest? There would be no need for that whole body. But if divinity were in all of them, each atom would be divine, and there would be not one god but many. Yet we have seen that God is one.'[473]

You will find, on reflection, that this argument rests on Premises 1 and 5. But suppose they are told, 'God's body is not composed of atoms; it is not made up of substances like those you say He creates. He is a continuous body, divisible only in fancy, and fantasies count for nothing. You might just as well imagine the vault of the heavens being split and sundered.'[474] That is pure fantasy, the Philosophers say, like applying our experience **1.126a** of the world here below to make inferences about bodies unknown.

Method 2, which they think most impressive, is based on God's transcendence: 'He is unlike any of His creatures. But if He were a body, He would be like other bodies.' They go on at some length about this: 'If you say "a body unlike other bodies," you contradict yourself. For every body is like any other, in being a body. Bodies differ only otherwise'—that is, in their accidents. It would also follow, so they say, that God could create His like.

471. The capacity here is *fiṭra*, understood as the God-given capacity to reason logically.
472. Maimonides does so as well, but he thinks his proofs stronger than those of the kalām.
473. Again the Mutakallimūn commit the fallacy of division; cf. 1.108ab.
474. The language echoes Qur'ān 84:1.

There are two ways of rebutting this argument: Someone might say, 'I do not agree that nothing is like God. What proof have you that God cannot resemble a creature in some way, unless—good Lord!—you tie His uniqueness to a scriptural text? But then incorporeality would no longer be a matter of reason but of revelation.' And if you say, 'If He is like a creature, then He created His like,' the critic will answer, 'It is not like Him in every way, and I do not deny that God has diverse aspects and attributes.' A corporealist would hardly stick at that.

The second way is harder. It is well established among those who do philosophy and have probed the Philosophers' doctrines deeply that the spheres are called bodies in quite
**1.126b** a different sense than bodies of ordinary matter. The matter is different, and so are the forms. The terms *matter* and *form* have different senses as applied here below and to the spheres. The sphere does have volume, of course, but that is not what makes it a body; a body is a composite of matter and form. But if that can be said of the spheres, all the more readily can a corporealist say, 'God is a body with a shape, but essentially and substantially unlike any created being. The two are called bodies in quite different senses'—just as we theists hold that 'being' is said of Him and of the world in different senses.

A corporealist need not agree that all bodies are made up of identical particles. God, he says, created all bodies, and they differ in substance and essence. He would no more compare God's body to that of the created light of the Shekhinah or the Pillar of Cloud than compare the Shekhinah to the stars and celestial spheres—or the sphere of the sun to dung. 'God's body,' he says, 'is sublimely perfect, utterly incomposite, unchanging and unchangeable.[475] That is why His body is eternal, exists necessarily, and creates all else at His will and pleasure.' I wish I knew how the sick corporealist view could be refuted by the marvelous arguments I taught you.

**1.127a** Method 3. They say, 'If God were a body, it would be finite.' True. 'If finite, it would have a definite size and shape.' Also a sound inference. 'And for any given size and shape,' they add, 'God, if a body, might have been larger or smaller or shaped otherwise. His having this particular size and shape would require some determining cause.'

This argument, too, I have heard them vaunting. But this one is flimsier than all the rest, since it depends on Premise 10. I have shown you how problematic that is for the world, let alone for God. For it undercuts the idea of nature. This method is no different from their argument that since the world exists rather than not, there must be a cause to determine that outcome, both alternatives being possible. If someone asks them why the same reasoning cannot be applied to God? Does His existence, too, not require

475. Alexander does speak freely of the spheres' divine bodies: "The divine body, being simplex (since it could not be everlasting were it complex) and having but one motion"—its rotation, where the elements have contrary motions—"has no other nature than its soul" (Alexander, *On the Cosmos* §19).

a cause to favor it over nonexistence? The answer, of course, would be 'That leads to a series that must end at a necessary being, free of contingency and needing nothing to give it being.' But the same reply could be given regarding God's supposed size and shape. For of any size or shape that once did not exist and later did, it could be said that it might have **1.127b** been larger or smaller or shaped otherwise and so needs a determiner. But the corporealist could say of God's presumed shape and size (exalted be He above all defect and all likeness to His creatures!), 'It was never nonexistent, and then real, and thus in need of a determiner. He Himself is necessary, and so are His size and shape. He needs no one to determine or favor His existence over nonexistence. And just as there is no possibility of His nonexistence, His size and shape need no specifier: They too are necessary.'

Think it over now, dear inquirer. Would you not rather seek the truth and drop the dogma, wishful thinking, and awestruck deference to habit and cant? Do not fool yourself about these thinkers or the fruits of their labors. They got out of the frying pan and into the fire—abolished nature and denatured heaven and earth[476] just to make creation demonstrable by these posits of theirs. Yet they did not prove that the world was created but only undermined our arguments for God's existence, unity, and incorporeality. For all our proofs depend on the settled nature of the world of our experience, as known to reason and the senses.

Now that we have seen the upshot of their arguments, we should turn to the proofs and premises of the Philosophers for God's existence and unity and the impossibility of His being a body. But we shall grant them one premise that we do not ourselves accept: the world's eternity. After that, I'll show you my own approach, so far as sound reasoning has allowed me to frame proofs of these three theses. Having done that, I'll return, with **1.128a** God's help, to engage with the Philosophers' eternalism.

476. See 1.106a, 109a, 114ab.