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AJS Review, Vol. 6. (1981), pp. 87-123.

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SAMUEL IBN TIBBON AND THE ESOTERIC CHARACTER OF THE *GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED*

by

AVIEZER RAVITZKY

I

Samuel ben Judah Ibn Tibbon, translator of the *Guide of the Perplexed* and of other treatises of Maimonides,¹ is in many ways also the first interpreter of Maimonides' philosophic teaching. The orientation of his interpretation of Maimonides' philosophy is already seen in his early writings²—epistles, critical notes appended to his translations of *the Guide*, a philosophic glossary and the introductions to his translations. His interpretation was extensively developed, however, in his later and more comprehensive

1. Ibn Tibbon translated the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides' introductions to Pereq Heleq and to 'Avot, Maimonides' Commentary on 'Avot, the *Epistle to Yemen* and probably also the *Epistle on Resurrection* (cf. D. Z. Baneth, "Judah Alḥarizi and the Chain of Translations of the *Epistle on Resurrection*" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 11 [1940]: 260–70, and the literature mentioned therein). The translation of Maimonides' epistle to Joseph ben Judah attributed to Ibn Tibbon is very doubtful. (See Baneth's introduction to his edition of the epistles of Maimonides [Jerusalem, 1946], p. 47.) Ibn Tibbon also translated Aristotle's *Meteorology* (based on Biṭriq's Arabic version), as well as Averroes' *Treatises on the Intellect*. Other translations attributed to Ibn Tibbon are very doubtful. See Moritz Steinschneider, *Catalogus . . . Bodleiana* (Berlin, 1852), pp. 2481–94; idem, *Die hebraeischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1893), index.

2. We shall comment below on Ibn Tibbon's independent writings when appropriate.

treatises—the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*³ and *Ma'amar yiqqavu ha-mayim*.⁴ These treatises are explicitly devoted to philosophic exegesis of biblical verses, but are deeply impregnated with the proper interpretation of Maimonides' philosophy and with its problematics. Samuel Ibn Tibbon's writing had a decisive influence on Maimonidean thinkers throughout the thirteenth century, among whom may be numbered the authors of two comprehensive commentaries on the *Guide*, Moses ben Solomon of Salerno,⁵ and Zerahiah ben Shealtiel Hen.⁶

3. Hereafter: *CE*. The citations will refer to MS Parma 2182. I. Sonne attributed to Ibn Tibbon a commentary on Proverbs, since he found in manuscript a comment by Ibn Tibbon on Proverbs as "a book we are about to elucidate." (See Isaiah Sonne, "Ibn Tibbon's Epistle to Maimonides" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 10 [1939]: 150.) However, the comment he found was taken from *CE*, where the discussion concerned some verses of Proverbs. S. Salfeld believed Ibn Tibbon wrote a commentary to the Song of Songs, after having found in Moses Ibn Tibbon's commentary on the Song of Songs a comment about his father's exegesis of some verses of the book. (See Siegmund Salfeld, *Das Hohelied Salomo's bei den juedischen Erklaerern des Mittelalters* [Berlin, 1879], pp. 85–86.) Moses' comments, however, refer to some problems in the Song of Songs discussed by his father in *CE*. See fols. 11r, 25r, 50r, 76r, 94r, 123v–124r. See also A. S. Halkin, "Ibn Aknin's Commentary on the Song of Songs," *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume*, 2 vols. (New York, 1950), English sec., p. 397, n. 44.

4. Hereafter: *MYH*. Page numbers refer to the edition of M. L. Bisseliches (Pressburg, 1837). While writing *MYH*, Ibn Tibbon began to write another book entitled *Ner ha-hofes*, which was to deal with the esoteric interpretation of various verses of the Torah. (See *MYH*, pp. 9, 14, 18, 24, 41, 59, 70, 92, 103, 114, 160, 175.) This book is not extant and we have no way of knowing whether the book went further than its first pages. The "Commentary on the Views of our Master Moses on the Account of Creation" (MS Bodl. Hunt. 46) is not in line with Samuel Ibn Tibbon's views on a number of matters. It is possible that it was written by his son, Moses. Renan's conjecture that Ibn Tibbon wrote a complete commentary on the Bible is not correct. See Ernest Renan, *Les Écrivains juifs français du XIVe siècle* (Paris 1869), p. 340.

5. This commentary exists only in manuscript. The following references will be to MS Munich 370. See G. B. Sermonetta, "The Comments of Moses ben Solomon of Salerno and of Nicholas of Giovenazzo to the *Guide of the Perplexed*," *Iyyun* 20 (1970): 212–40.

6. This commentary is extant only in manuscript. The following references will be to MS Cambridge Add. 1235. On Ibn Tibbon's influence on the commentaries of Moses of Salerno and Zerahiah Hen, see Aviezer Ravitzky, "The Possibility of Existence and its Accidentality in Thirteenth Century Maimonidean Interpretation" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 2–3 (1978–1979): 67–97; idem, "The Hypostasis of Divine Wisdom in Thirteenth Century Jewish Thought in Italy," *Italia* 4 (1981); idem, "The Thought of Zerahiah ben Isaac ben Shealtiel Hen and Maimonidean-Tibbonian Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1978). Ibn Tibbon was cited innumerable times in the commentary of Moses of Salerno, and he is the only Jewish philosopher with the exception of Maimonides who is mentioned in the commentary of Zerahiah Hen. Dr. M. S. Nehoray recently called my attention to "Solomon ben Judah Nasi and His Commentary on the *Guide*" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1979) in which he also mentions only Ibn Tibbon and his son-in-law Anatoli. (See Nehoray, "Solomon Nasi," pp. 11, 16. The commentary was written in the fourteenth century.)

Ibn Tibbon's treatises were composed prior to the great wave of controversy over the Maimonidean writings, which took place in the early thirties of the thirteenth century; yet his books evince the impact which the early waves of the anti-Maimonidean polemic already had.⁷ Ibn Tibbon's anomalous stand against the controversy over the teaching of Maimonides in the Jewish communities is worthy of note and is an appropriate beginning for our discussion.

In the introduction to his *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, Ibn Tibbon describes how the communities split into an anti-Maimonidean majority and a pro-Maimonidean minority, where "many of our generation" find what Maimonides said distasteful and only the chosen few—"one in a city, two in a family"—react positively to his teaching.⁸ However, in contradistinction to the usual approach of the pro-Maimonideans, who tried to deny or reject accusations that Maimonides held daring views with far-reaching implications from a religious point of view, Ibn Tibbon chooses to emphasize, even in this connection, that Maimonides' words indeed conceal a daring and esoteric tendency. Ibn Tibbon even declares that the few who defend Maimonides' teaching do so because they do not fully understand its true intentions. Had they truly understood the hidden teaching of Maimonides, they would for the most part have also joined the camp of those who deride him:

For I have seen what they have done with the light which the true sage, the great rabbi, our master and teacher, Moses, servant of the Lord, had disseminated to those who are righteous when he spoke of the way of true wisdom in his *Book of Knowledge* and in his *Commentary on the Mishnah—Pereq Heleq and 'Avot*—as well as in his exalted treatise the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Many of our generation despised what he said in these treatises, and some of them spoke about them and called their light darkness. Those whom the Lord

7. The scholars of Lunel who were close to Ibn Tibbon were already involved in 1203 in the controversy of Meir ben Todros Halevi Abulafia. Meir Abulafia's first epistle attacking Maimonides was addressed to Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel and to Aaron ben Meshullam. (See *Kitāb al-rasā'il* [Paris, 1871; reprint ed., Jerusalem, 1967], pp. 13–40). Aaron ben Meshullam was the person referred to in the will of Samuel Ibn Tibbon's father as one "in whose love and wisdom you [Samuel] should have confidence." See *Derekh ʿivim*, ed. Hirsch Edelman (London, 1852), p. 6.

8. This description of a social schism does not conform with the assertion that prior to the polemic of R. Solomon ben Abraham of Montpellier only a few opposed Maimonides. Cf. Joseph Sarachek, *Faith and Reason* (Williamsport, Pa., 1935; reprint ed., New York, 1970), p. 71.

graced with a little wisdom and who opened their eyes a little to those words [of Maimonides], who are but one in a city and two in a family, approve of what he said. Yet that happened—by the living God—only after they bent [his words] to some extent to conform with their wishes and with the opinions which had been instilled in their hearts, those in which they believed while growing up. They partly transform what [Maimonides] said so that his words become tolerable to them. Had they, however, fully understood the profound intention of the Master they would have undoubtedly acted just as their [anti-Maimonidean] colleagues mentioned above, and only a very few would have remained [Maimonidean]. You know that the Master spoke about matters which are secrets of the Torah only by way of allusion and, [in summary fashion], by the transmission of chapter headings.⁹

This uncompromising stand, which does not affect graciousness even for rhetorical purposes and does not expect to gain the support of an audience which has not grasped the esoteric teaching of the *Guide*, was taken by Ibn Tibbon before the events which led from excommunication to public burning of Maimonides' philosophic writings. But Ibn Tibbon was not unaware of the danger of attack and criticism which could bring about the suppression of a book. He himself was warned by a colleague to take care that this did not happen to his writings, and, indeed, he explicitly states his apprehension that the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* might be suppressed,¹⁰ were it to be perceived by readers "as contradicting the set opinions to which they have grown accustomed, and this would make them enraged and infuriated."¹¹ At any rate, Ibn Tibbon considered himself as almost unique among the Jewish community in his esoteric reading of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, and he directed his words at those few men¹² of reflection who "know that

9. CE, fols. 7v–8r: עבד מרנא ורבנא משה עבד האלקים החכם האמיתי הרב הגדול מרנא ורבנא משה עבד האלקים וצ"ל בדבריו על דרך החכמה האמיתית בספר המדע ובפרוש משנת חלק ובפירוש אבות ואף כי במאמרו הנכבד מורה הנבוכים, כי רבים מאנשי דורינו מאסו דבריו בהם וקצתם דיברו בהם וקראו שם אורם חשך, ואשר חננם השם מעט חכמה ופקחו עין בדברים ההם מעט, והם אחד מעיר ושנים ממשפחה, יטבו דבריו בעיניהם, וחי השם אחר שיטו קצת אחר רצונם ואחר הדעות שנקבעו בליבונם וגדלו עליהם, ויוציאו קצת הדברים ההם מכוונת אומנם ואו יסכלום. אך לולי ירדו לסוף כוונת הרב בכולם או היו כתבריהם הנזכרים בלא ספק. לא היה נשאר מהם רק מעט מועד. ואתה יודע שלא דיבר הרב בענינים שהם סיתרי תורה רק על דרך רמזים ומסירת ראשי פרקים.

10. CE, fol. 33v. His fear lest his work be suppressed was based on the fact that "its words do not conform to their corrupt opinions which are far removed from the understanding of the secrets of the Torah."

11. CE, fol. 7v: קצתם וירבה אפם שאו יחרה אפם עליהם, שאו יחרה אפם עליהם, שאו יחרה אפם עליהם. Cf. *Guide* 1: 31.

12. "If many of my generation speak against me, it is impossible that not even one or two of them would gain some benefit from me, whether in my generation or in a future generation." CE, fol. 7v.

the Master spoke about matters which are secrets of the Torah only by way of allusion and transmission of chapter-headings.”

Contemporaries of Ibn Tibbon, too, connected his personality with the secrets of the *Guide*. This can already be seen in the writings of central figures in the Maimonidean controversy shortly after Ibn Tibbon's death. When David Qimḥi, the grammarian and exegete, wished to have a scholarly discourse about problems and doubts raised by the *Guide*, problems and doubts which should be dealt with only in oral and not written communication, he complains that “since our brother, the great sage Samuel Ibn Tibbon, has been gathered to join his ancestors, I have found no one to talk about [my problems and doubts].”¹³ Abraham Maimuni, the son of Maimonides, testifies, while defending his father, that Maimonides considered Ibn Tibbon a sage who understood the secrets of his teaching: “Toward the end of his life, he received the epistles of the Father of the Translators, the sage theologian, the distinguished Samuel son of the distinguished Judah Ibn Tibbon. . . . Indeed he was a great and respected sage of great understanding; my righteous father and master . . . told me that [Ibn Tibbon] reached all the way to the depths of the secrets of the treatise *Guide of the Perplexed* as well as the rest of [Maimonides'] writings, and understood his [or: its] intention.”¹⁴ We shall later note which of Samuel Ibn Tibbon's views were already evident while Maimonides was still alive. At any rate, Ibn Tibbon was thought of by Abraham Maimuni, too, in connection with the question of “the secrets of the *Guide*.” And in the other camp, Solomon of Montpellier, leader of the anti-Maimonideans, attacked Ibn Tibbon for his allegorical interpretation of Scripture¹⁵ and described him as one who reveals in public secrets concealed by Maimonides.¹⁶ A few years later there

13. מעת אשר נאסף אל אבותיו אחינו החכם הגדול ר' שמואל אבן תיבון ז"ל לא מצאתי עם מי אדבר בזה. David Kimḥi's letter to Judah Alfakhar, in *Qoveš teshuvot Ha-Rambam ve-iggerotav* (Leipzig, 1859; reprint ed., Jerusalem, 1967), pt. 3, pp. 3b–4a. Cf. Frank Talmage, *David Kimḥi* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), p. 30. This letter was written in 1232, about the time of Ibn Tibbon's death.

14. בסוף ימיו הגיעו אליו כתבי אבי המעתיקים החכם האלקי כבוד ר' שמואל בן החכם כבוד ר' יהודה בן תבון ז"ל. . . . כי חכם גדול וכבוד ומבין היה, והעיד עליו הצדיק אבא מארי זצ"ל כי הוא ירד עד עומק עניני סודות ספר מורה הנבוכים ושאר חיבוריו והבין כוונתו. “The Wars of the Lord,” in *Qoveš teshuvot*, pt. 3, p. 16. These things were written in 1235.

15. Compare the latter attack of Simeon ben Joseph (En Duran) on Anatoli's allegorization of the stories of the Torah (Sarachek, *Faith and Reason*, p. 167). Compare also the protest of Ibn Tibbon's descendants against Abba Mari ha-Yarḥi at the beginning of the fourteenth century: “They said that our exertions stem from hate for the writer of the *Malmad* and Samuel Ibn Tibbon,” Abba Mari Moses ben Joseph ha-Yarḥi, *Minḥat qena'ot* (Pressburg, 1838), p. 170.

16. ושמענו מפי המעתיק אשר גלה כל מה שסכה הרב זצ"ל, שהיה אומר בפי רבים על תורתנו כל הספורים משלים. “And we heard from the trans-”

appeared a scathing critique of Samuel Ibn Tibbon, *Sefer meshiv devarim nekhohim*, by the kabbalist Jacob ben Sheshet who speaks harshly against the esotericism which Ibn Tibbon attributes to Maimonides: "How many evil hints did [Ibn Tibbon] hint there. . . . He intended to say . . . that the Master [Maimonides] deceives with his words which are faithful to the Torah, and that his assertions are directed to the multitude."¹⁷ Here, Ibn Tibbon is not represented as one who reveals what Maimonides conceals but one who invents hidden intentions "to say about clear words . . . which fortify religion and faith [i.e., Maimonides' words], that they were only used to mislead the multitude, but were not truly believed by him."¹⁸ Thus we see that Samuel Ibn Tibbon was perceived by himself as well as by his contemporaries, admirers as well as detractors, not only as the translator of Maimonides, but also as a spokesman par excellence for an esoteric interpretation of the text.¹⁹

What is the nature of this interpretation? How did Ibn Tibbon view himself as distinct from his contemporaries in understanding the intention of Maimonides' teaching? We are concerned here with the first appearance of a question which was to be discussed throughout the Middle Ages, and which constantly appears in modern scholarship devoted to medieval Jewish philosophy.²⁰ The problem of esotericism and exotericism in the *Guide of the Perplexed* arises of course with Maimonides' own pronouncements about

lator who has revealed all that the Master had concealed that he used to say in public about our Torah that all its stories are allegories as well as all the commandments which are customary, and I have heard a vast number of things like that, people ridiculing the words of our rabbis." Letter to Samuel ben Isaac, *Ginzei nistarot* 4 (1878): 11–12.

17. כמה רמזים רעים רמו בכאן [אכן תיבתן] . . . כיון . . . כי הרב [הרמב"ם] מרמה בדבריו המאמינים כמה שכת'. *Meshiv devarim nekhohim*, ed. Georges Vajda (Jerusalem, 1969), chap. 15, ll. 53–55. The bracketed words here and in the citations below are not in the text, nor is the italization in the citations below.

18. לומר בדברים מבוארים ומפורשים . . . ומחזיקים הדת והאמונה, שנאמרו לרמות ההמון, ולא שכן היא אמתו. *Meshiv devarim nekhohim*, chap. 28, ll. 48–50.

19. Also according to the thirteenth century interpreters influenced by Samuel Ibn Tibbon, he is closely connected with the secrets of the *Guide*, their concealment or their revelation. Cf. Moses of Salerno, *Commentary on the Guide*, fol. 269v; Zerahiah Hen, *Commentary on the Guide*, 1:6.

20. Two new articles which exemplify the two lines of interpretation of the *Guide* have appeared recently. For the esoteric approach, see Aryeh Leo Motzkin, "On the Interpretation of Maimonides," *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1978): 39–46. For the opposite view, see Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation," *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 16–40. We dispense with repeating the relevant bibliographical citations referring to both medieval and modern scholarship found in these articles.

deliberate obfuscation, scattering of subject matter, and intended contradictions which he inserted in his book and in his distinction between teachings meant for the multitude and “a demonstrated truth . . . giving satisfaction to a single virtuous man.” That opened the way for a variety of interpretations. One interpreter would assert that Maimonides’ declaration about concealment should be the primary, almost exclusive, key for the profound understanding of the *Guide*, chapter and verse. Another interpreter would see it only as one of the tools to be used in connection with some of the issues covered by the *Guide*. The first perceives Maimonides’ esotericism to be all inclusive, penetrating to the roots of his teachings, its theological foundations not excluded. The second limits Maimonides’ esoteric layer to some specific, but not necessarily central, issues. Those who upheld a radical interpretation of the secrets of the *Guide*, from Joseph Caspi and Moses Narboni in the fourteenth century to Leo Strauss and Shlomo Pines in the twentieth, proposed and developed tools and methods for the decoding of the concealed intentions of the *Guide*. Can we already find the roots of this approach in the writings of Samuel Ibn Tibbon, a few years after the writing of the *Guide*? The assertion that in the thirteenth century—especially in the first half—the *Guide* was studied “unprofessionally,” and that only in the fourteenth century was there systematic study of the *Guide*²¹ does not stand up under examination of the writing of Samuel Ibn Tibbon, his son-in-law Jacob Anatoli and his son Moses Ibn Tibbon, not to speak of the systematic commentaries composed in the second half of the thirteenth century. However, does the attempt to propose a systematic and precise method for the decoding of Maimonides’ far-reaching intentions already appear in the writings of the first translator and interpreter of Maimonides, one whose writings were clearly influential in the generations which followed? Ibn Tibbon taught that “wise men . . . assert something novel which is not in harmony with the belief of the many when their reflections warrant it, and when the belief of the many is beneficial and greatly needed for the stability

21. Cf., e.g., D. J. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy* (Leiden, 1965), p. 34. Generally speaking, the interpretation and work of the Maimonidean scholars of the thirteenth century have not yet gained appropriate scholarly attention. Commentaries on the *Guide* from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are the ones which were printed (the only thirteenth century commentary to be printed was that of Shem Tov Falaquera) and discussed in Maimonidean scholarship, whereas earlier Maimonidean thought has been treated by modern scholarship only in the context of the controversy regarding the writings of Maimonides and philosophy in general. This polemical literature by nature is not concerned with serious textual analysis or profound discussion of philosophical problems.

of the world and for the political order, they will assert their novel teaching in a way which the vulgar will not grasp, but will try as much as they can to conceal it by using riddles, parables and hints, so that only the wise may understand.”²² We propose to examine how this approach of Ibn Tibbon is reflected in his study of the *Guide*.²³

II

The history of the written interpretation of the *Guide of the Perplexed* begins with an epistle concerning Divine Providence addressed by Ibn Tibbon to Maimonides in 1199.²⁴ In this epistle the translator asks about certain contradictions which appear in the *Guide*’s discussion of this problem, and proposes an out and out Aristotelian interpretation of Maimonides’ teaching about “Providence which is consequent upon the intellect” (*Guide* 3:17).

There are two distinct strata in this interpretation. In the first stratum, Divine Providence is identified with the supreme human intellectual attainment, the intellection of God, a degree of intellectual attainment which is essentially connected with the disregard of material afflictions which becomes irrelevant for the intellecting person.²⁵ Divine Providence over the perfect human being is not reflected in external occurrences, but in the negation of the significance of these occurrences on account of “[man’s] ultimate perfection and his consequent immortality.”²⁶ In a second stratum, Providence is treated through the perspective of the Divine Will as reflected in nature, both of the universe and of man. Every natural event is ultimately related to the Supreme Will which brings into being nature’s laws.²⁷ Cor-

22. החכמים . . . יאמרו לפי עיונם דבר חדש שאינו כפי מה שמאמינים ההמון בו, כשהאמונה ההיא טובה וצריכה. מאד להמון ביישוב העולם ובסידור ענייני המדינה, יאמרו הדבר ההוא בענין שלא יבינוהו ההמון כלל, אך ישתדלו להסתירו בד. בכל יכולתם וראמרוהו בחידוד ובמשלים וברמזיות להבינו לחכמים לבד *CE*, fol. 103v.

23. The relationship between this position and the writings of Al-Fārābī, and even more so those of Averroes, call for a separate treatment. See below, n. 106. Here we are concerned with the way it is reflected in the interpretation of the *Guide*.

24. This epistle has been published. See Zvi Diesendruck, “Samuel and Moses Ibn Tibbon on Maimonides’ Theory of Providence,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 11 (1936): 341–66.

25. Cf. *CE*, fol. 57r.

26. Cf. *MYH*, p. 41: “And one of the separated intellects [the active intellect] . . . will purify his intellect from its impurity, which is ignorance and error, and will make him attain perfection to the greatest possible extent: *That is the end of Divine Providence for the human species*.” Cf. also *MYH*, pp. 44, 114.

27. Cf. the comments made by Isaac Abravanel in his commentary to the *Guide* 1: 44 (and also 1: 41) on the interpretations of his precursors.

respondingly, every human action is ultimately related to the Divine Will and Providence from which the human intellect emanates. For the purposes of this paper, we are concerned with the methodology of the interpretation of the text and with the assumptions underlying it in regard to the *Guide's* intentions.

Samuel Ibn Tibbon constructed his interpretation from a detailed examination of various chapters of the *Guide* and called into question those passages which do not accord with this interpretation. He was especially concerned with certain things said in the *Guide* 3:51, from which it would appear that there is an external, miraculous Providence ("by way of sign and miracle") which protects the one who intellects *in actu* from catastrophe—as long as he does not cease to intellect his intellectum (only when "he abandons Him . . . and is thus separated from God, does he become in consequence of this a target for every evil that may happen to befall him"). Ibn Tibbon paid specific attention to this passage because it contradicts both strata of his interpretation, but he noted further difficulties.²⁸ Ibn Tibbon's comments which accompany his analysis reveal his general approach toward the nature of the contradictions in the *Guide*: The interpreter need not be troubled by contradictions when one assertion is consistent with the "philosophic view" whereas the other is completely satisfactory to "men of religion" (or "men of religion of our time").²⁹ Such contradictions are to be expected, and the worthy reader will know the reason for them and the direction they tend to, and he will be able to distinguish between those "said truly" and those "said for purposes of concealment." The difficulty lies elsewhere, when the text appears to support a middle position between the philosophic view³⁰ and the common religious view, a position which is consistent with neither of the two adversaries. For example: Ibn Tibbon will not be in any quandary when one Maimonidean passage appears to support belief in corporeal rewards for the righteous while another asserts the philo-

28. For example, a contradiction between a passage in the *Guide* 3: 17 and the *Guide* 2: 48 and chap. 8 of the *Eight Chapters* (see the edition of Diesendruck, p. 357). Maimonides distinguished in the *Guide* 3: 17 between a natural disaster such as "the foundering of a ship . . . and the falling down of a roof, . . . [which] are due to pure chance" and the human activity of going by ship, which occurs "by divine will." Ibn Tibbon rejected this distinction in his epistle relying on the Maimonidean text itself.

29. See Diesendruck, "Samuel and Moses Ibn Tibbon," pp. 358–61.

30. Maimonides advances his proposal for the solution of the problem of providence in the *Guide* 3: 51 as a solution which would satisfy the philosopher's doubts about the existence of providence over individuals.

sophic view according to which Divine Providence is equal to the level of intellectual attainment.³¹ When the text, however, appears to support a synthesis—external miraculous Providence over the intelligent (3:51)—a synthesis which combines one element of the common religious faith (external miraculous Providence) and one philosophic element (Providence as a function of intellectual attainment), the attentive reader is in a quandary. It is clear that this approach is in fact a universal method for the interpretation of the *Guide*, and is not limited to this question. Ibn Tibbon relates that he found in the *Guide* characteristic contradictions in regard to several subjects, contradictions between the consistent philosophic view and the traditional view of the “men of religion,” but he was always able to distinguish between what was said “truly” and what was said “in order to hide and to conceal”³² alone.³³ The contradiction which appears in the *Guide* 3:51,

31. Cf. Davidson, “Maimonides’ Secret Position,” n. 7a.

32. המאמרים המסתתרים הנאמרים בזולתו מן העניינים ובשמירה יסתור קצתם לקצתם כשיעורינו כמו שיתכן, אך כלם בענין שיכול המעיין בהם להכיר מה שיתחייב שיוכר ויתקיים מהם והם אשר נאמרו על האמת ואשר מהם נאמרו לצורך ההסתר פן יתיישב גלוי הבאור במה שלא יתכן לבאר בו . . . אבל העיין הנפלא אשר בפנ”א לא ראיתו נאות באחד משני המינים: לא היותו מן המאמרים שיקימו דעות בשום פנים כפי מה שיוכן ממנו [וגם] לא אראנו עוד ראוי להסתר . . . ואמרי בו כי הוא אינו ראוי להסתר ולהעלם לפי שהוא כמו שאמרתי לא יאותו בו בעלי הדת שבדורנו זה . . . לסכלם באמתות כלם (“His concealed assertions referring to other matters and to Providence . . . contradict each other when properly considered, but they are all done in such a way that the reader can know what should be known and established as true. *These are said in truth*, while others are *said for the purpose of concealment*, lest an explanation be improperly revealed. . . . But the amazing discussion in 3: 51 cannot be properly attributed by me to either of these two categories: it does not seem to belong among those assertions *establishing [true] opinions* any way you look at it. Nor do I believe it appropriate to *concealment* [to be used for concealing true opinion]. . . . I say that it does not properly conceal and hide since, as I have said, it does not conform to the views of the men of religion in our time . . . because of their ignorance of all truths”) (Diesendruck, “Moses and Samuel Ibn Tibbon,” pp. 361–62). On concealment from “the men of religion,” see also Zerahiah Hen, *Commentary on Job* in Israel Schwarz, *Tiqvat ’enosh* (Berlin, 1862; reprint ed., Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 177–78. See also *MYH*, p. 62: “He [the writer of the Psalms] as well as others used [the following method] in all secrets of the Torah and of faith, . . . [namely], that when they write about a certain subject, they write in *most places* according to *the needs of the multitude* . . . whereas in *one place* or . . . in a few places they allude to the truth regarding that subject.” See below concerning the continuity of esoteric writing from the Bible to the *Guide*. The great similarity between what is asserted in these citations and the views advanced by Leo Strauss in his interpretation of the *Guide* is self-evident. Cf. Leo Strauss, “The Literary Character of the *Guide of the Perplexed*,” in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill., 1952), p. 73.

33. Cf. the commentary of Joseph ibn Caspi, 1:9 (and Abravanel’s comment thereon); 2: 12; 2: 32; 3: 13; Moses Narboni, premise 18 in 2, introduction; Efodi, 1: 9; 1: 37 (and Abravanel’s comment); 2: 1 (p. 15a); 2: 32 (p. 67a); Shem Tob ben Joseph 1: 9; premise 18 in 2, introduction; 2, 32 (p. 68a). I have not found Ibn Tibbon mentioning a contradiction of the fifth sort (see Maimonides, *Guide*, introduction: “The fifth cause from the necessity of teaching and making

however, does not fit this scheme and thus causes "great perplexity."

It is not surprising that Moses Ibn Tibbon, son of Samuel, who in many cases did not follow in the footsteps of his father's Aristotelianism, also did not adopt the methodological approach underlying his father's interpretation. Explicitly critical of Samuel Ibn Tibbon's way, Moses Ibn Tibbon sought to harmonize those passages of the *Guide* which treat Providence. According to Moses Ibn Tibbon, those passages which propose the philosophic view of Providence refer to a lower manifestation of Providence, whereas 3:51 describes its supreme, supraphilosophic, manifestation: "God's Providence over his worshippers and adherents in emanating toward their divine and prophetic wisdom."³⁴ For the purpose of harmonization, Moses Ibn Tibbon attempts to graft onto the words of Maimonides the views of Ibn Sina³⁵ and Ibn Ezra³⁶ about the perfect man's power to control mentally external bodies and to fashion them at will. Samuel Ibn Tibbon, on the other hand, constructed his interpretation on the basis of different premises as to the character of the *Guide's* text,³⁷ and those premises do

someone understand.") However, since a recent paper asserts that the *Guide's* commentators had a hard time finding a contradiction of this type, I note the following places: Ibn Caspi 1: 3; 1: 4; Efodi and Shem Tob, 1: 3; Moses of Salerno, fols. 9v, 123v; Michael ben Shabbethai Balbo, MS Vatican 105, fol. 127. Cf. also Shem Tob Falaquera, introduction (p. 10). The commentaries on the *Guide* are cited here according to the following editions: Falaquera, *Moreh ha-moreh*, in *Qadmonei mefareshei ha-Moreh* (Vienna, 1852; reprint ed., Jerusalem, 1961); Ibn Caspi, *Maskiyot kesef*, *ibid.*; Moses Narboni, *Be'ur la-Moreh*, *ibid.*; the commentaries of Efodi, Shem Tob ben Joseph, Asher Crescas and Isaac Abravanel were printed in the popular editions of the *Guide* in the translation of Ibn Tibbon. The commentaries of Moses of Salerno and Zerahiah Hen are cited according to the above mentioned MSS unless otherwise noted.

34. Cf. Diesendruck, "Samuel and Moses Ibn Tibbon," pp. 363–65. I believe that a more comprehensive study would make it possible to juxtapose the differences between father and son on a variety of issues as the first example of the continuing controversy about the proper interpretation of the *Guide*. Cf., e.g., Samuel Ibn Tibbon, *MYH*, p. 22 against Moses Ibn Tibbon, *Sefer Pe'ah*, MS Bodl. Opp. 241, fol. 14r; Cf. on this also Moses of Salerno's comment on Samuel Ibn Tibbon in MS Bodl. Opp. 576, fol. 14r; so, too, Zerahiah Hen on the *Guide* 1:9.

35. See *Kitāb shifā al-nafs*, 4: 4; *Kitāb al-ishārāt wal-tanbihāt*, ed. J. Forget (Leiden, 1892), p. 220; S. van den Bergh, *Averroes' Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, n.s., vol. 19 (London, 1954), p. 175.

36. Cf. the commentary on Numbers 20:8, 22:28; the short commentary on Exodus 3:15. Different variations of this view were held by many Jewish thinkers. Some are noted by Colette Sirat, "*Pirquei Mosheh* of Moses Narboni," *Tarbiz* 39 (1970): 290–95. See also Moshe Idel, "On the influence of *Sefer 'Or ha-sekkel* on Moses Narboni and Abraham Shalom," *AJSreview* 4 (1979), Hebrew sec., p. 3; Falaquera on the *Guide*, 3: 51.

37. No wonder that an interpreter such as Moses Narboni preferred Samuel Ibn Tibbon's position to that of his son, who "did not understand the words of the Master at all, and did not know what made his father say this" (Narboni on the *Guide* 3: 11).

not allow for harmonization. He continued to wonder about these things more than twenty years later, when writing his *Ma'amar yiqqavu ha-mayim*:³⁸ "As to 3:51, . . . I have not understood his intention in that chapter, by God! Unless he said it so as to conceal his views even more *ad captandum vulgi*."³⁹

The radical nature of the method of interpretation which first appears in the epistle on Providence may also be represented by the way Samuel Ibn Tibbon uses the other key provided by Maimonides to the reader of the *Guide*, his warning about his having scrambled the subjects he discussed in the *Guide* and scattered them among various chapters. In order to reconstruct Maimonides' position on any subject, the reader is called upon "to connect its chapters one with another" and to search meticulously for the proper context of comments whose subject matter does not fit their textual setting. Here, just as on the problem of intended contradictions, Samuel Ibn Tibbon evinces the beginning of the radical esoterical interpretation of the *Guide*.

The comments found in this epistle regarding the *Guide* 3:23 may serve to exemplify his approach. In order to arrive at an adequate interpretation of Maimonides' theory of Providence, Ibn Tibbon compared dozens of scattered passages. *Inter alia* he made use of Maimonides' comments on the significance of the Book of Job. Maimonides distinguished between Job's early view, which denies Providence—as a result of the many catastrophes which befell him—and his later view, which Job adopted after he decided to reject the body and "admitted that true happiness, which is the knowledge of the Deity . . . cannot be troubled . . . by any or all the misfortunes."⁴⁰ Job's earlier view, which denies individual Providence, was declared in the *Guide* 3:23 to be identical to Aristotle's view. But according to Ibn Tibbon's own conclusion, after connecting the chapters one to another, it is Job's latter view, the one confirmed by revelation and "divine testimony," that is identical to Aristotle's teaching:

38. *MYH* was written after 1221. See Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebraeischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin, 1893), p. 200.

39. פ' נ"א מן החלק השלישי . . . לא הגעתי לכוונתו בפי' ההוא. האלהים, אם לא אמרו לחוספות הסתר ולצורך המוני. *MYH*, p. 98. See also *CE*, fol. 73r. "As the Master said toward the end of his discussion of providence in a chapter of the third part, providence is a corollary of wisdom . . . that the essence of providence is the existence of the existent, and its preservation the time period in which it can be preserved and keep its existence."

40. *Guide* 3: 23.

Having gotten to know the Creator truly, Job was no longer concerned with the various sorts of pseudohappiness . . . having attained the knowledge of immortality . . . for indeed permanent happiness is the knowledge of God, and it seems to me that Aristotle agrees with this view; indeed so do most true philosophers, and certainly those among them who believe in immortality. . . . As far as I can see, the view of Job, subsequent to his having rejected [the body] and regretted [his earlier view], is identical to Aristotle's view . . . and the purpose of God's testimony is to reject the views of Job's friends, or something like it, and to give preference to Job's views. This, it seems to me, is what comes out of these chapters of the *Guide*. The best proof is what Maimonides says toward the end of 3:25.⁴¹

Ibn Tibbon's analysis is not hard to follow: Job prior to his change of attitude (A1) and Job subsequent to this change (A2) do not represent different views about the existence of Providence over external concerns. The transformation of Job represents, rather, a change in his personal attitude to the afflictions of matter, toward external occurrences, following A2's becoming aware of "permanent happiness" and "immortality." But Ibn Tibbon knows—from other sources—that this awareness of the possibility of permanent intellectual happiness is shared also by many Aristotelians (see below). Thus, the view of A2 is identical to Aristotle's view, and this is the view preferred by God in his speech to Job. (Cf. Ibn Caspi: "Aristotle's views about this . . . are identical to the view of our Torah as interpreted by the *Guide*.")⁴² Can we find in the *Guide* any hint to support this view? Ibn Tibbon believes we can: "The best proof is what Maimonides says toward the end of 3:25." In 3:25, Maimonides begins to discuss a new topic

41. . . . אִיּוֹב אַחֲרֵי שִׁדְעַת הַבּוֹרָא יָדִיעָה אֱמִתִּית לֹא חֲשַׁשׁ לְאוֹתָם הַהֲצִלּוֹת הַמְרוּמוֹת . . . אַחֲרֵי שִׁדְעַת הַשָּׂרָאוֹת הַנֶּפֶשׁ . . . אֲבָל הַהֲצִלָּה הַתְּמִידִית הִיא יָדִיעָה ה' ית', וְכִמְרוּמָה לִי כִי אֶרְסֹו כְמוֹדָה בּוֹה הַדַּעַת, אֲבָל רַב הַפִּילוֹסוֹפִים הָאֱמִתִּיִּים, כ"ש מִי שִׂאֱמִין מֵהֶם בְּהַשָּׂאוֹת הַנֶּפֶשׁ, לֹא שִׁיחִי אֶצְלָם אוֹתָם הַהֲצִלּוֹת שֶׁאֵינָן אֱמִתִּיּוֹת אֲלָא רַעִיוֹנוֹת הֵם הַתְּכֵלִית בְּהַצִּלָּה . . . אֲבָל אֶצְלִי דַעַת אִיּוֹב אַחֲרֵי שֶׁמָּאֵס וְנָחַם הוּא אֲשֶׁר יֵאֱמָר אֶרְסֹו . . . וְעִדּוֹת ה' בָּאָה לְדַחוֹת דַּעַת חֲבֵרֵי אִיּוֹב אוֹ קֶרֶב לֹוּה וְנָתַן יִתְרָן לְדַעַת אִיּוֹב עַל דַּעַתָּו. וְזֶה הַמְחִישׁ בְּדַעַת מֵאלוֹ הַפְּדֻקִּים כְּפִי הַנִּרְאָה לִי, וְהַעֲדָה הָאֱמִתִּי עָלָיו סוֹף פְּכִיָּה מִזֶּה. החלק. Diesendruck, "Samuel and Moses Ibn Tibbon," p. 356. Further on Ibn Tibbon progresses from the discussion of the first level of providence—spiritual felicity and immortality—to the discussion of the other level, reflected in natural existence. He characterizes natural events as a result of "eternal Divine Will, not individually created." In *MYH*, Ibn Tibbon will distinguish between "the truth of Providence," which is the principal theme of Ecclesiastes and "the truth of immortality," which is the principal theme of Job (p. 70).

42. *Maskiyyot kesef* on *Guide* 3: 18. Cf. also Shem Tob on *Guide* 3: 18 (p. 27b); 3: 23 (p. 35a). Ibn Caspi makes Aristotle's view conform to that of the *Guide*. See also Falaquera against Ibn Tibbon's interpretation of this problem: "The harmonization of the Master's view . . . and the philosophers' view, . . . the view of Aristotle . . ., is the harmonization of two opposites."

("actions"), attributes natural actions to Divine Wisdom and ends by saying: "It is upon this opinion that the whole of the Torah of Moses our Master is founded. . . . If you consider this opinion and the philosophic opinion, reflecting upon all the preceding chapters in this treatise that are connected with this notion, you will not find any difference between them regarding any of the particulars of everything that exists." Ibn Tibbon finds in this identification of the view of the Law and the view of philosophy⁴³ a hint regarding the chapters dealing with Providence and its identification with natural law.⁴⁴ That is to say, the true intention of the Torah regarding Providence is not at issue with the view of the philosophers, either about the identification of Providence with natural law, or about its identification with intellectual happiness and immortality, which are the two strata of Ibn Tibbon's interpretation mentioned above.

III

The correspondence between philosophy and the Bible regarding eternal intellectual happiness subsequently becomes a central topic in Samuel Ibn Tibbon's writings and a pivotal point of his philosophical exegesis of the Bible.⁴⁵ He follows Arabic philosophy when he identifies this question with the question of the possibility of conjunction with the Active Intellect, the lowest of the separate Intelligences according to medieval Aristotelian ontology. According to an Aristotelian principle, the intellector unites (is conjoined) with his intellectum, and becomes identical with it. Thus, if indeed man is able to intellect an eternal intellectual object such as the Active Intellect and to unite with it, immortality is possible. Ibn Tibbon's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* shows that he was well aware of the controversy among the Arab Aristotelians regarding this question. He says: "Abu Naṣr

43. A strictly esoteric reading of Ibn Tibbon himself could hint at the following contradiction: on the one hand, Maimonides presented Aristotle's view on Providence as "consequent upon his opinion concerning the eternity of the world" (*Guide* 3: 17); on the other hand, the passage in the *Guide* 3: 25 to which Ibn Tibbon points as confirming the identity between the view of the Torah and the view of philosophy in regard to Providence, ends as follows: "You will find no difference [between them] other than that which we have explained: namely, that they regard the world as eternal and we regard it as produced in time. Understand this."

44. A substantial portion of *MYH* is devoted to the development of some fundamental ideas referred to in his epistle on Providence. See *MYH*, pp. 61–121.

45. Another pivotal point would be a comparison between the Bible and philosophy on the problem of creation and nature.

al-Farabi said that conjunction of the human soul with the Active Intellect is stuff and nonsense,⁴⁶ but Averroes said about this utterance of Abu Naṣr [al-Farabi] that it is not theoretical reflection which brought him to this conclusion. But since Al-Farabi himself was cognizant of the superiority of his wisdom, yet found that he did not attain this level of conjunction,⁴⁷ he asserted that no human being can attain it."⁴⁸ As we noted above, Ibn Tibbon's epistle of 1199 already mentions the view of "most true philosophers, and certainly those among them who believe in immortality."⁴⁹ At any rate, in his *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (written after 1213),⁵⁰ we find indications of vigorous and detailed knowledge of Arabic philosophic texts dealing with the human soul and immortality, at least of two Averroistic treatises—Averroes' *Long Commentary on the De Anima* and his *Treatises on the Intellect*—treatises which were translated by Ibn Tibbon into Hebrew. In these works Averroes argues with Al-Farabi's rejection of the possibility of

46. Cf. Averroes, *Essays on the Intellect*, translated by Ibn Tibbon, ed. J. Hertz (Berlin, 1869), p. 10; see also Ibn Tufail, *Hayy ben Yaqdhān*, Institut d'Etudes Orientales de la Faculté des Lettres d'Alger, vol. 3, trans. and ed. Léon Gauthier (Beirut, 1936), p. 14. Al-Fārābī contradicted himself on this point in several places. Cf. Shlomo Pines, "The Philosophic Sources of the Guide of the Perplexed," in Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago, 1963), pp. lxxix–lxxxiii; see also S. Pines, "The Limitation of Human Knowledge according to Al-Fārābī, ibn Bājjā and Maimonides," in I. Twersky, ed., *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 84–85; Aryeh Leo Motzkin, "Philosophy and the Law," *Interpretation* 10 (1980). Cf. Alexander Altmann, "Ibn Bājjā on Man's Ultimate Felicity," in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 1965), English sec., 1: 48–49. Samuel Ibn Tibbon attributed to Al-Fārābī the view which denies the possibility of uniting with the active intellect, as this doctrine was presented and criticized by Averroes in his essays on the intellect, which Samuel Ibn Tibbon translated into Hebrew. Moses Ibn Tibbon attributed to Al-Farabi the opposite view, which asserts the possibility of uniting with the active intellect, a doctrine in Al-Farabi's book, *The Principles of Beings* (also called *The Political Regimes*), which Moses Ibn Tibbon apparently translated into Hebrew. See Moses Ibn Tibbon, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Lyck, 1874), p. 9. Cf. Al-Farabi, *Sefer Hathalet ha-nimṣa'ot*, ed. Zwi Filipowsky in *Sefer ha-'Asif* (Leipzig, 1849), pp. 2, 5. (The editor attributed this translation of Al-Farabi to Samuel Ibn Tibbon, but see the references to Steinschneider in n. 1 above.)

47. See Averroes, *Essays on the Intellect*, p. 10. Cf. Falaquera, *Commentary on the Guide*, p. 43.

48. CE, fol. 25r: אבונצר אלפרבי הוא אמ' שדבר הדבקות נפש האדם עם השכל הפועל הוא כדברי הבלי התפלות. עד שאבן רושד אמ' על הדבר הזה הנמצא לאבונצר כי לא הביאנו העיון לומר' כן אך מפני שירע רוב חכמתו ומצא כי לא הגיע אל זאת המעלה גור שאין אדם מגיע אליה.

49. Cf. CE, fol. 36r: "The possibility of the unity of the spirit of any man to the separated intellect. . . . Most Aristotelian philosophers believed in this possibility, but some of them denied it."

50. Steinschneider, *Catalogus . . . Bodleiana*, p. 837.

cussed in the context of Maimonides' interpretation of the story of Adam in Genesis, it is to be doubly concealed. A few instances of Samuel Ibn Tibbon's discussion of these topics may help to clarify the method which guides him in his esoteric reading of the *Guide*.

The accounts of the creation of Adam and Eve, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, the creation of man in the image of God, and so forth, are allegorically interpreted by Ibn Tibbon,⁵⁸ who systematically follows the various chapters of the *Guide*. "Man" represents the formal-intellectual aspect of mankind and "woman" the material aspect,⁵⁹ the origin of desire and annihilation. The creation of the first woman, and her being "taken out" of Adam represents man's vocation and power to exist as a pure intellect⁶⁰ *in actu* who prevails upon his corporeality and potentiality, just as his recurring recourse to woman and to her temptations represents his decline into materiality. The secrets of the creation and generation in God's image⁶¹ and the eating of the fruit of the tree of life⁶² (*Guide* 1:42: "Correct opinions are called *life*")⁶³ point to the vocation and end of man to conjoin with the supreme intelligibilia and to attain intellectual immortality. These ideas demand double concealment.

This is so, first, because of the preferences of the allegorical level of meaning of the biblical story, the universal story of man *qua* man, over the historical one. (Cf. Ibn Caspi: "The Master hints at a certain concealment in the Account of Creation, for the man who is mentioned there is not one single individual, but the collective man";⁶⁴ and Samuel Ibn Zarza: "So it

58. See especially *CE*, fols. 123v–128r. See also *CE*, fols. 1r–2v, 86. Cf. Jacob Anatoli, *Malmad ha-talmidim* (Lyck, 1866), p. 22b.

59. Cf. *Guide*, introduction; 1: 17; 2: 30; 3: 8 and Efodi's commentary on 1: 6.

60. Cf. the comments of Moses of Salerno, fol. 274v, and Samuel Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim* (Mantua, 1559), p. 7b; both of them cite Ibn Tibbon.

61. See *CE*, fol. 86. Cf. Zerachiah Hen on *Guide* 1: 6–7; Ibn Caspi, 1: 1; and Narboni, Efodi and Shem Tob on 1: 7 and Abravanel's critique, *ibid*.

62. Cf. the commentaries of Moses of Salerno (fol. 271r) and Narboni on 2: 30 (p. 41b), who cite Ibn Tibbon. See also Falaquera on 1: 2, end; Shem Tob and Abravanel on 1: 30, end.

63. See also *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhoh Teshuvah, 8:3. Cf. Falaquera on 1: 42 and Ibn Caspi 1: 30.

64. רמזו המורה על קצת נסתר במעשה בראשית, כי האדם הנזכר שם לא היה אחד רמזו לכו, אבל על הכלל. *Mas-kiyyot kesef* 1: 2. Ibn Caspi not only interprets the story of Adam as the paradigmatic account of man, but explicitly hints that he denies the historical significance of the story. See 1: 14 and 2: 29: "The name '*Adam ha-rishon*' (the first man) is attributed according to the *Guide*'s concealed view to Moses, for he was the first man who ever existed" (i.e., whose intellect became active). See also the editor's view there (1: 14) on Narboni's and Ibn Caspi's secret, and Abravanel's reaction to their "deceitful act" (*ma'aseh ta'tu'im*). So also for Samuel Ibn Zarza

seems that according to Ibn Tibbon . . . the secret . . . is as follows: The intellect was called Adam.”)⁶⁵

Second, these ideas contain hints as to the secret of “life” and “death”⁶⁶ and thus about a philosophic transformation of the beliefs in the resurrection of the dead and the world to come. (Cf. Zerahiah Hen: “The secret of the chapter *yalad* and the chapter *hay* [in the *Guide*] mentioned by the sage Samuel [Ibn Tibbon]. . . It seems to me that the secret of the chapter *hay* is that the author [Maimonides], tried to show that the word ‘dead’ is attributable even to someone who is not dead . . . and that ‘life’ is attributable to true opinions . . . and he who understands will understand.”)⁶⁷

Third, the term “man” is the connecting axis between the two most esoteric topics in the Bible, “the Account of Creation” (Adam) and “the Account of the Chariot” (the likeness of man upon the throne).⁶⁸ “Man” in its profound sense refers to any intellectual being in the lower as well as the heavenly realm.⁶⁹ (This has of course important implications also in regard to the nature of the ideal of *imitatio Dei* and to the interpretation of the last chapter of the *Guide*.)

(see n. 60), but this is not necessarily so in the case of Efodi on the *Guide* 1: 2 (pp. 2, 17), where he cites Ibn Caspi and adds: “Everything which happened to the first man happens to everyone in our own age many times over.” See also Shem Tob, *ibid.*, p. 16: “And it seems to us in every generation that everything that happened to the first man is the account of the history of man.” See also Efodi and Shem Tob on 1: 8 and Abravanel on 1: 7.

65. ונראה לפי דעת בן חבון . . . הסוד . . . הוא כן: לשכל קרא אדם הראשון. *Mikhlof yofi*, MS Munich 64, fol. 229r. Further on, he says that the priority of “the first man” is the priority of the intellect over matter; he says this in connection with a theory of neoplatonic emanation. Cf. the words of Shalom Anavi (15th century), MS Vatican 105, fols. 271r–286r (esp. fol. 271r–v).

66. Cf. *CE*, fols. 1v–2r, 24, 75r, 92v, 123v, 124, 127r (but see 134r). Cf. Maimonides’ introduction to *Perek Heleq* in *Haqdamot le-Ferush ha-Mishnah*, ed. M. V. Rabinovitz (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 129.

67. סוד פרק ילד ופרק חי שזכר בהם החכם ר' שמואל . . . נראה לי כי סוד פרק חי הוא שהמחבר זצ”ל השווה בין להביא ראיות שמלת מת נופלת אפילו על מי שאינו מת . . . שחיים נאמר על הדעות האמתיות . . . והמבין יבין. See the commentary on the *Guide* 1: 6. See also 1: 42. Cf. Ibn Caspi and Narboni on 1: 42 and Abravanel’s reaction as well as the editor’s comment, *ibid.*; also Shem Tob on 1: 13; 1: 42 and Ibn Caspi, Efodi and Shem Tob on 1: 70. Cf. Sheshet Ševi Nasi of Saragossa, cited by Alexander Marx, “Texts By and About Maimonides,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 25 (1934–35): 421; cf. also Samuel Ibn Zārza, *Mikhlof yofi*, p. 343a: “Know, that it is Elijah who is the means to the resurrection of the dead, i.e., since he attained divinity, which is the living essence of the intellect, and that is the resurrection of the dead, in that the potential intellect becomes the intellect *in actu*, for as long as the intellect is only in potency it is dead.”

68. Ezekiel 1:26.

69. See *MYH*, pp. 50–51.

In the light of all this it becomes clear why Ibn Tibbon's remarks on the *Guide's* chapters dealing with the secrets of man in Genesis reflect and clarify his method in the the esoteric reading of the *Guide* and the ways of allusion and concealment attributable to Maimonides:

The poet [Judah Alḥarizi] thought that every word which Maimonides noted as being equivocal was noted by him as signifying something about God. This is not so. Maimonides mentioned many biblical terms having to do with a secret of the secrets of the Torah or the secrets of faith,⁷⁰ although there is no need to mention them in connection with God. The chapter on 'ish, yalad, ḥay and 'adam⁷¹ are in this category. . . . Should anyone reveal the real intention of any of them, he would betray the oath of the Master who abjured anyone who would understand any novelty in his treatise not to reveal it. The intention of the chapters is the essence of what was innovated by him, or—you may say—all of what was innovated by him. Maimonides said explicitly that he scattered the topics [in the *Guide*] to separate topics which are of one kind so as to conceal their true intentions from the multitude. There is no doubt that anyone who reveals the intention of even one of them is a true transgressor.⁷²

The species of man . . . includes the masses and the superior few, . . . for "man" is an equivocal term as was mentioned in the *Guide* 1:14. Although "man upright" [Eccl. 7:29] according to our interpretation ["man" as intellect which prevails over its material element]⁷³ is not mentioned explicitly in that chapter, it seems that it is the first meaning of the three meanings of man [namely, Adam]. Understand this. The best demonstration for this is that before Eve was taken from man [Adam], his name was Man [Adam], and after she was taken away from him, the part that was left of him was also called man. . . . For the true wise man [Maimonides] used the equivocity of the name "man" in many instances, and certainly in the chapter about the Account of

70. Cf. *CE*, fol. 6r; *MYH*, p. 62 and n. 106 below.

71. *Guide* 1: 6, 7, 42, 14 respectively.

72. חשב המשורר כי כל מלה שזכר הרב ז"ל שיתופה, וזכר לה שנומצא ממנה בענין השם ולא כן הוא, אך זכר מלות רבות לסוד מסודות התורה או סוד מסודות האמונה, אע"פ שאין צורך להזכירם למה שנומצא מהם בענין השם, ופרקי ילד וחי ואדם מזה המין . . . ולו היה אדם מגלה כוונת אחד מהם היה עובר על השבועה אשר השביע הרב ז"ל כי כל מי שיבין דבר חידוש ממאמרו שלא יגלהו. וכונת הפרקים היא עקר מה שחדש או אמר שהוא כל מה שחדש, הלא הוא אמר ששם מפורדים מפורדים להרחיק האחד מחברו שהוא ממינו ומעניינו כדי להעלים מן ההמון כוונתם, ואין ספק שכל מי שישגלה כוונת אחד מהם הוא פורץ גדר באמת *Perush ha-millim ha-zarot be-Moreh nevuḥim*, ed. Judah Ibn Shmuel Kaufman (Jerusalem, 1946), p. 15. An inferior edition is printed in the popular editions of the *Guide* as translated by Samuel Ibn Tibbon.

73. Cf. *CE*, fols. 125r–127v and the reference there to *Guide* 3: 8–11.

Creation,⁷⁴ and Chapter 1:16⁷⁵ of the *Guide* will alert the man of understanding.⁷⁶

In the first paragraph we see how Samuel Ibn Tibbon's esoteric interpretation of the *Guide* was universally applied. The "intention of the chapters" is more or less completely devoted to secret teachings and is the "essence of what was innovated"⁷⁷ by Maimonides. From the two paragraphs cited above, we may cull Ibn Tibbon's guidelines for decoding the aims of the *Guide*:

1. Among the many chapters in the first part of the *Guide*, which deal with anthropomorphic terms in the Bible, there are dispersed lexicographic chapters dealing with a different class of terms (such as the chapters dedicated to 'ish, yalad, hay and 'adam).⁷⁸ Ibn Tibbon's competitor as translator of the *Guide*, Judah Alharizi, ignored these deviations and understood all the chapters as having a single purpose—the negation of anthropomorphism (see "The Intention of the Chapters" which he appended to his translation).⁷⁹ Ibn Tibbon emphasizes, in his strong criticism of Alharizi,⁸⁰ that the

74. The reference here is apparently to *Guide* 2: 30. Cf. *CE*, fols. 86v, 126v, 2r. See also Shem Tob on 2: 30 (p. 61b), 2: 46, 2: 29 (p. 55a).

75. This chapter in the *Guide* is devoted to the interpretation of *sur* in the Bible. Two possibilities for an esoteric interpretation of this chapter were proposed later to Ibn Tibbon: Zerahiah Hen identified *sur* with the first man "who is the beginning of mankind, from whom the human species was quarried; he was created in the image of God." (It may be that Hen and Ibn Tibbon find here an additional allusion for the allegorization of the first man as the quintessential intellectual element in man.) The second possibility is proposed by Ibn Caspi on 1: 17 (and cf. Introduction, p. 7).

76. מין האדם הכולל ההמון והסגולות . . . כי האדם נאמר בשתוף כמו שנוכר בפרק י"ד מן החלק הראשון ממאמר מורה הנבוכים, ואע"פ שענין האדם ישר לפי פירושו בו אינו נוכר בפירוש בפרק ההוא, אך נראה שהוא ענין הראשון מן השלשה, והבינהו. והראיה הגדולה על זה שקדם שנלקחה חוה מאדם היה שמו אדם ואחר שנלקחה ממנו נקרא החלק הנשאר ממנו אדם . . . שהחכם האמתי שמש בזה הענין משתוף שם אדם במקומות רבים, כל שכן בפרק ממעשה בראשית, *CE*, fol. 129v. Cf. also fol. 128r. ומפרק י"ו מן החלק הראשון ממאמר מורה הנבוכים יתעורר איש תבונה

77. Judah Ibn Shmuel Kaufman, the editor of the *Perush ha-millim ha-zarot* and the author of a commentary to the *Guide*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 1935–1959), wondered at this point: "Is this all that Maimonides innovated?" He was thus constrained to conclude that Ibn Tibbon is here referring to Alharizi rather than to Maimonides. However, Kaufman's approach to the *Guide* is very different from Ibn Tibbon's and Ibn Tibbon's explicit words fit well with his method of reading the *Guide*. They should consequently be understood as they stand.

78. Cf. Zerahiah Hen on 1: 14: "Many are perplexed saying, why did the author [Maimonides] point out the equivocacy of the name 'adam [man], for it does not signify the creator . . . , but his intention was to allude to a very important matter, which is implicit in what he says. It must not be explained. He who understands will understand it."

79. Alharizi interpreted the intention of these chapters by the general context of their location in the *Guide*—the negation of anthropomorphism. These four chapters refer in his opinion

irregular chapters allude to a unique esoteric teaching, to an intention beyond the explicit content of the sequence of the chapters. The basic notion behind this method was developed in great detail (perhaps too great) by modern scholarship on the *Guide*.

2. The correct reading of the *Guide*'s chapters should be carried out in two complementary directions: on the one hand, one should distinguish each chapter from the rest, and on the other, one should combine different chapters and construct out of them a single topic. Again, on the one hand, one should get to the bottom of the specific subject matter of each chapter, its specific "innovation,"⁸¹ an innovation not necessarily limited to the explicit subject matter of the chapter ("Although . . . it is not mentioned explicitly in that chapter."). On the other hand, one should combine scattered chapters which allude to one single subject, so as to reconstruct the full scope of the topic.⁸² This method applies also to the chapters dedicated to the equivocity in the Bible, and chapters far removed from a certain chapter can provide additional hints and guidelines for the correct understanding of the notions and concepts treated in that chapter.⁸³ (For example, "man [*adam*]" is used as a proper name in the Account of Creation and also as a common noun referring to the species of man. It refers to the common human individual, including both his form and matter, but also to the superior individual whose intellect transcends his matter. To all these meanings of "man" may be added the one used in the "Account of the Chariot.") Maimonides himself may follow biblical usage and conceals his

to God and not to man. See *Sha'ar kavvanat ha-peraqim*, printed in a number of popular editions of the *Guide* in the translation of Ibn Tibbon.

80. Cf. Narboni on 1: 59.

81. See Ibn Caspi, introduction ("Instruction with Respect to this Treatise"); Shem Tob on 1: 36 (p. 58a).

82. Cf. Zerahiah Hen on 1: 6: "He alludes to you in many chapters regarding matters which you need in order to understand other chapters which are very far removed from them."

83. A typical example of this method is implicit in his critique there of Alharizi, who made the chapter on *'adam* refer to the "man" in Ezekiel's Chariot. Ibn Tibbon thinks that Maimonides scattered the various significations of this term in various places in the *Guide*, and one should not confuse the significations of the various chapters. The specific subject matter of the *Guide* 1: 14 1 is the equivocity of this noun when signifying a human being and his potential for transcending the level of the multitude and being substantiated as an intellect, like "the first man." The specific subject matter of another chapter, 3: 5, is the "man" in the Account of the Chariot (see *MYH*, p. 50). By joining these and other chapters together one can reconstruct the general intention of "man," as signifying any intellectual substance, human or superhuman. Cf. also Ibn Tibbon's critique of Maimonides' positing of the supreme signification of "man" in Ezekiel's Chariot in *MYH*, p. 52.

intention by making use of the differing connotations of terms in different chapters of the *Guide*.

The present discussion is primarily concerned with methodology. A detailed analysis of the content of Ibn Tibbon's interpretation of Maimonides' view on this subject calls for a detailed discussion of various chapters of the *Guide* and is outside the purview of this article. I do believe, however, that a discussion of this sort would uncover elements discussed at length in the post-Tibbonite interpretation of Maimonides from the thirteenth century onward. (Even two recent studies devoted to two specific issues in the *Guide*—the equivocity of "man"⁸⁴ and the Garden of Eden,⁸⁵ which use an esotericist method of interpretation, independent of Ibn Tibbon's, reveal interesting and clear similarities in detail to Ibn Tibbon's interpretation.) We have restricted ourselves here to comments on Ibn Tibbon's method of interpretation and to some illustrations of the content of this interpretation.

IV

In his well-known study of the *Guide*, Leo Strauss developed a detailed conception of the unique literary character of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, an "oral" character which serves as a mean between writing and speaking.⁸⁶ In keeping with the esoteric character of his teachings, Maimonides searched for a literary method which would be a substitute for private discussion with a worthy student, one which enables constant testing of the interlocutor's reactions. A private discussion allows for a gradual increase in the level of allusion or for a retreat to conventional teaching when a student reveals himself as unworthy. This tendency is reflected in the use of various literary devices such as the scattering of subject matter, the breaking of the formal continuity of the chapters, contradictions, obfuscating the construction of the *Guide* and allusions by way of "chapter headings." Maimonides emphasized that "the Account of the Chariot . . . is subject to a legal prohibi-

84. Cf. Harvey's dissertation, cited in n. 56, Appendix A. Compare this with Ibn Tibbon, *CE*, fol. 11v: "Whoever understands the *Guide of the Perplexed* would not deny that 'man' is identical to 'man's spirit.'" See also fol. 60r.

85. In a colloquium of the Center for Judaic Studies at Harvard (held February, 1980), Sarah Klein-Braslavi presented an outline of a study to be published, entitled "Maimonides' Interpretation of the Story of the Garden of Eden."

86. See Leo Strauss, *Persecution*, pp. 47–78. See also L. Strauss "How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines (Chicago, 1963), pp. xxi–lvi.

tion against its being taught and explained except orally,"⁸⁷ and that he who understands will never fully explain an esoteric teaching even "by speaking directly to an interlocutor, how then could he put it down in writing?"⁸⁸ Maimonides' method of writing tries, therefore, to reproduce as much as possible the advantages of a private discussion. Strauss also connected the unique literary characteristics of the *Guide* to Maimonides' view about the transmission of secrets, orally and in hints scattered in writings, during the period of the Bible and the Talmud up to the philosophical decline of the Jews during the time of Exile.

Now, an explicit discussion about the nature of esoteric writing which reproduces the advantages of oral teaching and imitates the possibilities of revelation and concealment inherent in face to face conversation already appears in the work of the first translator and interpreter of the *Guide*, Samuel Ibn Tibbon. He too discussed this problem in conjunction with a review of the tradition of oral and written teaching by allusion in the earlier history of the Jews, a tradition revived by the composition of the *Guide*. Among the disciples or commentators of the *Guide* in the thirteenth century, from Abraham Maimuni⁸⁹ to Isaiah ben Moses of Salerno⁹⁰ and Zerahiah Hen⁹¹ we find time and again comments hinting at the necessary tension between public writing and private or esoteric conversation. But it was Samuel Ibn Tibbon who devoted a detailed discussion to this question and to a characterization of the nature of esoteric writing as a substitute for oral conversation.

Ibn Tibbon taught that "this wisdom . . . no man was permitted to teach publicly, but only to transmit chapter headings to those who have understanding and are worthy of it, so that they may from those principles [the chapter headings] understand the whole issue, and that can only be done face to face. This may be easy for those who are wise and understanding, for there are many devices and twists and turns which the wise teacher may use

87. *Guide*, Introduction to Part 3.

88. *Guide*, Introduction. See also 1: 71; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah, 2: 12; 4:

11. On the general value of learning by rote according to Maimonides, see Isadore Twersky, "Sefer Mishneh Torah la-Rambam, megamato ve-tafqido," in *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 5 (1972): 14–15.

89. See also his commentaries on Genesis and Exodus in S. D. Sassoon's edition (London, 1958), p. 21. Cf. David Kimḥi, n. 13 above.

90. A comment on his father's commentary on the *Guide* in MS Munich 370, fol. 9r.

91. An epistle to Judah ben Solomon, MS Cambridge 1235 Add., fol. 92r. See also Shem Tob on *Guide* 1: 36 (p. 58a).

to impart his intention to his more understanding students. All this he can do without making things explicit, something that cannot be done in writing.”⁹² Ibn Tibbon distinguished between two sorts of “devices⁹³ and twists and turns” used in oral teaching: there are external rhetorical devices such as tone of voice and facial expression, but there is also the rhetoric of the language itself and the words it employs. Devices of the first sort facilitate allusion and even make it possible to communicate the opposite of what one is voicing aloud, “just as one would say to another, ‘you did very well in so doing,’ and the hearer would understand that the speaker in fact thinks ill of those deeds.”⁹⁴ These devices cannot be directly reproduced in esoteric writing (although it may be that Ibn Tibbon thought that this effect may be achieved in a more complicated, indirect way by employing intended contradictions). On the other hand, rhetorical devices of the second type, which are linguistic, are obviously imitable in writing. A skillful writer will know how to allude by context—by “adjoining one subject to another,” by “transmission of chapter headings,” and by “appending comments.” This writer will then approximate the advantages of private, intimate conversation which enables contemporaneous revelation and concealment and his writing will make it possible “to whisper [!] and to hint until his intention becomes clear.”

Ibn Tibbon maintains that this is the literary character of those parts of the Bible which call for special philosophic interpretation (i.e., the Account of Creation, the Account of the Chariot, portions of the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, the Song of Songs and Job). This is also the literary character of the midrash and of the *Guide*. Thus it is no wonder that the esoteric methods used by the *Guide* will be found to be already present in the Bible. For example: “This is the way of concealment used by Ecclesiastes in his book in order to make his rhetoric more difficult, by the use of equivocity, by both dropping and adding necessary connections [between themes], and this makes it possible for someone to interpret in a way counter to the intended interpretation . . . but the man of understanding will understand. . . . It should not occur to you that [Ecclesiastes] is needlessly repetitious. This is not the way of this book. Any time he repeats himself or

92. *CE*, fol. 3v.

93. See *Guide*, Introduction (Pines, p. 18): “The author accordingly uses some device to conceal it by all means.”

94. *CE*, כמה שיאמר אדם לחבירו—בטוב עשית כשעשית דבר כך, ויבין הנאמר אליו כי רע היה בעיניו מה שעשה, fol. 3v.

appears to contradict himself, he does it intentionally, and the intelligent reader will understand what he wanted to innovate by this repetition, and which of the two contradictory teachings is the truth which the author wishes to communicate."⁹⁵ Stratagems used in the *Guide*, such as intended contradictions which do not yield to harmonization but call for the interpreter's unequivocal discretion, discontinuous writing ("the lack of connection") and intended obfuscation, all arise from the origin of Jewish philosophical literature in classical antiquity. Elsewhere we learn also that the exoteric level of a biblical writing is identified with those assertions which are common and constantly repeated, whereas the concealed truth is to be found in that assertion which is rare or isolated: "He [the writer of the Psalms] as well as others used [the following method] in all secrets of the Law and of faith, . . . [namely], that when they write about a certain subject, they write in most places according to the needs of the multitude . . . whereas in one place or . . . in a few places they allude to the truth regarding that subject."⁹⁶ He who writes esoterically will repeatedly and publicly declare his adherence to conventional opinions, and will insert into these declarations his concealed true view.

The emphasis on the oral character of the Jewish philosophical tradition is connected to Ibn Tibbon's intriguing notion of the dynamic nature of the spiritual history of Israel and the gradual purification of the religious concepts of the community throughout the ages. His comparative study of the sources makes Ibn Tibbon conclude that there was a gradual disclosure of the secrets of the Torah (which are identical to philosophic truths), a development which came about as a result of changing spiritual and cultural conditions. A decisive factor in the formation of this process was the cultural, religious and philosophic status of the non-Jewish environment. To cite one example, the Torah was addressed to a community inured to paganism, against the background of a universally held materialism, and thus it was constrained to conceal the philosophic truth about the existence of the

95. בזה המין מן ההסתר עשה קהלת זה הספר להחמיר המליצות, הן בשיתוף מלות הן בחסרון קשרים הן בתוספות, עד שיוכל אדם לפרש בדבר הפך המכוון בו . . . והמשכיל יעמוד על כוונתו . . . שלא יעלה בדעתך שהוא שונה דברים ללא חזעלה, שאין מנהג הספר הזה כן, אך כל אשר יכפול דברים או יאמר דברים נראים כסותרים זה את זה, הכל עושה לצורך *CE*, fols. 135r-136v. Cf. fols. 32r, 76v, 103v.

96. נהג הוא וחולתו בכל סודות התורה והאמונה . . . שיכתבו הענין האחד ברוב המקומות לפי צורך ההמון . . . ובמקום *MYH*, p. 62. See also p. 166: "He did so in order to conceal . . . and thus confused the order," p. 157. Cf. Anatoli, *Malmed ha-talmidim*, pp. 32b, 51a; introduction, p. 3.

intelligences separated from matter which serve as intermediaries between God and the universe. It had to conceal this lest these intermediaries, the separate intelligences, be personified, materialized and deified.⁹⁷ This was no longer necessary in the days of David and Solomon (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs) when "the [belief in the] existence of God and the angels [i.e., separate intelligences] was already widespread, the relation [of the angels] to [other] existents and their relation to God became widely known. There was thus no further need of concealment, and Solomon no longer refrained from mentioning the existence of the intermediaries, though he did it by allusion."⁹⁸ However, even the writings of such authors, which have more philosophic content than does the Torah,⁹⁹ face a community given to pagan and materialistic influences, though on a different level. This is so, for example, in regard to the belief in immortality which "in those days . . . was not set in their hearts, . . . for the Sabeian faith existed then all over the world, . . . and they could not avoid the faith of those unbelievers. . . —the more so in regard to the ascent of the soul which was not mentioned in the Torah explicitly."¹⁰⁰ The historical approach does not apply to the philosophic or religious content itself which is the domain of the few in every generation, beyond time and place,¹⁰¹ but is strictly applied to

97. See *CE*, fol. 68r: "Moses gave the Law when the Sabaeans prevailed over the whole world, and they denied the existence of anything not perceived by the senses. . . . They thus had declared the higher bodies to be divinities of the lower bodies. They did not believe in the existence of existents having no body nor power in a body, i.e., they denied the existence of intelligences separated from matter or any other subject." *MYH*, p. 173. Cf. *Guide* 1: 63; 3: 29; 3: 45; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot 'Ovedei kokhavim, 1: 1–2; *Epistle on Resurrection*, ed. Joshua Finkel, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 9 (1939): 31–32.

98. פשטה מציאות האלה והמלאכים בעולם ונודע ערכם במציאות וערכם אל השם, ועל כן אין צורך אל כל ההסתר. *CE*, fol. 68. See also *MYH*, pp. 123, 152, 157.

99. See *MYH*, p. 132. Cf. Georges Vajda, "An Analysis of the *Ma'amar yiqqavu ha-mayim* by Samuel b. Judah ibn Tibbon," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 10 (1959): 137–49 (esp. p. 141, n. 1); see also G. Vajda, *Recherches sur la philosophie et la Kabbale dans la pensée juive du Moyen Age* (Paris and the Hague, 1962), pp. 1–32.

100. *CE*, fol. 113v. Cf. Moses Ibn Tibbon, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Lyck, 1874), p. 8.

101. In this context he is not speaking about the development in the philosophic problems themselves, but rather about a gradual revelation of the secret allotted to the select few in every age. In his treatment of another issue, the investigation of nature, Ibn Tibbon speaks also of progress which comes about as a result of the theoretical and empirical development of the sciences by succeeding generations. After disagreeing with the static view which does not believe in the possibility of such a development "since I can do nothing not done already by the ancients," Ibn Tibbon notes: "By nature, later seekers after wisdom augment the knowledge and deeds of earlier ones. For when a later student having a fine intelligence and a pure under-

the style and nature of the written literature. "The Torah speaks in human language (*dibberah Torah ki-leshon benei 'adam*)," not only according to the general language of man as man, not only in accordance with the "vulgar imagination" of every generation,¹⁰² but in a language which adapts itself to the intellectual world of specific hearers, to their time and place.¹⁰³ It is precisely the emphasis on the existence of an additional unwritten stratum which is the common legacy of the intellectual elite throughout history,¹⁰⁴ independent of any specific context, an emphasis intended to provide a guarantee against an historicist relativization of philosophy or faith. It is this which allows the interpreter greater freedom in the historicization of the written text. To cite one example: "Moses . . . had to conceal many beliefs and to present them as something other than what they were. . . . Now whereas he did conceal them from the multitude and showed them to be different from what they were, he undoubtedly transmitted them [orally] to Joshua and to the seventy elders together with the rest of the oral Torah. He also alluded to many of them to let the wise know about them in their proper place, . . . until David and Solomon . . . came and added hints to those secrets, once they saw that the need to conceal them had lessened."¹⁰⁵ A

standing understands what the earlier ones knew—either by hearing them directly or by hearing those who studied their writings—he will make branches grow from the roots which they put forth and will reach further conclusions from what they had to say, not to speak of what can be added by experimentation and theorizing. This is just as we find in astronomy, in medicine and in the other arts, that the latter adds from his own theorizing and understanding," *CE*, fol. 55r. "For the student senses what the master did not, and the latter senses what the earlier one did not; this is the way that knowledge increases," *CE*, fol. 68v. See below also about the relationship to Maimonides.

102. See the *Guide* 1: 26. Cf. also 1: 33; 1: 46; 1: 59; 3: 13 (p. 19a); *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah 1: 9–12; *Epistle on Resurrection*, p. 17. See also Falaquera on 1: 35.

103. For an interpretation of Maimonides' view of the commandments in relation to a gradual, historic process of the monotheization of humanity, see Amos Funkenstein, "Maimonides: Political Theory and Realistic Messianism," *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* (Berlin and New York, 1977), pp. 91–96.

104. Ibn Tibbon does not cease emphasizing the continuity of oral teaching, beginning with "Shem and Eber, and others, who had not written books but would lecture and teach face to face, orally" until Moses (citation in the text of the paper below) and the prophets, whose books are but a partial revelation of their oral teaching ("there is no doubt that Isaiah taught more to his disciples orally"), to David who "taught more to the people of his time orally" than he did by writing, and to Solomon "who also taught his generation orally, and then apparently compiled in writing some of what he said orally." *CE*, fol. 4.

105. משה . . . הוצרך ע"ה להסיר אמונות רבות ולהראות בהם זולת מה שהם . . . ועם הסתירו אותם מן ההמון והראותו בהם זולת מה שהם, אין ספק שמסרם דרך קבלה ליהושע ולשבעים זקנים עם שאר התורה שבע"פ, וגם רמז בריבוי מהם להעיר החכמים במקומם . . . עד שבאו דוד ושלמה ע"ה והוסיפו רמזים בסתרים ההם בראותם שמעט צורך ההסתור בהם, *MYH*, p. 174.

complete analysis of these comments in their proper context, comments such as the one which notes that the Torah sometimes “shows them as something other than what they truly are,”¹⁰⁶ would entail a comparison with Averroes and Averroism,¹⁰⁷ beyond the interpretation of Maimonides’ teaching. Here we are concerned with the way Samuel Ibn Tibbon fitted these things into his special view of intellectual and literary history.

Finally, it is interesting to note that this dynamic conception is not limited to an overview of the classical sources but is directly applied to Ibn Tibbon’s own contemporary scene and to the philosophical work of his generation. Here too, the cultural state of the non-Jewish milieu is a decisive factor influencing the character of Jewish literature. In his work, *Ma’amar yiqqavu ha-mayim*, Ibn Tibbon described the development of non-Jewish religious concepts up to his own time, in a way similar to what he says in his *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* about the development of the peoples of the world in biblical times. The enhancement and intensification of philosophical education in the non-Jewish world compelled Maimonides and his disciple, Ibn Tibbon, “to add more clarity to their hints,” just as David and Solomon had done as a result of a similar process. Yet Maimonides and Ibn Tibbon had to surpass David and Solomon as a result of the deterioration in theoretic knowledge and wisdom of the Jews during their time in Exile.¹⁰⁸ This is the context in which Ibn Tibbon viewed the enterprise of Maimonides and the esoteric-exoteric character of his work. It also allowed him (Ibn Tibbon) to reveal daring intentions in the Bible and in the *Guide* beyond the “simple meaning of Maimonides’ words.” He was constrained to

106. Cf. *MYH*, pp. 62, 132, 21: *CE*, fols. 45r, 135r; Anatoli, *Malmad ha-talmidim*, introduction, p. 3. On Joseph Ibn Caspi’s approach which denies to many biblical verses the rank of philosophic truth and finds in them an expression of the views, beliefs and customs of the multitude, see Isadore Twersky, “Joseph ibn Caspi, Portrait of a Medieval Jewish Intellectual,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 238–42. Ibn Tibbon and Ibn Caspi share the view that not every biblical assertion is absolutely true, and not every verse deserves philosophic allegorization. (Ibn Tibbon explicitly presented his views on this issue as more extreme than those of Maimonides, and noted that in his lost book, *Ner ha-hofes*, he elaborated his position. See *MYH* p. 132). Both Ibn Tibbon and Ibn Caspi maintain that their position holds also for issues not directly connected to the issue of anthropomorphism. But Ibn Tibbon’s position is connected to the pedagogic-political context of the Bible; he does not share Ibn Caspi’s general hermeneutic principle regarding the adoption of the opinions and customs of the multitude even beyond this context (see Twersky, *ibid.*). This particular theme in Ibn Tibbon’s teaching goes beyond our present concern with his interpretation of Maimonides. I hope to be able to treat it elsewhere.

107. See G. Vajda’s studies cited in n. 99.

108. See the *Guide* 1: 71, 2: 11, 3: 10.

do this as a result of the transformation in the status of philosophy which he witnessed: "For I have noticed that those truths which have been concealed by our prophets and the sages of our Torah since days of yore are today all widely known to the peoples of the world . . . and they are now deriding us, saying that we have only the outer peel of the words of our prophets, and similar insults and aspersions. . . . I have noticed too that the true sciences are far better known among the nations under whose rule I live than they are in the Islamic countries."¹⁰⁹ This illustrates the fact that in Ibn Tibbon's time the ascendancy in philosophy passed from the Moslems to the Christians for the first time since the tenth century:¹¹⁰ yet it reflects historical sensitivity and social consciousness rather than profound knowledge of Christian scholasticism. Ibn Tibbon's teaching is still inextricably intertwined with Arabic philosophy. At any rate, the transplantation of the philosophic center and the dissemination of theoretical truths in Ibn Tibbon's non-Jewish environment legitimized a transcending of Maimonides' esotericism, called for by the continuous dynamic process of the uncovering of secrets in the history of Israel. This process, which had been stalled during the period between the codification of the Talmud and the writings of Maimonides, who revived it, was to be continued by his disciples in disseminating his teachings and continuously developing them. (One hundred and forty years after Ibn Tibbon, Moses Narboni said the following: "The Master [Maimonides] briefly hints at what we reveal to you *in extenso*, for times naturally change and so do people, and so we can now widen the small holes of the filigree-work with more truths than it was possible to do in the past, for accepted convention is no longer at loggerheads with intellectual truth as much as it was in the past. This is due first and foremost to Maimonides."¹¹¹ Revealing the secrets of the *Guide* becomes possible due to changing times and the spreading of philosophic truth.)

Beyond our interest in Ibn Tibbon's conception of history, these views of

109. . . . כי ראיתי שהאמתות שהסתירום מאז נביאינו וחכמי תורתנו הם מפורסמים היום כולם לאומות העולם . . . והגיעו מחרפים אותנו שאומרים עלינו שאין בידינו מדברי הנביאים רק הקליפות, די בזה גידופים וחרפות . . . וראיתי התכמות האמתיות שנתפרסמו מאוד באומות אשר אנו תחת ממשלתם ובארצותם יותר ויותר מהתפרסם בארצות ישמעאל *MYH*, pp. 173–75.

110. Cf. Shlomo Pines, "Scholasticism after Thomas Aquinas and the Teachings of Ḥasdaï Crescas and his Predecessors," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 1 (1966): 38, n. 102.

111. הרב ז"ל ירמזו בקצרה על מה שגלינו לך בארוכה, וכבר נעתק הזמן ואנשי הדורות אל הטבע—אופן נזכר להרחיב נקבי המשכית באמתות יותר מאשר היה בעובר, למה שאיננו חולק בזה העת המפורסם על המושכל כמו בשעור 111. אשר היה חולק בעובר, וז"ל היה הסבה הראשונה בזה *Narboni on the Guide* 2: 19 (p. 34a).

his are significant for the understanding of his interpretation of Maimonides. A work such as the *Guide*, which is said to react against a situation in which "those truths which have been concealed by our prophets and the sages of our Torah are today all widely known to the peoples of the world" cannot be fully grasped outside the context of the non-Jewish philosophic literature of its time and place.¹¹² Indeed, these assertions cannot be divorced from their apologetic context directed toward the nonphilosophic or semiphilosophic contemporary Jewish society. Yet it was not by chance that Ibn Tibbon chose in this context to emphasize the need for an apologia vis-à-vis his non-Jewish philosophical environment.¹¹³

* * *

Our conclusions may be summarized as follows:

Samuel Ibn Tibbon underscored the esoteric and oral character of the

112. Cf. Joseph Ibn Caspi, *Menorat kesef*, in 'Asarah kelei kesef, ed. Isaac Last (Pressburg, 1903), p. 77, who justifies revealing secrets with the following argument: "I simply copy what the philosophers like Aristotle and his colleagues, who wrote about these things in their books, say. What I wish to do is to clarify the three worlds, what we call the Account of the Chariot. Their books are well known to everyone, though, truly, they are unknown by our people, due to our transgressions." Abravanel would later use Ibn Tibbon's argument in a way counter to Ibn Tibbon's original intention, in order to argue against the identification of the secrets of the Torah with philosophic truths: "It would be very strange if intellectual investigation were identical to prophetic emanation . . . for philosophic lectures are delivered to a public of thousands in the academies of the wise of the gentiles . . . young and old, and they do not try to conceal it at all. Ibn Tibbon has already sensed the doubtful nature of this argument." See "Te'anot lequhot mi-teva' ha-ketuvim yema'anu mah she-peresh ha-RaMBaM be-merkevet Yehez-qe'el," printed in the popular editions of the *Guide*, pt. 3, pp. 71–72. This issue was already a source of contention between Zerahiah Hen and Hillel of Verona at the end of the thirteenth century. Note the former: "For you search for secrets where they are not. . . . It is the things found in their treatises on natural science . . . which he calls secret, not because they are written in the books of the natural philosophers, but because they are hinted at by the prophets" ('*Oṣar neḥmad* 2 [1857]: 132). See also Anatoli, *Malmad ha-talmidim*, p. 32b. Cf. Abraham Ibn Daud, '*Emunah ramah* (Frankfurt, 1853), p. 4, and Maimonides, Introduction to Perek Heleq, pp. 118–19.

113. The argument that it is obligatory to disseminate the sciences among the Jews, and to reveal the intellectual truths hidden in the Jewish sources on account of the contemporary philosophic inferiority of the Jews vis-à-vis their neighbors is constantly repeated in the writings of scholars influenced by Ibn Tibbon in the thirteenth century. See Anatoli, *Malmad ha-talmidim*, introduction, pp. 9, 171a; Moses Ibn Tibbon, *Sefer Pe'ah*, fol. 11r; Moses of Salerno, *Commentary*, fol. 212v; Zerahiah Hen, *Commentary on Job*, p. 169; Zerahiah Hen, introduction to the translation of Averroes' *Middle Commentary on the Metaphysics* (which was published together with his translation of the *Liber de Causis*): Pseudo-Aristotelis, *Liber de Causis*, ed. Ignac Schreiber (Budapest, 1916). See also Judah ben Solomon ha-Kohen of Toledo, *Midrash Hokhmah*, MS Cambridge Add. 1527, fol. 30r.

Jewish philosophic tradition. Jewish literature, from the Bible onward, adopted the pedagogic method used in face to face teaching and concealed at the same time as it revealed. This literature reflects also the tension between its ahistoric philosophic content and the historic—pedagogic necessity arising from the cultural environment. The gradual uncovering of philosophic truths reveals the historic transformation and gradual development of concepts of faith of both Jewish and non-Jewish society in the course of time.

The *Guide of the Perplexed* is a foundation stone as well as a new starting point within this “oral” esoteric tradition. Ibn Tibbon viewed himself as occupying a unique position from which to appreciate Maimonides’ daring intention and emphasized it even in the face of the controversy regarding the Maimonidean corpus. In order to decode the secrets of the *Guide*, one must grasp the method of allusive and concealed writing, in addition to having a philosophic education and philosophic power of reflection.

The fundamental methodological principles which guide Ibn Tibbon’s esoteric reading are: highlighting the role of intentional contradictions and avoiding the attempt to harmonize the true, esoteric teaching and the vulgar teaching which is used to conceal the former, and according to the biblical paradigm, that would also mean identification of the concealed truth with the rare or unique statement appearing in the text and identification of the vulgar, conventional teaching with common or frequent statements; a strict reconstruction of the teaching of Maimonides on any specific issue by a meticulous comparison of the chapters and “connecting” one to another; distinguishing each chapter’s unique subject matter while combining scattered chapters dealing in effect with a single issue; a search for the esoteric context of comments which seem out of place; special attention to chapters whose subject matter breaks the continuity of a series of chapters; special attention to the elucidation of biblical equivocal words and to various and scattered uses of those equivocal words in Maimonides.¹¹⁴ Basic elements of this method already guided Ibn Tibbon during the lifetime of Maimonides, around the time of his translation of the *Guide*.

114. This refers to biblical terms. It should be noted that in his translation of the *Guide*, the translator did not take care to translate an Arabic term by the same Hebrew term in every case. This is also true for terms which have a paramount importance in the *Guide*, as, for example, the Will of God. The Arab terms *mashiyya* and *irāda* were not translated in every case as *raṣon* or *hefeṣ* respectively. See Abraham Nuriel, “Ha-Raṣon ha-’elohi be-Moreh nevukhim,” *Tarbiz* 39 (1970): 39.

From the point of view of the substance of the views attributed to Maimonides, this method has been exemplified here by the strict Aristotelian interpretation of the issues of Providence and nature, intellectual perfection and immortality, in the allegorization of a biblical story and in other allusions connected to it. Does this method apply also to the roots of Maimonides' theological views, his concept of God, His Will and creation *ex nihilo*? It is difficult to give an unequivocal answer to this question since it depends on our interpretation of Ibn Tibbon himself and of his own esoteric writing; there is also the difficulty of distinguishing between the views which he attributed to Maimonides and those he considered as having developed himself. Nevertheless, it appears that even in these fundamental aspects of Maimonides' theology, Ibn Tibbon distinguished between an esoteric and an exoteric teaching. In the epistle on Providence we already note his tendency to prefer those sections dealing with Divine Will as embodied in natural reality over other sections of the *Guide*, and to treat Providence as reflected by the Will which is mediated by nature and its laws. In the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, belief in a single unmediated act of Creation was maintained to be "the simple sense of some of the Master's words which he explains in some sections of his distinguished treatise."¹¹⁵ In the *Ma'amar yiqqavu ha-mayim* we find an undercurrent of criticism of Maimonides' explicit statements about creation and the Divine Will, a critique which very carefully hints at a Saadianic-Kalam context of certain sections of the *Guide*,¹¹⁶ and refers to another section as "the simple sense of his words con-

115. CE, fol. 67v.

116. 1. Saadia Gaon interpreted "And God said let there be light—God willed that there should be light." See Saadia Gaon, *Commentary on the Torah*, ed. Joseph Kafih (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 11. His interpretation identifies the creating speech with the causing will which is not directed at any particular object, and indeed that is the interpretation which is most appropriate to a belief in a direct and simultaneous creation *ex nihilo* of all existence. Ibn Tibbon, following Abraham Ibn Ezra, had reservations about this interpretation and explained that God's "speeches" (*ma'amarim*) are directed toward intermediary beings (intellects and spheres; see below) between God and his creatures, in the Account of Creation. It was convenient for him to point to his predecessors' controversy (*MYH*, p. 125), but a reader who is well-versed in the text of the *Guide* will recognize the drift of what is being said, and will note that the approach which is being criticized is the very one adopted by Maimonides himself in what seemed to Ibn Tibbon to be "the plain sense of his words." Maimonides had in fact noted that "this has already been said by an individual other than us and is very well-known." *Guide* 1: 65. Cf. CE, fol. 67.

2. Maimonides distinguished between belief in an arbitrary voluntary action of God—"by will alone" (a belief similar to that held by the Ash'arite Kalam) and the belief of "our scholars and of our men of knowledge" in a voluntary action of God which is subsequent to wisdom, to

tained in the *Guide*, 2:30.”¹¹⁷ At any rate, Ibn Tibbon’s independent writings have recourse to Divine Will only in the sense of its embodiment in natural reality. The Will is the power of guidance intrinsic to the world order and the laws of nature—“in accordance with Divine *Will* which is in accordance with that *nature* which emanated from Him”¹¹⁸ (*italics added*). The Will is the activating power reflected in the motion of the spheres, in the recursiveness of generation and corruption, and so forth. I have not found in Samuel Ibn Tibbon’s writings any usage of the attribute of Will taken as a Free Will beyond reality, a Will whose essence is “to will and not to will.”¹¹⁹ The same is true for Ibn Tibbon’s theory of creation, which expropriates the Aristotelian eternal beings—intelligences, spheres, elements—from the act of creation. The Account of Creation takes place against the background of eternal beings and is limited to the process of generation of the individual beings of the sublunar world. Maimonides’ identification of the Account of Creation with Aristotelian physics was taken advantage of by Ibn Tibbon to the fullest.

* * *

This paper has treated Samuel Ibn Tibbon as an interpreter of Maimonides, and it has generally avoided dealing with his own teaching. Ibn Tibbon viewed his independent work as having grown out of Maimonides’ philosophy, and yet he did not hesitate to take issue with his master on many details of the philosophic interpretation of the Bible and on a number of theoretical problems. His unbounded admiration for the man, the life of whom “in any branch of learning we have not known since the days of Rav Ashi,”¹²⁰ did not place Maimonides beyond error, and it might be possible that “immersed in his work he did not reflect on this, for that is what habit

a telic intention (*Guide* 3: 25–26). Ibn Tibbon cautiously bestowed on these terms a new meaning. Every belief in a direct simultaneous *ex nihilo* creation of all reality is called by him a belief in creation “by will alone,” as against creation “by wisdom”—which would mean henceforth a caused mediation of existing beings (*MYH*, p. 126). Thus, by taking advantage of Maimonidean linguistic usages, “the plain sense of his [Maimonides’] words in 2: 30” (*MYH*, p. 128) are included in the criticized view.

117. *MYH*, p. 128.

118. הכל עושים ברצון השם לפי הטבע שהשפיע עליהם, *MYH*, p. 119. See A. Ravitzky, “The Hypostasis of the Divine Wisdom.”

119. *Guide* 2: 18.

120. *CE*, fol. 4v. Cf. the Epistle of Aaron b. Meshullam to Meir Halevi Abulafia, in *Qoveš teshuvot ha-RaMBaM ve-iggerotav*, pt. 3, p. 11.

does to sages as well.”¹²¹ Explicitly and consciously, Ibn Tibbon saw himself as guided and fructified by Maimonides, but not repeating and duplicating him: “I know that it is of his water that we are drinking, but the intention of every wise man is to teach and reveal to men in order that those who learn from him add to what he taught by making use of what he revealed to them.”¹²² “Let none of my readers suspect me of taking issue with the Master, . . . but as he himself said, there are several ways in which obscure things such as these may be understood.”¹²³ “What I happen to find in the visions of Ezekiel adds to what our Master, the teacher of truth, has noted, and it is his comments from which all our comments or reservations spring.”¹²⁴ We should note however, that we are not engaged here with one in a long list of Maimonidean thinkers and interpreters throughout the ages. We are dealing with a scholar whose interpretative career started during Maimonides’ own lifetime, through a personal correspondence with the Master, who was his first translator and interpreter, and who laid down the rules for a whole school which was active for more than a century. Finally, we noted what the scholars of his time thought about Ibn Tibbon *à propos* the secrets of the *Guide*. I would therefore like to conclude with a comment about the contacts and the nature of the relationship between Maimonides and Samuel Ibn Tibbon, a comment which could be relevant to the problem of the interpretation of the *Guide*.

Maimonides put his imprimatur on Ibn Tibbon’s translation of the *Guide*, recommended him to the scholars of Lunel as his worthy translator,¹²⁵ and replied in detail to Ibn Tibbon’s queries about the style and the ideas contained in the work and about his evaluation of some philosophical

121. אגב שטפיה לא עיין בה כי כזה וכזה יעשה ההרגל, ואף לחכמים. *CE*, fol. 65v. See also fols. 4v, 31r, 62v, 67v, 68v, 77v, 82r, 90r, 137v; *MYH*, pp. 19, 22, 29, 30, 39, 47, 51, 108–10, 114, 130, 132, 148. Cf. also his brief comments on the *Guide*, MS Jewish National and University Library 8*746 (see *Dalālat al-hā’irin*, ed. Salomon Munk [Paris, 1856–1866], p. 102, n. 2). It should be noted that Ibn Tibbon did not accept all of Maimonides’ proposed Hebrew equivalents in his translation (see I. Sonne, “Maimonides’ Epistle,” p. 89, n. 13).

122. יודע אני שמיימי אנו שותק, אבל כוונת כל חכם לב במה שיורה ויגלה לבני אדם שיוסיפו עליו הלוקחים מפיו על. *MYH*, p. 114. Cf. n. 101 above.

123. אל יחשדני המעיין לחולק על דברי הרב . . . אך כמו שאמ’ הוא כמה פנים יש לדברים סתומים כאלה. *CE*, fol. 77v.

124. מה שנודמן לי במראות יחזקאל מוסיף על מה שהעיר עליו הרב מורה צדק, שהערתו היא סבה לכל הערותינו. *MYH*, p. 53.

125. *Qoveṣ teshuvot ha-RaMBaM*, pt. 2, p. 44a. See also p. 27b, and the epistle of Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel, *ibid*.

writings. Their correspondence began apparently in 1197,¹²⁶ while Ibn Tibbon's last letter to Maimonides was sent during the last year of Maimonides' life, 1204.¹²⁷ It appears that Maimonides refrained from replying to Ibn Tibbon's letter concerning Providence (1199). Is it true that we do not possess all of the correspondence between them,¹²⁸ but it appears that this is not the reason for lack of reply to this particular epistle, since Ibn Tibbon continuously wondered about this question more than twenty years later. His son Moses Ibn Tibbon, Shem Tov Falaquera and Moses Narboni also studied and commented on this epistle,¹²⁹ and it is difficult to believe that all of them disregarded a reply written by Maimonides. Seven months after the writing of the epistle on Providence, Maimonides replied in writing to other questions (Tishri 1511 [Seleucid Era]—September 1199) and did not mention the question of Providence.¹³⁰ A. Marx's view that Maimonides had not yet received the epistle on Providence is not the only possible explanation for the absence of a Maimonidean reply.¹³¹ It appears that Maimonides refrained from reacting even afterwards. It should be noted that Maimonides rejected Ibn Tibbon's request to come to Egypt to study with him personally, although he wrote graciously about Ibn Tibbon's plan to visit him: "Come, O blessed of the Lord, and most blessed of visitors, I am very happy and delighted about this. . . . Do not, however, expect to spend even one hour alone with me either by day or by night, and do not expect any gain in wisdom or learning [by coming]."¹³² Maimonides wrote in detail

126. There is a disagreement about the reconstruction of the various phases of the correspondence. See Alexander Marx, "The Correspondence between the Rabbis of Southern France and Maimonides about Astrology," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 3 (1926): 333–36; idem, "Maimonides and the Scholars of Southern France," in *Studies in Jewish History and Booklore* (New York, 1944), pp. 58–62. Cf. also I. Sonne, "Maimonides' Epistle."

127. See *CE*, fol. 5v.

128. For example, Maimonides answered Ibn Tibbon's request to visit him (see below), yet we do not possess the original letter of request. Ibn Tibbon reports too on his last letter to Maimonides (*CE*, fol. 5v), but we do not possess this either. There might have been other exchanges of letters.

129. See A. Marx, "The Correspondence," p. 335, n. 54; Diesendruck, "Samuel and Moses ibn Tibbon," pp. 348–50.

130. Cf. M. Steinschneider, *Catalogus . . . Bodleiana*, p. 2490; I. Sonne, "Maimonides' Epistle," pp. 146–47.

131. Diesendruck had already wondered ("Samuel and Moses ibn Tibbon," p. 345, n. 21) about the probability of the suggestion that a letter was on its way approximately seven months.

132. בא ברוך ה' ומבורך שבבאים, ואני שש ועלו ושמת בזה . . . אמנם תועלת חכמה מן החכמות או להתייחד

about his extremely heavy schedule, advised Ibn Tibbon against undertaking a dangerous sea journey, and ended by saying: "Come gladly for the sake of a visit, but not to study, for my time is very limited." Should we conclude that Maimonides altered his positive attitude toward Ibn Tibbon after reading his epistles such as the epistle on Providence? That is not what we learn from Abraham Maimuni, who wrote, "Toward the end of [Maimonides'] life, he received the epistles of the Father of Translators, the sage theologian, the distinguished Samuel, son of the distinguished Judah Ibn Tibbon. Indeed he was a great and respected sage of great understanding; my righteous father and master . . . told me that he [Ibn Tibbon] reached all the way to the depths of the secrets of the treatise *Guide of the Perplexed* as well as the rest of his [Maimonides'] writings, and understood his [or: its] intention."¹³³ These words do not refer, to be sure, to Ibn Tibbon's later independent writings, but as we noted above, central elements of Ibn Tibbon's approach to the interpretation of the *Guide* could be anticipated even during Maimonides' lifetime.¹³⁴ However much we want to rely on Abraham Maimuni's testimony, it appears that Ibn Tibbon himself never

כלל ובהתבודד עמי אפילו שעה אחד ביום או בלילה אל תחיל בזה כלל pt. 2, p. 28b (that letter is from Tishri 1511, Seleucid Era). Prof. Jacob Levinger has suggested (in an oral communication) that Maimonides tried to hint to Ibn Tibbon that he should not expect additional revelations about Maimonides' views of problems such as providence, even in a private conversation.

133. See above.

134. In addition to what has been said above, I would like to note the following: In Ibn Tibbon's introduction to Maimonides' commentary on 'Avot, the translator hints at his dissatisfaction with the concluding chapter of the *Guide*, which might be thought to imply that the moral virtues (*hesed*, *mishpat* and *sedāqah*) are preferable to the theoretical virtues, i.e., to intellectual union (*haskel ve-yado'a 'oti*) in contradistinction to other chapters in the *Guide*. Ibn Tibbon prefers an alternative interpretation of Jeremiah 9:22–23; henceforth the primacy of intellection would no longer be in doubt: "Although the Master interpreted this verse well in 3: 54 . . . I have a different interpretation of some of its words, . . . an innovation. I have no doubt that it is a good and true one. . . . It seems to me that there is another interpretation, . . . which is that the main thrust of the hint in the phrase, 'For in these things I delight, saith the Lord,' refers to 'that he understands and knows Me' (*haskel ve-yado'a 'oti*), for here he gives a reason why one should glory in these two [understanding and knowing], and not in the other three noted [*hesed*, *mishpat* u-*sedāqah*—lovingkindness, justice and righteousness]; the reason is that these two, i.e., *haskel ve-yado'a 'oti*, are His ultimate desire and intention in man" (ואע"פ שהרב) ז"ל פירש זה הפסוק פירוש טוב בפרק נ"ד מן החלק השלישי . . . יש לי בפירוש קצת מלותיו דרך אחרת . . . חידוש אין ספק אצלי בטובו ואמתתו . . . ונראה לי זולת מה שפירש בהם . . . והוא שעיקר הרמז באמרו—כי באלה חפצתי נאום ה'—שב אל השכל, וידוע אותי—נתן טעם למה ראוי להתהלל באילו השנים, לא בשלושה הנוכרים, מפני שאלו השנים, ר"ל ה'—שב אל השכל, וידוע אותי. (השכל וידוע אותי. הם תכלית חפצו וכוונתו באדם); (MS Vienna Heb. 156, fol. 8r). This was published in the Vienna edition of the Mishnah. Cf. also *CE*, fols. 91, 138v; *MYH*, p. 170. Steinschneider established the date of the translation of Maimonides' commentary of 'Avot as 1202 (*Die*

felt rejected by Maimonides, and at a later date did not hesitate to “turn his face to stone [i.e., to be shameless]” and to request the Master—who had written to him earlier that he had not even one free hour—to compose philosophical commentaries on Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and the Song of Songs (this was just before Maimonides’ death). What was the nature of their relationship in the years 1199–1204? Did Ibn Tibbon distinguish between Maimonides’ refraining from directly answering him and avoiding a face to face meeting between them and his possible agreement to a written work alluding to the secrets of those biblical books which call for greater philosophical interpretation? We have no answer to these questions. Samuel Ibn Tibbon’s conviction that he was unique in understanding the secrets of the *Guide* cannot be doubted. The ultimate question of the intention and aims of the Master himself is thereby not solved.

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hebraeischen Uebersetzungen, p. 438. The addition of *ZaL* [of blessed memory] is attributed to a later copier.) Thus we must consider the possibility that Maimonides saw this passage and could be informed about Ibn Tibbon’s tendencies from yet another angle. Modern scholarship on the *Guide* (beginning with Herman Cohen) was concerned with the problem treated here by the *Guide* (from the point of view of the interpretation of the *Guide*). See, e.g., Eliezer Goldman, “Ha-‘Avodah ha-meyuḥedet be-massigei ha-‘amittot,” *Bar Ilan Annual* 6 (1968): 287–313. See also L. V. Berman, “The Political Interpretation of the Maxim: The Purpose of Philosophy is the Imitation of God,” *Studia Islamica* 15 (1961): 53–61; Alexander Altmann, “Maimonides’ Four Perfections,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): 23–24.