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MAIMONIDES ON THE FALL OF MAN

by

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The forms of interpreting sacred texts are many. In the civilization of the pagan Greeks, the works of Homer and Plato served as springboards for interpretation of various kinds. In Judaism, it was the Pentateuch, the rest of the Hebrew Bible, and the talmudic literature; in Christianity, the Old and the New Testaments; and in Islam, the Qur'ān and traditional literature. Of course, the concept of sacred text is fluid and part of a process depending on the attitudes of society which change over time.

In the Jewish tradition, with which we are concerned more particularly, one thinks of the distinction between *peshaṭ* and *derash,* the literal and the nonliteral. Within the literal one could also include the critical historical interpretation of the meaning of a text.[1] In late medieval times one also

NOTE: A preliminary version of this paper was delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies in 1975. An abstract was published in the *Association for Jewish Studies Newsletter,* no. 17, June, 1976, p. 13.

1. Cf. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London, 1967), in general and with respect to the use of meaning and interpretation as technical terms. On interpretation as a fundamental category of Jewish intellectual history, see Simon Rawidowicz, "On Interpretation," in his *Studies in Jewish Thought,* ed. N. N. Glatzer (Philadelphia, 1974), pp. 45–80. I did not find Wilhelm Bacher's *Die Bibelexegese Moses Maimuni's* (Budapest, 1896) (Hebrew translation by A. Z. Rabbinowitz, *Ha-RaMBaM parshan ha-miqra* [Tel Aviv, 1931/2]) of use in this study. I hope to discuss the forms of interpreting sacred texts more generally on another occasion with full bibliographical references.

speaks of *remez*, identified with the philosophical mode, and *sod*, identified with the mystical mode. This fourfold classification might well be based on Christian methods of interpreting scripture.[2]

Maimonides would obviously accept the *peshaṭ*, the literal meaning, as a valid method of interpretation, although exactly how literal one can be is also a matter of interpretation.[3] He might possibly enlarge it to include the critical-historical since some of his investigations and interpretations of the Bible betray a keen historical sense. The actions of God, including the commandments, are purposeful and one can discover their meaning through an examination of their function in their environment.[4]

The ethical homiletical approach which is characteristic of midrash, Maimonides obviously recognized. This is the time-honored way of giving a text significance. Certain of the material to be found in the rabbinic midrashim he interpreted as being philosophical in nature, so that one could separate out the forms of literary interpretation to be applied to the midrash itself.

Maimonides rejected the interpretations of the mystics. He was profoundly unsympathetic to mystical "excesses." Seeing the Torah, for example, as the mystical name of God was something that would strike him as foreign.[5]

Of course, for Maimonides, an important method of interpretation was the philosophic mode. In order to get a better understanding of what Maimonides understood by that method of interpretation, let us examine Chapter Two of the First Part of the *Guide* on the fall of man. Here we have

2. See Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York, 1974), pp. 168–74 (especially pp. 172–74) and idem, "The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism," in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1965), pp. 32–86.

3. See Leo Strauss, "Spinoza on Interpretation," *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, 1952), pp. 142–201.

4. See *Guide*, 3:25–26; Leo Strauss, "How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago, 1963), pp. xxxiii–xliv, but cf. below n. 14.

5. See *Guide*, 1:62. See also his *Responsa*, ed. Joshua Blau, 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 1957), 1:200–1. The negative attitude to *Shi'ur Qomah* in his responsum represents a development from the time he wrote his *Commentary on the Mishnah*. See his commentary on Pereq Ḥeleq in Joseph Qāfiḥ, ed., *Mishnah 'im perush Mosheh ben Maimon: Neziqin* (Jerusalem, 1964), p. 213, n. 42. See also Alexander Altmann, ed. and trans., *Epistle on Shi'ur Qoma* [by Moses of Narbonne], in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p. 232, n. 37. Blau's translation of *lam arā qaṭṭ* by *lo ḥashavti me-'olam* is not necessarily correct. It could also have a present meaning in Middle Arabic. See J. Blau, *Diqduq ha-'aravit ha-yehudit* (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 142.

an excellent example of the philosophic genre of the interpretation of Scripture. After completing our examination, I then shall try to address myself to the question of the principle underlying the possibility of the philosophic mode of interpretation of the Bible according to Maimonides. My concluding remarks will be addressed to the general place of the philosophic mode of interpretation.

I

First, let us examine the structure of the chapter and then its meaning, section by section.

I find that the chapter has six parts, only the last not subdivided. I give the structure as follows:[6]

I. Prefatory remark (p. 23.19–27 Pines; p. 15.22–28 Joel)
   a. General introduction (p. 23.19–22 Pines; p. 15.22 Joel)
   b. Prefatory statement (p. 23.22–27 Pines; p. 15.23–28 Joel)

6. In what follows, Pines refers to Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed,* trans. S. Pines (Chicago, 1963), and Joel to the edition of Salomon Munk's Arabic text by Issachar Joel, *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn* (Jerusalem, 1939). I also refer the reader to the acute analysis of this chapter and related material in Steven S. Schwarzschild, "Moral Radicalism and 'Middlingness' in the Ethics of Maimonides," *Studies in Medieval Culture* 11 (1978): 65–94 (esp. 73–75). In general, I find Schwarzschild's analysis compelling. However, I am unable to agree with him that Maimonides posits a sphere of ethical activity which is essentially rational in nature. To the very end, Maimonides holds to the doctrine that ethical and political matters belong to the category of "generally accepted things" (see *Guide,* 2:33, Pines, p. 364; Joel, p. 256). However, it still remains to be clarified exactly what the relationship is between the natural order and the ethical and political order which is to be bridged by the imitation of the actions of the Deity. On the other hand, I also do not agree with Marvin Fox's conclusion in his "Maimonides and Aquinas on Natural Law," *Diné Israel* 3 (1972): xxxv (cf. also Schwarzschild, p. 87, n. 65) that "Maimonides, finding no rational ground for moral distinctions, avoids the dangers of social chaos by returning to the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinic tradition." It seems to me that a more fruitful approach to this problem would be the investigation of the sources of moral and ethical behavior in Alfarabi's and Maimonides' understanding of Aristotle's depiction of the prudent man in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (see below). A very interesting and suggestive article connected intimately with the theme taken up here has appeared recently. See Warren Zev Harvey, "Maimonides and Spinoza on the Knowledge of Good and Evil," *'Iyyun* 28 (1979):167–85 (in Hebrew). In the course of his argument much of the material we have discussed here is taken up. In addition, Spinoza's view on the interpretation of the fall of man is expounded. A main point of this article is that the knowledge of good and evil, "generally accepted things," is not something accessible to the intellect, but rather to the imagination and, accordingly, the practical intellect is not mentioned specifically any place in the *Guide.* Here we have the opposite view to that of Schwarzschild. However, Harvey mentions as well that Maimonides in the

II. An anonymous objection to the story of Adam's fall (pp. 23.28–24.11 Pines; pp. 15.28–16.8 Joel)
   a. Objection (pp. 23.28–24.6 Pines; pp. 15.28–16.5 Joel)
   b. Supporting analogy (p. 24.6–11 Pines; p. 16.5–8 Joel)
III. Maimonides' reply (pp. 24.12–25.25 Pines; pp. 16.8–17.3 Joel)
   a. Rhetorical preface (p. 24.12–20 Pines; p. 16.8–13 Joel)
   b. Answer proper (pp. 24.20–25.25 Pines; pp. 16.3–17.3 Joel)
IV. Support to Maimonides' reply (p. 25.25–36 Pines; p. 17.3–10 Joel)
   a. Support (p. 25.25–31 Pines; pp. 16.26–17.3 Joel)
   b. Support of support (p. 25.31–36 Pines; p. 17.3–10 Joel)
V. Explanation of verse in Job and application to Genesis story (pp. 25.36–26.21 Pines; p. 17.10–22 Joel)
   a. Explanation of verse in Job (pp. 25.36–26.10 Pines; p. 17.10–14 Joel)
   b. Application to Genesis story (p. 26.10–21 Pines; p. 17.14–22 Joel)
VI. Concluding exclamation

* * *

In reflecting on the sections of the chapter, I see the third and fourth parts as hanging together flanked on either side by two sections. The second section is the opposite of the fifth, as we shall see, in the sense that the objector posits that Adam starts out as a beast according to the plain meaning, whereas in Maimonides' view he ends up as a beast. Both the first and the last sections are very short and there seems to be no obvious relationship between them except that they serve to introduce and conclude the interpretation. The structure is triangular in nature, rising to a climax in section three and then subsiding with supporting material. More important, the action moves from those things better known to us, from received opinion, to philosophical values. Once the point is made, a gradual descent throws

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Guide, 1:53 (Pines, p. 121.9–13; Joel, p. 82.4–7) does recognize that one of the functions of the rational faculties is to rule (*yasūs*) cities, thus implying that intellect may know good and evil. Harvey's solution to this difficulty is to say that once the imagination knows good or evil actions or intentions, it may employ the intellect to distinguish between them. For further elaboration, see Harvey's article. What he does not take into account, along with Schwarzschild, is the case of the prudent man in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. See below references in n. 30. I must leave full treatment of this subject for another occasion.

light on other material. But let us now look more closely at the text, point by point.

* * *

In section one, Maimonides remarks that every Hebrew,[7] i.e., every Hebrew speaker for whom the Genesis story was intended, knew that *'elohim* was an equivocal noun, capable of meaning the Deity, angels, or rulers governing cities. Maimonides derives support for his statement from the Aramaic translation of Genesis by Onqelos, the Proselyte, that in the crucial verse for his interpretation, *And ye shall be as* 'elohim, *knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:5), *'elohim*[8] means rulers of cities. Having laid this premise down, which is the key to his interpretation of the fall of man, Maimonides proceeds to put the question.

Before going on to analyze the second part, it seems important to point out that Maimonides is fulfilling the first of the two purposes of the *Guide* which he mentions specifically at the beginning of the Introduction to the *Guide:* the explanation of the various meanings that biblical terms may have. They may apparently be taken in one sense, whereas they should be taken in some other sense. Here obviously, and this is the mistake of the objector, the term *'elohim* has been taken to refer to the Deity, or possibly the angels, whereas Maimonides states it should be taken in the sense of rulers of cities. It is an equivocal term.

The second part of the chapter begins by expounding the objection of the objector, a learned man (*rajul 'ulūmī*), a man of the sciences, but not a man of the religious sciences.[9] Let us examine the position of the objector and its

7. The use of the word *'ibrānī* here is striking. I understand it to mean Hebrew speaker. He is quite conscious of the fact that the traditional knowledge of Hebrew has been interrupted. Therefore, he implies that one of the difficulties in understanding the biblical text is simply semantic, i.e., the range of meanings easily accessible to the ancient Hebrew is not easily accessible to us.

8. Onqelos has "and you shall be like great ones, deciding between good and evil." I believe that Maimonides' interpretation rests on the word "deciding" (*ḥakimin*) for his interpretation. For rulers, he uses the word *ḥukkām.* Cf. also, for example, Exodus 21:6 for *'elohim* in the sense of "judges." Maimonides does not mention Genesis 3:22, "And the Lord God said, Indeed, man has become like one of us to know good and evil," which on the face of it clearly conflicts with his interpretation of *'elohim.* It is typical of Maimonides that he alludes to the allegorical character of the story of the fall without going into details, as he states clearly at the beginning of his introduction to the *Guide:* "But if we explain these parables to him or if we draw his attention to their being parables, he will take the right road and be delivered from this perplexity" (Pines, p. 6; Joel, p. 2.27–29).

9. Compare the way Maimonides begins his *Treatise on the Art of Logic:* "Some lord

underlying assumptions. Basing himself on the apparent meaning of the text,[10] he thinks that the primary purpose[11] was that Adam should be as the other animals. When he disobeyed he received the great perfection peculiar to man, the capacity to distinguish between good and evil. This is man's noblest characteristic; in virtue of it, men are constituted as substances. It is therefore a matter of surprise to the objector that man's disobedience should be rewarded with a perfection which he did not have before, intellect,[12] rather than be punished. This is the end of the first part of this section.

In the second part of the objection, the objector brings an analogy to his understanding of the biblical narrative. In his view, the narrative can be compared with the story of a man who disobeyed and committed great crimes and in consequence underwent a metamorphosis, becoming a star in heaven. What we have here is an attempt on the part of the objector to make the biblical myth into a pagan, perhaps gnostic myth.[13] The objector implies that the biblical narrative is no better than one of the pagan myths which extol rebellion against the decree of the gods. Therefore, the Torah teaches that unethical conduct is rewarded. The objector takes a strong position in his attack on the biblical myth. Maimonides, consequently, takes a strong tone in answering him.

(*sayyid*) of the legal-religious sciences asked a man (*rajul*) who theorizes about the art of logic, etc." For bibliographical references, see my "Some Remarks on the Arabic Text of Maimonides' *Treatise on the Art of Logic*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88 (1968):340–42.

10. *Ẓāhir al-naṣṣ*. Pines translates "clear sense." The objector asks according to the apparent meaning, while Maimonides answers according to the inner meaning (*bāṭin*).

11. *Al-qaṣd al-awwal*.

12. See Alfarabi, *Risālah fī 'l-'aql*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beirut, 1938), for an examination of the different senses of the word intellect (*'aql*). The beginning of Alfarabi's epistle is left out of Arthur Hyman's translation in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, eds. Arthur Hyman and J. J. Walsh (Indianapolis, 1973), pp. 215–21. This treatise is important for understanding Maimonides' concept of the intellect. For contrast, see George Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism* (Oxford, 1971), for an extensive treatment of the rationality of 'Abd al-Jabbār, an eleventh-century Mu'tazilite theologian.

13. S. Munk in his notes to his French translation of the *Guide* thinks of stories of Nimrod, who revolted against God, constructed the Tower of Babel, and who was said to have been placed in heaven, identifying him with the constellation of Orion. See also Julian the Apostate, "Against the Galilaeans," in his *Works*, trans. W. C. Wright, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1913–23), 3:327; Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 2d rev. ed. (Boston, 1963), pp. 91–94. Jonas remarks that "Gnostic allegory, though often ... conventional ... is in its most telling instances of a very different nature. Instead of taking over the value system of the traditional myth, it proves the deeper 'knowledge' by reversing the roles of good and evil, sublime and base, blest and accursed, found in the original" (pp. 91–92 and see pp. 93–94 with reference to the gnostic view of the serpent). In this light, the objector wishes to make the biblical myth out to be a gnostic myth.

Let us now proceed to the third part of the chapter opening with Maimonides' rhetorical introduction to his answer. I call the introduction rhetorical because in it Maimonides is not interested in meeting the arguments of the objector, but tries to undermine his prestige by attacking his character. He accuses him of superficiality because he is used to reading history and poetry—two genres which for Maimonides are extremely unimportant and perhaps downright pernicious.[14] The objector is concerned with the body rather than with the mind. Overindulging the senses is the mark of unphilosophic man.[15] Maimonides also criticizes the objector for saying the first thing that comes to mind and this is one of the marks of the man of the multitude.[16]

Maimonides then proceeds to give his substantive answer to the objector. Quite to the contrary, Maimonides argues, Adam before the fall was not an irrational animal—he was the epitome of rational man, being concerned with truth and falsehood, the pursuit of theoretical perfection. He was a philosopher. In fact the biblical narrative turns into a philosophical allegory on the model of the Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān story of Ibn Ṭufayl[17] with much the same point. The solitary life in which reason has control is the best one for man as an ideal; being concerned with the material world and in its thrall is a disaster. It represents a descent into the cave away from the heady regions of pure thought. Ibn Ṭufayl also makes the same point. Ḥayy, the solitary philosopher-mystic, enters society governed by a virtuous religion, only to be disappointed, so that he returns to a life of contemplation. In the *Guide* there is the same downgrading of "civilized" life. It is curious that at the end of the *Guide*, Maimonides emphasizes the political duty incumbent on the philosopher.[18] Is this an expression of the latent tension in the outlook of

14. For Maimonides' attitude to history and its relation to the prevailing Jewish attitude, see Bernard Lewis, *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 23ff. but cf. above n. 4.

15. See *Guide*, 2:40 end.

16. See Alfarabi, *Compendium Legum Platonis*, ed. Francesco Gabrieli (London, 1952), p. 3 (English translation in Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook* [Glencoe, 1963], p. 84).

17. See Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy b. Yaqẓān*, ed. and trans. Leon Gauthier (Beirut, 1936) (partial English translation in R. Lerner and M. Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, pp. 134–62).

18. See my "The Political Interpretation of the Maxim: The Purpose of Philosophy is the Imitation of God," *Studia Islamica* 15 (1961): 53–62, and my forthcoming "Maimonides on Political Leadership," to be published in a volume of essays on the Jewish political tradition, edited by Daniel J. Elazar.

Maimonides between a political and apolitical attitude? Or perhaps, rather, it is the Torah of Moses which itself is the key to the control of the appetites so that one may then be able to rise to the heights of metaphysical speculation and thus to recapture the pristine, original essence of man as expressed in *pardes* (Paradise), the contemplation of the truth.[19]

Maimonides then brings two proofs for his interpretation of the story. The first is that man is made in the image of God, and the only way that this statement can have meaning according to Maimonides, as he has shown in the previous chapter, is to say that there is some similarity between the intellect of man and God, understood as intellect.[20] The second proof, or indication, is that Adam was given a commandment. This indicates that he had practical wisdom, as well as theoretical wisdom. The theoretical and the practical were a unity in him, since everything was ordered to a life of the mind.[21]

The fall of man consisted in a change of priorities, from an interest in the things of the mind to becoming interested in the things of the body; from being a philosopher, a master of his passions, to becoming a beast in human form, mastered by his passions; from being a solitary thinker, to becoming a ruler of cities, being informed by the imagination only.[22] Man was not concerned with truth and falsehood but rather with good and evil, with those things generally accepted, to use Maimonides' terminology. What is the distinction that he has in mind?

The distinction here laid down is familiar in Aristotelian philosophy. In Aristotle we find a general distinction between demonstrative syllogisms based on true premises and dialectical reasoning based on generally

19. For the meaning of *pardes* in the thought of Maimonides, see my "Maimonides, the Disciple of Alfarabi," *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974): 164, n. 30, and 167, n. 44, with references quoted there. See below n. 26 and see also Harvey, "Maimonides and Spinoza . . ." (reference above n. 6), p. 171 who takes essentially the same position with respect to the function of the Mosaic law and its rabbinic development.

20. Cf. S. Pines, "Translator's Introduction," in Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed,* pp. xcvii-xcviii.

21. Thus he was not interested in sexual activity, which can only be a distraction and is disgraceful in Maimonides' view. See references in Pines, "Translator's Introduction," p. lxii. The same is true of Ḥayy. He lives the solitary life and achieves happiness without sexual activity.

22. See *Guide,* 2:36 and 37, for a description of prophecy which fits Adam. In fact, according to Maimonides, imagination did not enter in Moses' prophecy (*Guide,* 2:36 end and 2:45 end) and thus Adam and Moses were identical, the difference being that Adam, before the fall, represents the ideal for man, not living in society, while Moses represents the ideal for man living in society.

accepted opinions which are probable, but not certain. Here we see Maimonides using this distinction between reasoning based on different assumptions and applying the one to the sphere of theory, of truth and falsity, and the other to action. Action, he implies, the goal of choice between good and evil, cannot be qualified by truth and falsity, but only by good and evil. To put it another way, theory is the realm of fact in which one can seek whether one opinion is valid and another invalid; the sphere of action is that of value, which by its very nature is subjective. The idea that the area of morals and ethics is not certain in comparison to the theoretical disciplines is mentioned by Aristotle and is related to the distinction between *physis* and *nomos* stressed by the sophists.[23]

According to Aristotle, generally accepted opinions are those which are generally accepted as known either by all or by the majority or by the wise—by all of the wise or the majority or by the most famous and distinguished of them.[24] These premises are the basis of dialectical arguments. Thus, previous to the fall, Adam was not concerned with matters relating to values but only with the truth. In itself the commandment not to eat of the fruit of the tree represents for Maimonides the values of the philosophical tradition which he followed, i.e., not to be concerned with the flesh but rather with the spirit of philosophical inquiry. And once he had reached that state, there was no need for him to occupy himself with the realm of ethics and politics.

However, from being a little lower than *'elohim* (here having the meaning of the angels, i.e., the separate intelligences or perhaps God[25]), he became like *'elohim,* here meaning the "rulers of cities, knowers of good and evil." That is, instead of being concerned with the theoretical intellect, he was concerned with matters in which imagination plays a large part. Here, Maimonides indicates that the meaning of the biblical myth is that the true happiness of man consists in the theoretical life; being wholly concerned with the political is a distortion of man's true nature. Paradise (*gan 'eden, pardes*) is identical with theoretical speculation.[26] The sense of values one gets from this initial explication of the fall of man is the tension between the ideal life for man which is the theoretical life and life in the cities not

23. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1.3.1094b13ff., with W. F. R. Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 32ff.

24. See Aristotle, *Topics,* 1.1.100b21.

25. See *Guide,* 1:68, and reference in n. 20 above.

26. It is interesting to point out that *pardes* is cognate with English "paradise," since they have the same ultimate origin. See above, n. 19.

informed by intellectual virtue, which is essentially corrupting. This tension is one which runs throughout the *Guide*. One should contrast, however, as I have hinted above, the beginning of the *Guide* with its emphasis on the life of the mind and the consequent downgrading of the life of man in society with the end of the *Guide* in which Maimonides, after having described the four perfections of man, goes on to talk about the imitation of God which comes afterward and is political in nature, thus elevating the life of action to a very high plane. However, this kind of political activity is that informed by philosophical perfection and insight into the nature of the universe, whereas in the allegory of Adam, his fall seems to have been rather steep. That is, he turned away from the truths of metaphysical speculation to be enslaved by the imagination so that the only kind of political realm which was possible for him was that which belonged to political states which had only the physical well-being of mankind in view, not a divine state which took into account both the physical and intellectual well-being of the citizens.[27] One may detect the elements of a drama of salvation here. The fall story symbolizes man's coming under the power of the imagination from an original idyllic state in which he was completely devoted to truth and falsehood, not being concerned with good and evil actions. With the fall, man became enthralled by his animal nature; he became like the beasts that speak not, i.e., do not reason. The story contained in the Pentateuch illustrates the way in which a proper concern for the theoretical life was made possible, through the efforts of individuals like Abraham who prepared the way for the teaching of Moses to be promulgated. The Torah is intended to train the beast in man to be obedient to the demands of the theoretical and practical intellect. Idolatry represents the subservience of man to his imagination. The fact that Maimonides accepts the interpretation of *'elohim* to mean rulers of cities shows clearly that the Adam story is to be taken as a philosophical allegory.[28] Here, we see Maimonides accomplishing the second purpose of the *Guide*, explaining very obscure parables occurring in the works of the prophets, but not explicitly identified as such.[29] It is not to be taken in its apparent (*ẓāhir*) sense as the objector wished, but in its hidden (*bāṭin*) sense.

Here one might ask, how is it possible for Adam to have fallen since he

27. See *Guide*, 2:40.

28. The Adam story is to be taken as a parable (*mathal* or *laghz*), which is the method used by Pythagoras, Plato, Empedocles, and the prophets. See my review of Alfarabi, *Utterances Employed in Logic*, in *Oriens* 23–24 (1973–74): 511–13.

29. See *Guide*, Introduction, beginning.

was so firmly concerned with contemplation? How does the incorruptible become corrupt?[30] Here we have to answer a question with a question. What then is the role of Eve and the serpent in the story? It is curious that Maimonides does not mention them here. From some hints in the *Guide* one can piece together what his conception of Eve was and what role she plays in the story. She seems to represent matter and in this Maimonides is following the tradition identified with Plato of identifying matter with woman. The flaw in man is that he is composed of matter and it is matter which prevents him from being a purely disembodied intelligence which is his true destiny. The serpent seems to be imagination which is not controlled by reason. Thus, man's fall results from matter and imagination which are continually on the alert to break down the hold of intellect upon them.[31] The allegorical character of the narrative appears as well from here.

Once Maimonides gives his answer he proceeds to the fourth part of his explanation which is essentially an attempt to support his allegorical interpretation with a remark on the meaning of the Hebrew word for "open" occurring in the story and the fact that it need not be taken in a literal sense. Therefore, the meaning of the verse "And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked," is that "They then became alert to the fact that being naked was to be considered an evil matter."

The fifth part of the exposition opens with a verse from Job. Maimonides states that he will give the significance (*ta'wīl*) and meaning (*sharḥ*) of the verse. That is to say that in this case the nonliteral and the intended meaning of the verse are the same. This portion of the explanation falls into two parts. First Maimonides gives his explanation of the verse and then he returns to the Genesis narrative to show how his interpretation of the verse from Job is implied there. Thus, the verse in Job "He changes his face and Thou sendest him forth" is taken to refer to man's changing his direction in

30. Adam in his prefall state represents the ideal for Maimonides, and he is the temperate man who does not have excessive or evil desires, not the self-restrained man who controls his desires. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 7.2.1146a10–16; Maimonides, *Introduction to 'Avot*, Chap. 6, ed. Qāfiḥ, p. 392; and Herbert Davidson in his "Maimonides' *Shemonah Peraqim* and Alfarabi's *Fuṣūl al-Madanī*," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 31 (1963): 34–37, 43–45. See in general, R. A. Gauthier, *L'éthique à Nicomaque*, 2 vols. (Louvain-Paris, 1970), 2:236–38 and especially p. 596. Thus, how can the temperate man become intemperate is another way of phrasing the question.

31. See *Guide*, 1:6 and 17 and 2:30 (pp. 355–57 Pines; Joel, pp. 249–51 with commentaries [esp. Munk *ad locum* who sums up the prevailing interpretation]). See further Harvey, "Maimonides and Spinoza . . ." (above n. 6), p. 171, n. 33 who also mentions the minority position that the snake represents the appetitive faculty. He brings some evidence to support this view.

disobedience to his true nature, and for this reason, as punishment, he was expelled from his tranquil state. When man disregarded his true nature and became engrossed in things of the flesh, from being a man concerned with theoretical matters, he became like the beasts that speak not; that is, he lost the exercise of his rational capacity which is related to speech. The idea here seems to be that were man to have kept closer to his nature, he would not have had to struggle with nature for his livelihood. He would have been satisfied with the simple foods of a state of nature. Once he was concerned with the body, he was cursed with having to eat unsuitable foods only after toil and labor, which could only deflect him from his goal of contemplation. Only a life founded on the ascetic contemplation of the eternal virtues gives man the necessary time and leisure to indulge in matters of the mind.

Maimonides ends this section with a verse from Psalms, "Adam unable to dwell in dignity, is like the beasts that speak not."[32] Adam finally ends up an irrational animal. Thus, the last line of Maimonides' total answer completely reverses the objector's understanding of the biblical myth. The objector thought that the plain meaning of the scriptural story was that man had started out as an irrational animal, disobeyed, and became moral man, the highest thing one could become. Maimonides, on the contrary, is concerned to show that the biblical narrative accepts the premise that man's true nature is contemplative—man qua man is philosophical. The fall consisted in man's losing his understanding of his true priorities. Finally, he ended up as an irrational animal—man controlled by his passions—a complete reversal from the objector.

The chapter ends with the somewhat enigmatic prayer which I translate literally as follows: "Praise to the master of the will, the aim and wisdom of whose will cannot be apprehended."[33] The meaning of this exclamatory prayer is not obvious. I suggest along with certain medieval commentators that Maimonides is underlining the ultimate difficulty in understanding why man should have a dual nature, and have to struggle so hard in order to

32. Ps. 49:13.

33. "Aim" is in the singular in the Arabic and Pines' translation should be corrected accordingly. "Aim" and "wisdom" both refer back to "will," not to "Master." I have therefore translated the phrase awkwardly, but, I hope, intelligibly, in order to make this clear. In connection with the term for will, *mashṭ'ah*, see Abraham Nuriel, "The Divine Will in the *Guide*" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 39 (1970): 39–61; and A. Altmann, "The Religion of the Thinkers: Free Will and Predestination in Saadia, Baḥya, and Maimonides," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), pp. 35–51. See also Schwarzschild, "Moral Radicalism . . ." (reference above n. 6), p. 91, n. 99.

have the proper conditions for his true nature to have full development.[34] Maimonides believes that we must yet praise the author of this drama in any case because of what we apprehend from his actions revealed in nature.

II

After having examined in detail Maimonides' explanation of the fall of man as philosophical allegory, I should now like to discuss briefly whether there is a fundamental validating principle underlying his philosophic mode of interpretation.

The principal question is why should there be a philosophic meaning underlying the stories of Scripture? What assurance is there that there should be any philosophic meaning there? Generally speaking, for philosophers for whom the revealed Torah occupied a special place it was impossible that truth should conflict with truth. Therefore, it was understood that whenever there was a conflict with reason one ought to interpret the text. This right of interpretation extended throughout the Hellenistic world and continued into the period of medieval Middle Eastern civilization.

In the case of Maimonides, however, there was a deeper underlying position which was much more definite and rigorous than the one described above. On another occasion, I have tried to show how Maimonides is the disciple of Alfarabi in the relationship between philosophy, religion, jurisprudence, and theology.[35] One of the basic insights of the Alfarabian understanding of the relationship between philosophy and religion is that systematic thinking, whether of a demonstrative, dialectical, or sophistical nature precedes specific religions in time. I think that we have to take Alfarabi seriously when he stipulates that thinking has to precede individual religions in time. He means to say that religion is the expression of a specific sophisticated world view in popular terms for the multitude of men. Therefore there can be demonstrative, dialectical, and sophistical religions. Of course, one can think of societies in which philosophy did not precede religion, rather the opposite was the case, such as Islam. In this case, Alfarabi uses the concept of crosscultural borrowing. Religions which have been preceded by

34. See the commentaries on this passage, especially that of Shem Tob in Maimonides, *Moreh nevukhim* (Warsaw, 1872), pp. 17b–18a.

35. See my "Maimonides, Disciple of Alfarabi," (reference above n. 19). See also Muhsin Mahdi, "Alfarabi on Philosophy and Religion," *Philosophical Forum* 4 (1972):5–25.

thought systems can be borrowed by one culture from another, and philosophical systems, not necessarily identical to the original model for the religion, can be then borrowed or developed in the particular society. It seems clear that Maimonides accepts this scheme. This explains why he insists that the prophets are both philosophers and statesmen, for a philosophic world view has to inform the religious dimension. The reason why there is no independent philosophic tradition in Jewry is to be explained by the fact that this tradition has become lost for various reasons.[36] In any case, with respect to our problem here, it is quite clear why there must be a philosophic meaning to Scripture because it represents in popular form the teaching of philosophy and was composed by a philosopher. Of course, the Torah is couched in terms appropriate to the understanding of the people of its time. It is for this reason that it is so difficult to understand the original intention of Scripture which became obscure over the course of time.[37]

This theory, put forward by Alfarabi and adopted by Maimonides, is an attempt at understanding the myths which are found in the sacred scriptures of the pagan Greeks, Jews, Christians and Muslims.

III

I should like to conclude by briefly trying to raise some questions about the validity of Maimonides' interpretation of Scripture. I should not like to attempt an evaluation of Maimonides' attempt since that would involve an analysis of Maimonides' purpose in interpretation which we have touched on briefly, an attempt at determining how well he accomplished his purpose, and then a comparison with other interpretations of the Adam story.

When we talk about validation of something, we imply that there must be some external criterion by means of which we can measure the truth or falsity of what we are trying to validate. Our first question must then be: Is there any criterion by means of which we can validate varying interpretations of a specific literary text?

In his book, *Validity in Interpretation,* E. D. Hirsch, Jr., has argued forcefully for the intended meaning of the author as the criterion for the validity of varying or disparate interpretations and I refer those interested to

36. See "Maimonides, Disciple of Alfarabi," pp. 166–67.
37. See above, n. 7.

his book for a thoroughgoing discussion of the various facets of the problem of validation. Otherwise, one might have to compare works of literature to picnics in which the author brings the words and the reader the meaning.

Therefore, in order to evaluate Maimonides' interpretation here, we would have to have an interpretation of the meaning of the myth in accordance with the willed meaning of the author. Exactly what the implications of this are for Sacred Scripture in general has not been spelled out so far as I know. Hirsch himself states and I quote: "The principle of subsuming implications under the author's willed type is a genuinely universal principle and extends also to the interpretation of sacred scripture. But I prefer to let anyone who is at home there make the extensions for himself. That is easily done, I think, if we remember that the requirements of validity are everywhere the same even though the elements of interpretation vary widely with different intrinsic genres . . ." (p. 126). So far as I know, no one has really done that. In the case of Maimonides one would have to investigate the Adam story in an attempt at understanding the significance of the story with respect to the willed meaning of the author, were that possible. One could, it seems to me, also examine interpretations in order to rule them out, but this would be very difficult without first establishing what interpretation or interpretations most plausibly came closest to what we could understand as the author's intention.

If we approach Maimonides with Hirsch's criteria, I think that Maimonides would say that the scriptural genre is that of philosophy for the masses expressed through the medium of symbolic stories. The interpretation which Maimonides suggests, I think he would argue, is the willed intention of the author of the myth. The best way to attack Maimonides' position in Hirsch's terms is to say that Maimonides' mistake was that he mistook the genre of the biblical tale. Were we able to establish that the Bible belongs to a different genre, we would be well on the way to destroying the rationale for Maimonides' philosophical interpretation of Scripture.