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A THIRD APPROACH TO MAIMONIDES' COSMOGONY-PROPHETOLOGY PUZZLE

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I

Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*¹ is a book of puzzles. Worried lest his radically intellectualist teachings harm the unschooled reader incapable of replacing naive faith with reasoned conviction, Maimonides took extraordinary precautions to conceal them from him. He cut up his arguments as with a jig saw, placed the pieces in careful disarray, and tossed in a goodly number of extra pieces which seemingly fit but do not. His presupposition, of course, was that any reader keen enough to piece together his puzzles would be intellectually prepared to cope with his teachings. No one will gainsay that Maimonides did a superb job of concealment. After almost eight centuries, students of the *Guide* are still trying to figure out how to solve its puzzles.²

One puzzle in the *Guide* concerns the relationship between cosmogony and prophetology. In *Guide*, 2.13, Maimonides describes three opinions on

¹ Page references to the *Guide* will be to Shlomo Pines's English translation (*The Guide of the Perplexed* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963]), although in quotations this translation may sometimes be modified.

² In his Introduction to the *Guide* (pp. 5-20), Maimonides advises his philosophic reader (cf. p. 10, l. 21, and n. 24) on how to uncover the esoteric meaning of the book. E.g., he writes: "If you wish to grasp the totality of what this treatise contains . . . then you must connect its chapters one with another; and when reading a given chapter, your intention must be not only to understand the totality of the subject of that chapter, but also to grasp each word that occurs in it . . . even if that word does not belong to the intention of the chapter. For the diction of this treatise has not been chosen at haphazard . . . and nothing has been mentioned out of its place, save with a view of explaining some matter in its proper place" (p. 15). A valuable key to Maimonides' esoteric teaching in his discourse on the "seven causes" of contradictory and contrary statements (pp. 17-20), and perhaps in particular his comments on the *seventh* cause: "In speaking about very obscure matters, it is necessary to conceal. . . . Sometimes . . . this necessity requires that the discussion proceed [in one place] on the basis of a certain premise, whereas in another place [it] proceeds on the basis of another premise contradicting the first one. In such cases, the vulgar must in no way be aware of the contradiction; the author accordingly uses some device to conceal it by all means" (p. 18). On the esotericism of the *Guide*, see Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: Free, 1952) 38-94; and his "How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in Pines's translation of the *Guide*, xi-lvi.

the creation of the world; then in 2.32, he describes three opinions on the phenomenon of prophecy, and remarks: "The opinions of people concerning prophecy are like their opinions concerning the eternity or creation of the world. I mean by this that just as the people to whose mind the existence of the deity is firmly established have, as we have set forth [in 2.13], three opinions concerning the eternity or creation of the world, so are there also three opinions concerning prophecy."³ Maimonides does not say anything more about the relationship between the two sets of opinions, but it seems reasonable to infer that there is a correspondence between the three opinions on creation and the three opinions of prophecy.⁴ What this correspondence might be, however, is certainly not evident. The puzzle before us, therefore, is: just *how* do the three opinions on creation correspond to the three opinions on prophecy? Our puzzle is particularly confusing because Maimonides' teachings on both creation and prophecy are themselves puzzles, and scholars remain until this day in wide disagreement as to what Maimonides really believed about these two subjects. To solve the puzzle of the cosmogony-prophetology correspondence, therefore, involves solving—at least in part—the two puzzles of creation and prophecy.

The cosmogony-prophetology puzzle has recently received detailed attention in two independently written essays: Lawrence Kaplan's "Maimonides on the Miraculous Element in Prophecy"⁵ and Herbert Davidson's "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation."⁶ According to the solution endorsed by Kaplan, the first opinion on creation corresponds to the third opinion on prophecy, the second opinion on creation to the first on prophecy, and the third opinion on creation to the second on prophecy; i.e., 1:3, 2:1, 3:2. According to Davidson, the correspondence is 1:1, 2:3, 3:2.⁷ The current discussion of this puzzle would, I think, be lacking if some words were not said in favor of the most obvious correspondence, namely, 1:1, 2:2, 3:3, and this is what I

³ *Guide*, 360.

⁴ As Isaac Abrabanel observes in his Commentary on *Guide*, 2.32, if the only similarity between the two sets of opinions were the number 3, then Maimonides might as well have said that the opinions on prophecy are like the Patriarchs, or like any other trio. See *More Nēbukim* with Commentaries of Ephodi, Shem Tob ben Joseph ibn Shem Tob, Asher Crescas, and Isaac Abrabanel (Warsaw: Goldman, 1872) 66a. Abrabanel's observation is translated in Alvin Reines, *Maimonides and Abrabanel on Prophecy* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1970) 4–5.

⁵ *HTR* 70 (1977) 233–56.

⁶ In Isadore Twersky, ed., *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1979) 16–40.

⁷ The solution endorsed by Kaplan was, it seems, first explicitly suggested by the sixteenth-century rabbinic scholar Mordecai Jaffe, and has been held in the present century by S. Atlas and J. Kafih (see Kaplan, "Maimonides and the Miraculous Element," 249–50). The solution endorsed by Davidson is what Kaplan calls "the standard explanation of the correspondence"; it was explained in detail by Abrabanel and has been accepted by modern scholars like S. Munk, M. Friedländer, Z. Diesendruck, and Reines (see Kaplan, "Maimonides and the Miraculous Element," 251–52 n. 42).

intend to do in what follows. In fact, it seems to me that this most obvious of correspondences is indeed the one intended in Maimonides' esoteric teaching.⁸

II

Before I adduce my arguments in favor of 1:1, 2:2, 3:3, it will be helpful here to set down briefly Maimonides' comments on each of the two sets of three opinions. In his presentation of both sets, Maimonides describes not only the opinions themselves but also those who hold them. The three opinions on creation in 2.13, are briefly: (1) creation of heaven and earth after absolute nonexistence⁹ by God's will, (2) creation in time of heaven and earth out of eternal matter, (3) eternity *a parte ante* of heaven and earth. These three opinions are said to be held respectively by: (1) "all who believe in the Law of Moses," (2) "all of the [modern?] philosophers of whom we have heard reports and whose discourses we have seen" and also Plato, (3) Aristotle and the Aristotelians. The three opinions on prophecy in 2.32, are briefly: (1) God turns whomsoever he wishes into a prophet, (2) prophecy is a natural human perfection, (3) prophecy is a natural human perfection but can be miraculously prevented by God. These three opinions are said to be held respectively by: (1) the vulgar both among the pagans and among those who profess our Law, (2) the philosophers, (3) us, i.e., this opinion is "the opinion of our Law and the foundation of our doctrine."

Let us now proceed to the arguments in favor of 1:1, 2:2, 3:3.

III

The argument for the correspondence of 1:1 is obvious, and has been stated succinctly by Davidson: "The parallelism is perfect: both the existence of the world and the appearance of a prophet are construed as sheer miracles, the coming into being of something from nothing."¹⁰ To be sure, 1:1

⁸ I have not seen this solution suggested in either the medieval or modern literature. However, it is perhaps implicit in the esoteric comments of some of the medievals.

⁹ This opinion, according to which the world was created "after absolute pure nonexistence (Arabic: *ba'd al-'adam al-mahd al-mutlaq*)" (p. 281, 11. 8-9), is *not* identical with the opinion that the world was created *ex nihilo* (Arabic: *min al-'adam*). It implies that *before* creation there had been nonexistence, whereas the opinion of creation *ex nihilo* may be interpreted to signify the continuous creation of existence out of nonexistence, or the eternal information of matter (= *nihil*). In other words, it is incompatible with the theory of the eternity of time, whereas the opinion of creation *ex nihilo* is compative with it. See Sara Klein-Braslavy, *Peruś ha-Rambam lē-Sippur Bēri'at ha-'Olam* (Jerusalem: Israel Society for Biblical Research, 1978) 81-90. The distinction between creation after nonexistence and creation *ex nihilo* is ignored by both Kaplan and Davidson, as well as by most scholars who have written on Maimonides' cosmogony. On concepts of creation in mediaeval Arabic literature, see Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1976) 355-72.

¹⁰ "Maimonides' Secret Position," 23. "Nothing" must be understood here as "no matter" (see previous note).

almost certainly implies that Maimonides' attribution of the first opinion on creation to "all those who believe in the Law of Moses" is not to be taken at face value, but should be revised to read: "*the vulgar* among those who believe in the Law of Moses"; for if the first opinion on creation corresponds to the vulgar opinion on prophecy, then it seems that it too is a vulgar opinion. Such a revision of Maimonides' attribution of the first opinion on creation indicates, of course, that while in his exoteric teaching Maimonides advocated this opinion, in his esoteric teaching he rejected it. This, in fact, is Davidson's view,¹¹ and I believe that it is correct.¹²

Kaplan, as indicated above, prefers 1:3 to 1:1, and this is of course in accordance with Maimonides' explicit claims that the first opinion on creation is held by "all who believe in the Law of Moses" and that the third opinion on prophecy is "the opinion of our Law." According to 1:3, 2:1, 3:2, the correspondence favored by Kaplan, it would seem that all believers in the Law of Moses, including Maimonides himself, hold 1:3. Kaplan, however, does not commit himself to this proposition, since he leaves open the possibility that Maimonides esoterically held 3:2. Kaplan's analysis is based on the premise (which I consider correct) that prophecy according to Maimonides is a natural human perfection. Kaplan argues accordingly that *if* Maimonides did indeed hold the belief that the world was miraculously created after absolute nonexistence by the will of God, then it would follow that he should hold that God is able to perform miracles in nature, and that God is thus able to prevent

¹¹ Ibid., 24–26. On p. 36, however, Davidson expresses reservations about this view (and, indeed, about his entire analysis of Maimonides' position on creation), both on the grounds that the evidence he has assembled is "not unambiguous," and on the grounds that Maimonides may have been "less immune to error and carelessness than he and his readers through the centuries have imagined." While on the cosmogony Davidson thus expresses uncertainty as to whether Maimonides held 1 or 2, he voices no doubt that on prophethood Maimonides held 3. In his view, therefore, Maimonides' own position on the cosmogony-prophethood correspondence is if not 2:3, then 1:3. That 1:3 is (according to his own analysis) composed of *non*-corresponding opinions would presumably be taken by Davidson simply as evidence that Maimonides did not, as the "thoroughgoing esotericists" suppose, write the *Guide* with "exceeding precision" (see p. 25).

¹² With regard to the possible objection that Maimonides had to have held the first opinion on creation since it is necessary for his conception of prophecy, see Maimonides' instructions to his reader in *Guide*, 1.71: "You should not ask how prophecy can be true if the world is eternal, before you have heard our discourse concerning prophecy" (p. 181). This comment, as Pines observes, "tends to produce the impression that prophecy can be true (or valid) even if the world is eternal" (Introduction to his translation of the *Guide*, cxxviii n. 115). However, whatever "impression" this comment produces, its plain meaning is that until the reader has studied Maimonides' discourse on prophecy, he has no right to conclude that the doctrine of creation after nonexistence is necessary for Maimonides' conception of prophecy. Now, Maimonides' discourse on prophecy begins at *Guide*, 2.32, and ends at 2.48. Since Maimonides' presentation of the three opinions on prophecy appears in 2.32, right at the beginning of that discourse, it is obvious that in examining that presentation the reader has no right to presume that only the first opinion on creation is compatible with Maimonides' conception of prophecy. See also Maimonides' affirmation of the compatibility of prophecy and eternity in *Guide*, 2.16, p. 294.

miraculously the occurrence of the natural phenomenon of prophecy (i.e., Maimonides would hold 1:3). However, Kaplan concomitantly argues, *if* Maimonides held the Aristotelian theory of eternity, then he would not be able to speak of miracles, and would simply hold that prophecy is a natural phenomenon, period (i.e., Maimonides would hold 3:2). Kaplan is forced to leave open the possibility that Maimonides held 3.2 instead of 1:3, because he does not wish to deny the possibility that Maimonides held the Aristotelian theory of eternity.¹³ To my mind, however, it is inconceivable that *if* Maimonides held 1:3, 2:1, 3:2, he would endorse 3:2, for this would suggest that he was dissociating himself from the unequivocal position of the Law of Moses (viz., 1:3), i.e., that he was *rejecting* the Law of Moses in favor of Aristotelian philosophy.¹⁴ What seems correct to me (for reasons which will be given below) is that Maimonides did hold the Aristotelian theory of eternity, but that he did not consider it to be in conflict with the true doctrine of the Law (i.e., he held 3:3). As for the argument that if Maimonides held the Aristotelian opinion on cosmogony (3) he could not speak of miracles, and thus could not hold the opinion of "the Law" on prophecy (3), it is sufficient to remark that although the Aristotelian theory of eternity, as Maimonides understands it, does indeed seem to rule out supernatural phenomena, Maimonides' mention of miracle in his presentation of the opinion of "the Law" on prophecy need not be taken as referring to a *supernatural* miracle.¹⁵

¹³ "Maimonides on the Miraculous Element," 256.

¹⁴ That Maimonides considered Judaism and philosophy to be mutually exclusive has admittedly been maintained by Leo Strauss in several works; e.g., *Persecution*, 42–43, and "How to Begin to Study the *Guide*," xiv. Strauss thereby raises the question of whether Maimonides in his esoteric doctrine did indeed ultimately reject the Law of Moses for Aristotelian philosophy. Cf. also Pines's remark: "that Maimonides realized the true issue between philosophy and religion, or religious Law, does not necessarily mean that . . . he . . . chose religion" (Introduction to his translation of the *Guide*, cxviii). Nonetheless, I think that there is no justified doubt about Maimonides' uncompromising commitment to the Law of Moses, even if it is *also* true (as I think it is) that his commitment to philosophy was likewise uncompromising. On the integration of Judaism and philosophy in Maimonides, see Twersky, "Some Non-Halakic Aspects of the Mishneh Torah," in A. Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1967) 95–118; idem, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven: Yale University, 1980); Arthur Hyman, "Maimonides' Thirteen Principles," in Altmann, *Studies*, 119–44; idem, "Interpreting Maimonides," *Gesher* 6 (1976) 46–59; and David Hartman, *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1976); and see my review of Hartman's book in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 17 (1979) 86–88, and my "Political Philosophy and Halakhah in Maimonides" (in Hebrew), *Iyyun* 29 (1980) 198–212.

¹⁵ In *Guide*, 2.25, p. 328, Maimonides comments that Aristotle's theory of eternity would not contradict the Law if miracles are "interpreted"; and in 2.29, pp. 345–46, he suggests that miracles are "in nature." See also Maimonides' *Eight Chapters*, 8 (ET in J. I. Gorfinkle, ed., *The Eight Chapters of Maimonides on Ethics* [New York: Columbia University, 1912] 90–91; and in R. L. Weiss and C. Butterworth, eds., *Ethical Writings of Maimonides* [New York: New York University, 1975] 87–88).

IV

The argument for 2:2 is based on the clear correspondence of attributions: each of the corresponding opinions is attributed to "the philosophers." Now, with regard to the second opinion on cosmogony, it is evident that "the philosophers" must be understood as "the *non-Aristotelian* philosophers," since according to Maimonides the Aristotelian philosophers did not hold the second opinion, but rather the third. If, then, Maimonides as a good Aristotelian held the third opinion on cosmogony (which I think he did, as I shall explain below), he would in effect here be setting his own opinion (3) in contradistinction to that of "the philosophers" (2). Similarly with regard to prophetology, Maimonides sets his own opinion (3) in contradistinction to that of "the philosophers" (2).

With regard to the attributions, therefore, the relationship between 2 and 3 in cosmogony seems to be analogous to that between 2 and 3 in prophetology. Moreover, there is a similar analogy with regard to the subject matter. In both the cosmogony and the prophetology discussions, 3 is presented as being like 2, with one exception. In the cosmogony discussion, it is reported that those who hold 3, like those who hold 2, assert that "something endowed with matter can by no means be brought into existence out of that which has no matter," *but* that unlike those who hold 2, they assert that "the heaven is in no way subject to generation and passing away."¹⁶ In the prophetology discussion, similarly, it is reported that 3 is identical with 2 "except in one thing," viz., that according to 3 "it may happen that one who is fit for prophecy . . . should not become a prophet."¹⁷

If we are justified in arguing that the relationship between 2 and 3 in the cosmogony discussion is analogous to that between 2 and 3 in the prophetology discussion, we would certainly be justified in going one step further, and in arguing that the relationships between 1, 2, and 3 in the two discussions are analogous. Thus, 1 in both discussions is the vulgar opinion; 2 in both discussions is the "philosophic" opinion; and 3 in both discussions is the "philosophic" opinion with one exception.

Davidson, as indicated above, argues for 2:3, and thus attributes to Maimonides the Platonic view on creation (although he allows that Maimonides might after all have held 1:3).¹⁸ That Maimonides could have held the Platonic view on creation is emphatically rejected by Kaplan, who argues (I think decisively) that in Maimonides' judgment "a doctrine that affirms that the heavens are subject to generation and passing-away in effect denies the possibility that there exists a rational, natural order," and such a doctrine would have had to have been rejected by Maimonides, who, like Aristotle,

¹⁶ *Guide*, 2.13, p. 284.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.32, p. 361.

¹⁸ See above, n. 11.

believed in "a fixed natural order."¹⁹ Kaplan's pairing 2:1 is based on his conclusion that for Maimonides the Platonic view on creation is unscientific, and thus it should correspond to the unscientific opinion of the vulgar concerning prophecy.²⁰ Kaplan's argument for 2:1 is compelling, except that it is not at all clear that the second opinion on cosmogony is more unscientific than the first.

V

In my judgment, Maimonides held 3:3. In other words, he held the Aristotelian position on cosmogony (3), in spite of his exoteric support of the position that the world was created after absolute nonexistence (1); and he held the position on prophecy which he said he does (3).

The question of whether Maimonides, despite his many disclaimers, did hold the Aristotelian theory of eternity was debated by medievals and continues to be debated by moderns. As we have seen, for example, Kaplan leaves the question open (maintaining that Maimonides held *either* 1:3 or 3:2) and Davidson answers negatively (maintaining that Maimonides held 2:3 or alternatively 1:3).²¹ It seems to me, however, that there is ample evidence in the *Guide* to indicate that Maimonides did advocate the Aristotelian theory, and some of this evidence will be summarized presently. Before this summary, however, two comments are in order.

First, to avoid a common misunderstanding, it should be emphasized that to conclude that Maimonides held Aristotle's theory of eternity is *not* to say that he denied creation, and it is *not* to say that he denied religion; rather, it is to say that he denied what he considered to be the vulgar notion of creation and the vulgar notion of religion. Thus already in the thirteenth century, the philosophically astute kabbalist Abraham Abulafia argued in his esoteric commentary on the *Guide* that it is an error to consider the creation and eternity of the world as exclusive disjuncts, for the world may be *both* created (*hadaš*) and eternal *a parte ante* (*qadmon*).²² According to Abulafia, the notion of continuous or eternal creation is found, for example, in the words of the morning prayer, "He creates [*mēhaddeš*] each day continuously [*tamid*] the work of creation."²³ The compatibility of creation and eternity

¹⁹ "Maimonides on the Miraculous Element," 250, 253.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 249–51.

²¹ Kaplan's view that on cosmogony Maimonides held 1 or 3 but surely not 2 is corroborated with extensive evidence by Klein-Braslavy, *Peruš ha-Rambam* (summary of findings, 256, 266). Davidson's view that on cosmogony Maimonides held 1 or 2 but surely not 3 has been held recently by some other scholars, e.g., S. Feldman in his article on "Creation and Cosmogony," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 5, col. 1067–69; however, the evidence for this view is not convincing, being based on unargued rhetorical statements of Maimonides, e.g., at *Guide*, 2.25, p. 330. Cf. below, n. 55.

²² *Sitre Tora*, MS. Paris, hébr. 768 (Hebrew University Microfilm, no. 12327) 137b–40b; MS. Paris, hébr. 774 (Hebrew University Microfilm, no. 12332) 147b–49b.

²³ *Ibid.*, MS. 768, p. 140a; MS. 774, p. 149a. A similar use of this phrase (from the *yošer 'or* blessing preceding the morning reading of the *Šema'*) is found, e.g., in Isaac Albalag, *Tiqqun*

was not infrequently affirmed in the medieval Maimonidean literature. In his well known commentary on the *Guide*, for example, the fourteenth-century Maimonidean philosopher, Moses of Narbonne, speaks of the crucial theological importance in Maimonides' system of the proposition of "the eternity of the world, which is to say, the eternal creation [*ha-b'eri'ā ha-niṣḥit*]." ²⁴

Second, it should be remarked that to conclude that Maimonides held Aristotle's theory of eternity is *not* to say that he thought that the theory had been proved. His explicit statements to the effect that the theory has not been proved are, it seems clear to me, to be accepted as straightforward expressions of his true opinion. ²⁵ However, if Maimonides thought that the theory had not been proved, he *also* thought that Aristotle himself did not think it proved. ²⁶ Maimonides, as far as I understand him, embraced the theory of eternity for the same reason that he thought Aristotle had embraced it: namely, it conforms to the nature of what exists, i.e., it conforms to our empirical observation of the continuous motion of the heavens. ²⁷

ha-De'ot, ed., G. Vajda (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1973) 31, 1. 1; in Hasdai Crescas, *Or Adonay*, IIIA, 1, 5 (Ferrara: Abraham Usque, 1555) 24viii, 1. 16; in Joseph Solomon Delmedigo, *Noblot Hokma* (Basel: Samuel Ashkenazi, 1631) 97b, 1. 20; and in modern times in Franz Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, Introduction (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971) 2. 111. Another liturgical text cited by Abulafia (*loc. cit.*) as indicating the notion of eternal creation is "today is the birth of the world" (Additional Service, New Year, after sounding of ram's horn).

²⁴ Commentary on the *Guide*, Introduction, ed., J. Goldenthal (Vienna: K. K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1852) 1b, 1. 18. Cf. "Epistle on *Shi'ur Qomā*," ed. A. Altmann, in *Studies* (cited above, n. 14) 259, 1. 128 (trans., pp. 276–77), where Narboni—like Abulafia (see preceding note)—cites the prayer, "today is the birth of the world." On the compatibility of creation and eternity in the medieval Hebrew philosophic literature, cf. also, e.g., the references to Albalag, Crescas, and Delmedigo in the preceding note. A recent study of the theory of eternal creation in late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages is S. Feldman, "The Theory of Eternal Creation in Hasdai Crescas and Some of His Predecessors," *Viator* 11 (1980) 289–320. Feldman, however, does not consider the possibility that Maimonides held the theory (cf. above, n. 21).

²⁵ E.g., *Guide*, 1.71, p. 180; 2. Introduction, 241; 2.15–16; 2.17, p. 298; 2.19, pp. 307–8; 2.22, p. 320; 2.23, p. 322; 2.25, pp. 328, 330. On Maimonides' general skepticism, see Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in Twersky, ed., *Studies* (cited above, n. 6) 82–109.

²⁶ *Guide*, 2. Introduction, 240; 2.15, pp. 289–92; 2.19, pp. 307–8.

²⁷ "For [Aristotle's] opinion [concerning eternity] is nearer to correctness than the opinions of those who disagree with him insofar as inferences are made from the nature of what exists [Arabic: *min tabi'at al-wujūd*] (*Guide*, 2.15, p. 292; cf. 3.17, p. 468). "That which exists [*al-wujūd*] does not conform to the various opinions, but rather the correct opinions conform to that which exists" (*ibid.*, 1.71, p. 179). Similarly, Maimonides remarks that his proofs for the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God—which presuppose the eternity of the world (see following note)—are "derived from the nature of existence [*min tabi'at al-wujūd*] that can be perceived and that is not denied except with a view to safeguarding certain opinions" (*ibid.*, 182). Cf. Maimonides' summation of the arguments for creation after nonexistence put forward by the Kalam: "they have abolished the nature of what exists [*tabi'at al-wujūd*] and have altered the original disposition of the heavens and the earth by thinking that by means of these

We turn now to our summary of the evidence on behalf of Maimonides' advocacy of the Aristotelian theory of eternity.

To begin with, Maimonides states in *Guide*, 1.71, that in his proofs for the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God (in 2.1–2), and in his discussion of these subjects in his works on rabbinic law (e.g., *Mišne Tora*, Yēšode ha-Tora, 1), he always presupposes the *eternity of the World* in order “not to cause the true opinion . . . to be supported by a foundation [viz., the doctrine of creation after nonexistence] that everyone can shake and wish to destroy, while other men think that it has never been constructed,”²⁸ Maimonides, it is true, claims that his presupposition of the eternity of the world is merely methodological, and does not imply his commitment to it.²⁹ Nevertheless, an examination of Maimonides' proofs in *Guide*, 2.1–2, testifies that *our knowledge of God* is based on the Aristotelian premise of eternity.³⁰ More significantly, in my opinion, an examination of Maimonides' statements in his great Code, the *Mišne Tora*, reveals that the Aristotelian premise of eternity is indeed *required* for the fulfillment of the divine *commandments* to know God and to know that he is one,³¹ and that Abraham our father had in fact come to know God on the basis of the Aristotelian premise of eternity.³²

Again, an examination of Maimonides' comments in the *Guide* on the biblical narrative of creation shows that for him the Hebrew word *bara'*

premises it would be demonstrated that the world was created in time . . . [and thus they] have destroyed for us the demonstrations of the existence and oneness of the Deity and of the negation of His corporeality, for [these] demonstrations . . . can only be taken from the permanent nature of what exists [*min tabi'at al-wujūd*], a nature which can be seen and apprehended by the senses and the intellect” (ibid., 1.76, pp. 230–31; cf. 1.71, pp. 179–81). In sum, science has no choice but to base itself on “that which exists,” even when dealing with questions which apparently cannot be absolutely decided on that basis.

²⁸ *Guide*, 1.71, p. 182.

²⁹ Ibid., Cf. also 1.76, p. 231; 2. Introduction, 235, 239.

³⁰ I.e., on premise 26 (“time and motion are eternal, perpetual, and existing *in actu*”), *Guide*, 2. Introduction, 239–40. Not only does this premise figure critically in Maimonides' proofs, but apparently there can be no such proofs without them, “for [these] demonstrations . . . can only be taken from the permanent nature of what exists” (see above, n. 27).

³¹ See *Book of Knowledge* (ET, M. Hyamson [Jerusalem: Boys Town, 1962]), Yēšode ha-Tora 1:1–7, where God's existence (1:5) and unity and incorporeality (1:7) are inferred from the empirical observation that “the [diurnal] sphere spins continuously”; that this phrase is understood by Maimonides as denoting the Aristotelian theory of eternity is clear from Maimonides' remarks in *Guide*, 2.2, p. 252. Cf. my “The Question of the Incorporeality of God in Maimonides, Rabad, Crescas, and Spinoza” (in Hebrew), in S. Heller Wilensky, et al., ed., *Tēpisat ha-Elohut bē-Maḥšaba ha-Yēhudit* (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1981). Cf. also Strauss, “Notes on Maimonides' Book of Knowledge,” in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion presented to Gershom G. Scholem* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 269–72; and Twersky, *Introduction* (cited above, n. 14) 448 n. 224.

³² *Book of Knowledge*, 'Akum 1:3, where Abraham (in the spirit of Yēšode ha-Tora 1:7; cf. preceding note) is portrayed as having inferred the existence of God from the continuous spinning of the diurnal sphere.

("created") in the first verse of Genesis does not designate coming into being *after* nonexistence (Arabic: *ba'd al-'adam*), but rather coming into being *from* nonexistence (Arabic: *min al-'adam*), which seems to mean that it designates the continuous ontic dependence of creation on Creator, or if you will, the continuous information of matter by the Form of the world.³³ Similarly, according to Maimonides, the first word in Genesis, *bē-rešit* ("In the beginning"), does not refer to a *temporal* beginning, but rather to a "principle" (Arabic: *mabda'*) in the philosophic sense of the Greek *archē*.³⁴ Moreover, the Arabic word *al-bāri'* ("Creator") occurs in the *Guide* more than twenty times in contexts which are at least compatible with the Aristotelian theory of eternity, but *not even once* in a context suggesting the doctrine of creation after nonexistence.³⁵

Again, Maimonides reports in *Guide*, 2.28, that "many adherents of our Law" attributed to King Solomon the belief in the eternity of the world. Although Maimonides makes a point of protesting that Solomon could not have harbored such a belief, his explication of the scriptural verses in question gives the distinct impression that Solomon did indeed hold the Aristotelian position.³⁶

³³ *Guide*, 2.30, p. 358; 3.10, p. 438. Cf. above, n. 9. And see Klein-Braslavy, *Peruś ha-Rambam*, 81–82, 86–87.

³⁴ *Guide*, 2.30, pp. 348–49. Cf. Klein-Braslavy, *Peruś ha-Rambam*, 114–31. And cf. Hasdai Crescas's interpretation in Wolfson, *Crescas's Critique of Aristotle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1929) 290–91, 664 nn. 34–35.

³⁵ See Abraham Nuriel, "The Question of a Primordial or Created World in the Philosophy of Maimonides" (in Hebrew), *Tarbiẓ* 33 (1964) 372–87; cf. I. Ravitsky's response, *ibid.*, 35 (1966) 333–48. The word *al-bāri'* occurs in *Guide*, 1.10, p. 36; 1.15, p. 41; 1.22, p. 52; 1.51, p. 113; 1.53 (twice), pp. 119, 122; 1.56, p. 130; 1.68, p. 165 (overlooked by Nuriel); 1.69 (four times), pp. 169–70; 2.11, p. 274; 2.12, p. 279; 2.14, p. 288 (in explicit reference to the Aristotelian theory of eternity); 2.19, p. 302 (in explicit reference to the Aristotelian theory of eternity); 2.20, p. 313 (in explicit reference to the Aristotelian theory of eternity); 3.12, p. 446 (cf. p. 443, l. 3, where the underlying Arabic is *bāri'hu*); 3.13 (twice), pp. 448, 451. Maimonides, it may be remarked further, shows similar care with regard to the use of the Hebrew *bore'* ("Creator") in the *Book of Knowledge*. Strauss has called attention to Maimonides' avoidance of the Hebrew root *br'* in *Yēšode ha-Tora* 1 ("Notes" [cited above, n. 31] 272). The first text in which a derivative of this root is predicated of God is *Yēšode ha-Tora* 2:3, where the verb *bara'* is used in a context identical to that of *al-bāri'* in *Guide*, 2.11.

³⁶ Thus, Maimonides states (p.334) that "people thought" that Solomon's words, "And the earth abideth forever [*l'ē'olam*]" (Eccl 1:4), indicate the eternity *a parte ante* of the world. However, he goes on to explain that "the word *'olam* does not signify [only] eternity *a parte post* unless it is conjoined with the word *'ad*"; but in the verse in question *'olam* is *not* conjoined with *'ad* (p. 335). It seems to be implied, therefore, that these words of Solomon's—as well as similar texts where *'olam* appears without *'ad* (e.g., Eccl 3:4, cited on pp. 335–36; but perhaps Gen 21:33, cf. references on p. 645)—do indeed indicate the eternity *a parte ante* of the world.

Maimonides' exegeses in *Guide*, 2.28, are followed closely by Spinoza in *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, 6 (trans. R. H. M. Elwes; New York: Dover, 1951) 96 (on Ps 148:6, Jer 31:35, and esp. on Eccl 1:1–9 and 3:14). On Eccl 1:9, cf. also Maimonides' *Eight Chapters*, 8 (Gorfinkle, 90; Weiss-Butterworth, 87; cited above, n. 15).

Again, Maimonides hints that three distinguished rabbis held the theory of eternity. On the basis of a dictum in the *Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer*, Maimonides suggests in *Guide*, 2.26, that the tanna Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus held that the "throne of glory" is the heavens (i.e., the celestial spheres or, perhaps more precisely, the diurnal sphere), and that it is eternal *a parte ante*.³⁷ On the basis of dicta of the amoraim Rabbi Abbahu and Rabbi Judah ben Simon, Maimonides suggest in *Guide*, 2.30, that they held the eternity *a parte ante* of time.³⁸

Finally, what on the face of it appears to be fundamentally objectionable to Maimonides in the Aristotelian theory of eternity is that it denies God's will and affirms necessity.³⁹ Inspection of the relevant texts, however, shows that Maimonides does speak of God's "volition" (Arabic: *irāda*) in his presentation of Aristotle's theory of eternity.⁴⁰ Besides, Maimonides' teaching that God's will, wisdom, and essence are one and inscrutable effectively strips the concept of God's will of any cognitive meaning.⁴¹ Similarly, Maimonides claims that as opposed to Aristotle who had held that all things exist by divine necessity, he holds that they exist by divine *purpose*.⁴² However, he completely neutralizes this claim when he subsequently pronounces that the word "purpose" is used equivocally when applied to the purposes of men and of God.⁴³ Moreover, in several critical texts Maimonides openly advances the doctrine of divine necessity.⁴⁴ It is noteworthy in this connection that in explaining Aristotle's notion of the necessary derivation of the world from

³⁷ See also *Guide*, 1.9 and 70. Note the different interpretations of Lam 5:19 in 1.9 (p. 35; cf. 1.10, p. 37) and in 2.26 (p. 331); in this verse *'olam* appears without *'ad* (see preceding note), and so its meaning is not restricted to eternity *a parte post*. In 3.2 (p. 422; on Ezek 1:26), the throne of glory has been understood by some medieval and modern commentators as symbolizing the convexity of the diurnal sphere. On the throne of glory in the *Guide*, see Klein-Braslavy, *Peruṣ ha-Rambam*, 89, 132; Aviezer Ravitzky, *The Thought of R. Zerachia b. Isaac b. Shealtiel Hen & the Maimonidean-Tibbonian Philosophy in the 13th Century* (in Hebrew) (Doctoral diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977) 258–63, cf. 236 n. 1; Wolfson, "Hallevi and Maimonides on Prophecy," *JCR* 33 (1942/3) 78–79 (reprinted in his *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, ed. I. Twersky and G. H. Williams [Cambridge: Harvard University, 1977] 2. 115–16); idem, *Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1979) 113–20. Cf. G. Vajda, *Recherches sur la philosophie et la kabbale dans la pensée juive du Moyen Age* (Paris: Mouton, 1962) 412, s.v. "Trône (de Gloire)"; M. Idel, "A Fragment of Asher ben Meshulam of Lunel's Philosophical Writings" (in Hebrew), *Kiryat Sefer* 50 (1975) 150, 152–53.

³⁸ Cf. Klein-Braslavy, *Peruṣ ha-Rambam*, 228–45.

³⁹ See *Guide*, 2.19–21.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.13, p. 284, lines 30–31 ("all that exists has been brought into existence . . . by God through his volition").

⁴¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 1.53, p. 122; 1.69, p. 170; 2.18, p. 302; 3.13, p. 456.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2.19, p. 303; 2.21, pp. 316–17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3.20, p. 483; cf. 2.18, p. 301; 2.21, p. 315.

⁴⁴ E.g., "the works of the Deity . . . are of necessity permanently established as they are, for there is no possibility of something calling for a change in them" (*ibid.*, 2.28, p. 335; note the exegesis of Deut 32:4 on p. 336, and cf. 1.16, p. 42, and 3.25, p. 506). Cf. below, n. 46.

God, Maimonides writes in *Guide*, 2.20, that "this necessity is somewhat like the necessity of the derivation of an intellectum from an intellect,"⁴⁵ words which recall his own position put forth in 1.68, concerning the unity of intellect and intellectum in God.⁴⁶ In fine, if both Aristotle and Maimonides maintain the doctrine of divine necessity, and if both also speak about divine will, then on the allegedly crucial question of divine necessity and divine will there is no evident difference between Aristotle and Maimonides. What had been thought to be Maimonides' fundamental objection to Aristotle's theory of eternity now appears to be no objection at all.

Much more could be said in support of the proposition that Maimonides held the Aristotelian theory of the eternity of the world, but this is not the place to elaborate on the problem, and in any case the preceding summary of the evidence suffices for our purposes.⁴⁷ Having indicated the grounds for assigning to Maimonides the third opinion on creation, let us now examine the grounds for assigning to him the third opinion on prophecy.

At the outset, we may state that Maimonides' position on prophecy is not nearly as problematic as his position on creation. Surely he did not hold the opinion of "the vulgar" (1). It is imaginable, however, that despite his explicit affirmation of the opinion of "the Law" (3), he really held the opinion of "the philosophers" (2). The view that Maimonides esoterically held the opinion of "the philosophers" has been entertained by some medieval and modern commentators, and—as we have seen—it is left open as a possibility by Kaplan.⁴⁸ However, there does not seem to me to be any good reason to reject Maimonides' explicit affirmation of the opinion of "the Law." For as Kaplan's highly sensitive reading of Maimonides' statements on prophecy in *Guide*, 2.32, shows conclusively,⁴⁹ there is no essential distinction between the theory of prophecy of "the philosophers" (2) and that of "the Law" (3). Now if there is no essential distinction between 2 and 3, then there would seem to be no good reason to insist that Maimonides held 2 instead of 3. The proviso mentioned in Maimonides' presentation of 3 which is not found in his presentation of 2, viz., that God can miraculously

⁴⁵ Pp. 313–314.

⁴⁶ Cf. "His knowledge of things is not derived from them. . . . On the contrary, the things . . . follow upon His knowledge, which preceded and established them as they are. . . . He also knows the totality of what necessarily derives from all His acts" (3.21, p. 485.)

⁴⁷ As Klein-Braslavy remarks, the very existence of ambiguities in Maimonides' position on creation is itself evidence that he held the theory of eternity: "If Maimonides had been of the opinion that the world was created [after nonexistence], he would have said it . . . explicitly and unequivocally, for the opinion of creation [after nonexistence] is the view acceptable to the vulgar man" (*Peruṣ ha-Rambam*, 256). If Maimonides' ambiguities were intended to conceal something from the vulgar, it surely was not the doctrine of the creation of the world after absolute nonexistence!

⁴⁸ See above, n. 13. Regarding the medievals, see Kaplan, "Maimonides and the Miraculous Element," 240.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 247–48.

prevent prophecy, has—as Kaplan explains—nothing whatsoever to do with the theory of prophecy proper. The point of the proviso is simply that according to the Law miracles *can* happen (even though they may be interpreted as purely natural phenomena), and thus just as God (to use Maimonides' own examples) miraculously prevented King Jeroboam from moving his hand (1 Kgs 13:4), and just as he miraculously prevented the soldiers of the King of Aram's army from seeing (2 Kgs 6:18), so too he can miraculously prevent a person naturally fit to prophesy from prophesying.⁵⁰ The question of just what Maimonides had in mind by his curious reference to the miracle of preventing prophecy need not detain us here.⁵¹ What is important is only that according to Maimonides the Law has a notion of miracle and the philosophers do not, and that Maimonides—for reasons which have nothing to do with his epistemology of prophecy—accepts the notion of miracle (even if he interprets all miracles as natural phenomena).⁵²

⁵⁰ "[W]ould anyone argue," asks Kaplan rhetorically, "that it is a fundamental principle of [the Law's] theory of vision that God can miraculously blind a person or that it is a fundamental principle of [the Law's] physiology that God can paralyze a person's arm?" (ibid., 248).

⁵¹ See ibid., 238–48, 252–53. However, *pace* Kaplan (237–38 n. 18), I suspect that Yēsode ha-Tora 7:5 *does* underlie Maimonides' reference to the miraculous prevention of prophecy (cf. Yēsode ha-Tora 7:5 with the problematic phrase in *Guide*, 2.32, discussed by Kaplan on 246–47 n. 38). See following note.

⁵² It may be argued that since according to Maimonides *all* miracles (including of course those recorded in 1 Kgs 13:4 and 2 Kings 6:18) are natural phenomena (see above, n. 15), the provision about the miracle in the opinion of "the Law" (3) on prophecy is wholly meaningless, and that consequently there is *absolutely* (i.e., not only essentially) no distinction between the opinion of "the philosophers" (2) and that of "the Law" on prophecy. However, it seems to me that it is a mistake to equate the naturalistic interpretation of miracles with the denial of all meaning to the notion of miracle, just as it is a mistake to conclude that a thoroughgoing physical determinist can have no use for terms such as "will," "accident," or "luck." In point of fact, Maimonides himself seems to have been a thoroughgoing physical determinist (see Pines, "Notes on Maimonides' Views concerning Human Will," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 6 [1960] 195–98; and Altmann, "The Religion of the Thinkers," in S. D. Goitein, ed., *Religion in a Religious Age* [Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974] 35–45), and there are analogies and connections between his treatment of will, accident, and luck, and his treatment of miracle (cf., e.g., *Guide*, 2.48). Altmann ("The Religion of the Thinkers," 41) has called attention to the "striking parallel" between Maimonides' comments in *Guide*, 2.32, concerning the miraculous prevention of prophecy, and his comments in *Eight Chapters*, 8 (Gorfinkle, 95–96; Weiss-Butterworth, 90–91; cited above, nn. 15, 36) concerning the miraculous prevention of human choice. While in *Guide*, 2.32, Maimonides likens the prevention of prophecy to the prevention of motion from Jeroboam's hand and the prevention of sight from the King of Aram's soldiers, in the *Eight Chapters* he had likened the prevention of prophecy to the prevention of motion from Jeroboam's hand and the prevention of sight from the Sodomites (Gen 19:11). It is most likely that the case of both the miraculous prevention of human choice and the miraculous prevention of prophecy (which itself may be seen as an instance of the miraculous prevention of human choice), Maimonides had in mind a certain phenomenon (probably psychological, but possibly physical or political) which prevents human beings from acting in accordance with their natural abilities. Regarding the prevention of human choice, see also *Book of Knowledge*, Tēsuba 6:3. On the relationship between Maimonides' theory of human choice and his statement that God may miraculously

In affirming that there is no essential distinction between the theory of prophecy of "the philosophers" (2) and that of "the Law" (3), we are in effect pointing to a significant parallel between 2 and 3 in cosmogony and 2 and 3 in prophetology. For with regard to the opinions on cosmogony, Maimonides tells us explicitly that in essence there is "no difference" between the opinion of "the philosophers" (2) and that of Aristotle (3), since both entail the belief in eternity *a parte ante*,⁵³ or—to put it another way—both preclude the doctrine of temporal creation after nonexistence, and both cohere with that of eternal creation, i.e., with the doctrine that "creation" refers to the ontic or causal dependence of the world upon God.⁵⁴ We have already observed (see above, section IV) that in both the cosmogony and prophetology discussions, 3 is presented as being just like 2 but with one exception. It now appears that we may add that in both cases this one exception is not essential to the issue at hand. Just as with regard to cosmogony the essential choice is between the unscientific opinion of "creation after nonexistence" (1) and the scientific opinion of eternal creation (2, 3), so with regard to prophetology the essential choice is between the unscientific opinion of prophecy as a supernatural phenomenon (1) and the scientific opinion of prophecy as a natural phenomenon (2, 3). Moreover, it seems that both with regard to cosmogony and prophetology Maimonides chose 3 over 2 for reasons which have to do with his naturalistic theory of miracles,⁵⁵ or more generally with his belief (which is neither part of his doctrine of creation proper nor part of his doctrine of prophecy proper, but which of course influences both these doctrines) that *all* phenomena are to be understood in accordance with "the nature of what exists."⁵⁶

prevent prophecy, cf. also Eliezar Goldman, "Maimonides' View of Prophecy" (in Hebrew), in *Samuel K. Mirsky Memorial Volume* (New York: Yeshiva University, 1970) 203–10. According to Goldman's analysis of Maimonides, "the divine will which is spoken of in connection with prophecy is none other than the choice of the prophet" (210), and similarly the divine will which can prevent prophecy is none other than "human choice, whose source is the preeternal divine will" (208–9).

⁵³ *Guide*, 2.13, p. 285.

⁵⁴ Maimonides' statement (*ibid.*, 283) that according to the opinion of "the philosophers" (2), "there exists a certain matter that is eternal . . . and that [God] does not exist without it, nor it . . . without Him [cf. 1.9, p. 35, on Lam 5:19; cf. above, n. 37] . . . [but that this matter does not have] the same rank in what exists as He . . . but He is the cause of its existence," holds good also according to the Aristotelian opinion (3).

⁵⁵ Regarding cosmogony, the only "argument" mentioned by Maimonides in favor of 2 as opposed to 3 is that according to 2 "all the [biblical] miracles [taken literally] become possible" (*Guide*, 2.25, pp. 329–30); but given Maimonides' views on the "fixed natural order" (cf. Kaplan's remarks cited above, n. 19), it seems that this is really an argument *against* 2! Davidson, to be sure, thinks otherwise (see "Maimonides' Secret Position," 20–22); cf. above, n. 21. Similarly with regard to prophetology, it is the theory of miracles (however it is to be understood) which separates the otherwise identical 2 and 3.

⁵⁶ See above, n. 27.

VI

In what has preceded, I have tried to present the basic arguments for the correspondence 1:1, 2:2, 3:3, as the solution to the cosmogony-prophetology puzzle of *Guide*, 2.13 and 32. Admittedly, solutions to the puzzles of the *Guide* are never apodictic. It can always be argued that wrong pieces have been crassly forced into critical places in the puzzle, and that the pretty picture intended by Maimonides has been distorted out of recognition. However, I believe that a comparison of the three suggested solutions will show that 1:1, 2:2, 3:3 is not less likely than 1:3, 2:1, 3:2, or 1:1, 2:3, 3:2; and even if it is concluded that all three are equally likely, then I believe the nod should be given to 1:1, 2:2, 3:3, simply because it is, after all, the obvious correspondence, and unless there are reasons to think otherwise it may be supposed that this is the correspondence that Maimonides had in mind.

In any case, my purpose in writing down the foregoing comments on the cosmogony-prophetology puzzle was simply to contribute to the current discussion of the puzzle by presenting a third approach for the consideration of students of the *Guide*. I do not delude myself that I have solved the puzzle to everyone's satisfaction, and I know that even those readers who will agree with me about the solution may disagree with me about the reasons I have put forth in its defense, and perhaps they will find even better reasons.