

THE CLASSIC JEWISH PHILOSOPHERS

FROM SAADIA THROUGH
THE RENAISSANCE

VOLUME THREE

Eliezer Schweid
Translated by Leonard Levin

SJJTP 3

BRILL

The Classic Jewish Philosophers

Supplements to The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy

Edited by

Leora Batnitzky (Princeton University)

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Elliot Wolfson (New York University)

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LEIDEN • BOSTON

2008

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available on
<http://catalog.loc.gov>.**

ISBN 1873-9008

ISBN 978 90 04 16213 6

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Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Hotei Publishing,
IDC Publishers, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers and VSP.

Originally published as *Ha-Filosofim ha-Gedolim Shelamu*
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Translations of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* are taken from Moses Maimonides,
The Guide of the Perplexed, trans. by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago
Press: 1963, reprinted in 2 volumes, 1974). Reprinted with kind permission of the
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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	xix
Translator's Preface	xxi
Introduction	xxvii

PART ONE

THE EARLY MASTERS: FROM SAADIA TO HALEVI

Chapter One R. Saadia Gaon	3
<i>His Life</i>	3
<i>His Fields of Productivity</i>	3
<i>Torah and Commentary</i>	4
<i>His Polemical Works</i>	5
THE BOOK OF DOCTRINES AND BELIEFS	6
<i>The Name of the Book</i>	6
<i>Three Sources of Knowledge: Sense, Reason and Inference</i>	7
<i>What is Rationalism?</i>	8
<i>Tradition—The Fourth Source of Knowledge</i>	9
<i>What is the Role of Reliable Tradition?</i>	10
<i>Seeking Agreement of Reason and Religion</i>	10
<i>Reason and Revelation Serve Each Other</i>	11
<i>The Order of Deliberation in the Book of Doctrines and Beliefs</i>	12
PROPHECY AND COMMANDMENTS	13
<i>Rational and Positive (= Arbitrary) Imperatives</i>	13
<i>The Need for Prophecy</i>	14
<i>The Source and Influence of the "Manifestation" Doctrine</i>	15
<i>Verification of Prophecy</i>	15
CREATION AND GOD'S EXISTENCE	16
<i>Creation as a Foundational Theological Principle</i>	16
<i>Maimonides's Criticism of Saadia's Doctrine of Creation</i>	17
<i>Kalam and Aristotelianism in Muslim Philosophy</i>	18
<i>Saadia's Fundamental Assumption: Cause Precedes Effect</i>	18
<i>Proofs for Creation of the World</i>	19
<i>Creation ex nihilo and God's Existence</i>	21

<i>God as Cause of the World</i>	22
<i>God Is Not Conceivable</i>	22
<i>Saadia's Relation to Scripture</i>	23
<i>God's Positive Attributes and Conception of a Personal God</i>	24
<i>The Good God</i>	25
SAADIA'S ANTHROPOLOGY	26
<i>Importance of the Terrestrial World</i>	27
<i>The Righteous Suffer, the Wicked Prosper</i>	27
<i>The Role of Human Material Existence</i>	28
<i>Free Will and the Problem It Raises</i>	28
<i>Physical Theory of the Soul</i>	29
SAADIA'S ETHICS	30
<i>Man's Obligation to God</i>	33
<i>The Ladder of Righteousness</i>	33
<i>Repentance</i>	35
<i>The Purpose of Serving God</i>	35
<i>The Middle Way</i>	36
<i>The Supremacy of Reason</i>	37
Chapter Two R. Isaac ben Solomon Israeli	39
<i>Israeli's Status as Philosopher</i>	39
<i>His Writings</i>	40
<i>The Source of the Doctrine of Emanation</i>	40
<i>Israeli's Doctrine of Emanation</i>	41
<i>Israeli's Picture of the World</i>	41
<i>The Difficulty in Understanding the Transition from Spiritual to</i> <i>Material</i>	42
<i>Prophecy</i>	43
<i>Israeli's Place in Jewish Philosophy</i>	44
Chapter Three R. Bahya ben Joseph Ibn Pakudah	46
<i>The Author</i>	47
<i>The Book and Its Transmission</i>	47
<i>Reliance on Saadia</i>	47
<i>Differences between Bahya and Saadia</i>	49
<i>Intellectual Understanding as a Goal in Contrast to Popular</i> <i>Organized Religion</i>	50
<i>The Divine Attributes</i>	51
<i>The Meaning of the Mitzvot: "Duties of the Heart" versus "Duties</i> <i>of the Limbs"</i>	54

<i>A Stranger in the World: The Opposition of Body and Soul</i>	56
<i>The Way to Perfection</i>	58
<i>The Gate of Divine Service</i>	58
<i>The Gate of Trust</i>	59
<i>The Gate of Unifying One's Deeds</i>	61
<i>The Gate of Humility</i>	62
<i>The Gate of Repentance</i>	63
<i>The Gate of Abstinence</i>	65
<i>The Gate of Love of God</i>	66
<i>Summary</i>	66
Chapter 4 R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol	68
<i>Gabirol's Philosophical Thought</i>	68
THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE	69
<i>Gabirol's Sources</i>	70
<i>The Structure of the Book</i>	70
<i>The General Truth: The Human Being as Microcosm</i>	71
<i>The Three Domains of Knowledge</i>	72
<i>The Threefold Division Embraces All Knowledge</i>	73
<i>The First Domain of Knowledge: Matter and Form</i>	74
<i>The Difference between Gabirol and Aristotle</i>	74
<i>Levels of the Hierarchy</i>	76
<i>The Relation of Matter and Form</i>	78
<i>Artistic Beauty—Philosophical Weakness</i>	78
<i>Theory of the Will</i>	79
<i>Religious Significance of the Will</i>	80
<i>Ethics as a Means</i>	80
<i>Parallel between the Body and the Physical World</i>	81
THE ROYAL CROWN	81
<i>Gabirol's Poetic Side</i>	83
<i>The Personal (Biblical) View and the Supra-Personal (Neo-Platonic)</i> <i>View</i>	84
<i>Poetry as the More Faithful Expression of Ibn Gabirol</i>	85
Chapter Five R. Abraham Bar Ḥiyya	87
<i>His Writings</i>	87
<i>His Place in the History of Learning</i>	88
<i>The Historical Background</i>	88
<i>The Philosophical Background—Platonic or Aristotelian?</i>	89
<i>The Relation of Torah and Philosophy</i>	89

<i>Negating the Religions of the Gentiles and the Gentiles</i>	
<i>Themselves</i>	90
<i>Israel's Special Status</i>	91
<i>His Conception of History</i>	92
<i>Determinism</i>	93
Chapter Six R. Judah Halevi	95
<i>The Relation of His Philosophical and Poetic Writings</i>	95
THE <i>KUZARI</i>	96
<i>The Internal Confrontation</i>	97
<i>The Confrontation with Philosophy</i>	97
<i>The Polemical Motive in the Kuzari</i>	98
<i>Halevi's Sources</i>	99
STRUCTURE OF DIALOGUE IN THE <i>KUZARI</i>	99
<i>Examples from Part 3</i>	100
<i>The General Structure of the Book</i>	103
<i>The Progression of Argument in the Book</i>	103
<i>The Frame Narrative: Why the Khazars?</i>	104
<i>The Ideal Student and Teacher</i>	105
FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGION	106
<i>The King's First Mistake: Inviting the Philosopher and His Speech</i>	107
<i>The Basis of Halevi's Method: The Opposition between</i>	
<i>Philosophy and Religion</i>	108
<i>The King's First Response</i>	109
<i>The Point of the Confrontation: The Validity of Belief in</i>	
<i>Revelation</i>	110
<i>The King's Second Mistake</i>	112
<i>The Christian and Moslem Positions</i>	113
THE DEMAND FOR HISTORICAL CERTAINTY	114
<i>The Opposition between Philosophy and Religion</i>	115
<i>Attack on the Authenticity of Christianity and Islam</i>	116
<i>Deviant Sects in Judaism</i>	117
<i>Verification of the Sinaitic Revelation</i>	117
<i>The Most Ironic Turn in the Comedy of Errors</i>	118
<i>The Contrast between Judaism's Importance and Its Lowly</i>	
<i>Status</i>	119
<i>The Nature of the Paradox: Particular Experience, but Universally</i>	
<i>Valid</i>	120
<i>The Historical Verification of the Sinai Revelation</i>	121

HALEVI'S HISTORICAL OUTLOOK	122
<i>Judaism is the Foundation of Human Culture</i>	122
<i>The Importance of Study of History</i>	123
<i>Removing the Motive of Sin from the Historical Narrative</i>	124
<i>Israel—The Heart of the Nations</i>	126
<i>The Meaning of Suffering and Exile</i>	126
<i>Halevi's Vision of the Present</i>	127
THE "DIVINE PRINCIPLE" AND PROPHECY	128
<i>The Substantive Difference between Israel and the Nations</i>	130
<i>The Prophet's Religious Superiority to the Philosopher</i>	131
<i>The Philosophical Basis</i>	131
<i>Developing an Epistemology of Prophecy</i>	132
<i>The Divine Perfections</i>	133
<i>Ranks of Prophetic Experience</i>	133
THE PURPOSE AND VALUE OF JEWISH PRACTICE	134
<i>Correct Religious Practice</i>	134
<i>"Active Living" in the Religious Realm</i>	134
<i>The Golden Mean</i>	136
<i>Intellectual Life is Subordinate to Religious Purpose</i>	137
<i>Submission Leads to Exaltation</i>	138
<i>The Reasons for the Commandments—Aids to Spiritual</i> <i>Harmony</i>	138
SUMMARY OF HALEVI'S POSITION AGAINST PHILOSOPHY	139
<i>The Preference for Debate with Aristotelianism</i>	140
<i>The Basis of the Debate with Philosophy</i>	141
<i>How Reliable is Reason?</i>	142
<i>What Is Philosophy's Domain of Validity?</i>	143
<i>Re-examining the Philosopher's Speech</i>	143
<i>The Source of Halevi's Arguments Against the Philosophers</i>	143
<i>Conclusion of the Kuzari</i>	144
<i>Summary</i>	145

PART TWO

MAIMONIDES

Chapter Seven Maimonides's Personality & Oeuvre	149
<i>Maimonides's Life</i>	149

<i>A Universal Personality: Legal Authority, Communal Leader, Philosopher</i>	149
<i>Synthesis of Tradition and Philosophy: A Source of Controversy</i>	150
<i>Survey of Principal Works</i>	151
<i>The “Book of Prophecy” and the “Book of Correspondence”</i>	152
<i>The Mishneh Torah and Guide of the Perplexed</i>	153
<i>Theological Dogma within the Law of the Ideal State</i>	154
<i>The Mishneh Torah as a Halakhic Work</i>	155
<i>Guide to the Perplexed: Reconciling Torah and Philosophy</i>	156
<i>The Importance of Religious Law: Ordering Individual and Social Life</i>	157
<i>The Mishneh Torah: The Republic and the Laws</i>	158
<i>The Source of Tension in Maimonides’s Thought</i>	158
<i>Differences with Kalam</i>	159
<i>Maimonides’s Relation to the Previous Tradition of Jewish Thought</i>	159
<i>The Relation between Tradition and Philosophy</i>	159
<i>Maimonides’s Relation to His Jewish Predecessors</i>	162
 Chapter Eight Maimonides’s Earlier Philosophical Writings—	
The Introductions to the Mishnah	164
General Introduction	164
Introduction to Sanhedrin, Chapter 10 (<i>Helek</i>)	165
Five Traditional Jewish Understandings of “World To Come”	165
Understanding the Traditional Views	166
Views Literally Accepted	167
Views Accepted Not Literally but Figuratively	167
The Role of the Thirteen Principles: Attaining a Portion in the World to Come	169
The Thirteen Principles	170
Theological Principles	170
Torahitic Principles	170
Principles of Reward and Punishment (Political Principles)	172
The Order and Structure of the “Principles”	173
How the “Principles” Relate to Philosophy and Common Sense Understanding	173
Agenda: Politics, Psychology, Ethics, Prophecy, Theology	175
 Chapter Nine Maimonides’ Politics, Psychology & Ethics	176
POLITICS	176

<i>Platonic Theory of the State</i>	176
<i>Man's Egoistic Nature Requires Political Subordination</i>	176
<i>Politician and Prophet as Legislators</i>	177
<i>Purpose of Laws: Benefit of the Community</i>	178
PSYCHOLOGY	178
<i>Aristotelian Psychology</i>	178
<i>Emphasizing the Soul's Unity</i>	179
<i>The Aspects of the Soul</i>	179
<i>The Nutritive Faculty</i>	180
<i>The Sensory Faculty</i>	180
<i>The Imaginative Faculty</i>	181
<i>The Emotional Faculty</i>	183
<i>Reason</i>	184
<i>Practical Reason</i>	184
<i>Theoretical Reason</i>	185
<i>Intellect as the Soul's Form</i>	185
<i>The Actualization of Reason</i>	186
<i>The Final Process of Enlightenment, Highest Goal of Humanity:</i>	
<i>The Acquired Intellect</i>	187
<i>Achieving Eternal Knowledge</i>	187
<i>The Meaning of Immortality: Intellect as Man's Eternal Part</i>	188
ETHICS	189
<i>Ethics Deals with the Soul's Perfection</i>	189
<i>The Object of Ethical Discourse: Habit or Virtue</i>	189
<i>The Domain of Ethics: The Emotional Faculty and the Senses that</i>	
<i>Serve It</i>	190
<i>The Emotional Faculty</i>	191
<i>The Supreme Goal of Humanity: Developing Theoretical</i>	
<i>Reason</i>	192
<i>The Nature and Cause of Evil</i>	192
<i>Human Free Will and Its Limits</i>	194
<i>Refuting the Pseudo-Scientific Belief in Astrology</i>	195
<i>Rabbinic and Scriptural Pronouncements</i>	196
<i>The Question of Choice in its Philosophical Formulation</i>	199
<i>The Contradiction Between Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will</i>	199
<i>The Golden Mean</i>	200
<i>Difficulties Arising from the Schematic Character of the Mean</i>	201
<i>The Purpose of Ethical Conduct</i>	202
<i>Divergence From Aristotle: From Eudaemonism to Austerity</i>	204
<i>The Differences Between Philosophical and Religious Ethics</i>	204

<i>Positive and Conventional Commandments</i>	205
<i>Ethics As Prerequisite to Prophecy</i>	207
<i>Ethical Perfection As Prerequisite to Prophecy in Maimonides</i>	208
Chapter Ten Maimonides's Theory of Prophecy	210
<i>Image of the Prophet as Ideal Leader</i>	210
<i>Prophet as Paragon of Acquired Intellect</i>	210
<i>Prophet as Ethical Exemplar</i>	211
<i>Criteria for Distinguishing Grades of Prophecy</i>	211
<i>Psycho-Physical Uniqueness of Moses's Prophecy</i>	212
<i>The Prophet-Philosopher and the Biblical Prophet</i>	213
<i>Revelation of Divine Will in Prophecy</i>	214
<i>What Is the Difference between Prophet and Philosopher?</i>	215
Chapter Eleven Foundations of Maimonides's Theology	219
<i>The Four Principal Proofs for God's Existence</i>	220
<i>Departures from Aristotle</i>	222
<i>Proofs for God's Unity, Eternity, and Incorporeality</i>	223
<i>Thinking Correctly about God</i>	224
<i>What is True Belief?</i>	225
<i>Refutation of All Positive Divine Attributes</i>	226
<i>Refutation of All Types of Divine Attributes</i>	228
<i>The Dialectic of Negative Attributes</i>	229
<i>Reconsidering the Kalam's Doctrine of Attributes</i>	230
<i>The Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy</i>	233
<i>From Negating Deficiencies to Affirming Perfections</i>	235
<i>Radical Incommensurability of God and World</i>	236
<i>Positive and Negative Attributes Pertaining to God</i>	237
<i>Progress in the Knowledge of God</i>	239
<i>The Via Negativa</i>	240
<i>Maimonides's Dialectic</i>	241
<i>Dialectical Consideration of the Divine Attributes</i>	243
<i>Each According to One's Level of Understanding</i>	244
<i>Resolving the Contradictions</i>	246
<i>Content of the Illumination</i>	247
<i>The Dialectical Thought-Process beyond the Attribute-Doctrine</i>	248
<i>The Attribute of Existence</i>	249
<i>Receiving the Divine Emanation</i>	251
<i>The Essential Difference between Philosopher and Prophet</i>	253
<i>Moses's Unique Achievement</i>	254

<i>Reconciling Two Views of the Prophet</i>	255
<i>Moses's Uniqueness as Prophet: Withdrawal from the Material</i>	257
Chapter Twelve Creation and Providence in Maimonides	259
GOD AS CREATOR AND WORLD-GUIDE	259
<i>God as the Unity of Intellect, Knower and Known</i>	260
<i>Philosophy as Authentic Torah-Tradition</i>	260
<i>Creation and the Divine Will</i>	262
<i>Divine Will in Guide Part II</i>	263
<i>God as Origin of Form and Matter</i>	264
<i>Summary</i>	265
<i>Creation Ex Nihilo</i>	266
<i>The Assumption of Creation</i>	267
<i>Different Views on Creation</i>	268
<i>What Led Aristotle to his View?</i>	270
<i>Maimonides's Arguments against Aristotle</i>	270
<i>Which Argument is More Convincing?</i>	272
<i>Difficulties with Aristotelian Cosmology</i>	272
<i>Which Difficulties are Greater?</i>	273
<i>The Deciding Factor: The Torahitic Consideration</i>	273
<i>Miracles</i>	274
MAIMONIDES'S VIEW OF PROVIDENCE	276
<i>The Problem of Divine Providence</i>	276
<i>The Philosophical Problem with Providence</i>	277
<i>Providence and the Problem of Evil</i>	277
<i>The Source of Evil in Nature and Human Nature</i>	278
<i>Different Views on Providence</i>	280
<i>Maimonides's View: A Synthesis of the Mosaic and Aristotelian</i> <i>Views?</i>	281
<i>The Medium of Providence</i>	283
<i>Divine Knowledge and Its Connection with Providence</i>	284
<i>Hermeneutic Inquiry on Providence in Job</i>	285
<i>The Commandments Express the Divine-Human Relation</i>	287
<i>Providence and the Prophetic Mission</i>	289
<i>The Prophet and Torah as Vehicles of Providence</i>	291
Chapter Thirteen Summary of Maimonidean Thought	293

PART THREE

THE LATER MASTERS:
CONTINUATION AND TRANSITION

Chapter Fourteen	The Maimonidean Controversy	301
	<i>Propagation of the Guide's Influence</i>	302
	<i>The Substance of the Controversy Over Maimonides's Teaching</i>	303
	<i>Essential Points of Critique of Maimonides's Views</i>	304
	RESPONSES OF MAIMONIDES'S STUDENTS	310
R. SHEM TOV BEN JOSEPH IBN FALAQUERA (1225–1295)	310
	<i>Reconciling Philosophy and the Torah</i>	312
	<i>How can the Torah be Interpreted by Reason Yet Stand above It?</i>	313
	<i>Propagation of Philosophy and the Educational Task</i>	315
	<i>His Interpretative Work: Avoiding Philosophical Perplexity</i>	317
R. JOSEPH IBN KASPI	318
R. ISAAC ALBALAG	319
	<i>Albalag's Critique of Maimonides</i>	321
	<i>Why Should These Matters be Revealed?</i>	322
	<i>Prophecy and Philosophy—Two Different Aspects of Understanding</i>	324
Chapter Fifteen	Transformations in Aristotelian Philosophy ..	326
	<i>Averroes's Theory of Emanation</i>	327
	<i>Averroes's Criticism</i>	327
	<i>The Influence of Christian Scholasticism of the 13th Century</i>	332
	<i>Christianity as a Theological Problem</i>	332
	<i>The Influence of Kabbalah</i>	333
	<i>Summary</i>	334
Chapter Sixteen	Gersonides	335
	<i>Gersonides's Stance toward Maimonides: Appreciation and Criticism</i>	336
	<i>Gersonides's Scientific Achievements</i>	337
	GERSONIDES'S UNIQUE THEORY OF CREATION	339
	<i>Gersonides's Concept of Time</i>	341
	<i>The Difficulty with the Solution of the Problem of Creation: the Eternity of Matter</i>	343
	<i>Theological Difficulties</i>	344
	GERSONIDES'S THEOLOGY	345
	<i>Rejecting Maimonides's Doctrine of Negative Attributes</i>	345

<i>God's Knowledge of the World and His Creatures</i>	347
<i>The Problem of Providence</i>	348
<i>Explanation of Miracle</i>	350
<i>The Problem of Prophecy</i>	350
HUMAN NATURE AND DESTINY	351
<i>Human Purpose: Perfect Knowledge of Eternal Truth</i>	351
<i>Immortality</i>	352
<i>Views on Immortality Analyzed</i>	352
<i>Aristotelian Critique of Individualism</i>	353
<i>How Can Individuality Exist Apart from the Body?</i>	354
<i>Summary</i>	356
Chapter Seventeen R. Hasdai Crescas	357
<i>Crescas as Conservative and Innovator</i>	357
<i>The Cultural-Historical Background to Crescas's Project</i>	358
<i>The Change in Jewry's Status in Christian Spain</i>	359
<i>Spiritual Tensions in the Spanish-Jewish Community</i>	361
<i>A Conservative Synthesis</i>	363
HIS TEACHER, HIS COLLEAGUE, AND HIS DISCIPLE	364
R. NISSIM GERONDI	364
<i>The Polemic against Christianity</i>	365
<i>R. Nissim's Critique of the Philosophers</i>	366
<i>The Commandments as a Demonstration of Obedience</i>	368
R. ISAAC BEN SHESHET (RIBASH)	370
<i>Ribash's Approach to Kabbalah</i>	370
<i>Ribash's Approach to Philosophy and Science</i>	371
R. SIMEON BEN ZEMAH DURAN	372
<i>Duran's Method of Jewish Dogmatics</i>	372
THE TEACHING OF R. HASDAI CRESCAS	374
<i>Crescas's Doctrine of Principles of Faith</i>	374
<i>Belief in God's Existence</i>	375
<i>Order of Importance of the Principles</i>	376
<i>The Doctrine of Principles as Framework of Crescas's Thought</i>	379
CRESCAS'S THEOLOGY	379
<i>Crescas's Critical Method</i>	380
<i>The Existence of an Infinite Magnitude</i>	381
<i>A New Concept of Time and Space</i>	382
<i>Removing Physics from the Realm of Religious Thought</i>	383
<i>Critique of Maimonides's Doctrine of Negative Attributes</i>	384
<i>How can We Describe God without Ascribing Plurality to Him?</i>	386

<i>What Are Essential Attributes?</i>	387
<i>Primary Attributes</i>	387
<i>Attributes That Follow Necessarily from the Concept of God as</i>	
<i>Cause of Existence</i>	389
<i>The Problem of Relation between Divine Unity and Multiple</i>	
<i>Attributes</i>	390
<i>Philosophic Knowledge and Prophetic Knowledge</i>	392
<i>Divine Incorporeality</i>	393
<i>The Source of the Difficulty: God's Joy in Creation</i>	394
CREATION OF THE WORLD	397
<i>Review of Maimonides's Doctrine of Creation</i>	397
<i>Review of Gersonides's Doctrine of Creation</i>	398
<i>The Kabbalistic Doctrine of Creation</i>	399
<i>Crescas's Doctrine of Creation</i>	399
<i>How can the Continual Be Renewed?</i>	401
<i>The World as Symbol of God's Internal Life</i>	402
MIRACLE	403
<i>Miracle as Exceptional Event</i>	404
PROVIDENCE	406
<i>Critique of Gersonides and Maimonides</i>	406
<i>Degrees of Providence</i>	407
<i>Judaism and Christianity</i>	409
<i>Human Free Will and Its Limits</i>	410
<i>Service of God</i>	414
<i>Parallel between Torah and Creation</i>	415
<i>Worship and Love of God in Exacting Halakhic Study</i>	420
SUMMARY	421
Chapter Eighteen R. Joseph Albo	423
<i>The Book of Principles as a Reflection of Its Age</i>	424
<i>Albo's Life and Writings</i>	424
ALBO'S DOGMATICS: THE PRINCIPLES	425
<i>The "Axioms" of the Science of Religion</i>	426
<i>The Types of Religion: Natural, Conventional, and Divine</i>	427
<i>Premises of Divine Law (= Religion)</i>	429
<i>Secondary Roots (Shorashim)</i>	430
<i>"Beliefs Connected with the Principle"</i>	432
<i>Summary of the Dogmatic Discussion</i>	434
ALBO'S ARGUMENT AGAINST THE PHILOSOPHERS AND	
CHRISTIANITY	435

<i>Maimonides and the Aristotelian Concept of Belief</i>	435
<i>Crescas and The Kabbalistic Concept of Faith</i>	436
<i>"Compromise" between Maimonides and Crescas</i>	437
<i>How Does One Distinguish True and False Belief?</i>	439
<i>What Experience Verifies Religious Belief?</i>	440
<i>Basing the Mosaic Torah on Experience</i>	440
<i>The Uniqueness of the Mosaic Torah</i>	441
Chapter Nineteen The Turn To Cultural Thought	443
<i>History as an Object of Philosophical Discussion</i>	444
R. SOLOMON IBN VERGA	446
<i>The Causes of Blood-Libels and Judeo-Phobia</i>	447
<i>Reasons for the Jews' Military Defeats</i>	448
<i>Reasons for Persecution of the Jews</i>	448
<i>A Tolerant Outlook toward Christianity</i>	449
DON ISAAC ABRAVANEL	450
<i>Abravanel's Literary Oeuvre</i>	451
<i>Abravanel's Historical Outlook</i>	452
<i>Abravanel's Relation to Maimonides's Theory of Prophecy</i>	455
<i>Abravanel's View of Maimonides's Dogmatic Theory</i>	456
<i>Abravanel's Relation to Civilization and State</i>	456
Chapter Twenty From Spain to Italy	459
THE BEGINNINGS OF ITALIAN JEWISH THOUGHT	460
<i>R. Jacob Anatoli and R. Hillel of Verona</i>	460
<i>R. Judah Messer Leon</i>	461
INFLUENCE OF THE RENAISSANCE IN ITALY	461
<i>Elijah Del Medigo</i>	461
<i>R. Judah Abravanel</i>	462
<i>The Literary Character of the Dialogues of Love</i>	462
<i>The Philosophical Content of the Dialogue</i>	464
<i>The Pagan Sources of R. Judah Abravanel's Thought</i>	465
SUMMARY	467
Bibliography	469
Index of Names	475
Index of Topics	482

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The basis of this book is a lecture course on medieval Jewish philosophy that I delivered under the aegis of the Department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1966–69.

My notes were published in three booklets by the Academon of the Students' Union, for the use of the students of the department. Four of my students helped to prepare them: Gilead Bareli, Shimon Levi, Dan Orion, and Zila Copenhagen. I thank them wholeheartedly.

However, this book is not merely a compilation of those lectures. It was rewritten and rearranged on the basis of my rethinking and researching these topics in depth over the course of the intervening years.

My major focus of research and teaching in that time has been the history of modern Jewish philosophy. Still, my interest in medieval thought has not lessened but grown stronger. It gave a fresh perspective to my outlook on modern Jewish thought, for the philosophical classics of the middle ages provide a primary source for modern Jewish thought to our very day. This book was written from that perspective, and if it has anything unique to offer in its method and general approach, that is its source.

The initiative for writing this book came from the editor of the Yedioth series "Judaism: Past and Present," Yochi Brandes, my former student in Jewish thought at the Schechter Institute for Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. I thank her wholeheartedly for making the proposal and for her assistance and enthusiastic encouragement during the writing, as well as for the meticulous and devoted labor that she invested in editing this work.

Eliezer Schweid
Jerusalem, 12 Elul 5759
August 24, 1999

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The Classic Jewish Philosophers is a translation of Eliezer Schweid's Hebrew work *Ha-Filosofim ha-Gedolim Shelanu* ("Our [Jewish] Great Philosophers"). This work is part of Schweid's larger enterprise to tell the story of Jewish thought—mainly its philosophical formulations—in all periods, ancient, medieval and modern. The ancient part of the narrative finds expression in *The Philosophy of the Bible*, a philosophical interpretation of the thought-world of the Bible following in the footsteps of Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel and the modern literary school of Biblical interpreters. The modern part is the subject of his five volumes of *The History of Modern Jewish Religious Philosophy*—which have appeared in Hebrew and which I will endeavor to translate in the coming years—marking the culmination of his scholarly project, of which this volume is the foundation.

In the 1960s, Eliezer Schweid was teaching the history of medieval Jewish thought at the Hebrew University, as a junior scholar under the guidance of Professors Shlomo Pines, Gershom Scholem, Yitzhak Baer and Natan Rotenstreich. From them he learned the craft of reconstructing the narrative of the Jewish thought of the past from documentary materials; however, he sensed a difference from them in the existential motivation of his scholarly efforts, as he describes in a recent lecture, "My Way in the Research and Teaching of Jewish Thought."¹ His teachers were religiously devoted to objective pursuit of the scientific truth without tint of subjective interest, a devotion which, Schweid thought, was rooted in their own existential situation of having to prove the value of Jewish thought and culture in the context of a gentile (especially German) academic world which was *a priori* prone to denigrate it. Thus these scholars (argues Schweid), to avoid the charge of personal interest, cultivated an exaggerated standard of scholarly objectivity that renounced any connection between the scholars' professional pursuit of truth and their own religious or cultural preoccupations as Jews. To reinforce this separation, they concentrated their scholarly efforts on the

¹ *Darki be-mehkarah uve-hora'atah shel mahshevet Yisrael*, lecture, published in *Limmud va-Daat be-Mahshavah Yehudit* Volume 2, 2006, edited by Haim Kreisel.

pre-modern period, believing that only with the detachment of historical distance was it possible to maintain that objectivity that allowed them to speak dispassionately about the historical realities of the past.

Schweid himself, on the other hand, grew up in that Yishuv-culture in Palestine of the 1930s and 1940s which sought to live a secular Jewish existence whose ethos was proclaimed by Ahad Ha-am and Bialik, but whose members were often ignorant of the historical and ideological underpinnings of traditional Jewish culture and had to become reconnected with them in order to provide the educational underpinnings for living out their own modern Jewish cultural existence. Personal experience convinced the young Schweid that the modern Jewish-Israeli culture could not succeed spiritually and morally in its goals without guidance from the historical and philosophical wisdom of the past, and he therefore made the personal decision to turn to the intensive study of the Jewish intellectual-cultural past. For Schweid, therefore, there was an *a priori* mutual relevance between the material one was studying and one's own quest for moral and religious orientation. By the same token, Schweid (as well as his mentor Rotenstreich) found it legitimate to extend scholarly research into the modern period, and he became one of the pioneers of the study and teaching of modern Jewish religious thought in the Department of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University (which under Guttmann and Scholem had been called the Department of Hebrew Philosophy and Kabbalah).

In my own view, it is the perennial task of all religious philosophy to strive for a holistic vision in which the realms of "is" and "ought"—the description of reality, and our conception of our own task and purpose within it—find harmonious integration. The articulation of this vision in the Biblical period was largely mythic and unselfconscious, taking for granted the cosmological assumptions of ancient Israel's cultural neighbors and grafting onto that cosmology the monotheistic vision of God and the ethical imperatives of the Biblical legislators and prophets. The history of rabbinic Jewish thought is properly to be viewed as the response of the rabbis to the dual backdrop of the Biblical legacy and the challenge of Greek and Roman thought-culture, and it has been treated in this perspective by such scholars as Isaac Heinemann, Saul Lieberman, Ephraim Urbach and Shaye Cohen.

Professor Schweid has not given systematic attention to the rabbinic period, with the exception of his writings on Jewish theodicy. He picks up the thread of narrative here with the Middle Ages, where the dominant "is-description" of the world was provided by the Aristotelian

philosophical legacy (which had incorporated some neo-Platonic elements), and it was against this backdrop that Jewish thinkers had to justify the “ought-affirmations” of the Biblical-rabbinic tradition. The many different possible ways of providing that integration provide the central themes of the philosophical approaches of Saadia, Ibn Gabirol, Halevi, Maimonides, Gersonides, Crescas, and the other thinkers with whom Schweid deals in this volume. In his volumes on modern Jewish thought, Schweid shows how the philosophies of the medieval Jewish thinkers served as models to the modern Jewish thinkers who had to achieve similar integrative tasks in their own time.

Another lens which Schweid continually brings to bear on these problems is the theory of culture, which he has independently developed in a separate work.² In his view, philosophy and religion are each forms of thought and expression which seek, each in its own way, to articulate the life-ideal and values of a society against the backdrop of its material way of life and historical tradition. Challenges and crises occur especially when one cultural tradition is confronted with another—in particular, when traditional Jewish society encountered Greco-Roman civilization in ancient times, or Christian and Moslem civilizations in medieval times, or West-European civilization in modern times. In each of these encounters there was a challenge both on the level of the “is-description” and the “ought-prescription,” as each civilization presented competing accounts both of the nature of reality and of the life-ideal and group-narrative to provide moral orientation, with which Jewish thinkers had to contend.

This brings us down to the contemporary moment, in which (by implication) every one of us—the reader, author, and translator of this volume included—must perform the same task of integration: *how can one live a meaningful and morally-justified life, drawing on the wisdom of the past, in the context of whatever tradition (Jewish or non-Jewish) the individual belongs to, in a world-view shaped by the best available science of our own day, and informed also by modern humanistic culture in its literary, philosophical and artistic genres?* Though these existential questions do not intrude or disrupt the flow of the narrative, they are never far beneath the surface of the author's

² Schweid articulates his theory of culture—and its permutations in modern Jewish thought—most fully in his book, *Likrat Tarbut Yehudit Modernit (The Idea of Jewish Culture: Its Origins and Development in Modern Times, 1995)*.

awareness, and it is his sensitivity to them that gives life and purpose to his enterprise.

We should also appreciate that though Schweid's own starting-point was rooted in the particular context of modern Jewish-Israeli existence, his sympathy has always extended both to the situation of Jews living in all lands and all times, and to the whole scope of human experience in all cultures. The pursuit of religious and philosophical meaning is a universal human enterprise which takes place in the particular forms of the various human cultures in which religions and philosophies have been conceived and formulated, of which the Jewish religion and the Jewish culture are one instance. Thus while the scope of interest is universal, and the criteria of scholarly justification are those on which all scholars seek to find agreement, the existential motive of the inquiry (in Schweid's view) can legitimately draw on each and every inquirer's own human stake in the enterprise, which is rooted in his or her own personal and cultural situation.

From this perspective, it is clear how the thinkers described in this volume offer an interesting range of different approaches. There is first of all Saadia, the pioneer of systematic thought, whose simple optimistic rationalistic stance enabled him to claim overall agreement between reason and revelation, though his proofs would not hold water for later subtler thinkers. Next there are the neo-Platonists—Israeli, Bahya, Ibn Gabirol—whose poetic visions of a cosmic chain of being were poetically enthralling and gave inspiration to later generations of mystics. Then come the nationalists—in Schweid's reading, these include Abraham Bar Hiyya and Judah Halevi—who privilege the moment of direct encounter between the worshipper and God over philosophical cogitation, and situate it in a universal historical drama in which the Jewish people are seen to play a unique, central role.

The central figure in medieval Jewish thought—Maimonides—occupies a third of the current work. He is the most controversial Jewish thinker, for medievals and moderns alike, for at least three reasons: (1) the radical ambition of his thought challenged—and continues to challenge—those comfortably settled in a traditional stance; (2) his deliberate ambiguity and indirection of expression invites multiple readings; and (3) the canonical prestige of his work tempts thinkers of many different persuasions to bolster their own positions by identifying with him and reading his statements as support for their own.

The agenda for the modern Maimonidean controversy was set by the late Leo Strauss, in two main steps. In *Law and Philosophy* (1937), he

claimed that one should read Maimonides (and Moses in Maimonides's portrayal) as exercising the role of Plato's philosopher-king, presenting religious doctrine and law alike to perform the political function of guiding the people to happiness in this world and the next. In *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Strauss went further and suggested that the inconvenient truths of the philosopher—namely, its contradiction with the received doctrines of religion—had to be kept from the naïve reader by an esoteric technique of writing, in which the plain sense of the text is a cover for a very different meaning.

Schweid's reading of Maimonides wrestles with Strauss's double challenge. He accepts Strauss's first point, but mostly rejects the second, though the two are related. This, in turn, is shaped by Schweid's own conception of the political task of religious philosophy today. Especially in the current age, when the cat is out of the bag and there are no longer any esoteric secrets, it would undermine the normative guiding role of religious philosophy altogether to allow that the correct "is-description" of the world is at irreconcilable odds with the "ought-prescription." Maimonides's God, like Einstein's, is subtle but not malicious: the philosophical truth is hard for common people to understand, but when it is properly understood, it confirms God's benevolence, wisdom and justice on a more profound level than the common person naïvely understands it, but not ultimately in contradiction to that understanding. Though the Maimonidean formulation of the reconciliation of "is" and "ought" would require additional refinement in the modern age (as Schweid's account of modern Jewish thinkers—especially Mendelssohn, Krochmal, and Hermann Cohen—elaborates), it is, in Schweid's reading, one of the major accessible models for those seeking to develop their own religious-philosophical outlooks today.

It is not, of course, the only one; Schweid is temperamentally a pluralist, and nothing less than a dialectical grappling with all the positions in medieval and modern Jewish thought is called for. Thus the "incompatibilist," esotericist, or double-truth positions—though Schweid does not ascribe these to Maimonides—are left on the table, represented here by Kaspi and Albalag. In addition to the positions already mentioned, Schweid gives especially careful and reverent attention to the religious philosophy of Ḥasdai Crescas. Maimonides's thoroughgoing transcendental theology is balanced by Crescas's emphasis on divine immanence, a shift that points forward to Spinoza's pantheism and the nature-mysticism of Aaron David Gordon. Gordon was one of Schweid's personal heroes and a major influence on his Zionist and

spiritual-philosophical outlook (especially in modeling how one can pursue a spiritual quest while keeping one's feet firmly planted in the secular world). Schweid's biography of Gordon is another of his many books illuminating areas of Jewish thought and awaiting translation.

The divine immanence was of course a prominent theme of the medieval kabbalah. Several of the figures in this work—Ibn Gabirol, Halevi, and Crescas—either contributed to the thought-tendencies that would be expressed in kabbalah or owed something of their philosophical orientation to it. However, because of its very different methodological approach from philosophy, Schweid decided to deal with it only tangentially in this work.

This volume occupies a place not only in Schweid's life-work as historian of Jewish thought but also as social educator. Schweid remarks elsewhere (for instance, in the Introduction to *Philosophy of the Bible as Foundation of Jewish Culture*) how the rift in contemporary culture denoted by the catch-word "post-modernism" threatens to sever the connection of contemporary individuals from the cultural legacy of the past. To remain relevant, the narrative of the past must be continually be retold in terms that offer connection to the concerns of the present. It was to achieve this connection for himself that Schweid embarked on his own study of the Jewish thought of the past. He developed his presentation of that narrative in an effort to provide the connection for the students at Hebrew University, from which lectures the first version of this book developed. I drew on Schweid's presentation in turn for my own intellectual growth, and began to translate it in order to help provide that connection for my own students at Rutgers University and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York. Their encouraging feedback has reassured me that this work succeeds as a vehicle of connection. May it continue to provide that service for the present and future readers of this book.

Leonard Levin
June 25, 2007

INTRODUCTION

When should we start the history of Jewish philosophy? On this there is disagreement among the scholars.

Philosophy is not native to Jewish culture, but is the product of absorbing outside influences. It is the generally accepted consensus to see the beginning of Jewish philosophy in the first encounter of Jewish culture with Greek culture during the Second Temple period, especially in the works of Philo of Alexandria. However, some scholars push the beginning back further, and see in the religious thought of the Bible the first crystallization of a Jewish philosophy, or at least its antecedents. As for me, I begin my study with R. Saadia Gaon, the first of the major medieval Jewish philosophers.

We need not engage in elaborate justifications for omitting a discussion of the central concepts of the Bible and of rabbinic lore from a treatment of philosophic thought. To be sure, the Jewish philosophers included the religious and ethical thought that came to expression in the Bible and in rabbinic sayings as essential sources for their own enterprise, but these were not philosophical in and of themselves. One can consider them as such only through understanding the notion of “philosophy” in a broad sense, and by ignoring the usual requirement that philosophy strive for critical and systematic thought based on well-defined epistemological criteria. Thus, to present the ideas of the Bible as a stage in the history of Jewish philosophy seems to me to be a bit of creative philosophical interpretation rather than a scientific procedure. I do not wish to disparage the importance of such an enterprise. On the contrary, I deem it more important than a strictly scholarly approach, but it is not the objective of this book.¹

I decided not to include in this book the thought of Philo of Alexandria, because it is atypical and historically isolated. Its inclusion is an innovation of modern Judaic scholarship. In the history of general thought, it is possible to see Philo in retrospect as one of the founders of Christian religious philosophy, but he had no similar influence

¹ It is the central objective of a more recent book by Schweid: *The Philosophy of the Bible as the Foundation of Jewish Culture*. (LL)

on mainstream Jewish thought. To be sure, one may draw fascinating parallels between Philo's interpretations of the Bible and those of the rabbis. However, though Jewish literature of the Second Temple period was influenced by Greek language and literature, it was closed off from direct philosophical influence, which it avoided dealing with. The Platonic and Stoic ideas that one can find in rabbinic literature are the fruit of social contact, not of grappling intellectually with systematic philosophical thought. Rather than revealing philosophical ideas, they should be studied as literary background for the philosophical interpretation that they received by thinkers of later generations, which made the task of medieval Jewish philosophers easier.

The only Jewish center of antiquity where there was a visible encounter between Judaism and Greek philosophy was in Alexandria of Egypt. Here one could see the cultural conditions similar to those that obtained later in Babylonia (under the Sassanids and the Caliphate), in medieval Spain, and in modern Germany. To be sure, with respect to the mainstream Jewish movements of that period, the Alexandrine Jewish flourishing was short-lived and had little influence, whether in its own time or on posterity. As a result of its swift and complete devastation, after which the centers of Jewish creativity moved eastward beyond the sphere of influence of Greek culture, Alexandrine Judaism remained an isolated episode without impact on further Jewish creativity. Only in modern times was its literary legacy rediscovered and sought out by Judaic scholars.

Philo's writings were preserved by the Christian Church, who found great affinity with them. To be sure, some Philonic ideas found their way into the teachings of medieval Jewish thinkers, but only indirectly. The bulk of his teaching remained a passing episode in the history of Jewish culture. This cannot be said of medieval Jewish philosophy. From the tenth century onward, Jewish thought experienced a delayed encounter with Greek philosophy, mediated first by Muslim and later by Christian religious philosophers, under circumstances that demanded dealing with it directly. Thus there developed a substantial body of Jewish philosophical literature. Medieval Jewish philosophy was no mere episode, but a formative encounter of decisive influence. A continuous philosophical tradition was established in Judaism. For all these reasons, we start our narrative with the first Jewish philosopher of this period whose writings were preserved and exerted a continuing influence.

Does Jewish Philosophy have a Unique Identity?

The second point that we should clarify briefly in this introduction is the meaning of "Jewish philosophy." Does it exist as a distinct tradition? Is it to be identified by unique traits and content? These questions stem from the fact that systematic philosophy did not grow up originally in the culture of Israel, but was the product of an encounter with another culture. Therefore it is possible to view it primarily as a branch of the philosophical tradition, whose connection with this or that religion is accidental.

I do not want to describe in detail at this point the unique traits and content of Jewish philosophy. That will be more properly done when all the evidence is in, not at the outset of our survey. Nevertheless, I wish to repeat my earlier assertion, that during the Middle Ages there developed a tradition of philosophical interpretation that combined the outlook of the written and oral Torah with philosophical concepts and presented itself as an authentic Jewish tradition growing out of its own peculiar cultural-historical reality. In other words, we have here a particular movement of thought that dealt with its own special sources and cultural challenge. This is an assumption without which it would be pointless indeed to treat Jewish philosophy as a separate tradition from general philosophy.

It seems to me that it is easy to delineate the boundaries of this cultural phenomenon. The first criterion is the formal and authoritative association with an ancient tradition conceived as having its own cultural identity and totality. We cannot emphasize this too strongly, for the significance of the independent identity and integrity of medieval Jewish culture has too often been ignored in treatment of medieval Jewish philosophy. Against the backdrop of a younger culture still developing its comprehensive cultural style—namely, the Arabic culture of that period—there is special importance in its association with an ancient, foundational religion (Judaism played this role in relation both to Islam and Christianity). Special importance may be attributed to the holistic culture of a community possessed of an ancient literature and traditional institutions, which lives and acts in accordance with them. This literature and these institutions determine from the outset the modes of response of this community to innovations and transformations in its cultural environment.

In this connection it is proper to pay attention to an instructive fact, one that is commonly cited as a sign of cultural backwardness,

though another interpretation is possible. Generally Jewish philosophy in the Middle Ages does not rise to the highest level of philosophical achievement of a given period, but follows it belatedly, as a kind of anachronistic response to a previous stage of intellectual development. R. Saadia Gaon wrote in the intellectual idiom of the Mutazilite Kalam, though he lived in a generation that was already dealing directly with the Aristotelian corpus. R. Judah Halevi was still wedded to certain tendencies in Kalamic thought, in a period where a certain variety of Aristotelianism reigned supreme. Indeed, Maimonides's philosophical thought is in accord with the best Aristotelian thought of his time (at least, to a certain extent), yet his dominant achievement in the Jewish world would soon be anachronistic with respect to its Aristotelian foundations, for he based himself on Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Avempace, whereas Averroes's more radical approach soon gained ground among the advanced thinkers of the Western Mediterranean. If this may be said of Maimonides, how much more the case with the Jewish philosophers of Christian Spain! They remained wedded to Arabic philosophy of the 10th to 13th centuries, while in their immediate vicinity there flourished new intellectual currents that developed in the Christian Church (particularly that of Thomas Aquinas).

It is possible to characterize all this as intellectual backwardness, but it is also possible to see it as the legitimate expression of an independent culture's native rhythm of development, growing out of its own connection with contemporaneous reality. When this culture absorbs ideas from outside, it does so as part of an independent retrospective synthesis.² Such a culture begins to grapple with these new ideas only after they have been absorbed and seem to be part of its native legacy and not an outside influence. In other words, we see here a culture that strives to protect its originality and independence, and therefore it accords legitimacy only to those cultural expressions that have succeeded in making their mark on the totality of Jewish life, and can therefore be presented as unfolding from within. That is to say, it does not respond to novelty immediately, but rather to what has aged somewhat and become an inseparable part of the cultural wholeness of that generation. One should not then call this phenomenon backwardness,

² Compare the central thesis of Ahad Ha-Am's essay "Imitation and Assimilation": a minority culture can be undermined by adoption of foreign ideas, unless it takes care to integrate them into its own unique ideational and value structure. (LL)

but rather conservatism—taking the necessary time for the autonomous development of the Jewish culture, following its own rhythm and its regular native pattern.

This principle applies also in later periods. Often those Jewish thinkers who were obsessed with being up-to-date—avant-gardists who availed themselves directly of the contemporaneous creations of outside culture (and such thinkers existed even in the Middle Ages)—cut themselves off from the suffering of the Jewish heritage, and also from the tradition of Jewish thought. We know that some Jews participated in Arabic philosophical circles in Baghdad in the 9th and 10th centuries (Judah ben Joseph, Said ben Eli, Wahb ben Yaish, Nathan ben Ḥayyim, and others). There were also philosophers such as Abu al-Barakat al-Bagh-dadi, who converted to Islam at the end of his life, and who had no connection with Jewish philosophy. There is also the boundary case of a faithful Jew like Solomon Ibn Gabirol, who in his innovative philosophical work made no direct reference to Jewish sources. The result was that the same fate befell his work *Fountain of Life* as befell the works of Philo of Alexandria—it influenced Christian thought, but it left only meager traces on Judaism and Jewish literature.

This leads us to the second criterion. Rabbinic Judaism's need for philosophy originated out of polemical and defensive considerations—to defend its positions against the Karaites, the Moslems, the Christians, etc. It needed to assert its identity and to defend itself from a standpoint of self-awareness. Only in the context of that struggle did mere philosophizing for its own sake become transformed by a larger agenda—to serve the Jewish religion. From this point forward, philosophy became an internal dimension of Jewish religious thought, developing its principles and its characteristic content within that framework.

PART ONE

THE EARLY MASTERS:
FROM SAADIA TO HALEVI

CHAPTER ONE

R. SAADIA GAON

Jewish philosophical literature first developed under the influence of Moslem philosophers in Babylonia (Iraq) during the Geonic period, in the first half of the 10th century. We know the names of some Jewish philosophers who lived prior to R. Saadia Gaon and from whom he learned. But Saadia—who may be regarded as the father of medieval rabbinic literature in all its many varied branches—was the first whose philosophical works have come down to us in their entirety. One may consider him the founder of the philosophical tradition that interprets holy writ from a Jewish/rabbinic viewpoint.

His Life

R. Saadia Gaon was born in 882 in Fayyum, Egypt. At about the age of 30 he left under circumstances that are unclear (apparently because of persecution by the Karaites) and came to Palestine. His varied literary activity began in Egypt and continued throughout his life, spurred on by the many controversies in which he was deeply involved, especially those between the Rabbanites and the Karaites, and between the Jewish communal leaders of Babylonia and Israel. He moved to Babylonia in 922 and was appointed Gaon of Sura in 928. He died in 942, after a life full of struggle and controversy.

His Fields of Productivity

Saadia's fields of productivity were varied, but one tendency is clearly recognized in all—to establish the authority of the rabbinic tradition against all its opponents. His philosophical work was devoted to the same goal. He was creative in six principal fields: lexicography and study of the Hebrew language; prayer and liturgical poetry; biblical translation and commentary; polemical literature; halakhic literature, and philosophical literature. As our interest here is in his philosophical thought, I shall content myself with pointing out the new tendencies that came to expression in his contribution to codifying the prayer

book, interpreting the Torah, and polemicizing against the critics of rabbinic Judaism, particularly the Karaites, all of which may serve as an introduction to his philosophical enterprise.

Saadia compiled one of the earliest prayer books, known as “The Sid-dur of R. Saadia Gaon,” and included in it a redaction of the Passover Haggadah. We shall not delve into the complex issue of the history of the prayer book and the evolution of Jewish prayer, but it is worth pointing out one feature. His prayer book was codified as a response to the criticisms of the Karaites against the rabbinic prayer formulas, for the Karaites included only biblical texts in their own prayers.

We also recognize in Saadia’s prayer book his inclination to a method-ical approach that verges on the scientific. This is characteristic of all his undertakings, and in this respect we may see him as inaugurating a new period, and not just in the philosophical arena.

Torah and Commentary

Saadia wrote a translation of the Torah in Arabic with commentary. We also have fragments of his translation of other books of the Bible.

His translation and commentary addressed a specific need of the Jewish community—the emergence of an Arabic-speaking community who were no longer knowledgeable in Hebrew (or the Aramaic of the prior Targum). In addition, it was necessary to deal with the various sects (especially the Karaites) as well as the Moslems, each of whom had their own reading of the sense of Scripture. An authoritative translation from the rabbinic perspective could counter these.

In Saadia’s commentary to the Torah, a rationalistic and conserva-tive tendency is prominent. It is clear that he is attempting to refute the penetrating objections of the rationalistic critics of the Bible who were active at the time. (Hiwi al-Balkhi, for example, raised 200 ques-tions against the Bible, and we can deduce their nature from Saadia’s responses: Why was Adam prevented from accessing the Tree of Life? Why did God not rescue Abel? How is it conceivable that God should repent of having made man? Why is the blood of animals acceptable as an offering to God? If God knows everything, why did He test Abraham? Etcetera.) Rationalistic criticism of the Bible left a strong impression, and its influence made inroads among Jews of the Rabbanite party. Thus there was a felt need for a project of basic interpretation of Scripture that would defend its plain sense and answer the objections.

Saadia included methodical introductions with his commentaries, in which he dealt with the questions of the time of composition of the books, the authority of their authors, the purpose of the Torah, etc. These introductions also gave expression to his scientific approach, his polemical purpose, and his characteristic conservative rationalism.

His Polemical Works

Saadia's major lifelong controversy was against the Karaites. He wrote many works toward this objective, not all of which have come down to us. Apparently they were not originally intended for publication, but for the benefit of an inside circle of students, for the Karaites enjoyed the protection of the authorities. Therefore many of these works were lost.

Saadia's most important polemical work was "The Open Book," in which he summarized many of his arguments; only fragments remain of it. The main objective of his case against the Karaites was to prove the necessity of an oral Torah. One of the most important Karaite writers, Kirkisani, cites seven evidences of Saadia for the necessity of the Oral Torah:

1. There are commandments in which the quality is not specified (what constitutes a proper Sukkah?).
2. There are commandments in which the quantity is not specified (how much of one's produce must one give as a heave-offering?).
3. There are commandments in which the material substance is not specified (which utensils are susceptible of impurity?).
4. Exact times cannot be known from the Bible (when does the Sabbath begin and end?).
5. God commanded observances that are not mentioned at all in the Bible (such as prayer).
6. We cannot know from the Bible the number of the years or the history of the Jewish people after the cessation of prophecy.
7. The hope for the renewal of the world and of the Jewish people develops from post-biblical reality.

The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs

Saadia's rationalistic, apologetic and polemical predilections led him to philosophy. He did not view philosophy as an intrinsic objective of religious thought, and he did not engage in it for its own sake. He saw it as a useful tool for defending the true faith against its opponents. The problem that troubled him, by his own testimony, was the wide-ranging disagreement among his contemporaries as to the proper doctrines and beliefs. This led to uncertainty, whereas the goal of religion is to bring one to the certainty that is the foundation for a correct way of living:

...My heart grieved for my race, the race of mankind, and my soul was moved on account of our own people Israel, as I saw in my time many of the believers clinging to unsound doctrines and mistaken beliefs while many of those who deny the faith boast of their unbelief and despise the men of truth, although they are themselves in error. I saw men sunk, as it were, in a sea of doubt and covered by the waters of confusion,—and there was no diver to bring them up from the depths and no swimmer to come to their rescue. But as my Lord has granted unto me some knowledge which I can use for their support, and endowed me with some ability which I might employ for their benefit, I felt that to help them was my duty, and guiding them aright an obligation upon me...¹

We note that Saadia speaks as a believer secure in the knowledge of his truth. He himself is not troubled by any doubts, but he grieves for the plight of those who are beset by doubt and perplexity, and sees himself as obligated to help them out. This is the background of his engagement with philosophy.

The Name of the Book

The name of the book *Sefer ha-Emunot v'ha-De'ot* (*Kitab al-'Amanat wal-'Itikadat*) attests to this purpose. Some² think that this title expresses an

¹ Saadia Gaon, *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Introduction, Altmann p. 29, Oxford 1946; reprinted in *Three Jewish Philosophers*, Meridian 1961 (2006 Toby Press reprint is repaginated).

² The two English translations of Saadia's title illustrate Schweid's point. Samuel Rosenblatt translated the title *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, in accordance with the first approach. Alexander Altmann translated it *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*. After discussing the connotation of the original Arabic terms of the title, Altmann concludes: "The title of the book thus epitomizes the whole purpose which the author had in mind, namely, to enable the reader to reach a stage where the *'Amanat* ("doctrines," i.e. of Judaism) become the object of *'Itikadat* ("conviction," i.e. faith based on speculation)." (p. 20)

opposition between authenticated “beliefs” to “opinions” that are merely conjectural. Others see it as a contrast between “doctrines” that are taken on faith and need to rise to the level of “beliefs” substantiated by reason. In either case, Saadia’s purpose is to define the principles of religion and argue their truth. This purpose informs the method of presentation and the structure of the book. At the start of each chapter he sets forth one religious principle and supports it by a Biblical proof-text. In the body of the discussion he presents philosophical arguments in its favor, outlines opposing positions and refutes the objections in every possible way, thus banishing all doubt and imbuing his readers with secure certainty.

Three Sources of Knowledge: Sense, Reason and Inference

In order to fulfill this mission successfully, Saadia first outlines the sources of human knowledge and the ways of validating it. Doctrines and beliefs come to us, in his view, from three sources:

1. *Knowledge Perceived through the Senses*—This is the main source. Saadia assumes that what we see is not merely the outer form of things, but their very essence. In Saadia’s view, human beings can only grasp what is grasped through the senses, i.e. material entities. Purely spiritual entities cannot be grasped by our faculties of knowledge, but what we grasp through the senses is certain. Indeed, Saadia recognizes that the senses can err and generate doubt, but in his view we discover our errors by means of the senses and correct them. Therefore experiential observation undertaken in an exact and critical manner can remove all doubts.
2. *Knowledge of Reason*—These are elementary truths that reason intuitively by itself, for they are integral to it. Saadia has in mind the distinction between good and evil, and the basic axioms of logic. On the one hand, there is self-evident knowledge, and on the other hand, there is sensory knowledge. These two sources are combined in every intellectual apprehension. We explain this by saying that the intellect passes judgment on sensory experience. The content of intellectual apprehension has its source in or through the senses. Thus the intellect, like the senses, can avoid error and doubt through repeated critical examination.
3. *Inferential knowledge*—These are conclusions that follow from the senses and from reason by logical deduction. The third source is

dependent for its action on the first two. Most scientific knowledge is of this sort, but most errors derive from it as well, because complex cognition requires a doubly critical stance, both of its sensory and rational elements. Nevertheless, a sustained critical effort can dispel doubt.

If we are careful not to contradict the senses, reason, and what follows logically from both, and if we are not hasty in our judgments, but proceed patiently and methodically on firm foundations, then we can arrive at well-founded and firm knowledge on which we can rely.

What is Rationalism?

Saadia's rationalism is sincere inasmuch as he believes in the ability to arrive at absolute knowledge of the truth within the realm of our experience. Still, we are speaking of a knowledge with limits. We know by our reason that there are things beyond our knowledge. Our knowledge depends on our senses, and our reason passes judgment on our limited sensory experience. Moreover, we know how to arrive at well-founded conclusions, but even then we cannot be entirely sure that we have not erred. We must recognize that our reason is limited and liable to err. Therefore, even when we arrive at a conclusion that satisfies us, we ought to admit that we may have erred. This is a very important conclusion for understanding Saadia's religious thought, as will become clearer later.

Let us elaborate on this point. Saadia wants to arrive at certainty. He has no interest in speculation for its own sake. The intellectual enterprise for its own sake is not a goal for him. His only goal is to live in accord with the Torah's commandments. Furthermore, he recognizes no supra-sensual reality. The example that he brings is instructive: we see smoke and deduce that there is fire; we see a man moving and deduce that he has a soul. This may seem to go beyond the evidence of the senses, but this is not really the case. We are still in the sensory realm. Saadia considers the soul, too, as a sensory reality that we know from our inner experience; we do not surpass the limit of what is grasped experientially. God, who is the cause of sensory reality, is a spiritual essence, but when we assert this we have arrived at the limit beyond which our reason cannot go. We cannot know God, but only His creative activity.

This is the basic difference between Saadia's approach and a philosophy that has arrived at a metaphysical perspective. Saadia's rationalism does not believe in breaching the limits of experience and contemplating metaphysical truth. He only recognizes that experience points to a metaphysical reality of which we can know nothing.

All philosophers agree on the crucial proposition that God is unknown. Nevertheless, they make a concerted effort to apprehend something of God's metaphysical essence, as we shall see later. Saadia vehemently opposes this move. When he arrives at the uttermost limit of knowledge, he does not speculate further.

We can thus characterize Saadia's religious thought as a limited rationalism, which contents itself with verifying natural facts in order to confirm religious thought and action within the limits of human experience, and to overcome doubt. His chief aspiration is religious certainty, and in that respect he achieves his objective.

Tradition—The Fourth Source of Knowledge

The deliberation on the sensory and rational sources of knowledge is a prelude to the fourth source on which religion is based: "reliable report," or tradition.

Saadia sets up tradition as a special source of religious truth. But nevertheless he emphasizes its dependence on the three previous sources of knowledge: we must validate the claim of tradition too, because only then can we rely on it.

Setting the fourth source on the same plane as the first three raises the question of the relation of revelation to reason. Saadia's limited rationalism points this discussion in a particular direction. Clearly, the difference between reason and revelation does not pose the distressing religious problem for him that it did later for Maimonides. He assumes from the outset that there is a simple identity between them. The question is not how to reconcile contradictions between reason and revelation, but rather to what use each of the sources shall be put.

The distinction between good and evil is within the capacity of natural human reason. This follows from a utilitarian conception of the moral ideas: good denotes the useful, and evil the harmful to humankind. In that respect one does not require divine revelation to distinguish good and evil. Nevertheless, Saadia gives revelation a broad scope in the practical realm.

What is the Role of Reliable Tradition?

Reliable tradition is a source of knowledge specific to religion, yet Saadia offers a universal basis for it. First of all, it does not operate in isolation but rests on a sensory experience of revelation. It is distinct from all other sensory experiences in that it is an exceptional event, in which truth was revealed from an authoritative source and enjoined to pass it on to posterity. Some sort of tradition is necessary for the existence of any cultural community. However, "reliable tradition" is unique by being based on revelation, for its claims are not subject to verification at any time by ordinary human experience.

It follows therefore that Saadia does not place revealed tradition on a higher level than the first three sources, but on a common plane with them, and in respect of its foundation (if not its contents) it is dependent on them. Thus it is also subject to rational criticism and corroboration. Just as Saadia demands agreement between the first two sources of knowledge (sense and reason) and the third source (inference), so he demands agreement between these three sources of knowledge and the fourth, to prevent error and doubt.

But now the critical approach changes in accord with the unique character of revelation. We must examine not just the content of the matters that were transmitted, but the authority of the tradition. We must be convinced of its reliability. We therefore need special criteria for gauging the authenticity of prophetic revelation for those who were present at the event or for its direct recipients. Afterwards, when these are transmitted to later generations, we must examine also the credibility of the transmitter, the teacher, and when he withstands our examination, we rely on him in certainty.

According to Saadia, "reliable tradition" verifies and confirms the first three sources of knowledge and the truths that we derive from them. In this way Saadia's rationalism extends into the domain of religion.

Seeking Agreement of Reason and Religion

We have now arrived at the main point of Saadia's rationalism. He has a prior expectation of full agreement between revelation and the fruits of reason. This agreement seems a simple thing, and its existence is obvious. He assumes that there will be no contradiction between the words of the true prophet and the certain conclusion of the intellect. When there is an apparent contradiction like the one we have seen,

Saadia determines that one should interpret the prophet's words in a rational sense rather than their literal sense. The most blatant example is eliminating every vestige of materiality from the biblical depiction of God. Another example is the belief in the world to come:

Should it, however, be thought by anyone that these passages were capable also of other constructions that would invalidate their use as proof of [the doctrine of] a world to come, we might explain to him that he is mistaken in his belief because reason demands retribution in another world. Now any interpretation that agrees with reason must be correct, whereas any that leads to what is contrary to reason must be unsound and fallacious.³

In other words, we rely on the words of the prophets, but reason teaches us how to interpret them, and so the words of the Bible cannot be affirmed without rational examination.

Does this mean that Saadia subjects the very word of God to the critique of the human intellect? Certainly not. He merely assumes a simple agreement that is intuitively obvious. Only what does not offend our intellect can be the word of God. Saadia is unaware of the philosophical theory that will come with Maimonides, according to which human intellect is fully autonomous and is able to discover on its own metaphysical truths that are an alternative to revelation. Therefore the problem of a fundamental confrontation of reason versus revelation did not arise with Saadia. But the question does arise, why do we need both? What does one add to the other? Why isn't one of them enough?

Saadia's answer to this question follows from his conception of limited rationalism: reason and revelation do not contradict each other, but there is a realm of knowledge vital to humankind that is beyond reason, that we can know only from revelation.

Reason and Revelation Serve Each Other

In that case, why do we need reason in religion? To this, Saadia answers first that the obligation to interpret and verify the words of revelation is an independent need, and at the same time it is a commandment rooted in revelation itself. In addition, there is a polemical reason.

³ *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, IX, 3, Rosenblatt p. 333.

One must know the logic of the heretic and the skeptic, so that their misguided arguments will not disturb us.

As we said, we need reason in order to understand the words of revelation, but also for the sake of our intellectual inquiry we need the prior knowledge that comes from revelation so that we shall know what questions to ask, so that there will be a clear direction to our inquiry, and so that we shall arrive at absolute certainty, because in matters of faith and religion we cannot rely on reason alone. There will always remain the doubt that follows from the possibility that there is a gap in our reasoning of which we are unaware, and someone intellectually superior to us may reveal it. When we arrive at complete agreement between the intent of revelation and rational reflection, we can rest certain that we have arrived at the truth.

The Order of Deliberation in the Book of Doctrines and Beliefs

The structure of the deliberation in the *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* reflects the relationship between revelation and reason. The order of presentation in each chapter is Statement, Proof, Polemic—(1) presentation of the Biblical idea; (2) rational verification of the same; (3) refutation of contrary ideas.

Presenting the idea in its biblical formulation is not a formality, but substantive. Saadia starts with the Torah source in order to verify it. Thus, too, in his formulation of articles of faith that are problematic with respect to our daily experience (such as resurrection of the dead, the future redemption, and reward and punishment), he summarizes and clarifies the traditional view unequivocally and methodically, as if stating a simple fact whose truth is vouched for by revelation. After all, we are not speaking here of the natural order that we verify by daily experience, but of God's intervention in nature. Only God can vouch for that purpose and verify it. On the one hand, he is highlighting the rational character of Scripture in order to refute arguments that have been raised against it. On the other hand, after he has given reason its due, he is interested in establishing the authority of revelation and tradition. This is recognizable also in the way that he explains the role of tradition in the life of the culture, especially its necessity in preserving the social order. The Karaites had protested against the rabbinic tradition of the Oral Law, and Saadia wishes to demonstrate its vital role.

*Prophecy and Commandments**Rational and Positive (= Arbitrary)⁴ Imperatives*

Among the commandments that define the religious lifestyle, Saadia distinguishes two varieties that parallel the mutual duality of reason and revelation: imperatives of reason and imperatives of obedience.

Rational imperatives—these are the commands that even had they not been revealed in the Torah, we would be obligated to them by reason. These include some imperatives that are religiously significant (belief in God, belief in individual providence, prayer), as well as social imperatives (prohibition of murder, theft, adultery, etc.).

Positive (or arbitrary) imperatives—these are the commands that reason does not require (though it does not exclude them either). Their obligatory nature derives from the Torah. This refers especially to commands that touch on worship of God (Sabbath, dietary laws, etc.).

However, this classification is not hard and fast. Each category contains elements of the other.

On the one hand, there is an arbitrary element in rational imperatives. Reason recognizes general rules of conduct, but the specific norms that embody them rest on governmental authority. For instance, the prohibition of murder is categorical, but the distinction between murder and manslaughter, the gradation of their severity and the punishments meted out to them are a matter of governmental determination that will necessarily be arbitrary to some extent. This is not a purely rational judgment, and it calls for the absolute authority that is to be found in revelation.

On the other hand, there is a rational element in the positive commands. Reason requires man to bend his will to the authority above him and to acknowledge the Good One who has dealt him good, who extends him beneficence without limit. Thus, there is a rational reason to fulfill those commands whose rationale is obedience and subordination to the divine will, even if the person who observes them sees no private benefit from their performance.

⁴ The distinction Saadia draws is familiar in legal theory as the distinction between natural law and positive law. The Hebrew *shim'iyot* connotes “hearing, obedience, discipline”—hearing the law conveys the authority required for obeying it. Altmann translates it “Revelational,” see *Jewish Philosophers* (2006), 228.

We may therefore say that the difference between the rational and positive commands rests with whether the primary content of a given command expresses human utility—whether of an individual or a society—or subordination to the divine will. However, with respect to our motivation to obey and fulfill the imperatives, there is an arbitrary aspect to rational commands and a rational aspect to positive commands.

The Need for Prophecy

The distinction between positive and rational commands, and the need for arbitrary authority even with the rational commands, necessitates a means by which the divine word can come to humanity, in other words, prophecy.

How does Saadia understand the phenomenon of prophecy?

First of all the question of the likelihood or reasonableness of the prophetic vision does not bother Saadia especially. For Halevi and later for the Aristotelian philosophers, this is a question of the first rank—how can one explain prophecy, either psychologically or theologically? But for Saadia, this is an indubitable experience for which it is not hard to give a scientific explanation. The reason is that he had no general theory of the natural and the supernatural, but he accepted the biblical view of reality at face value and sought rational evidence for all its components. When he was faced with outright denial of the divine source of holy scripture, he sought to show that it was groundless.

In that case, how does God bring his word to mankind? In the *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Saadia dealt with this question with extreme brevity, but he treated it more fully in his earlier work, the commentary to the *Book of Formation*. The *Book of Formation* (*Sefer Yetsirah*) is an enigmatic mystical work that deals with the creation of the world and the secret connections between the divine and terrestrial realms. Scholars debate the date of its composition, and we shall not enter into that controversy. Suffice it to say that it was invested with traditional authority by both the philosophers and the kabbalists of the Middle Ages. Saadia used it for his purposes and it contributed to his development of the idea of the “created manifestation” of God by means of which he explained prophecy.

God is a spiritual entity, whereas man is a material creature. It is therefore impossible that God himself should speak to man or appear to him. Nevertheless, Saadia accepts at face value the prophets’ testimony that they saw divine visions and heard the divine voice speaking to them.

He explains this by postulating a mediating entity that was made visible to the prophets' eyes and was heard by their ears by divine fiat.

This "glory" or manifestation must be an ethereal material entity that was created to serve as a medium. It is pictured in forms that have allegorical significance, and in this way it informs the prophets of the divine will. The voice that the prophet hears is also a material voice. This is the explanation for the fact that different prophets see different visions. God depicts the glory to each prophet in a way appropriate to him. The vision is allegorical, but what the prophet sees and hears are real apparitions and voices, not the phantoms of his imagination. Thus Saadia reconciles an incorporeal notion of God with the objective reality of the prophetic vision.

The Source and Influence of the "Manifestation" Doctrine

The doctrine of the divine manifestation is not Saadia's invention. He received it from various sources. The first known source is the Logos of Philo of Alexandria. This is one of the isolated instances of the transmigration of a Philonic idea—perhaps through Christian literature—into medieval Muslim and Jewish religious philosophy.

Through Saadia's commentary on the *Book of Formation*, the doctrine of the divine manifestation spread widely among Jewish circles in the Middle Ages. It became the central doctrine of the medieval German Hasidim. It influenced Halevi's theory of prophecy. Some Aristotelian philosophers also regarded it as acceptable for popular teaching, as it strictly avoided anthropomorphism.

Verification of Prophecy

The explanation of the prophetic phenomenon appears simple, yet it still raises the question of verification: how does the prophet know with certainty that he experiences a true prophetic vision and not a phantom of the imagination? Moreover, how do his listeners know that he is a true prophet?

The answer to both questions is: the demonstrative miracle. God alters the order of nature after He has announced to the prophet that He will do so. The fulfillment of the announcement is the objective testimony that the prophet had a divine revelation. This answers the prophet's doubts and his listeners' as well.

This explanation is bound up with a whole line of secondary questions. Saadia asserts—against the accepted views of many thinkers of the Muslim Kalam—that nature generally follows a set pattern in conformity to rational law. In this respect he is close to Aristotelianism. The natural order is altered only occasionally by God for a definite need, such as the verification of revelation. The prophet has no super-human powers; hence, the demonstrative miracle must clearly be an act performed by God himself. By it, prophecy can be verified.

However, there is still the power of a deceptive illusion, and so one should not accept a miracle without a double cross-examination: examination of the prophet by his witnesses, and examination of the witnesses. Saadia is of the opinion that Moses's prophecy had an absolute superiority over all other founders of religions. The testimony of his prophecy was public and well-examined. But still another question is raised: How is a change in the natural order possible? Aristotelian philosophers held that nature is eternal and its laws are permanent, and it is impossible that they will suffer change. Saadia feels no difficulty on this point. God created nature. This is itself a miracle, and since God is omnipotent, there is no obstacle to His changing the order of nature when there is a rational need to do so. The only problem is again: How can one distinguish between a true miracle and a deception? Only the critical acuity of people who carefully re-examine what they have seen, and only the cross-comparison of the testimony of many witnesses, can yield us that certainty. In his discussion of Christianity and Islam, Saadia again maintained that only Moses's prophecy stood on adequately examined testimony.

Creation and God's Existence

Creation as a Foundational Theological Principle

We saw that prophecy rests on a demonstrative miracle, and the miracle rests on the assumption that the world was created by the will of an omnipotent God. Indeed, the affirmation in Genesis that the world was created after a prior non-being (which Saadia interprets as creation *ex nihilo*) and in that respect is generated (not eternal) and is regenerated continually, was in his view the foundation for proving the metaphysical truths of religion—knowing that God exists, and knowing the divine attributes. The knowledge that human beings are commanded to fulfill

the divine commandments is a necessary deduction from the fact that God created the world and humankind in it. To this, Saadia added a very important stipulation: God is perfect and lacks nothing, so it is clear that He did not create the world for His own sake, but rather—as the Good and Beneficent One—for the sake of the world and humanity. This therefore provides a double reason for our obligation to fulfill God's commandments. We are beholden to God for the kindness of creating us, and God's commandments are given for our benefit.

Maimonides's Criticism of Saadia's Doctrine of Creation

We can understand how central the belief in the world's creation was to the foundation of Saadia's biblical religious world outlook, from the spirited criticism that Maimonides directed at it. Saadia first proved that the world was created, and on that basis he proved God's existence. Maimonides argued that one ought not to prove God's existence on the basis of the world's creation, because creation is not subject to logical proof. There are considerations on each side of the argument. Therefore one should not make the proof of God's existence dependent on an unproved proposition. On the contrary, it would be better to prove God's existence on the basis of the physics of Aristotle, who preferred the view that the world is eternal and the laws of physics are everlasting.

Maimonides's argument raises a problem of interpretation, one with which we will have to reckon when we come to discuss his philosophy. In connection with his criticism of Saadia, one must emphasize that (according to our view) Maimonides accepted the belief in the world's creation, for only on that basis can one establish a religious theology true to the outlook of the Bible, one that posits a God who wills, commands, directs the world, provides for reward and punishment, reveals, and works miracles. We learn all this from revelation. But in order to believe in revelation, we first need to believe in the existence of God. To this purpose, we should rely on a physical theory that is systematic and tested, namely that of Aristotle, and not on an assertion of creation that cannot be proved!

This criticism sheds light on Saadia's method. It reveals Saadia's innocence and naivete in relying on the authority of the biblical text. The Torah begins with the description of creation and presentation of God as creator. Saadia follows the same procedure in his philosophical argument. Maybe that is why he was unaware that his proofs of

the creation of the world would not withstand the test of systematic philosophical method.

Kalam and Aristotelianism in Muslim Philosophy

This is the place to clarify Saadia's relation to the two principal currents in Muslim philosophy, and to identify the main difference between them. The Mutakallimim were theologians who engaged in philosophy exclusively from a religious viewpoint and purpose. They were not interested in scientific and philosophical subjects for their own sake. Aristotelian philosophers, on the other hand, were interested in philosophy for its own sake. For them religion was only one portion, though an important and central one, of the general truth that interested them. For that purpose, they relied not simply on revealed scripture, but on scientific research, both empirical and theoretical. It is clear that Saadia followed the path of the Kalam. He did not engage in natural science for its own sake. Nevertheless, there are grounds for establishing that Saadia was familiar with Aristotle's physics and considered it superior. The result was a kind of amalgam between theological and scientific arguments. Saadia showed originality and creativity in this endeavor, but he did not see that he was subordinating what he learned of Aristotle's physics to what he learned from the Kalamic thinkers, and that from a systematic Aristotelian standpoint his arguments for the creation of the world and his proofs for God's existence were not convincing.⁵

Saadia's Fundamental Assumption: Cause Precedes Effect

To understand Saadia's proofs, we must uncover a prior assumption that differs from Aristotle, one that he regarded as so obvious that he did not bother to state it. In Saadia's view, a physical cause for generating

⁵ The situation is perhaps a bit more complex than Maimonides's remarks in *Guide* I, 71 suggest. John Philoponus, a Christian thinker of the 6th century, revised the Aristotelian argument against an actual infinity to draw the conclusion that an infinite series of events in time was equally as inconceivable as an infinite concatenation of objects at one time. It is not clear why Aristotle's version of the argument should be accepted and Philoponus's rejected. Crescas was consistent in rejecting both. Al-Kindi, by many accounts the first "true philosopher" among the Moslems, accepted Philoponus's argument. It is of course true that Saadia was philosophically a dilettante using philosophy occasionally for theological purposes. Still, he could have claimed (citing Al-Kindi's example) that his use of this argument in support of creation had the endorsement of at least one "true philosopher." (LL)

objects and the processes that they undergo must be prior in time to its effects. In other words, it cannot be the case that the cause and effect occur at the same time. Thus the cause must be external (transcendental) to the effect. It thus follows that if we encounter objects or processes that cannot be explained of themselves, we must assume that there is an external cause prior to them in time, which caused them. It is easy to see that this assumption contains in itself Saadia's primary argument. If we prove that the world that we see cannot develop from itself—if we prove that the world only has “possible existence” and not “necessary existence”—we can then of course prove that there is a cause that caused the “possibly existing” thing to become actual, and that cause is God, of whom we know whatever of Him is revealed through His creations.

Aristotle (and Maimonides following him) disagreed with this assumption. In his view, the causes and effects of every process of becoming and transformation must coexist in time. This necessarily follows from the relation of cause and effect. The cause precedes the effect, of course, in respect of importance and role. But if we assume that God is eternal, it necessarily follows that the world is coeternal with God. Saadia did not see the fallacy in his own argument, and therefore Maimonides criticized him. But it is clear from this example how much Saadia was influenced by the biblical way of thought.

Proofs for Creation of the World

Saadia offers four proofs for the creation of the world:

1. *The world is finite*—The world's finite character can be demonstrated in various ways, for instance from the fact that the earth is encircled by the sun's orbit. This is an Aristotelian assumption, and likewise the following: A finite body cannot contain an infinite force. Therefore it is necessary that the world must have a beginning and end in time.⁶ We note that Saadia uses Aristotelian premises to arrive at conclusions opposite to Aristotle's. It is clear, too, that the source of the difference is what we specified

⁶ The medievals were ignorant of the principle of inertia. Moving bodies must run out of gas, so to speak. There were two solutions to this problem: either the world has a temporally finite run due to a finite gas tank, or the Aristotelian “unmoved Mover” is constantly (and eternally) supplying it with additional momentum. (LL)

earlier: Saadia believes that the cause must precede its effect in time, and therefore the effect must begin at a certain moment, after the action of the cause.

2. *The world is composed of many parts*—This can be demonstrated by simple sensory observation of the world. It is composed of many parts, and all the parts are composed of parts that can further be subdivided, *ad infinitum*.⁷ In that case, the composition of the parts that preceded the whole must be a kind of creation. Here too Saadia used an Aristotelian theory that has been uprooted from its systematic context. In its Kalamic source, this argument is based on the theory of atoms. Every object is composed of atoms, and the composition is brought about by creation. Saadia rejected the atomic theory on Aristotle's authority, and therefore he deals with the composition of the organic constituents of the world: earth, water, air and fire; mineral, vegetable, animal and rational (human); etc. Indeed, in Aristotle's view one may prove from this composition that God is their cause, but it does not follow from this what Saadia argues, namely that the process of composition must have had a beginning in time.
3. *All objects change their accidental qualities*—All things in the world come into being and perish. There is continual renewal in existence, and whatever is regenerated is originally generated. The source of this argument is again Kalamic: everything is composed of atoms, and they are only distinguished from each other in the arrangement of their atoms. A qualitative change in a body is caused by rearrangement of atoms. Thus far, the Kalamic proof. But Saadia rejected atomic theory, and reverted to the Aristotelian outlook, according to which objects are generated and change through transformation of form in hylic matter. This change of form is a perpetual regenerative process, i.e. the appearance of new objects each of which has a beginning and ending point of its existence.

⁷ The Aristotelians believed in the continuity and infinite divisibility of matter, similar to the infinite divisibility of real numbers. Saadia followed the Aristotelians in this belief, and of course so did Maimonides. Curiously, only the Muslim Kalam thinkers held to the belief in atomism, a precursor of our modern atomic theory. So much for the invincible scientific superiority of Aristotelianism! (LL—to which Schweid replies: "Well. Modern physics shows that the atoms are infinitely divisible—back to Aristotle!")

4. *Time cannot be infinite*—Of all the proofs that Saadia offers for the creation of the world, this is the only one that has philosophical merit. It had important antecedents, and it contains in kernel the essential difference between the Aristotelian outlook and Saadia's biblical outlook. If the world is eternal—so argues Saadia—it must follow that an infinite time preceded the present moment, and similarly every present moment has an infinite time preceding it. This is absurd; an infinite time cannot pass in actuality. It follows that time must have an absolute beginning. This argument points to a difficulty inherent in the Aristotelian system. This disagreement would eventually be codified as one of Kant's philosophical antinomies. Aristotle overcame this difficulty by the argument that time is cyclical and continually fluctuating between potentiality and actuality. It follows that past and future alternate continually through eternal repetition. On the other side, Saadia's (and Kant's) conception of time is biblical: there is an absolute difference between past and future, and time goes not in a circle but in a straight line in the direction of the purpose and perfection that God intended for creation. Here, then, is a substantive difference between the biblical, monotheistic conception of time and Aristotle's pagan conception.

Creation ex nihilo and God's Existence

Saadia deduced three principal consequences from the creation of the world:

1. *Creation must be from nothing*—This follows simply and necessarily from Saadia's conception of creation. If the world was created from pre-existing matter, then it itself is pre-existing and eternal.
2. *The created cannot create itself*—If we suppose that it created itself, we imply that it preceded itself. From this, he proves that there must be a God who is the cause of creation.
3. *From the creation of the world, we can deduce God's attributes*—He is revealed as Creator, and this is the foundation of further theological discourse.

God as Cause of the World

In the opening of the second chapter, Saadia establishes several auxiliary principles that guide him in his discussion. From the ten principles that he specifies, we mention two that are especially important:

1. Human knowledge ascends by degrees from matters easy of understanding and “gross” (material) to matters difficult of understanding and “subtle” (spiritual), from sensory knowledge to abstract concepts. This ascent parallels the order of investigation from the effect to the cause. In other words, every cause is more subtle and ethereal than its effect. The example that Saadia cites is instructive: We see snow; the cause of the snow is water, which is more subtle than snow (for snow is opaque and water is transparent). The cause of water is a mist, which is subtler than water. The cause of the mist is the sun, which is still more subtle; the cause of the sun is God, who is not grasped by the senses at all. Saadia seeks to explain by this demonstration why inquiry in the latter things is especially difficult, and why this difficulty is not a valid argument against the truth of the matter. On the contrary, the difficulty is evidence that we are progressing toward knowledge of the truth. Indeed, from this point he arrives at a topic of even greater importance—the conclusion that God is one and incorporeal, for the cause of the material must be more ethereal than the effect. The corresponding assumption is left implicit for the time being—the cause is outside the effect and different from it in essence.
2. Everything known is limited; human inquiry is limited. Saadia understands this assumption in two parallel ways. First, inquiry is limited because it is dependent on the senses, which are limited. Second, everything that is a subject for inquiry is limited, i.e., reality as a whole is finite.

God is Not Conceivable

We shall now combine the two premises: Everything known to us in the world is either from the senses or on account of the senses. What is known from the senses is limited, and everything that transcends sensory knowledge transcends the bounds of inquiry. Materiality alone is the cause of plurality. The immaterial, the spiritual, is one, and the categories of material existence do not apply to it. In other words, spiritual

reality is the final reality; there is no other reality beyond it. There are not two spiritual entities. This is the proof for the unity of God.

Thus inquiry into existing entities brings us, through the chain of effects and causes, to the supra-mundane cause of all reality, and with that we come to the limit of reality. But let us remember: in Saadia's view, *the limit of reality is also the limit of human knowledge*.

We stand before something that has necessary existence, and the assumption of such a being is a condition for our inquiry concerning the world, but of that thing itself we can have no conception. God is beyond our power to know, which grasps only what comes from the senses. In other words, God is the spiritual cause of the material world. In that respect He is outside the world and outside our thought. He is the One who is immaterial and unchanging.

Saadia's Relation to Scripture

Now we stand before the crucial task that Saadia took upon himself—to reconcile this concept of God that comes from speculation with the biblical concept of God.

The first problem that arises is the problem of material and anthropomorphic representations of God in the Bible. Saadia considers it obligatory to reconcile his indubitable conclusion of reason with the Bible, and he does it by interpreting the text figuratively. Moreover, he sees this reconciliation as required by the Bible itself, for we find in the Bible the injunction not to depict God by any image, and not to compare Him to His creation.

In that case, why does the Bible nevertheless have recourse to corporeal imagery? Saadia's answer is already found in the words of the rabbis: "The Torah speaks in human language."⁸ But it is possible to understand this injunction in different ways. According to Maimonides, these rabbinic words express the far-reaching difference between the understanding of the simple person and the philosopher. Saadia is far

⁸ A qualification is in order here. The practice to interpret away the anthropomorphisms of the Bible is indeed an important part of rabbinic thought, as the midrashic interpretation of many sensitive passages (and their rendering by the Targumim) amply demonstrates. However, the saying "The Torah speaks in human language" was coined by the rabbis for a more technical purpose: to leave textual redundancies uninterpreted instead of using each redundancy (such as the doubling of a verb) to indicate another legal lesson. The use of this saying in connection with Biblical anthropomorphism is a medieval usage. (LL)

from adopting this elitist distinction. His philosophical thought is on the border of understanding of every Jew who learns Torah. Corporeal imagery of God follows, in his view, from the need for enrichment of expression to convey the feeling of tangible presence of God:

If someone were to ask, "But what advantage is there in this extension of meaning that is practiced by language and that is calculated only to throw us into doubt? Would it not have done better if it had restricted itself to expressions of unequivocal meaning and thus have enabled us to dispense with this burden of discovering the correct interpretation?" my answer would be that, if language were to restrict itself to just one term, its employment would be very much curtailed and it would be impossible to express by means of it any more than a small portion of what we aim to convey... Were we, in our effort to give an account of God, to make use only of expressions that are literally true, it would be necessary for us to desist from speaking of Him as one that hears and sees and pities and wills to the point where there would be nothing left for us to affirm except the fact of His existence.⁹

In other words, embellishment comes from the need for expression, not the need for communicating the truth to ordinary believers. When we come to express the richness of our thought about God, we have need of the variety of words borrowed from the nature of things, from the world of sensory experience. We cannot dispense with it, not even the philosopher, so as not to impoverish our thinking. In this manner Saadia gives full endorsement to the biblical mode of expression and the biblical way of conceiving God, and he requires it in the language of prayer as well.

God's Positive Attributes and Conception of a Personal God

In addition to the corporeal imagery of God we find in the Bible positive attributes of another kind, attributes that conceive God as a personality acting from intentionality and will, namely the attributes Living, Powerful, Wise, and Willing.

In Maimonides's discussion of the divine attributes, he draws no distinction between these attributes and those which are grossly corporeal and anthropomorphic. In his view, only someone who does not understand the matter properly will treat the two differently. One can only predicate these attributes in a positive sense of a material entity. That

⁹ *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, II, 10, Rosenblatt 117–8.

is not Saadia's view. Indeed, he understands the difficulty in ascribing these attributes to God, inasmuch as they would introduce plurality in Him, whereas God must be one in simple unity, without composition. Nevertheless, Saadia does ascribe these attributes to God in a positive sense. How so? In his view, these attributes follow necessarily from conceiving God as Creator. The Creator must necessarily be living, powerful, wise and willing. These attributes are implicit in the concept of "creating" when we analyze its meaning.

In this way Saadia seeks to overcome the danger of plurality in affirming these attributes. We conceive them instantaneously in thought as a single notion; only the limitations of language require us to formulate this notion in four separate words.

Saadia nevertheless affirms the personal notion of God that arises from creation. His extreme caution on the question of plurality in connection with the attributes, rather than reflecting reverence for the conclusions of intellectual inquiry (as is actually the case with Maimonides), more likely reflects sensitivity to the difference between the Jewish concept of God's absolute unity and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity (to which he dedicates a great deal of polemical attention). Saadia wants to banish compositeness from theological discourse. The Torah's doctrine of divine unity does not tolerate plurality.

The Good God

So far, the biblical concept of God has been preserved throughout the discussion of the conception of God. The impress of that concept is still more visible in those contexts where God appears as the object of human worship. From the fact of being creator of the world and humanity, God is already conceived as the source of absolute lovingkindness. Creation is the revelation of a will whose sole motive is beneficence, to do good in the most perfect way possible. It is inconceivable that God should harbor maleficent motives or evil intentions toward His creatures. He creates them for their good, not for His sake. It necessarily follows from God's goodness that He should govern the world and exercise providence over it by means of commandments and prohibitions, by bestowing free will on human beings, and by educating them through reward and punishment. And from all this, it follows further that God will exercise His providence justly in all matters of reward and punishment for human actions, both in this world and in the world to come.

All these assumptions give rise to many of the central problems in religious thought, with which Saadia will deal in the remainder of the book: free will, providence, the substance of reward and punishment, and the apparent discrepancy between material fortune and moral desert (“the righteous suffer, the wicked prosper”).

For now, we summarize: God, whom Saadia portrays as the cause of the world, is the personal God, Creator, Commander, Beneficent One, master of providence and retribution, as depicted in the Bible.

Saadia's Anthropology

So far we have discussed Saadia's theology and the biblical sources that underlie it. We will now set next to it his view of human nature, which is also drawn from Scripture, to which his rational arguments provide no more than a cosmetic veneer.

Mankind is the purpose of creation. Everything is prepared for him, for his survival and happiness. We learn this not only from the Bible, but also from experience. Humanity is found in the middle of the world-order, between heaven and earth, and observation teaches that the middle, the heart, is the primary part (like the seed in the fruit).

Why are we so privileged? What qualifies us for this dignity? The answer, of course, is human reason. Saadia refers here not only to potential reason in the abstract, but its actual achievements:

By virtue of it man preserves the memory of deeds that happened long ago, and by virtue of it he foresees many of the things that will occur in the future. By virtue of it he is able to subdue the animals so that they may till the earth for him and bring in its produce. By virtue of it he is able to draw the water from the depth of the earth to its surface; he even invents irrigating wheels that draw the water automatically. By virtue of it he is able to build lofty mansions, to make magnificent garments, and to prepare delicate dishes. By virtue of it he is able to organize armies and camps, and to exercise kingship and authority for establishing order and civilization among men. By virtue of it he is able to study the nature of the celestial spheres, the course of the planets, their dimensions, their distances from one another, as well as other matters relating to them.¹⁰

The biblical roots of this conception of human wisdom are quite clear. This speaks of practical wisdom and knowledge of the world. It is far

¹⁰ *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, IV, 1, Altmann 117.

removed from the philosophical outlook that sets for man the goal of knowing metaphysical truth or the divine nature. The goal here is not knowledge of God, but fulfillment of His commandments in His world.

Importance of the Terrestrial World

Here we raise the question: If man is so exalted, why was he placed in a despicable material vessel, sunk in pain and suffering? Does this not refute the notion of humanity's centrality in God's eyes?

Saadia answers: All is for humanity's benefit, to educate them to know their duty and direct them toward their true goal.

Two additional major assertions are implicit in this answer. The human being is a creature destined to live in two worlds, and the one world is a means to achievement of the other. This world is a vestibule before the world to come. This is an assumption on which Saadia bases his whole religious vision (and we have yet to see the importance of this view for his ethics). It is impossible that this world should be the end of life's road, for God's beneficence necessitates that the good He bestows on us should be absolute and permanent good. This world was arranged so that through our service in it we should accumulate merit for the world to come. This service implies full affirmation of the life of this world, lived according to the material, social, and psychological conditions pertaining to it.

The Righteous Suffer, the Wicked Prosper

We will now address Saadia's approach to the problem of theodicy. Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper? The answer is wholly based on the assumption that the human being is a creature destined to live in two worlds. The righteous receive the punishment for their few misdeeds in this world, and the wicked receive the reward for their few good deeds. All this takes place in this world, so that they shall receive their true deserts without admixture in the world to come.

To this scenario, Saadia adds the notion of divine trial. God tries His creatures through suffering. The righteous person knows why he is being tried. He knows that the purpose of this trial is to add to his merit, to increase his reward. Therefore he is encouraged and stands firm. This view is quite remote from the philosophical outlooks that penetrated Jewish thought in the following generations. Saadia is caught

in the embrace of rabbinic views, to which he adds his philosophical arguments.

The Role of Human Material Existence

In the religious philosophy that developed after Saadia, there was widespread acceptance of the view that materiality is the cause of human deficiency and evil. It is therefore important to emphasize that Saadia related positively to man's material condition. There is no trace in his thought of the notion that evil is caused by materiality *per se*.

Materiality is not the cause of human temptations or deficiencies. Saadia attributes these directly to the soul, in which (following a generalized Platonic schema) he distinguishes three faculties: appetite (in common with plants), anger (in common with animals), and reason, which governs the others. Saadia asserts that these faculties are manifested in the soul, which is joined to the body, but he finds no feature in the body to account for the difference between them. Furthermore, he does not regard the manifestation of these qualities in the soul as a deficiency, but rather as a necessary condition for maintenance in the life of this world. The body is given to man as an instrument for action, to work and make and produce, for this is the human task in this world. Furthermore, through activity and production he achieves happiness in this world and accumulates merit for the next world. This is a central assumption on whose basis Saadia develops his ethical theory.

Free Will and the Problems It Raises

The next stage in Saadia's doctrine of human nature is the discussion of human free will and the problems it raises. We note that Saadia did not at first raise the theoretical problem that follows from the contradiction between natural law and free will. He is bothered by another question: Why did God give man the freedom to choose evil and thereby come to grief? He responds that precisely thus is expressed God's loving-kindness vis-à-vis humankind. He gives them the opportunity to really earn their reward. There is no comparison between the good that one receives gratuitously as a gift, and the good that one earns through genuine merit. The special status and active role of humankind in this world require that they be free. God does not compel them, but commands them, and gives them the power and potential to do what is commanded and refrain from what is forbidden them.

The emphasis that Saadia puts on the notion of free will is characteristic. He draws a difference between inaction on God's part and on man's. When God refrained from creation prior to the existence of the world, this was not to be counted as "negative action," for existence has no opposite. But a person is counted as an actor, whether performing an action or refraining from one. Refraining from one thing is tantamount to doing the opposite. Therefore it is proper for a person to receive reward or punishment both for performing a positive action and for refraining from it.

This notion implicitly places a high value on a person's activity in the life of this world, in contrast to the contemplative philosophical ideal that prevailed in the following period.

Conceiving God as observing and knowing all human actions, together with the affirmation of human freedom, posed a difficult theological problem of which the Bible seems unaware. The rabbis were aware of the problem but offered no solution to it. Saadia is also aware of it and devotes some attention to it, but he does not seem to consider it of great importance. His main argument is that even though God knows all human deeds in advance, His knowledge is not a compelling reason causing people to act the way they do. God's knowledge operates on one level, and human action on another level. According to this view, God's foreknowledge of what will happen in the world has nothing to do with God being a comprehensive, determinate cause of all mundane events by some eternal law emanating from Him. On the contrary, Saadia seems to regard God's knowledge as similar to one's sympathetic knowledge that a friend will act in a particular way, though this knowledge is hardly a cause of the friend's action.

It is clear that this solution depends on a rather simplistic approach. Saadia does not deal with the logical difficulties implicit in it. When we set this beside the rabbinic saying, "All is foreseen, yet free will is given," there is little difference. Saadia's version is longer, and somewhat more explicit in his statement of the problem.

Physical Theory of the Soul

We mentioned above the faculties of the soul—appetite, anger, and reason—in accord with the Platonic theory. But Saadia's conception of the nature of the soul is not Platonic, but rather closer to the outlook of the Stoics.

Plato considered the soul a spiritual entity joined unwillingly to the body. Saadia, on the other hand, regarded the soul as a material substance, though of the most ethereal sort, even surpassing the celestial bodies in purity, and therefore invisible to the eye. It is conjoined to the body at the heart by means of the blood, and acts through the body. The body is considered a mere instrument, and the source of its actions is in the inner motions of the soul, through the three faculties. Reason governs the lower faculties and directs the proper deeds of the person. We should emphasize that even the faculty of reason belongs to this ethereal material substance. In Saadia's view, the human intellect is not a purely spiritual entity.

This conception of the soul enables Saadia to affirm in a simple fashion the whole corpus of rabbinic views concerning the immortality of the soul and the reward and punishment of the world to come. When the body dies, the soul is separated from it and survives on its own. The souls of the wicked move on to Gehenna (Hell) which is located under the earth, where they are burned with a fire more ethereal than the fire of this world; still, it is real fire in a real place. The souls of the righteous ascend to a heavenly location, where they are illuminated by the light of the divine glory—a light unlike that of the sun, but a substantial light nonetheless.

Saadia is also able to depict the resurrection of the dead in accordance with this view. The soul returns to earth and inhabits a body similar to the one it possessed originally. Saadia depicts the details of the resurrection in a fashion that would provoke Maimonides to irony and ridicule.

On all these topics, Saadia perpetuates traditional notions that originated with the rabbis. He tries to demonstrate that on those issues where the rabbinic view surpasses that of the Bible in degree of detail (for instance, reward and punishment after death, survival of the soul, and the resurrection), it is nevertheless based on the Bible. His original contribution is limited to his attempt to prove that these traditional views are compatible with a scientific, rational account of experience.

Saadia's Ethics

On the basis of Saadia's theology and anthropology it is possible to present his theory of religious ethics in a systematic fashion.

We will start with several premises, which are based on the preceding discussion:

1. *The Duality in Saadia's Conception of Man*

We have already seen that Saadia's teaching seeks to encompass and balance certain pairs of assumptions that involve, if not quite a contradiction, at least a dialectical tension. From an ethical standpoint, the most striking and important duality is on the one hand his theocentric conception of the human being, who stands in a position of absolute dependence and absolute subordination to the creator-God; and on the other hand the anthropocentric conception of God, who has the human being in mind as the central purpose of His creation, on which account all His actions and commandments are directed at the preservation of man and his happiness, both temporal and eternal. This tension is perceptible throughout Saadia's theology and anthropology. It is especially noticeable in the explanation he gives for the Torah's commandments. Man is bound to obey because he is commanded, even when the commandments are directed at his own benefit. And on the other hand, even when man fulfills the arbitrary commandments that express his subordination to God, it is ultimately for his own benefit rather than God's.

The same tension is manifest in Saadia's remarks on the obligation to verify the words of revelation through reason. He balances this tension by addressing the apparent contradiction between the human being's status as an independent creature of free will, qualified to determine the good and bad for himself, and his obligation to obey God absolutely. Since the divine command is for man's benefit and obedience is also for his benefit, Saadia thinks that there is no contradiction here but complementarity between autonomy and heteronomy.

2. *The Duality in Saadia's Conception of Good and Evil*

From here there follows a second tension, associated with his definition of good and evil. In Saadia's view, good and evil are measured by a utilitarian criterion. The human being is directed to strive for wellbeing in the simplest sense: to maintain himself in health and security, to satisfy his needs, to achieve happiness. Nevertheless, Saadia insists that good and bad be presented as absolute and universal, i.e. we are not speaking of the private advantage of individuals, but of what is good for all. In other words, Saadia does not argue that it is forbidden to

harm another because in the final reckoning it will be to the detriment of the perpetrator, because of the disturbance of social order or the breakdown of security. His argument is more basic. It is impossible that the same action be good and evil at the same time. If an action is good for me but bad for my neighbor, then it is good and bad at the same time, which is logically absurd. The good by definition is good to all.

We note that this is a primitive approximation of the Kantian categorical imperative. But how can this be squared with the utilitarian criterion of good and evil? Sometimes I must override my private happiness for the sake of the other! Saadia's simple answer is based on the doctrine of reward: man is destined for two worlds. Thus the pain of my self-abnegation in this world will stand as merit toward the reward of the future world. Whoever knows this in advance will rejoice in doing good for his neighbor, even at his own expense and pain.

3. *The Duality in Saadia's Conception of Action*

We have a third tension that arises from Saadia's notion that the human being is destined for two worlds. He does not recommend that we leave this world in a hurry, even though he sees it as a vestibule to the next world. Even here, in this world, one must strive for longevity, prosperity and happiness, for only through affirmation of this transient life do we merit the life to come. There follows from this a special attitude toward action in Saadia's teaching. We have already seen that his doctrine is fundamentally activist. A person is given her body for the sake of action. Human wisdom is practical wisdom, and one merits eternity through one's deeds. But the purpose of all these deeds is repose in eternity. Still, this repose will not be an absence of activity, but the fruit of action. It is its fruit, not in the sense that the one is the external means to the other, but the product is the content of the achievement. In other words, what the person enjoys in the hereafter is the fullness and culmination of one's lifetime of activity, the intensive satisfaction from one's deeds.

That is the profound meaning of Saadia's argument that there is no comparison between the good that one receives gratuitously, and the good and happiness that one earns through one's deeds. In contemporary language, we can say that by doing good one achieves *self-actualization*, and the repose in the next world is the joy that results from this. It is not transient, but a joy that abides forever. Only in this way can we understand how Saadia affirms this world even in his affirmation of the world to come. Just as the Sabbath is the culmination

of the workday week, so the world to come is the culmination of this world. Just as there is no Sabbath without the work-week, so there is no world-to-come without this world.

Man's Obligation to God

A person is obligated to thank her benefactor. This thanks is expressed in deeds. The deeds follow partly from reason's self-commandment, and partly from fulfillment of commands that have no direct human utility and are not required by reason.

On the basis of these assumptions, Saadia enters into further specification of the principles underlying the Torah's commandments, which he lists as the following four:

1. The Wise One commands His followers to thank Him for His beneficence.
2. The Wise One commands His followers not to vilify Him.
3. The Wise One commands His followers not to harm one another.
4. The Wise One commands various deeds of no direct benefit to those who do them, in order to increase their reward.

These four principles include the two types of commandments that we mentioned earlier: the rational (principles #1–3) and the positive-arbitrary (principle #4). Saadia's intention is more readily understood if we consider the source behind his four principles, namely the Ten Commandments. Principle #1 reflects the first two commandments ("I am the Lord," and "You shall have no other gods"). Principle #2 reflects the third commandment ("Do not take the name of the Lord in vain"). Principle #3 reflects the ethical precepts of the second table ("You shall not murder," etc.) Principle #4 reflects the commandment of the Sabbath, which Saadia counts among the positive commandments.

However, the Ten Commandments also express the general principles underlying the whole Torah. Thus Saadia has found a rational basis, directly or indirectly, for deriving all the commandments of the Torah, which when taken together prescribe the proper worship of God.

The Ladder of Righteousness

Service to God is measured by the degree of perfection in which a person fulfills the commandments of the Torah. It is interesting that

Saadia does not pay attention to the distinction between heartfelt observance and rote behavior. The range of deeds that a person performs, and the proportion of good deeds to sins, determine a person's moral rank.

The righteous are ranked according to the following scale:

1. The perfect is one who is meritorious in all his deeds. Saadia emphasizes that achieving this rank is within the realm of human possibility. This is characteristic of his optimistic outlook, which is related to his view that evil is not an essential part of human existence, not even of material existence.
2. The good person is one who is meritorious in the majority of his deeds.
3. The scrupulous is one who has devoted himself to one particular commandment, which he observes to perfection.

The wicked are ranked according to the following scale:

1. The bad person is one the majority of whose deeds count as guilt, or "demerits."
2. The disobedient is one who refuses to observe one particular commandment.
3. The negligent is one who treats positive injunctions lightly.
4. The sinner is one who transgresses minor prohibitions.
5. The felon is one who transgresses major prohibitions.
6. The apostate is one who repudiates all the commandments of the Torah.

We have two points to make about this ladder of ranking. First, except for the "perfect" and the "apostate" who define the extreme cases, all the intermediate levels differ only theoretically. Even the "good person" who is meritorious in the majority of his deeds has common characteristics with certain types of the "wicked" part of the ladder, and he is in need of purification and correction.

Second, in the course of Saadia's distinction between degrees of merit and demerit, there creeps in a fundamental biblical distinction that is based not in reason but in authority, namely the distinction between "major" and "minor" commandments. This distinction is determined arbitrarily by the Torah's ranking of the commandments; thus the principle of obedience for its own sake gains added weight.

Repentance

Repentance is not a central notion in Saadia's thought, because he does not consider sin to be a necessary component of man's situation in the world. The possibility of repentance follows from the principle of free will that God gave us, and he places no limit on it with respect to the done deed. Regret for sin, atonement for sin, the decision not to sin again, and abiding by this decision—all these fall in the category of repentance, and wipe out the sin between the human being and God. This idea is a standard part of rabbinic thought, and Saadia has nothing to add here.

Saadia's distinction between "merits" and "demerits" is also part of the popular tradition. Merit and demerit have meaning with respect to the state of the soul—sin sullies the soul, while the performance of commands purifies it. To be sure, the basic notion of "merit" and "demerit" in Saadia's thought do not pertain to the soul, but have a decidedly judicial character. "Merit" is what tips the scale toward innocence, while "demerit" tips it toward guilt. Reward and punishment come to a person depending on the overall balance of his merits and demerits.

The Purpose of Serving God

It follows from this that the purpose of serving God is to accumulate merit for the world to come by performing all the actions that the Torah commands, not necessarily those actions that are directly in the province of serving God. This is how Saadia depicts the state of the ideal soul of the person who is ensconced in the service of God:

When a person has achieved the knowledge of this lofty subject [God's unity] by means of rational speculation and the proof of the miracles and marvels, his soul believes it as true and it is mingled with his spirit and becomes an inmate of its innermost recesses. The result is then that, whenever the soul walks in its temple, it finds it... Moreover his soul becomes filled with completely sincere love for God, a love which is beyond all doubt... That servant of God will also grow accustomed to remembering God in the daytime when he does his work and at night when he lies on his bed... Nay it will almost speak—I mean his spirit—moaning at the recollection of God, out of longing and yearning... Nay more, the mention of God will nourish his soul more than fatty foods and His name quench its thirst better than the juiciest fruit... The soul's attachment to God will become so great that it will refer all its affairs to Him, trusting and reposing complete confidence in Him always....

The result of this is that when God affords it pleasure, the soul is grateful, and if He causes it pain, it endures it patiently...Aye, even if God were to separate the soul from its body, it would be indulgent toward Him and not entertain misgivings about Him on that account...The more it contemplates His being, the more does it fear and revere Him...Also the more it considers His attributes, the greater becomes its praise of Him and the more does it rejoice in Him...Thus it reaches the point where it loves those that love Him and honors those that honor Him...On the other hand, it hates those that hate Him and is hostile to His enemies...In this way it is induced to take up His cause and to refute everyone that raises arguments against Him, by the employment of reason and knowledge, not with harshness...It will furthermore laud and praise Him justly and uprightly, not by attributing to Him exaggerations and absurdities...¹¹

Does this passage contradict the previous description of a service that operates through accumulating merits in all the domains of worldly activity and through the pursuit of worldly and spiritual happiness?

It seems that this is not a contradiction, but emphasis of the other direction, which is also possible. Saadia describes here a state of being head-over-heels in love of the Supreme Being, the Creator and Governor of the world, out of complete trust in His existence and in His absolute goodness. But in this state of love-madness there is no tendency to austerity, only total reliance on the divine in all one's deeds, in the firm assurance that everything is for the best.

The Middle Way

There is a characteristic trend in medieval Jewish ethics, even in those movements with pronounced ascetic tendencies, which is to hew to the principle of the golden mean. One should not give in to extremism of any sort. Asceticism and hedonism are both ethically wrong. Generally speaking, Saadia's ethics follows this pattern also. But the notion of the mean is quite broad, and it can be interpreted in various ways that differ noticeably from each other. Saadia's way is perhaps the most original of them all.

The principle by which Saadia defined his "middle way" is the principle that he emphasized in his doctrine of creation. The one God creates a complex world characterized by plurality, and this plurality has its unifying principle in its relation to the Creator. For purposes of

¹¹ *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, II, 13, Rosenblatt 132-4.

ethics Saadia drew from this the conclusion that just as one must avoid belief in plurality with respect to God, so one must avoid an approach that denies the plurality and compositeness that is manifest in created reality, that emphasizes one element and impugns others. The perpetuation of the world is the perpetuation of all its parts. The perpetuation of man is the perpetuation of all his organs and functions. They strive for unity, but this must necessarily be a harmony of all the parts, and the golden mean is the way of harmonizing all the functions of the soul through the medium of the body.

These assertions, voiced in the opening of the discussion in the Tenth Treatise of the *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, are directed in debate against the ascetic tendencies in religious morality. Only a mode of conduct that gives the pluralism of the human soul its due, can succeed in perpetuating the human person. He expresses this also in an incisive interpretation of the famous recurring verse in Ecclesiastes. "Vanity of vanities" only applies when the persona of that book (standing in for Everyman) attempts to pursue one goal in isolation from the rest. But if one follows the path of harmonization of one's powers and faculties, this is not vanity. The same applies to one who applies himself exclusively to religious worship of God, or exclusively to wealth, honor, or power.

It is therefore proper to combine all our faculties in reciprocal fashion. In this way we can manifest the virtues appropriate to each area of behavior in a way that we do not go to excess with one and stint the others. This conclusion guides Saadia in developing the systematic structure of his ethical theory.

The Supremacy of Reason

Given that it is essential to preserve harmony, the next step follows logically. Wisdom—the thinking process that judges the correct measure for every action—must govern all human actions. Thus we must have recourse again to Saadia's psychology. It determines, as we said, that the soul has three primary faculties: the appetitive, the "irascible,"¹² and the cognitive. All of them are judged positive in their role, but the first two stand under the guidance of the cognitive. Wisdom is not presented

¹² Though anger is primary in this faculty, it includes love as well. "Affective" or "emotional" may be a more precise designation.

in this fashion as an end-goal, but as a means: it monitors the active life, and there is no conflict between it and the other faculties of the soul that are influenced by the body.

From the notion of unifying plurality Saadia also learns the need to listen to the wise individual as well as to wisdom in the abstract. Morality is codified in the Torah and is determined by the legal system in which rabbinic scholars play the decisive role. His whole discussion is built on this premise, for the content of ethical behavior is found in the Torah, and his whole philosophical investigation is aimed at the comprehensive justification of the norms that are defined in the halakhic system. Later on, Saadia enumerates thirteen modes of conduct that correspond to the thirteen attributes of mercy revealed to Moses: abstinence, eating, mating, desire, child-rearing, habitation, longevity, money, dominion, vengeance, worship, wisdom, and repose.

This is an inventive literary structure. Saadia seems to suggest that each of these “ways” represents a party with that as its banner: the party of abstinence, the party of eating, the party of mating, etc. But this is but a methodical device. Saadia wants to show that if a person follows one of these paths and neglects the others—or if he even neglects a single one—he will not succeed in getting to his goal even on the one path to which he devotes himself, because exceeding the proper measure and stinting the other satisfactions and functions will cause suffering and ruin. Excessive abstinence will not achieve purification but only exacerbation of the appetitive urges that have been repressed. Only if we use abstinence wisely, as a principle of limitation, it will be useful to us. But even pursuit of wisdom for its own sake, without practical application in conjunction with the other paths, will turn wisdom into folly, and similarly with each of the other paths.

The conclusion is simple. One should follow all the paths, and discover the proper proportion for each satisfaction and for each function. In this way we will insure that our actions shall lead to good for us and for those we affect, and when the time comes we will merit the reward promised us for the world to come.

CHAPTER TWO

R. ISAAC BEN SOLOMON ISRAELI

Our assertion that Saadia was the first of the medieval Jewish philosophers whose writings have reached us in their entirety requires some qualification. The same time-period saw a second beginning in a different direction. It was made by a Jewish thinker who seems to have been born before Saadia but died after him—for by one testimony he lived over 100 years, from the middle of the 9th century to the middle of the 10th. We are speaking of R. Isaac ben Solomon Israeli. We know little about his life. We know that he lived in Egypt until age 50, then moved to Kairowan, in the Maghreb (western North Africa), where an important Jewish center had developed. He was a famous physician and was appointed as physician to the royal court.

Israeli's Status as Philosopher

There is a debate about the importance of Israeli's contribution to philosophy. Maimonides belittled him as a mere physician in the letter where he mentioned his predecessors. Indeed, Israeli was a more important physician than Maimonides, and his medical works served long afterwards as basic texts in European universities.

There is also a debate about whether he was truly a Jewish philosopher, for he does not deal with any specifically Jewish issues, though he deals generally with the question of the relation of philosophical writings to scripture. Nevertheless, he is of primary importance as a general philosopher, for thanks to his writing we know something about the early development of theories whose actual sources have not survived. He is also important for Jewish philosophy because he was a pioneer in introducing the neo-Platonic philosophy within Jewish circles and had influence (apparently direct) on the thought of Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Moses Ibn Ezra, Joseph Ibn Tzaddik, and the early Gerona kabbalists.

His Writings

Israeli wrote several medical works, as we mentioned. Three philosophical works of his have come down to us: *Book of Definitions* (dealing with the definition of philosophical terms such as “philosophy,” “science,” etc.), *Book of Elements* (referring to the four terrestrial elements: earth, water, air, and fire), and *Book of Essences*, which was discovered about 50 years ago in Leningrad.

The contribution of these writings to Jewish philosophy focuses on two areas:

1. The doctrine of emanation and its relation to creation.
2. The doctrine of prophecy and its relation to philosophical understanding.

The Source of the Doctrine of Emanation

The founder of the neo-Platonic philosophy that developed as an alternative to the Aristotelian philosophy was the Greek philosopher Plotinus (3rd century). This school is characterized by its religious tendency, motivated by the striving for the human soul’s unification with the Godhead. For this purpose it is necessary to conceive the entire universe as a unified continuum that flows from the hidden divine source, but in order to arrive at the foundation of this outlook one must overcome Aristotle’s dualistic distinction between matter and form as two separate constituents of natural entities.

In Aristotle’s view all earthly entities are comprised of two separate parts, each with its own principle. Matter is the principle of corporeality, and form is the principle of the conceptual or spiritual essence. According to this conception, God is the source of the forms, and the principle of corporeality is independent of God. This distinction contradicted Plotinus’s mystical notion that man is generated from the Godhead and can become reunited with it. The doctrine of emanation seeks to overcome the split between the supernal and lower worlds. It seeks to show how all being flows from the divine source and generates plurality and materiality in successive stages. Thus is formed a hierarchical ladder of being by whose means it is possible to ascend and return to the hidden divine source.

Israeli's Doctrine of Emanation

Israeli described this process as a process of self-contraction of the Godhead out of its yearning to reveal itself to the other. The hidden Godhead creates out of its very self the other to whom it reveals itself in a two-stage process: the (positive) extension of the divine flow, and its (negative) limitation. This process continues in stages: from the infinite Godhead flows a first hypostasis: the universal Intellect of the world, which is as if a shadow of the absolute divine spirit. From the universal Intellect proceeds a second shadow: the universal intellectual Soul (the unified totality of all human beings) and afterwards the "animal Soul" (the totality of all animal souls) and "vital (or vegetative) soul" (totality of all plants). The next level is the "heavenly sphere" that demarcates the spiritual realm from the material realm. The "heavenly sphere" is depicted by Israeli as a spiritual entity that also bears the start of materiality in potential. Therefore the cyclical movement of the heavenly sphere produces the four elements of the material world: earth, water, air and fire.

The continued motion of the sphere brings about the mixture of these elements, which leads to the appearance of various materials that are predisposed to receive the various forms—the vegetative, the animal, and the human, which are thus manifested not only in their universal aspect but as concrete individuals who are born, die, and change constantly as we see in nature.

We note that here is an organic conception of the world whose prototype is the human being, who comprises in himself intellect, rational soul, animal soul, vegetative soul, and material body comprised of the elements. Thus every person is a microcosm, a reflection of the larger world.

Israeli's Picture of the World

In any case, the picture of the world that was formed as a result of this emanational process is divided into four parts:

1. The realm that is beyond all conception, comprising God Himself in His infinite, absolute being, as well as the potential latent within Him in complete hiddenness to bring forth a world from His inner self. In other words, we have here the general, abstract principle of materiality as well as the general, abstract principle of formality.

2. The realm of intellect, which comprises specifically the ten Intellects, of which the first emanates from God and the others emanate from the first Intellect.
3. The realm of soul, which comprises the Intellectual Soul (of the human species), the Animal Soul, and the Vital (or vegetative) Soul.
4. The physical realm, which comprises the heavenly sphere; the four elements (earth, water, air and fire) which in Israeli's view were created *ex nihilo* by the motion of the sphere; the entities composed of these four elements; and finally the artificial creations manufactured by humanity.

This model of the world—whose distinguishing element is the idea that the material principle (the source of the physical objects of nature) is to be found in potential in the Godhead itself—is at any rate original, and it had a certain influence, especially on the philosophy of R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol, and through it also on Jewish kabbalists and Christian philosophers.

The Difficulty in Understanding the Transition from Spiritual to Material

Describing the world as a process of *tzimtzum* (self-contraction of the divine: self-limitation and individuation) and “coarsening” (transformation of the spiritual to material being) raises the logical and religious difficulties that are bound up in the transition from the pure spirituality of divinity to the material world. From a logical standpoint, this would seem to be a self-contradiction: the purely spiritual is opposed by its nature to the material. How, then, can one understand the assumption that the material and corporeal is found “potentially” as a general principle in the Godhead itself? From a religious standpoint this contradicts the assumption shared by most Jewish thinkers that the material world was created *ex nihilo*, not emanated from God Himself!

To be sure, Israeli's position on this issue is far from clear. We find in him expressions that sound like a description of a continual process of emanation from the spiritual to the physical, and then the notion of *ex nihilo* must be understood only as a physical substance that is derived from a physical absence (in other words, it is derived from a non-physical substance that is its basis). But there are places in which he speaks of the distinction between three classes of generated entities (as contrasted with eternal entities): those that are created *ex nihilo*

(the elements), those that are created from prior beings according to the laws of nature (composite objects), and those that have their being from human creation (artificial objects). According to this conception, the transition from the heavenly sphere to terrestrial nature is viewed as an act of creation, which would imply that the material substance is *not* a smooth continuation of the process of emanation (and it is indeed hard to explain the jump from the spiritual to the material otherwise)! But this voluntaristic conception drives a dualistic split into the neo-Platonic doctrine that strives for unity. We can easily sense that the argumentative character of Israeli's discourse results from his desire to approximate the neo-Platonic monistic theory while remaining faithful to the idea of creation based in the Bible.

Prophecy

The second topic on which Israeli's thought was influential was the theory of prophecy. Saadia's remarks suggested one simple-enough direction for understanding the phenomenon of prophecy. Saadia described the phenomenon itself as it is described in the Bible: the prophet sees symbolic visions and hears an explicit utterance. He was only bothered by the question how these visions are generated and how the divine word sounds, but he does not attribute to the prophet any special kind of cognition. In this respect the prophet's cognition is the same as the common person's.

With Israeli there occurs a far-reaching change in this matter. In his neo-Platonic approach the content of the prophetic experience changes completely, as well as the function it serves, and inevitably its character as well.

The basis of the change is that Israeli, unlike Saadia, accepts the ideal of knowledge of eternal truth as the highest purpose of humankind. This valuation stands at the basis of the very doctrine of emanation, which was developed out of philosophical reflection: analysis of the relation between human knowledge and its objects. The hierarchy of beings is a ladder through whose knowledge—in a continuing process of independent contemplation—the individual attains his purpose and comes to know the source of his being. The prophet is not one who hears God's "words"—in the common literal sense of that expression—but one who has succeeded in arriving at the highest level in knowledge of the truth of himself and his origin.

This conception will raise a whole series of problems. First, instead of God turning to man in the simple sense, Israeli speaks of man's elevation to approach divinity. Second, the "mission" of the prophet acquires a new meaning: it is his task to reveal spiritual truth, and this also influences the understanding of the essence of the Torah and its commandments. But Israeli did not raise these questions for explicit discussion. A general question occupied him, one which indeed contained the rest by implication: what is the difference between the prophet and the philosopher? The knowledge of eternal truth is a philosophical ideal, but the Torah grants prophets a higher authority. How, then, is the prophet preferable to the philosopher?

Israeli's solution is on the one hand the identification of their respective tasks, and on the other hand ascribing to the prophet a higher rank of realization of the goal. The prophet is first of all a philosopher, and by means of philosophy he ascends on that ladder of levels of being that we described above to a higher level. What is the nature of that being?

The prophet sees visions. In Israeli's view (as against Saadia), he arouses for that purpose his imaginative faculty. In other words, prophetic knowledge is similar to a dream-apparition, which is an activity of the imaginative faculty, not representation of reality. But this does not lead Israeli to reduce prophecy to a subjective state. He argues from the other side that the imaginative faculty in a person can be activated and envisioned not only by the senses, but also by the intellect, and can reveal to us in this way intellectual truths of the highest order. On the other hand, the intermediate state in the mind—that of intellectual imaginings—exists outside of the soul as well, so that what the prophet sees with the help of his vision is the representation of a higher domain of reality to which the philosopher cannot rise or have experience of it. The task of the prophet is therefore to interpret these visions with his reason and to communicate them to others who cannot achieve prophecy. We can note here an evolution in the direction of the Maimonidean doctrine of prophecy.

Israeli's Place in Jewish Philosophy

Despite Maimonides's withering criticism, Israeli marks a transition to a new stage in the development of Jewish philosophy. After him, philosophy is no longer just a tool for interpreting and validating the

revelation in the Bible, but it is a spiritual vocation worth pursuing and attaining in its own right. Israeli identifies the philosophical yearning for knowledge of the truth as the highest religious ideal. This transformation will be visible in a more systematic and consistent way in the thought of R. Baḥya Ibn Pakudah and R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol.

CHAPTER THREE

R. BAḤYA BEN JOSEPH IBN PAKUDAH

In order to appreciate the full significance of the change that occurred between Saadia and the Jewish thinkers who followed him, we should study the thought of one Jewish thinker who was extremely influential, even if it is doubtful whether we can describe him as a philosopher in the professional sense of this concept—R. Baḥya Ibn Pakudah, the author of *The Duties of the Heart*.

Essentially, this book describes the progress of the individual from his first education until his attaining the highest level of service of God. Only the first two chapters of this book deal with topics that actually belong to the domain of philosophy. Still, he is a witness to the change that has occurred in philosophical study. On the one hand, he bases himself explicitly on Saadia's *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, praises it as a foundational text and assumes its conclusions as the starting point of his discussion. On the other hand, on every topic he pushes forward beyond its intellectual horizon. It thus appears that only his desire to address a broad popular audience and the need to rely on recognized rabbinic authority keep him from impressing on his readers the deep philosophical differences between his own views and the book which he cites to give them Jewish legitimization.

Nevertheless, we should stress that this is not an exceptional phenomenon. On the contrary, it is widespread and characteristic. The Jewish thinkers who were influenced by neo-Platonism in the 11th and 12th centuries (such as R. Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, R. Joseph Ibn Tzaddik, R. Moses Ibn Ezra, R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, and R. Judah Halevi) relied on Saadia to legitimize their involvement in philosophy, though the focuses of their thought and their religious experience differed from his. They accepted from Saadia the assumption that there is a necessary prior agreement between philosophical truth acquired from intellectual inquiry and the teachings of the Torah. This applies *mutatis mutandis* to the Hasidim of medieval Germany; though they had no philosophical interest *per se*, they drew considerably on the *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* and imported his views into their mystical outlook. But they required

the Gaon's authority in order to legitimize a world of ideas that had no clear precedent in canonical Jewish sources.

The Author

We know practically nothing about the personality of R. Baḥya Ibn Pakudah. There is even a debate among the scholars as to whether he lived before or after R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol. The disagreement is based on the fact that there are some parallels between them, and they differ as to whether one influenced the other or they were both influenced by a common third source. The current prevalent opinion is based on a citation from Moses Ibn Ezra that the *Duties of the Heart* was written in the last third of the 11th century. We know only that R. Baḥya was a judge in Spain, but we do not know exactly where.

This is the characteristic fate of a Jewish author: his biography is lost, even though his book becomes one of the most widely-read, studied, and influential books in the broader community to this very day.

The Book and Its Transmission

There are not many books in the area of moral and religious thought in which one finds so much tension as here between the devotional-emotional tendency of the individual and the established religion. Nevertheless it became a favorite book, influential and accepted in the broad community of students of Torah, apparently because of the simplicity and clarity of its writing and the rare literary combination of exact thought and poetic sensibility.

The book was written in Arabic, and the original has come down to us (it was published in a critical edition by A.S. Yehuda and A. Tzifroni). It was translated into Hebrew twice by the 12th century (by R. Judah Ibn Tibbon and R. Joseph Kimchi).

The medievals also ascribed to Baḥya another work with some influence, the *Kitab Ma'ani Al-Nafs* (*Theory of the Soul*, published under this name in 1896). It is now clear that this attribution was mistaken.

Reliance on Saadia

Baḥya bases his views directly on Saadia in the following matters:

Enumeration of the sources of knowledge—though he does not list all four, his terminology leaves no doubt that he borrowed this from Saadia.

Determining the relation between reason and the Torah—Bahya relies on Saadia in positing necessary agreement between certified conclusions of reason and the teachings of the received Torah, and in demarcating the respective functions of rational inquiry and revelation, whether in the realm of theoretical knowledge or of the commandments.

Rational and received commandments—Bahya accepts the distinction between rational and received (arbitrary) commandments, together with Saadia's explanation of the difference between them.

Creation of the world—like Saadia, Bahya presents the argument for the creation of the world prior to the argument for God's existence. He even relied on Saadia's proofs, though he added his own as well.

The doctrine of attributes—On this topic the similarity is less blatant, but in Bahya's presentation we also find interwoven Saadia's outlook that one can learn something of the attributes of God from considering Him as the creator of the world.

Two worlds—Bahya agrees that the human being is a creature destined for two worlds, of which the first is like the "vestibule" and the other like the "dining hall," all of which is in order that the soul should earn its status in the spiritual world by its own merits and not as a favor.

The task of this world—This world is appointed for deeds, and that is the justification for why the human soul is forced to descend from its supernal source and be bound up with the body.

The role of abstinence—Here too Bahya includes Saadia's position within a broader rubric. The kind of abstinence that Saadia recommended was for Bahya a first step in the human being's way toward perfection and spiritual purification. Bahya distinguished three levels of abstinence:

1. Abstinence according to reason.
2. Abstinence according to the Torah.
3. Abstinence according to special superior persons.

The second kind of abstinence is in agreement with Saadia's views.

Theodicy—Baḥya accepted Saadia's view of how one ought to justify God's ways even in those cases which appear as the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. But he added arguments and justifications of his own to Saadia's.

It appears that by examining this list it is possible to discern that the emphasis has shifted. In the matter of abstinence, for example, we see that Saadia's version of abstinence—according to the Torah—is but one of several levels of abstinence in Baḥya's scheme. It follows that the Torah's level, which Saadia presented as the highest level out of his opposition to excessive abstinence, is insufficient for Baḥya. He seeks a kind of abstinence that is not a mean but an ideal of a religious way of life. Even so, Baḥya was opposed to abstinence of a monastic sort, one that led to dissociation from earthly life and civil existence.

Differences between Baḥya and Saadia

We will now examine five major topics in which Baḥya starts from Saadia's position and goes beyond it: the identification of rational inquiry and Torah; knowledge of rational truth for its own sake; the divine attributes; the commandments; and the question of man's relating to the terrestrial world as his home.

The identification of rational inquiry and Torah.

As we saw, the central problem that preoccupied Saadia was how to achieve certainty in matters of faith—how to overcome doubt. The solution was to rely on two sources of knowledge—revelation and reason—in a way that reason would resolve the doubts that were raised concerning the authority of revelation, and revelation would resolve the doubts that were raised about the adequacy of reason. It is interesting, however, that Baḥya Ibn Pakudah seems to have ignored the problem of doubt in matters of faith. He proceeds from a primal innocent certainty that God exists, that He is the creator of the world and of humankind, exercising providence and commanding. He is settled on these issues, and therefore we find in his theoretical investigation of these matters a different motivation and goal, and his arguments are free of polemic and apologetic. He is focusing on a positive objective: to deal with the problems raised from the inwardness of the life of faith. Therefore, the adversary which he confronts is not intellectual doubt, but the person's evil inclination—the temptation to forsake the straight and narrow path that leads to his life's goal.

R. Bahya sees no need, then, to prove that the Torah speaks the truth. Instead, he wishes to redefine the division of labor between the Torah and reason from the standpoint of the achievement of the person's destiny. Indeed, framing the problem this way leads him to give preference to rational understanding and to ascribe to it an independent religious value that is higher than understanding derived simply from the Torah. In other words, in R. Bahya's view, the Torah and reason are two stages in man's spiritual-religious development. The Torah, received on authority, is prior in time, and rational understanding is prior in rank and teleology.

This turn of thought, that represents the Torah as an educational means that prepares the person for one's "intellectual awakening" (a waking-up from the "sleeping state" of sense-mediated experience), has far-reaching consequences, first of all in determining the relationship between organized religion and the religious experience of individuals. In Saadia's conception, there is no room for a distinction between official religion and personal religion, whereas for Bahya this distinction is a cornerstone of religious consciousness. As a result, one senses in him a great tension between the official established (halakhic) religion and the true religious attachment¹ of faith. The way of the Torah is a *compromise* in his view, and he has a difference and criticism to offer concerning it and its dangers, especially with respect to fulfillment of the commandments. True religion in his view is that which results from the power of pure intellectual understanding, not from obedience to compulsory authority.

Intellectual Understanding as a Goal in Contrast to Popular Organized Religion

From this there follows a different understanding of the purpose of intellectual understanding in matters of Torah. According to Saadia this is a *commandment* (to understand the words of Torah through the intellect), while according to Bahya this is the *goal*—to understand eternal truth.

¹ Attachment (= absorption, devotion)—*devekut*. Unfortunately the words for the ultimate religious experience in English and Hebrew do not coincide. "Attachment" is too dry, whereas "cleaving" is archaic. *Unio mystica* would convey the sense more accurately but is unintelligible except to scholars of mysticism and Latinists. "Ecstasy" misses the mark in the opposite direction, for the connotation in "ecstasy" of standing outside oneself—of losing consciousness of the self when achieving union with God—is not implied by *devekut*, where simply union or attachment with God is meant.

But this is the place to raise two qualifications. First, despite his tension with respect to organized religion, he does not break the mold. He justifies it from the political standpoint, and moreover (what is especially characteristic of him) from the educational standpoint. One cannot arrive at intellectual understanding without organized religion. Furthermore, even though Baḥya has a strong tendency to a life of austerity, as we said, he does not arrive at a monastic extremism but only at a private austerity, i.e. an austerity that does not withdraw one from the framework of ordinary social life, as we shall see. The tension with organized religion is intended to reform it, to shake it out of its formal routine, to prevent the danger of ossification, and to fill it with spiritual content. He nevertheless recognizes its necessity for most people, and for the special few at the start of their journey.

Second, Baḥya's inclination to the philosophical-intellectual direction, which is appropriate for the special few but not for the people at large, is balanced by a no-less-strong inclination to religious sensitivity. At times it appears that the pure religious feeling—the fear and love of God—are more important in his view than intellectual attainments, in a way that intellectual inquiry also serves him as a means to awaken the sense of enthrallment from the greatness of God's works, His power, His wisdom and His lovingkindness. Indeed he is referring to the most exalted feelings, that can be depicted as intellectual feelings, but this motive neutralizes the elitist tendency that is generally characteristic of the philosophical stance. This sensitive religiosity addresses ordinary people also, and raises them to a higher level even though they are unable to see the truth as the philosophers see it.

These two qualifications explain how R. Baḥya was able to deviate from Saadia's position without feeling that he had abandoned the field. He only stretched the framework to just within the limits of possibility.

The Divine Attributes

It is of course understood that what Baḥya includes under the rubric of "rational understanding" differs from Saadia's definition. Saadia recognizes only physical essences, whereas Baḥya includes spiritual essences also. Soul and intellect are spiritual essences for him. Though he recognizes that God cannot be grasped in thought, his purpose is not to make his peace with this incapacity and rest content with practical deeds of service, but rather to strengthen the yearning for perpetual

ascension and infinite advancement toward the ungrasped truth, which is nevertheless the true goal of life.

This conception gives rise to a new doctrine of divine attributes, which includes Saadia's views just as the first step in an infinite progression. Saadia recognized only one class of attributes, those which we learn from the realization that God is the Creator—i.e., we know God from His action. But Bahya adds to this class of attributes a second class, which he calls the attributes of God's essence, specifically, that God exists, is one, and is eternal.

What does this mean? Does Saadia not also assert that God exists, is one, and is eternal? Of course! But in our view Saadia does not see in these assertions, which he understands in their ordinary sense, attributes that reveal the divine essence, for he never raises the question how it is possible to say of God that He exists, is one, and is eternal, though it is clear that one cannot equate the existence, unity, and eternity of God to the existence, unity and eternity of His creatures. By contrast, Bahya's discussion starts with these questions: in what sense is it possible to say about God that He exists, is one, and is eternal?

Thus Bahya turns Saadia's naïve assertions into essential attributes and raises a whole set of new issues:

The issue of the identity between intellectual inquiry and Torah; the issue of knowing intellectual truth for its own sake; the issue of divine attributes; the issue of the commandments; and the issue of man's relating to the terrestrial world as his home.

Systematic consideration requires one to prove first that God exists, and afterwards to deal with the question of His unity, whether with respect to refuting the plurality of gods, or with respect to refuting God's compositeness. But when we deal with the questions of God's existence and unity as attributes by means of which God becomes present to human thought, the problem of unity is prior to that of existence, for the divine unity in its two senses distinguishes God from all other beings known to us.

If so, in what sense may we say of God that He is one? Bahya opens his analysis by distinguishing between two kinds of unity: "passing unity" and "true unity." "Passing unity" applies to every physical object which we recognize from our sensory experience, and to every spiritual entity that we recognize from introspection: our mind, our soul. When we relate to the concept of such an object, we grasp it in our thought as one, i.e. as an object of definition through a single concept. But we are quickly convinced that every such object is composite, and it is defined

with the help of its constituent parts. It has many characteristics, and its material substance can be subdivided infinitely. Therefore, Baḥya terms this kind of unity “passing” and not permanent, for a second consideration reveals that this one comprises many “ones” which can in turn be subdivided endlessly. By contrast, a “true one” should be one in absolute simplicity, a “one” that has no composition and cannot be subdivided in any sense. It stands to reason that if we can prove that God who creates the world is one and there is no other, it is proper that He should not have any composition, duality or multiplicity (especially trinity) in Himself. But clearly our minds cannot grasp such a unity, but only indicate it by the negative assertion that it has no multiplicity in any respect, for an entity like this—in which we cannot discern any plurality—is undefinable.

This conclusion inevitably has implications for the question of God’s existence. When we consider the nature of the world, we come to the conclusion that it has a creator. But does the creator exist in the same sense that the world or human beings exist? Surely not, for He exists in absolute unity, and we cannot distinguish His existence from His unitary essence, which is also beyond our comprehension. The same applies to God’s “eternity.” When we consider the world, we conclude that the God who created it is prior to it. But we cannot form a conception of this absolute primordially, for God transcends physical space and time. In that case, how exactly is God prior to them?

The logical thought-process we have sketched here is dialectical. It begins with a simple positive assertion: God is one, existing, eternal. We have no alternative but to understand these concepts in the same way that we understand them as they apply to physical entities and human beings. But we immediately find fault with this conception and deduce that God is not one, existing, and eternal in this sense, but only in a higher sense that only God understands. Do we arrive at true knowledge in this way? R. Baḥya thinks that this is indeed substantial approximation to knowing what is strictly unknowable. At any rate, this is the substance of the doctrine of negative attributes: attributes that begin with affirmation and end with negation. Maimonides would develop this method to the ultimate degree. Baḥya was the first to introduce this way of thinking into Jewish philosophy.

The doctrine of negative attributes requires the ability to think philosophically, and this was the privilege of a select few. But how do most people arrive at a reasoned knowledge of God? Baḥya responds to this question with the same answer as Saadia. People come to know God

primarily through the manifestation of divine wisdom revealed through the creation of the world, and that is the source of those attributes that represent God by way of His revelation in natural phenomena. In Baḥya's view, contemplation of nature attests to the higher wisdom that is revealed in every detail. In this respect, argues Baḥya, there is no difference between the miracles of existence of an ant or a fly or that of a human being. Only the supernal wisdom that passes beyond our understanding can explain them all.

However, in addition to the superlative wisdom that is manifest to all humanity in the natural world, the people of Israel also know their Creator from the testimony of holy scripture that God revealed Himself directly to His people. Baḥya was referring to the miraculous signs that proved God's providential guidance for all of Jewish history. It is instructive, however, that Baḥya prefers the evidence of divine manifestation in nature to providential manifestation in Jewish history. This is because from the standpoint of the ordinary individual, the experience of divine manifestation in nature is immediate and continual.

Experiencing God through nature and history generates a gap between the sophisticated few and the general masses, based on their different degrees of intellectual comprehension. Baḥya uses these concepts to explain anthropomorphic expressions in the Torah. The people can only understand God's involvement in nature and history through vivid images. Therefore "the Torah speaks in human language." But beneath the vivid popular-oriented imagery, the philosophic truth lies hidden.

The Meaning of the Mitzvot: "Duties of the Heart" versus "Duties of the Limbs"

The difference between Saadia and Baḥya in defining the ideal religious life is most striking in comparing their approaches to the commandments of the Torah. Baḥya accepted Saadia's distinction between rational and arbitrary commandments, but he combined them within a more comprehensive scheme, thus giving Saadia's categories a different significance.

In Baḥya's view, the most basic distinction is between duties of the heart and duties of the limbs.

Duties of the heart apply to the conscience, in the recesses of one's heart. Only the person and her creator know if she observes them. But the duties of the limbs are open to public view.

This is a superficial view of the matter. The essential difference is that the duties of the heart are internal duties that pertain to the soul, the kernel of the human self, whereas with the duties of the limbs we are fulfilling an external obligation. It is clear from this that it is impossible to fulfill the duties of the heart without the proper devotion, whereas it is possible to fulfill the duties of the limbs perfunctorily, in a mindless, rote fashion.

This distinction brings to a focus the tension between organized religion—which is concerned with regular, external compliance—and the inner religion and private spirituality of the individual. In the introduction to his book, Baḥya expressed his astonishment that the sages of Israel were not concerned with the duties of the heart and that no special work had been written devoted to that topic. He deduces from his reading of the Torah and the rabbis that devotion of the heart was indeed the central principle for them, yet despite this, no one had devoted a treatise on it. Baḥya surely sensed from the tension of his polemical arguments with prior Jewish thinkers that he was innovating here (even though he supported his argument with traditional citations). He saw himself as one who had come to fill a great and momentous historic gap: to restore religious life to its proper condition.

It is no accident that his predecessors, such as Saadia, felt no need to make this distinction, let alone devote a whole treatise to the duties of the heart. This very distinction is foreign to the conception that it is the purpose of a human being to perform certain deeds in the world, where the deeds themselves are viewed as the whole point. Baḥya's work represents a radical shift in a different direction.

Baḥya argues that the duties of the heart are all rational, for reason knows what is essential for a human being. These duties have no limit or boundary—they are endless. This is the nature of the connection between man and God—duty without end. By contrast, the duties of the limbs are limited, and they alone are subject to the division between rational and arbitrary. In Saadia's thought, the arbitrary commands express the religious relation between man and God, while Baḥya demotes them to a very low level. The arbitrary mitzvot are only a kind of necessary exercise to educate the person, to bring her to a true inner acquaintance with her higher rational duty to her God.

The importance of this distinction is signaled by the title of the book, *Duties of the Heart*. Baḥya devoted this book to the idea, and thus announced his purpose to liberate religious inwardness in Judaism and to de-emphasize external, institutional, regular and physical worship in favor of inner devotion.

A Stranger in the World: The Opposition of Body and Soul

Within this fundamental distinction between the duties of the limbs and duties of the heart there subsists another important distinction which holds the key to understanding Baḥya's world. The notion of "duties of the heart" introduces to Judaism a new sense of reality that differs completely from what we saw in Saadia. We even dare to say that this sense of reality is completely different from what was prevalent in the tradition based on the Bible through the rabbinic literature—namely, the sense of *man's feeling a stranger in the world*.

Baḥya's monumental innovation here is the sense of oppositional tension between body and soul. In Saadia's view, as we saw, the soul is conceived as a quite ethereal substance that contains three faculties: the appetitive, the irascible, and the cognitive. The source of these faculties is not in the body; they just operate through its medium. This is not the case with Baḥya. The soul is a spiritual substance in his view, and its source is in the "soul-world" that exists beyond the physical world. It subsists there in the purest unity. It is forced against its higher interest to become embodied, and only then are there manifested in it the various faculties through which it can sustain itself in the body. In other words, in contrast to Saadia, the body is not conceived just as a means of action in the world of deeds, but also as the root-cause of the need to act at all, as well as the source of all evil tendencies in human existence.

In this world the soul is condemned to live in constant tension between two poles. On the one hand, it is drawn by its original nature to withdraw from worldly life and return to its spiritual source, and on the other hand it is tied to worldly life by the body. The body deflects it from its true inclination, and it is trapped in it and languishes far from its source. In other words: the soul is perverted and corrupted by its bodily existence. The body traps the soul and distracts it from its proper focus. This is the necessary way of things in this world. When a person is still a child and the body is still growing, it is impossible for the soul to have an autonomous existence. It is entirely devoted to the needs of the body and is responsible for it. Only when the person is mature can the soul remind itself of its original nature. But then it is already tied into bodily habits, and one may well worry that it will not succeed in breaking free of this bond, for it has acquired a liking for sensory enjoyment. It is easy to be seduced by the lower—this is the danger that lies in wait for the soul in this world...

Reason is the highest faculty in the soul, and it sometimes appears from Baḥya's description that it hovers above it, forming a connection between it and its point of origin in the pure spiritual realm from which it emanated. Thus reason itself seems out of place in the material world. It shines in the human being like a light from above when he starts to achieve maturity, and his soul becomes aware of the difference between itself and the body. Then the person turns to listen to reason calling him and awakening him to return to his source. But inasmuch as reason remains a stranger to bodily earthly living, it is doubtful whether it can succeed in completing its task on its own. This is where organized religion proves its educational worth, by imposing on the person the duties of the limbs. Organized religion restrains sensuality, and thus it prepares the person for intellectual awakening.

To be sure, this doctrine poses an opposition between body and soul of which there is no inkling in Saadia. Nevertheless, Baḥya is responsive to the Jewish tradition and makes a considerable effort to balance this conception with that of the Torah. The life of the body and the senses is not evil in itself, though it harbors the temptation to sin. It does indeed put a person to the test, and God's intention in this is double: first, that the person should bring to perfection as much as possible the bodily existence that God created for its own good, and second that the soul should obtain the benefit of returning to its source not as a mercy but through its own merit. Thus Baḥya indeed adopts and repeats Saadia's ideas. But the difference between them remains evident:

According to Saadia, man is fully a citizen of both worlds. According to Baḥya, man is a stranger in this world. He is truly in exile here, for this is not his proper place.

The following excerpt from Chapter 8 ("The Gate of Taking Spiritual Account") expresses these matters quite concretely:

The thirtieth point is that one should take account with his soul regarding the conditions imposed upon him by his status as a stranger in the world. He should regard his position as that of one who came to a foreign country where he knew none of the inhabitants and none knew him. The king of the country had compassion on him because of his being a foreigner, and instructed him how to improve his condition there...

Therefore, my brother, voluntarily assume the obligations of the status of a stranger in this world, for you are in truth a stranger therein. The proof that you are an alien, and isolated in it, is the fact that at the time when you were coming into existence and when you were being formed in your mother's womb, if all beings in the world had endeavored to hasten your formation by a single moment or delay it by a moment...all these

efforts could accomplish naught. So, too, after you entered this world, no human being could provide for your maintenance without the help of God, nor could anyone make your body larger or smaller. If you could imagine that the whole world was yours alone, and had no other human inhabitant, that fact would not increase the means of livelihood accorded to you to the end of your days by as much as a mustard-seed. So too, even if the human population were increased in manifold measure, the maintenance decreed for you would not be diminished by as much as a mustard-seed. It would be neither less nor more; nor can any human being give you any advantage, nor cause you any loss. Nor has anyone the power to prolong or shorten your life. And this applies to all your qualities, natural dispositions and activities, good or bad.

Since this is so, what relationship is there between you and other creatures? In what way are you near to them or they to you? You are nothing else than a stranger in this world, to whom its inhabitants, however numerous, can bring no advantage and whom their small number cannot injure. You are nothing but a lonely and solitary individual who has none to associate with him but his lord, none to have compassion upon him but his creator.²

The Way to Perfection

With this new sense of man's alienation and isolation in the life of this world, Baḥya stakes out a new spiritual position. The soul must be filled with longing to liberate itself from the fetters of this world and return to its source. Its fundamental relation toward this world is negative. In place of the activist disposition, we find a stance of withdrawal, which emphasizes the "Thou shalt not" aspect of the tradition. This is the proper way for a person in this world; in this way one can arrive at one's appointed perfection.

Baḥya arranged the rest of his book as a series of "Gates" describing the stations on the way toward achieving the goal of a life of holiness that returns ultimately to the source. This is a road that ascends continually from one stage to the next.

The Gate of Divine Service

This gate deals with affirming God's unity and discerning His wisdom that is recognizable in all His works. From these as well as from education and socialization, we come to know the general obligation

² Hyamson translation (with modification) pp. 271–275.

to serve God. In this gate Baḥya compares the service that is inspired by the Torah with that inspired by reason. Torah-inspired service is a preparatory stage, the beginning of enlightenment.

The basic dilemma is that the ordinary person who lives in the world recognizes the obligation of serving God, but he does not stop living a worldly life. Where does one draw the proper line between the obligations of divine service and the compulsions and needs of earthly existence?

The Torah answers this question in a superficial, legal way. It sets a quantitative limit to each obligation. Whoever lives within the legal system is free of problems, but this is an inferior way that leads readily to a higher awareness. Fulfilling the mitzvot leads one to intellectual awakening. Then the question persists: How should one balance the need to live in this world and respond to its demands on the one hand, against the obligation to serve God, an obligation that is open-ended?

In this question we sense for the first time the tension between the demands of the body and the soul's primordial inclination to attach itself to God. We have here too the question, how to construe the intrinsic relationship of the regimen of commandments to the life of this world, one which Baḥya is interested in adjusting. One who asks the question is taking the first step forward. He becomes aware of his obligation to himself and to his Creator as well. This is the theme of the next gate, that deals with trust in God.

The Gate of Trust

In order for a person to serve God, he must be at peace with respect to his place in the world. He must stand facing the world with an attitude of inner tranquility. To achieve this, he must believe and trust in God.

Trust comes before service. Therefore, the accomplishment of trust must include everything that came before it: knowing that God is one and is the cause of the world's existence, knowing that God is all-powerful and wills the good, etc. These are conditions of trust in God.

But this certainty is liable to be disturbed by the suffering and distress to which believers and observant Jews are also subject. In order to have complete trust, one must answer the problem of the suffering of the righteous and prosperity of the wicked. One must prove that God governs His world fairly. To this purpose, one should first examine the question of human free choice: how much of our fate depends on our

voluntary deeds, and how much is it dependent on circumstances over which we have no control, which are the consequences of the laws of nature that God established during Creation? Generally speaking, Baḥya argues, we should recognize that our fate is determined by these two factors taken together. God situates His creatures in circumstances which He determined by His unsurpassed wisdom that is manifest in nature, and He expects us to respond in such-and-such a way through our choice. He offers the following example: There is water in a river, but in order for us to get the water so that it can meet our needs, we need to construct a water-drawing wheel. Setting up the wheel is up to us, but we must act in the context of the physical laws that God has determined. If there is no water to begin with, or if we try to obtain water in disregard of the relevant physical laws, then our choices and efforts are to no avail.

It follows from this, first of all, that people have an obligation to themselves, to survive, to satisfy their survival-needs, for this is their Creator's will, and for that purpose He provided them with means and possibilities. But they are given in a certain way and within certain limits, and we must obey them. This knowledge of the conditions of survival that depend on the correct independent choice in accord with circumstances beyond our control, is for R. Baḥya the precondition of true trust.

This outlook clarifies the difference between body and soul from another angle. Freedom of choice rests in the soul. From its standpoint, the soul is free without any inner limitation. Boundaries, limits and obstacles arise from the material world and from materiality. There follows from this a very important consequence for the religious life: We are absolutely free with respect to our inner spiritual lives. They depend only on us, and that is the great advantage of the duties of the heart, which we can fulfill in every situation and thus merit the spiritual reward that is the immediate consequence of their performance. In other words: The power of faith itself leads us to trust in God even if we live in circumstances of suffering and great spiritual distress, especially from a physical standpoint. This is indeed the primary and most important existential choice that confronts the soul, in which is fulfilled the rabbinic dictum: "Everything is in the hands of heaven except the fear of heaven." By contrast, in the realm of ritual actions that depend on bodily service, we are free only to a limited degree. And in the realm of actions that we perform for our bodily survival, we are in a state of complete confusion. We have an obligation for our physi-

cal survival, but to what extent ought we to strive for physical life and its advancement? How shall we know what is incumbent on us in this respect, and when we are exaggerating our care for physical survival and gratification of our desires to the point of sin?

In Baḥya's view, all depends on the inner stance of the soul, as determined by its fundamental choice. Trusting in God means living in the world on the basis of inner security, i.e. based on the knowledge that the life of the soul is primary and that one should not devote to the body any more effort than is absolutely necessary, so as not to deprive the soul. This is an austerity that expresses the recognition that bodily life has no independent value, and one should not regard it as a goal. We note that Baḥya does not establish a definite norm. The halakhah does not supply this norm either, for there are differences between individuals and situations. Thus the determination depends on an inner feeling and inclination. The one who trusts is involved in the life of the world without seeing it as the purpose of life, but rather as a finite obligation incumbent on him. This leads to the formulation of a key guideline: The one who trusts directs his actions not for his egoistic advantage, but in order to fulfill His creator's command and serve Him in all His ways. This is the theme of the next gate.

*The Gate of Unifying One's Deeds*³

The unification of deeds is in the nature of a positive guideline for setting limits to the obligation of physical survival. The limits are set as a result of our seeing care for physical survival as fulfilling God's will and directing our actions to that purpose alone. (In Baḥya's view, intention determines the character of every action. The disposition of the soul at the time of the deed is determinative. Thus the act itself could be either good or bad accordingly.) This is a yardstick by which we can gauge the boundary, for if fulfilling the obligation of physical survival brings us to overriding other mitzvot that are incumbent on us at the same moment, then we have transgressed the requisite boundary. This assumes a harmony between all actions, which is achieved by fidelity to one principle: fulfilling God's will.

³ Hyamson's translation "Wholehearted Devotion" also correctly captures a true nuance of the title "*Yihud ha-Ma'asim*."

Every positive step implicitly carries with it a negation that raises us up to the next level. The temptation lying in wait for the one who is practicing the virtue of trust is that he should be seduced by the allure of earthly enjoyments and be drawn to them for their own sake. When one arrives at the level of unification of deeds for God's sake, he has mastered the lesson of trust, but the temptation at this stage is more subtle and perhaps more dangerous, for it is more internal, and it is harder for the soul to perceive it. We are referring to the temptation of pride. The person who has managed to unify all his deeds for God's sake is liable to be proud of that fact. He takes credit for it, and he may well feel satisfied with his achievement. But in doing so he falls again into the trap of superficial earthly values: considering himself superior to other people. Thus if he boasts of the level he has reached, he has already slipped from it. In order to defend himself from the danger of pride, he must ascend yet another level, described in the next gate.

The Gate of Humility

To defend oneself from the temptation of pride, a person should recognize and remind himself constantly that before God he is absolutely worthless. This realization follows from everything the person has learned in the previous stages: knowing God's unity, discerning His wisdom in the created world, the obligation of divine service, trust and unification of deeds. The totality of these lessons brings one to humility and realization of one's worthlessness before one's Creator.

Here too, as in the preceding spiritual states that Baḥya has discussed, an ambiguity appears. Only with respect to God does one recognize one's worthlessness, but not with respect to other creatures. Furthermore, he arrives at true humility only when he has previously arrived at a correct estimate of the value of humanity in relation to other creatures. Not only does Baḥya not recommend the deeds of self-degradation that were practiced in the monastic asceticism of his day, but he sees in pride and proper recognition of one's own worth an inner precondition of humility before God. Before the Absolute One, one is absolutely humble. This recognition explains how Baḥya is able to find in the negative virtue of humility a positive side. Humility is not a stance of self-abnegation and self-deprecation. On the contrary, when humility is genuine, it is in effect the internalization of a sense of

pride. Only then is the joy of achievement at having unified one's deeds in the service of God transformed into a realization of positive inner worth that does not measure itself in comparison with others and is not self-satisfaction at the level one has achieved, but is the satisfaction in the act of devotion itself. This is service of God at its most genuine.

Is there a criterion for distinguishing the pride of self-aggrandizement from the pride of humility? We find ourselves here on the verge of fine distinctions that require the highest degree of self-awareness. When pride leads one to feeling smug and self-satisfied with what one has achieved, this is the wrong kind of pride; when the joy of achievement drives him to carry on and devote himself to service without limit—this is the sublimation of pride into a sense of humility.

The Gate of Repentance

We have seen that for Saadia repentance had only a secondary value. Not so in the *Duties of the Heart*. The opposition between the soul's original calling and its bodily inclination; the emphasis on internal intention; the deviation from the middle-of-the-road approach represented by the clear, specific guidance of Torah and halakhah—all these confront the soul with a task in whose endeavor error and failure are inevitable. Saadia's assumption that a righteous life without sin is eminently possible cannot withstand the test of R. Bahya's demanding standards. On the contrary, it seems that moral failure requiring repentance becomes for him a necessary condition for progress on the way to perfection, for it is a way of experience that includes self-correction as a part of that experience.

Moreover, we may say that the idea of repentance is a unifying theme of the entire journey that leads to perfection. In the life of this world, the soul strives with all its might to return from the realm of limited, sin-laden existence to its source, and without grappling with failure in the transition from each to the next, we cannot arrive at our goal. For this reason the idea of repentance is fraught with a larger significance than the bare notion of an opportunity given a person to correct what he has done wrong (as Saadia presents the matter). It is a separate stage in its own right. At a certain stage a person becomes a "penitent": he grapples with a certain kind of experience and achieves through it a certain kind of perfection. In this respect, the person who

has sinned a particular sin and repented is privileged with a unique experience that the person who has had neither that sin nor that specific repentance is missing.

Bahya distinguished between three kinds of repentance, in the last of which it acquires an independent religious value:

1. Repentance from serious sins, whose punishment would be “excision” from the community. This penitent does not stand above the innocent person, but on a lower level; his soul is stained and he cannot achieve total repair.
2. Repentance from minor sins. The penitent can return to the same level as the innocent person if he has repented completely, and if he has achieved restitution—externally to the extent possible, and especially internally (in the case of sins between the person and God).
3. Repentance from minor sins in a case where the penitent is restored to a higher level than the innocent person. To such a case the rabbis alluded when they said, “The perfectly righteous cannot stand in the place where the penitent stands.” If the sin brings the sinner to the state of true humility, and if through it he recognizes the value of service to God as an open-ended goal—i.e. if through the experience of the pain that he suffered through his sin, he comes to the recognition of the infinite distance between humanity and God, as well as recognizing the infinite obligation that is incumbent on him, in which he will always be found deficient and at fault because he can never discharge it in its entirety—then the sin has become a prerequisite to his perfection, for without it he would not have come to this realization. Therefore Bahya says that there is a sin that is more efficacious than righteousness, for it leads to humility; and there is a righteousness more harmful than sin, for it leads to pride.

Only by putting the primary emphasis on inner intention is it possible to arrive at this dialectical insight. In Saadia’s view, sin is unnecessary, and so repentance in and of itself is not a virtue. But in Bahya’s view, sin of the third kind is a kind of necessity, and so repentance that derives from the inner struggle with this fact constitutes a religious value of the highest order.

The Gate of Abstinence

R. Baḥya devoted a separate “gate” to abstinence, and thus distinguished it as a special level. Every station on the journey includes what preceded it and brings what was said before to its ultimate fulfillment and self-recognition. The most profound self-recognition is the next step toward perfection. The same applies in the case of abstinence. We can say that everything that preceded is included under the rubric of “abstinence,” but only by pushing it to the ultimate degree do we come to understand its special meaning as a higher stage on the way to perfection.

As in the matter of repentance, so also with abstinence Baḥya distinguished three degrees:

1. General abstinence—abstinence that follows from rational consideration of a practical, utilitarian sort, such as to avoid the damage caused by excessive indulgence. All people agree to this kind of abstinence in principle, only they might not recognize the danger, or they may lack the will-power to restrain themselves from indulging.
2. Abstinence according to the Torah—the Torah commands us to abstain from certain things that would be rationally permitted, in order to train one to control and purge one’s appetites.
3. Abstinence for the select few—some individuals take on a higher level of abstinence, and forbid themselves even what the Torah permits.

The tension between Baḥya’s religious stance and the tendency of organized religion reappears here in full force. Baḥya is not satisfied with the prescriptions of the Torah and halakhah, yet he understands and appreciates that the way of the Torah is not only a concession to the common people’s mediocrity, but it represents the maximum possible discipline of abstinence that is compatible with civilized living. Only rare individuals can take on a more extreme regimen, for if everyone adopted it, life as we know it would fall apart.

This tension is palpable also in his discussion of the nature of supererogatory abstinence. Some people abstain from all enjoyments in life because they despair of them. This way is not very praiseworthy, for it conceals a secret love of those same worldly goods. Others abstain out of love for God and separate themselves from human society. This is a kind of abstinence for which Baḥya shows some respect. But the

highest level is inner abstinence, which does not express itself in public self-denial that others can observe. People of this third kind continue to function and to fulfill all their obligations to society and to their peers, while privately they deny themselves worldly pleasures. In Bahya's view, this is the highest kind of abstinence.

This look that we have had of the highest kind of abstinence provides one of the first sources of the motif of the "hidden saint," whose hiddenness is the key to his saintliness.

The Gate of Love of God

Abstinence is the condition to love of God, for according to Bahya one cannot come to this love directly. Why not? Let us return to our basic assumption. Materiality seduces the soul from its original inclination. If we intend to arrive at the level of love of God, which demands absolute devotion, while skipping over all the previous levels, we run smack into the obstacle of sensuality that has not been purged or brought under control, and we fail. But if we follow the path of abstinence in gradual stages, then love of God will also grow stronger in proportion until it arrives at its fulfillment in the measure that is possible for human beings. It turns out that the way of abstinence from the world is also the way to love of God. This dialectic also applies to the quality of love. In the first stage, a person loves God because he enjoyed the divine favor and prospered in the world. This is the lowest level, because it is bound up with love of earthly existence. There is no abstinence in this kind of love, and it is what the rabbis called "love that is bound up with an object." The second level is love of God for His forgiving one's sins. This is a higher level, for through it the person sees himself as indebted to God. This is connected to fear of God, where "fear" is not dread of punishment, but consciousness of God's infinite greatness. This is the beginning of true love of God.

But the third and greatest level is the love that includes fear and goes beyond it. This is love that comes from recognition of God's greatness. Such love, which is a sense of devotion without limit, includes all the previous stages. It is the truest perfection.

Summary

R. Bahya Ibn Pakudah expressed in his teaching a new intuition of reality, and he created a new religious ideal. He internalized the encounter

with the spiritual culture that Saadia confronted externally. His dialogue with the traditional literature is expressed through the inner tension (on which he deliberated) between individual religiosity and the demands of organized religion. He tried to moderate this tension through enriching the spiritual dimension of traditional organized religion. He carved out a new path of religious individualism that goes beyond the letter of the law, not by departing from the traditional framework, but by mediating between its categorical demands and the specific religious consciousness of the individual.

CHAPTER FOUR

R. SOLOMON IBN GABIROL

In Bahya's thought, the confrontation between the new religious idealism and traditional halakhic, organized Judaism came to open expression. By contrast, in the original philosophic thought of R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol, it appears that there is no tension between them, or no interest in the conflict. Ibn Gabirol was enamored of the new religious ideal, and he presented and developed it without discussing the relation between it and the tradition, even though in his genius-level poetic output it appears that he identified unqualifiedly with the tradition, with its canonic sources and legal norms. The principle topic that I shall seek to consider in this chapter is the riddle pertaining to the consolidation of Saadia's rationalism in a generation that internalized Neo-Platonic philosophy as a central factor that concretized the religious ideal of faith and way of life.

Gabirol's Philosophical Thought

R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol lived during the years 1026–1070 and became famous among his people through his secular and religious poetry, many of which were incorporated into the Jewish prayer book. His philosophical thought had influence on some Jewish philosophers and kabbalists, though he is not mentioned by name. His principal philosophical influence was on medieval Christian philosophy.

His philosophical works were:

1. *The Fountain of Life (Fons Vitae)*. This is the most central and important work that has come down to us. It was written originally in Arabic, but it was preserved only in Latin, and the true identity of the author was only rediscovered in the 19th century.
2. *The Will*. By the testimony of the *Fountain of Life*, it appears that he wrote a treatise on the will, but it is not extant.
3. *Theory of the Soul*. It is known that Ibn Gabirol wrote a work on the theory of the soul, but it has not been preserved.

4. Commentary. Ibn Gabirol wrote an extensive allegorical commentary on the Bible. Some fragments have survived.
5. *Improvement of the Virtues of the Soul*. This book has come down to us, together with another book, *Choice Pearls*.
6. "The Royal Crown." This is a long poem that may be included among his philosophical works. It is his only surviving attempt to present his theological ideas in the framework of a Jewish prayer.

The Fountain of Life

The *Fountain of Life* has practically no influence in subsequent Jewish philosophy. On the other hand, in the 12th and 13th centuries there circulated among Christian scholars a Latin book, translated from the Arabic, with the title *Fons Vitae of Avicbron*, whose author was thought by the Christians to be a Christian or Moslem Arab, but not a Jew. The book was the subject of debate; it was enthusiastically defended by neo-Platonic thinkers (such as William of Auvergne and Duns Scotus), and was just as vehemently attacked by the Aristotelians (such as Thomas Aquinas), while it continued to influence the development of Christian theology.

And then in the 19th century the scholar Solomon Munk discovered a manuscript which was the translation of R. Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera of excerpts from a book titled *Meqor Hayyim of R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol*. He was able to prove from these excerpts that the book that had had such a brilliant career in the Christian Church was none other than a Latin translation of Ibn Gabirol's work. The most interesting feature of this episode was not the shock that registered among the Christian scholars (especially the anti-Semites among them), nor the special joy that this discovery afforded to Jews, who are always looking for Jewish influence on the rest of the world. It is most instructive that on the one hand, this book could be adopted into the Christian tradition without raising any dogmatic scruples, and on the other hand it disappeared for centuries from the map of Jewish thought. To be sure, the scholar David Kaufman tried to prove that it had an influence on Jewish philosophers and kabbalists. But his evidences are few and his proofs are weak. I am inclined to accept the verdict of Julius Guttman, who thought that the influence of this work in the Jewish world was negligible.

The simplest explanation for the scanty influence of this work on Jewish philosophers is that it dealt with general philosophical problems without relating to the problem of integrating them with canonical Jewish sources. This is a surprisingly free approach. In the succeeding generation, it was the project of integration that stood at the center of attention for Jewish thinkers. But this answer is insufficient, and the riddle continues to bother us.

R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol was a great religious poet, and the character of his poetry is very different from that of his philosophical writings. His poetry is suffused with traditional allusions and bears the stamp of the period of Jewish history in which it was composed. It found its way into the prayer book and its subsequent influence is considerable. The difference between the character and fate of his poetry and his philosophical writings begs for an explanation.

Gabirol's Sources

The starting-point of Gabirol's thought is to be found in the neo-Platonic tradition. However, it also has a marked individual character. Scholars debate whether the individuating features are entirely original, or whether he was influenced from other sources that have not been discovered. Though his systematic consistency would argue for originality, one senses an intellectual affinity with several pseudepigraphic writings that circulated in the Middle Ages, especially the "Theology of Aristotle" (which is a reworking of portions of Plotinus's *Enneads*) or writings that were attributed to the ancient Greek philosopher Empedocles.

The Structure of the Book

The book is constructed as a dialogue between a student and a teacher, but it is not a genuine conversation but rather a lecture that is subdivided into sections by structural questions. The student raises a topic in a tone of exaggerated humility seeking enlightenment, and the teacher lectures to him, after which the student thanks him for his words and raises another question, and so on.

Nevertheless, it seems that the literary structure has importance: it reflects the attitude of authority underlying the author's presentation of his views. These are not private opinions offered for critical examination, but rather the authoritative presentation of truth that is to be accepted *ex cathedra*. One must admit that there are definite gaps between the

certain tone of the presentation and the less-than-persuasive force of the logical demonstrations. It seems that the author needed a liberal dose of authoritative manner appealing to revelation to cover up the weakness of his argument.

Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the importance of the religious atmosphere generated by this kind of presentation, that can permit itself this lofty vagueness. There is something dramatic in the impressive revelation of truth that the student, though intelligent and knowledgeable, could not arrive at by himself, that resembles the practice of the occultists, who claim a supra-human source of their doctrines. Perhaps this also explains the freedom that the teacher exercised in not relying on canonical sources. He expresses a divine truth that was revealed to him directly.

The General Truth: The Human Being as Microcosm

R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol opens his work with an idea common to all philosophers of the Middle Ages, whether of neo-Platonic or Aristotelian orientation: The human being is a rational animal, and his highest purpose is knowledge of universal truth, which is eternal, for through this knowledge he realizes himself. But Gabirol turns this idea in a direction that characterizes neo-Platonism in particular. He affirms that this knowledge of universal, eternal truth by the person is in fact *self-knowledge*. The human being is a “microcosm”—a miniature world—and he reflects in his own being the being of the whole universe, therefore knowledge of all being is human self-knowledge. It stands to reason that the substantive difference between the neo-Platonic tendency that leans toward a subjective, mystical approach and the Aristotelian tendency that leans toward objective science, is rooted in this assumption that Aristotle did not accept.

How does this assumption influence the content of metaphysical truth?

Universal Knowledge

The aspiration to arrive at knowledge of universal truth as the content of human self-knowledge does not tend toward a detailed knowledge of the sciences, each requiring its own discipline. It also does not drive one toward plumbing the inexhaustible diversity of reality surrounding us. This mode of thought lacks the curiosity that characterizes the Aristotelian approach, that presses to know all knowable details and only

afterwards offers a general explanation. We are also missing the drive to show how the details form a totality. A philosopher of this sort is not curious to know earthly existence in detail. His goal is to know the unifying principle—the general rule from which it is possible to derive all the details and thus to undercut our interest in the details. For it is understood that the human being, inasmuch as he is a representative being, encompasses the overall principle of being but not the details that fall underneath it. This is an aspiration to ascend from the details to the universal, to encompass being at a glance and see it as one—above and beyond the plurality of its parts. From a certain aspect this is the aspiration of an artist or a believer but not of a scientist.

It is a tragic paradox that precisely in his attempt to grasp the absolute unity of all being Gabirol becomes entangled in irreconcilable contradictions, because reality is filled with oppositions and polarities.

Introspection

The aspiration to know the truth as the content of self-knowledge is not only uninterested in the rich detail of surrounding reality, but it justifies inattentiveness to the reality external to humankind. In other words, it mandates introspection in order to reveal the perspectival nature of thought itself. The thinker strives to comprehend the substance of his thought, to know his cognitive process, and thus to plumb the depths of his own essence. He stands drunk with fear and wonder before the bottomless well of his own inwardness, depths upon depths, until he feels that he has grasped the root of his selfhood in what transcends it, i.e. in God.

This is first of all a religious position. But it is a religious position very remote from that envisioned in Saadia's thought. But since it is religious it easily ignores the difference between itself and the truth in the non-mystical canonical sources.

The Three Domains of Knowledge

Universal knowledge is humanity's purpose. In order to arrive at universal knowledge, it is necessary to start with the broadest possible perspective, i.e., to determine all the domains of inquiry. When we are dealing with a detail or a portion of the whole, we keep track of our place in the totality and do not lose sight of it.

Thus knowledge is divided into three domains:

1. **Form and matter**—all beings of the terrestrial world are composed of form and matter, according to Plato and Aristotle. As our first familiarity is with this earthly existence, we should consider these to principles that comprise it.
We have already noted the total abstraction that frees the philosopher in one sweeping omission from all the burden of inquiry into the details of surrounding reality. Everything is immediately placed into these two categories: matter and form. These two categories reflect consideration of the nature of our knowledge of these entities, not how they are specifically constituted. The manner of thought that we are dealing with examines only the tools by which it grasps reality, and therefore it strives to know itself, not reality.
2. **Will**—The things that are composed of matter and form are not self-caused. The cause for their existence is the (divine) will that combines these two principles, and therefore the will is the second domain of knowledge.
3. **The First Substance**—The will belongs to the One who wills—the First Substance, or the infinite God. This is the third domain, and of it we have no knowledge. When thought exhausts what is given it to know, it discovers that it has a cause beyond it, to which it points. Ibn Gabirol indicates a propos of the three domains of knowledge that we should make a distinction between direct knowledge, inferential knowledge, and what is beyond human comprehension (i.e., what we know to be unknowable).

The Threefold Division Embraces All Knowledge

As we said, Ibn Gabirol assumes this encompassing framework as the originating point of his analysis. He devotes many pages to an abundance of proofs which seek to prove that this threefold classification encompasses all reality.

He was forced into this position by his belief that the number three is the prototype of completeness, of dynamic plurality that reverts back to union. Every effect has a cause, and the mediating force between cause and effect completes the triad. Likewise, in every alteration of quality and quantity, however slight, there is a transitional state between the prior and subsequent state. Three is the principle of identity amidst change. It is no surprise that the Christian philosophers assumed that

any thinker who presented the triad as the model of completion was himself a Christian, though logically there is no reason why a mystically-inclined Jewish thinker might not be drawn to the same idea.

The First Domain of Knowledge: Matter and Form

The *Fountain of Life* treats exhaustively of the first domain of knowledge: matter and form. It leaves the other domains to succeeding volumes.

We are able to distinguish the essence of each material object and its existence. The essence corresponds to the definition of the object, and the medievals spoke of the “quiddity” of a thing (from *quid* = “what”)—the answer to the question, “*what* is this thing?” But its existence in reality goes beyond our conceiving the idea of the object in thought; existence does not follow logically from the mere concept but is something in addition to it.

In Aristotle’s view, the form and matter do not exist separately, and the distinction between them is merely theoretical. Matter always takes on some form or other and is manifest through it; we know matter through the form. On the other hand, the form is expressed through matter; we know form through matter, by means of our senses. For example: the table (as form) exists by means of the wood (matter); wood may be thought of as the potential for a table to be actualized.

This Aristotelian theory raises many questions, such as what is the essence of matter, what is the essence of form, and what is the relation between the two of them. There is a richness of significance and a dearth of clarity that opened the door for many varied interpretations.

The Difference between Gabirol and Aristotle

At the start of his discussion Gabirol emphasizes the primary sense of the concept of matter: that which exhibits form. Matter is what gives existence to the form (or concept). By contrast, form identifies and delimits a portion of reality, and defines it as a separate entity. With this point, we have not yet emphasized the fundamental difference between Gabirol and Aristotle, but it becomes readily apparent when Gabirol develops his thesis. Gabirol is not interested in the variety of different forms and the variety of different materials. He is interested in the principles of “Form” as such and “Matter” as such. “Form” is the principle of existence in the broadest possible sense. It designates all-encompassing possibility, the possibility of plurality, though it is itself

one. Of course, since it is the principle of all existence, it is "prior" to each existing thing. On the other hand, "Form" is the principle of individuation and limitation. Each form is a separate entity complete in itself and distinct from its surroundings. In this way it is the cause of plurality beyond itself. Therefore, Gabirol argues, Form is active: it defines, distinguishes, and separates things, whereas Matter is passive: it bears and receives Form.

In such a way is generated a new ambiguity that causes problems in Gabirol's thought: in one respect it is possible to say that matter is the cause of plurality, for it is infinitely divisible, and without it there could not be multiple forms. Form is the cause of unity, because each form denotes a unified entity. But it is also possible to argue the opposite—that the form is the cause of plurality, because it effects a division in matter, and that matter is the cause of unity, for without it there would be no defined object. The same applies to the identity of things. It is possible to argue that matter individuates each entity, because without it there would be only one generalized form to speak of. On the other hand, it is form that delimits it, therefore it is the source of the identity of all objects. Similarly, it is possible to argue that matter is the prime element of all reality, for without it there would be no sense to the notion of the real. But form is also fundamental, because without it there would be no definite real thing subsisting. It follows that all these assertions have an equal measure of truth, yet they argue in opposite directions!

We come here to a second central respect in which Gabirol differs from Aristotle. In Aristotle's view the domain in which we can speak of a distinction of matter and form is the domain of material entities—bodies in the proper sense. These bodies are necessarily comprised of matter that can be perceived by the senses and from form that can be apprehended by reason. Therefore intellect is not corporeal, and therefore we can deduce that apart from material bodies there are also purely intellectual entities without matter. Intellect—including human intellect—is a unitary, spiritual, incorporeal entity, and all the more so God and the angels that are intermediate between God and humanity.

This assertion is undeniably problematic. In Aristotle's view, it is hard to understand in what sense intellect exists if it has no material substrate. But it is possible to explain on the basis of this assumption why Aristotle arrived at the unequivocal conclusion that form is prior to matter, and that the actual existence of form is prior to the potential

readiness in matter to receive form. In Aristotle's view, true reality is the reality of intellectual form.

By contrast, in Gabirol's view the distinction between matter and form applies to all entities. With astonishing daring but complete consistency he argues that it applies even to God! Why? Because for Gabirol matter is the universal principle of existence; it is the universal substrate of all forms, and there is no form without matter. Thus Gabirol fundamentally revised the conception of the relationship between matter and form, and thus he changed the conception of the notion between potentiality and actuality. In Aristotle's view, potentiality is possibility, a condition between full being and total non-being, whereas actuality is real being. In the neo-Platonic conception to which Gabirol subscribed, potentiality is the condition in which all forms are united in the Infinite but not manifest to finite thought.

The actualization of forms separates them out from one another. But this is not a condition of perfection but one of alienation. All the forms that have become separated yearn to reunite with their Source, because only there did they achieve truest realization. It follows that potentiality is the highest perfection of being, and not actuality!

Gabirol's neo-Platonic method seeks however to overcome the duality of the Aristotelian conception—the duality of matter and form; the duality of knower and known; the duality of actual and potential—it strives to understand reality as a dynamic unity which from the terrestrial standpoint of human existence manifests unity and plurality, but which from God's standpoint is completely unitary. If so, the physical world and the metaphysical world constitute a dynamic unity.

Gabirol attempted to express this outlook in a coherent philosophical way, but he did not succeed in overcoming its contradictions. But his philosophical failure points to a believer's consciousness of a certain truth, a truth that is in principle beyond the power of conception of human reason, but for which reason nevertheless yearns.

Levels of the Hierarchy

What we have said so far lays the basis for a conception that describes all reality as a pyramid-like hierarchy of beings deriving from the divine unity and striving to become reunited with it: from the one to the many, from the spiritual to the material, from the inconceivable to the conceivable. The next step will be an attempt to outline the principal

stages of the hierarchical scheme of existence and the transitions from one level to the next within it.

The simplest way for us to distinguish between matter and form is through their manifestation in an artificial product. We take wood—the matter—and fashion it into a particular shape—a table. The table is now the form of the wood. The form delimited and individuated a particular configuration from the myriad possibilities in the matter that bears it. But the result is a form that cannot reproduce itself: a table does not beget other tables in its image and likeness. This is thus the end of the process of generation—the final station.

We now consider the matter of the table—the wood. When we consider it we discern another conceptual form—the defined essence “wood.” It thus turns out that what was viewed as matter in relation to the table is a more primitive matter that has received the form of “wood.” This is a natural form that grows, dies, and reproduces. What, however, is it that bears the form “wood”? In Aristotle’s view, it is a composite of the elements earth, water, air and fire, and when we ask what bears these forms, the answer is: the pure potentiality of matter-as-such, what the philosophers call “primal matter” or “hylic matter.” But in Gabirol’s view it follows from this that there must be a prior source both for form and for matter. If there is a hierarchy of different forms, then there must be a parallel hierarchy of different matters that derive from the same source—from God who creates the universe. He deduced from this that there must be two types of matter that emanate hierarchically from God, each of which carries the potential for matter and form: (1) the matter that supports the heavenly spheres, which produce the primary elements (earth, water, air and fire). These elements are then given the form of corporeality, and thus is generated (2) the corporeal matter that supports the forms of corporeal bodies. Thus Gabirol succeeded in bridging the gap between spiritual matter and corporeal matter, even though it is clear that the question—“What is spiritual matter? How does it differ from form, and what distinguishes spiritual form from corporeal form?”—does not receive a logical solution but only a technical solution by a carefully-delineated progression of stages mediating between corporeal and spiritual levels: the soul is the “matter” (or substrate) that bears the form of corporeality (the body). Above the soul—whose spiritual matter bears an intellectual form—is a chain of ten Intelligences that mediate between God and the soul, and the principle of materiality (which in this respect is purely

spiritual) is found in God Himself. Gabirol makes a distinction between “universal matter” and “universal form.” Is it possible to understand these fine distinctions conceptually, or is this perhaps only a verbal scheme from which only the metaphysical imagination of a poet can derive any reality?

In any case, in Gabirol’s view the combination of universal form and universal matter generates the first Intelligence, which provides the matter for the form of the second Intelligence, and so on. Thus we can reconstruct the chain of being from the upper to the lower levels. The farther down we come, the more detail of composition we get, until we arrive at the lowest, grossest level of material being—the artificial.

The Relation of Matter and Form

To understand this picture, we should add something else of the relationship of matter and form. Matter is a static, passive principle, whereas form is dynamic and active. Form is impressed on matter, and it repeats this act of impression again and again, each time on matter which has previously received the impression of other forms. Each matter that already bears a form now becomes matter bearing a more composite form, more corporeal, for otherwise it is hard to understand how spiritual matter that has received a spiritual form becomes corporeal. At any rate, all of being is conceived as a complex interweaving of two basic elements—universal matter and universal form—until all the forms that were potentially to be found in universal form, and all the matters in universal matter, have been brought forth.

Gabirol offers in this context a parable that was later incorporated in kabbalah. Let us picture in our imagination a ray of light that passes through glass of many colors. The ray of light is one form, but it is broken up into different colors. The glass vessels are the matter by means of which the forms impressed on it change their colors. This is a wonderful image, which reminds us of the convoluted drawings of the modern artist Escher, and which demonstrates how imagination can surpass conceptual reason in its richness.

Artistic Beauty—Philosophical Weakness

It is hard not to be moved by the artistic landscape of this view of the world, combining multiplicity in unity. But philosophically it is very problematic. At times form is offered as the source of unity, at times

matter. At times form precedes matter, and at times the reverse. But the most difficult problem is how to reconcile the extreme dualism that ensues from a method that strives for absolute monism? How can these two elements be forced to relate to each other? And how can we identify them as proceeding from a single source?

In order to overcome this difficulty, Gabirol would have had to assume that even though matter and form are separate principles, they have a primary relationship. Matter is drawn to form, because it actualizes it. Form is drawn to matter, because it gives it existence. It is clear that this conception introduces an irreparable internal contradiction into the body of his method. The active becomes passive and the passive becomes active, and the basic distinction between matter and form is disturbed. And this still offers no answer to the question of their common source.

Theory of the Will

At this point we come to Gabirol's second original theory—his theory of the will. It is the will that bridges the gap between matter and form. It causes the force or the principle of action that passes through a chain of entities until it completes its impulse in the last one. Thus it acts on the matter through the form.

But what is this will? The book *Fountain of Life* was intended to deal only with the relation of matter and form. Gabirol devoted a separate book to the theory of will, but it was lost. In *Fountain of Life* there are only a few fragmentary references to his theory of the will. Nevertheless, we can learn something of Gabirol's ideas from them.

The will does not exist separately or act independently. Gabirol talks of it as if it were a separate entity, but he also describes it as an aspect of God's essence: it embodies God's turning from Himself to another being outside Him. In a human being too, the will is the soul's turning to another. Gabirol assumes a simple parallel between a human will and the divine will: the will is an externalizing agent, revealing the inner self.

In God, this is emanation. But what is revealed outside is less than the essence that is expressed. There is a contraction and a diminution. Very likely Gabirol tried in this manner to explain the graduated transition from the spiritual to the corporeal: the will that flows from the infinite divine essence and proceeds outward in a reduced form becomes more and more constricted and more and more corporeal,

it becomes transfigured into tokens that express it, and thus it embodied in the same manner as a thought is embodied in speech.

But it seems impossible not to see that in this way the same dualism is projected beyond the domain of universal matter and universal form. It is ascribed to the Godhead itself. Will becomes a further extension of the principle of form—Form above Form; the supernal Substance (God) becomes a further extension of the principle of matter—materiality above materiality. This idea lends itself to visual imagery or poetic expression, but not to logical solution.

Religious Significance of the Will

Gabirol's theory of the will seems to have had considerable influence on the Jewish kabbalah and Christian neo-Platonism. This manifested a basic inner need of medieval religious philosophy, to renew the immediate connection between humanity and God. Neo-Platonic theology makes reference to an infinite divine principle that is so remote that from the human standpoint it is experienced not as a presence but as an absence. One knows intellectually that the divine Nothingness is the absolute opposite of ordinary nothingness, such as the absence of a physical object. It is an absolute reality, but only God Himself knows it. How, then, can one establish a personal connection to the *deus absconditus*? How can one pray? How can one feel that one's prayer is heard?

The divine will, conceived as the hidden God's turning to one outside Himself, seeks to restore to the neo-Platonic outlook the personal dimension of traditional religion. God may indeed be hidden in His essence, but He reveals Himself through the divine will as a personal presence with intentionality and relationship, expressing benevolence. It reveals that the divinity is not egocentric but essentially beneficent. We may not grasp it conceptually, but the divine benevolence is expressed in the very existence of the world in which we find ourselves. This is indeed the connection between the theology of *Fountain of Life* and the personal God to whom Gabirol turns in his liturgical poetry.

Ethics as a Means

In order to complete our examination of Gabirol's philosophical views, we should pay attention to several aspects of his ethics as he expressed it in his short work, *Improvement of the Virtues of the Soul*.

As is common in neo-Platonism, Gabirol (like Bahya) did not ascribe ultimate importance to ethics but saw it as a means for human communion (*devekut*) with God, a communion that could in his view be achieved through knowledge of eternal truth. Ethics served to repair the defect in one's corporeal nature.

However, the way in which Gabirol understood the task of ethics is original and surprising, at least in the literary way it was presented. Here, too, we can sense that architectonic perfection takes the place of logical consistency.

Parallel between the Body and the Physical World

Gabirol proceeds here from the assumption that man is a microcosm: his soul and intellect correspond to the spiritual world, and his body corresponds to the physical world. His proper mode of existence is the harmonious co-existence of all the elements that comprise him, each on its proper level. So far, these words have a familiar ring, and we would expect him at this point to enumerate the tendencies of the soul that correspond to the various needs of the body, and to proclaim the rule that we should exercise each of them in the proper measure. But Gabirol prefers to develop further the model that demonstrates the exact parallel between the human body and the elements of the physical world, enabling him to give an exact specification of the good and bad qualities corresponding to the sensory qualities of the elements earth, water, air and fire: human qualities such as irascibility or patience, sadness or joy, an enumeration that includes their metaphysical similarity to cold or heat, moisture or dryness, lightness or heaviness, etc. Of course, the proper ethical conduct is the harmonious combination of all of these.

The Royal Crown

"The Royal Crown" is Gabirol's greatest philosophical-poetic work. Scholars of Spanish-Jewish poetry tend to assume that one can find in this supreme poetic creation elements of the ideas of the *Fountain of Life*, and that acquaintance with the philosophical work is required for a full understanding of the poem. Several attempts have been made to explain the poem on this theoretical basis. Parallels have been

demonstrated especially with respect to the conception of God in the first portion of the “Royal Crown” and the conception of creation at the end of the second part. Gabirol speaks of how God is beyond conception and beyond existence, and in classic neo-Platonic fashion he puts the notion of God’s infinite Oneness prior to the notion of His existence, and sets God’s oneness on a higher level than any other oneness known to us:

You are One, but not as one that is possessed or counted;
For multiplicity and change do not encompass You,
Nor description nor naming.
You are One, but my mind cannot set a rule or bound to You,
Therefore I say, I will beware of sinning through speech.

Nevertheless, the One that is above existence is the source from which existence flows, and to which it returns in the mystery of emanation:

You are One, the First of every series and foundation of every building.

In this connection it is possible to see in the “Royal Crown” several allusions to the theory of divine will as a dynamic aspect that relates to God and is revealed in Him, the first stage of emanation. Thus he says in the opening verse:

Yours is the existence. All being came forth from the shadow of Your
light
As we say, “Let us live in His shadow.”

We saw how the designation of “shadow” refers to the manner of emergence of finite being from infinite being in R. Isaac Israeli. The same idea is expressed in the *Fountain of Life*: “Movement comes from the Will, from its shadow and its beaming-forth.” In other words, each succeeding level is a reduction or shadow drawing on a higher essence. “Will” is the light from whose shadow all existence derives.

The image of light is a classic neo-Platonic usage, and its appearance here is characteristic:

You are Light, hidden in this world but revealed in the True World—
“In the mount where the Lord shall be seen”—
You are Light of the World—and the light of reason longs for you and
pines—
“For you shall see its border, but not all of it”—

In this short line is expressed the ideal of knowing eternal truth as the end-goal of human existence, and its identification with the ideal of serving God.

We do find elements of Gabirol's theology in his poetic work, and we can only discover them if we read the "Royal Crown" after studying the *Fountain of Life*. Without familiarity with his theological thought, we cannot fully understand the philosophical aspects of his poetry.

However, it is part of the beauty of his poetry that even without dwelling on the philosophical interpretation, the poem is not without meaning. On the contrary, it seems to me that we will not miss the main point of his poem even if we are unaware of the parallel to the *Fountain of Life*. Maybe the reverse is true: there is the danger that if we become too much enmeshed in the philosophical interpretation, we will miss the center of gravity of this work, which is first of all the expression of exalted religious feelings, in whose service the theological ideas are enlisted as metaphors. In other words, using theological ideas as a means, the poet expresses a *religious experience* which may be the groundwork for the philosophical interpretations that developed subsequently.

Gabirol's Poetic Side

It is easy to sense the change in religious atmosphere between *Fountain of Life* and "The Royal Crown." The first signal is the use of language permeated with biblical allusions. In effect, "The Royal Crown" is a verbal tapestry woven of transformed fragments of biblical verses, superladen with successive layers of meaning without losing their original meaning. Except for the rhyme, the structure of the poem is quite free, and in this respect it is remarkably close to the style of biblical poetry (especially Psalms), more so than most liturgical poetry of the Spanish Golden Age (including Gabirol's own religious poems). Of course we cannot deny that even on the plane of ordinary religious experience—leaving philosophical theology aside—a major transformation has taken place from biblical times to Gabirol's age. Nevertheless, we see in his poetry how the biblical element has become central, leaving a major impress on the emotional tone and the ideational content.

Gabirol intends for his poem to awaken the sense of endless astonishment of a person standing before his God. He opens the stanzas that describe the creation of the world in a way that will communicate this endless wonder to his readers:

Who can recount Your powers?
 Who can imagine Your greatness?
 Who can recall Your delight?

Who can tell Your righteousness?
 Who can understand Your mysteries?
 Who can cognize Your greatness?
 Who can know your wonders?
 Who can express Your awesome acts?
 Who can converse of Your greatness?
 Who can intuit Your exalted works?

The multiplication of epithets is calculated to instill and impress on the listener's soul feelings of exaltation beyond all superlatives. In other words, there is an attempt here to express feelings beyond the power of expression and to give this incapacity concrete representation. This is a characteristic method of expression in the neo-Platonic philosophy. This is the objective of the pattern of description that ascends from wonder to wonder—each wonder is incomprehensible in itself, but there is always another greater in creation. The wonder of the world-soul exceeds all else, and the wonder of the divine intellect surpasses even this, so that ultimately the depiction of God standing above all thought is yet another means to arouse the sense of wonder and exaltation, and with it the submission of the person before God's greatness.

The Personal (Biblical) View and the Supra-Personal (Neo-Platonic) View

But all of this is only one side of his poetry. Gabirol exploits the supra-personal exaltation of the neo-Platonic Godhead in order to awaken the feeling of endless astonishment. But he does not let go of the personal conception of God. On the contrary, perhaps the greatest power of the poem—constructed line by line on paradoxical tension—lies in the direct personal confrontation with the God who is beyond all comprehension:

Wondrous are Your works, as my soul knows well.
 Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the beauty, the victory, and
 the splendor.
 Yours, O Lord, are the sovereignty, dominion over all, wealth and
 glory.
 To You do the creatures of heaven and earth give homage, for they will
 perish while You stand firm.

We note the emphatic reiteration of the word "You," which continues through all stanzas of the poem. The opening and repeating refrain of each stanza follows the same pattern: "You, O Lord," "You are One," "You exist," "You are living," etc. From this direct personal address

flows the theme of submission of the third portion of the poem, which is suffused with the spirit of the Psalms: God who is incomparably exalted—God is close in His distance, beneficent God, caring God, commanding and enforcing God, but lenient and forgiving, who hears prayer.

In Gabirol's poetry the personal-biblical element is enriched by the neo-Platonic embellishment without being effaced. In this way the neo-Platonic conception develops new layers of depth and significance within the traditional (biblical and midrashic) conception.

In Gabirol's poetry we can even find, in a direct and manifest fashion, the traditional elements that disappeared without a trace in *The Fountain of Life*: the idea of reward and punishment in the World to Come; the idea of serving God through His commandments in the Torah; the expectation of the return to Zion and the rebuilding of the Temple—all these are elements with which Gabirol's religious poetry is replete:

May it be Your will, O Lord my God, that You turn back to me in Your
mercy
And turn me to You in complete repentance.
Prepare my heart for my supplication; lend Your ear,
Open my heart in Your Torah,
Plant the fear of You in my thoughts,
Enact good decrees for me,
And annul evil decrees from me.
Do not bring me into temptation and humiliation,
And save me from all evil afflictions.
Shelter me in Your shade until the scourge shall pass.
Assist my utterances and my thoughts, and save me from misspeaking.
Keep me in mind when You keep Your promise to Your people and
rebuild Your Temple
To see the restoration of Your chosen ones. May I be privileged to visit
Your holy site
That is now desolate and in ruins. Have favor on its stones and earth
And the clods of its remains. May it be rebuilt from its desolation...

Thus are the traditional values reasserted in Gabirol's poetry. This is no longer the neo-Platonic God but the God of Psalms and the Jewish prayer-book.

Poetry as the More Faithful Expression of Ibn Gabirol

I think I shall be correct if I assert that Gabirol's poetic work expresses him more completely than his philosophical work. In his

poetry we return from the foreign and alienated world of remote and generalized religiosity to traditional religion and its particular Jewish manifestation.

The fact that Ibn Gabirol wrote a book (*The Fountain of Life*) that could be accepted as compatible with Christianity is no proof that Judaism was peripheral for him, that he had come so much under the spell of the universal culture of his age that his connection with the Jewish world had been severed. On the contrary—his experiential self was thoroughly rooted in the Jewish tradition. These traditional values have not become an intellectual problem with which he must wrestle with philosophical tools, but he relates to them naturally and spontaneously. His Jewish-religious experience is central for him, and his theoretical speculation is only the projection of that experience on the universal plane.

One generation later, the situation had changed completely. The very existence of the Jewish people and the justification of its identity had become problematic, and then the issues that Gabirol had expressed only in his poetry and not his theoretical thought took center stage in systematic reflection. The most prominent example of this development was the theoretical work of R. Judah Halevi, with which we shall deal extensively in a later chapter. The choice of Israel, the revelation of Sinai, prophecy, exile and redemption are central themes of Halevi's philosophical thought.

We might say that there is an abyss of difference between Halevi and Ibn Gabirol. As theoretical thinkers, they are as different as east and west. But nothing has changed in substance. What Halevi says in the *Kuzari*, Ibn Gabirol says in his poetic works. The difference is that the traditional themes that were problematic in the generations before Saadia became problematic again in Halevi's generation, and so they had to be discussed systematically.

CHAPTER FIVE

R. ABRAHAM BAR ḤIYYA

The turn that raised the historical topics of Judaism for philosophical elucidation is first noticeable in the speculative writings of R. Abraham bar Ḥiyya, who was called “the Nasi.” Our knowledge of him is scanty, and much of it is in dispute. He seems to have been born in 1065 in Spain, and it appears that he lived most of his life in Barcelona. There is a debate as to whether afterwards he moved to southern France, for he wrote several pieces for the communities of that region. He died some time between 1136 and 1143. His title of “Nasi” came about apparently from an official office that he received in the royal court of Aragon. He was counted among the best-known men of learning in his time, and his influence was recognized afterwards in several domains of general scientific literature. But his writings attest to a fierce identification with Judaism, permeated with severe criticism of Christianity and Islam.

His Writings

R. Abraham bar Ḥiyya was first of all a scientist. His principal writings are in the areas of mathematics, astronomy and the calendar (and his speculative writings are also very much influenced by his involvement with astronomy and astrology). In these areas he had much influence in the general field.

His scientific writings were the following:

1. *The Foundations of Understanding and Tower of Faith* (an encyclopedic work of which only fragments have survived)
2. *The Shape of the Earth* (published in 1546 and 1720)
3. *Calculation of the Trajectories of the Stars* (manuscript)
4. *Astronomical Tables* (manuscript)
5. *The Book of Intercalation* (published in London, 1851)
6. *The Book of Surveying and Geometry* (published in Berlin, 1912)
7. *Meditation of the Soul* (A. Freimann, Leipzig 1860)
8. *The Scroll of the Revealer* (A. Posnanski, Berlin 1924)

The last two works are germane to our inquiry.

His Place in the History of Learning

In addition to his scientific and speculative works, R. Abraham bar Ḥiyya engaged also in the translation of scientific works from Arabic to Latin (in collaboration with a Christian translator). This fact is important not only for filling in the knowledge about him personally, but for understanding his place in the period of transition in the history of science and philosophy in the Middle Ages from the Arab-Muslim realm to the Spanish-French-Christian realm. His role as one of the personalities who contributed to the transmission of the scientific legacy that had had its formation in Islamic lands to the Christian world (and we should emphasize that Jewish scientists and philosophers played a central part in that transmission) lends a special significance to the content of his thought. We have here a scientist and philosopher of outstanding importance in the history of general Western culture, who defends his special Jewish identity in that context.

The Historical Background

The fact that he finds himself at the point of transition from the Moslem-Arabic world to the Christian-Latin world is palpable not only Bar Ḥiyya's scientific writings but in his speculative writings as well. Whether he actually moved physically from the Moslem-ruled to the Christian-ruled part of Spain or only traveled from the one realm to the other in the cultural plane, the fact that Spain as a whole was in transition from the one regime to the other is very noticeable in his writings. It is expressed first of all in the tension that subsisted between the Jewish community and its Christian environment. The crisis of survival that the Jewish community underwent in this period of the Crusades because of the passing away of the rule of "Ishmael" before the onslaught of "Edom" is the starting-point of his *Scroll of the Revealer*. It was clearly recognized that the Christian regime posed a new and more serious challenge to the continuance of Judaism as a separate faith, and this is the central problem in R. Abraham bar Ḥiyya's thought.

There was another factor for the exacerbation of the tension in the historical realm. General sciences such as mathematics and astronomy posed no religious problem in the Jewish world. On the contrary, they had ample legitimacy because they were useful ancillary tools for deliberations in one of the most important and central legal areas—determining the Jewish calendar. Bar Ḥiyya made a great contribution in

this area, and this was a basis for the harmony of general and Jewish learning that characterizes his writings. The contribution of basic sciences to pragmatic needs is another characteristic of the transitional period, and it overshadows the inquiry into metaphysical and theological-philosophical areas. In any case, the major conflict between the religions moved in Bar Ḥiyya's time from the metaphysical to the historical area.

The Philosophical Background—Platonic or Aristotelian?

Some scholars (such as Isaac Husik and Julius Guttmann) associate Bar Ḥiyya with the neo-Platonic school. Other scholars (Stitskin) counter-argue that he was actually the first of the Aristotelian Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages.

It is doubtful whether we can reach a clear-cut verdict between these opinions. If Bar Ḥiyya had presented us with a complete philosophical system, it would be possible to put him in one school or the other, but he did not. He seems to have been an eclectic thinker who accepted different elements from here or there and used them as premises or starting-points for discussions on topics that are not clearly philosophical in character. Thus he defines form and matter in a manner closer to the Aristotelian conception, while his description of the universe as a hierarchy of realms bears a neo-Platonic impress.

The Relation of Torah and Philosophy

When we compare Bar Ḥiyya to Saadia, it appears that the status of prophecy has undergone revision in his view as a result of neo-Platonic influence. In Bar Ḥiyya's view, the prophet communicates from the divine source not only the arbitrary commandments that a person would not know from his own reasoning, and not only the complete certainty in ordinary religious knowledge that revelation provides, but also additional truths that are beyond the power of reason. Not only is reason impotent to intuit these truths on its own, they are also above the power of reason to criticize.

This argument shows us that the question of the identity of reason and Torah was presented with new challenges, but Bar Ḥiyya's "orthodox" position is very clear. His position prefigures that of Judah Halevi, and the kinship between them is especially prominent in Bar Ḥiyya's argument that the gentiles who follow the method of reason

do not attain the same level of perfection that Jewish believers arrived at through the guidance of the Torah.

In Saadia's view, the advantage of Torah is the certainty that it carries by virtue of being divine revelation, yet it is subject to rational examination and criticism. In Baḥya's view, rational enlightenment is preferable to that of Torah. But in Bar Ḥiyya's view, the reverse is true—the enlightenment from Torah is preferable, because it is above that of reason. Such a conclusion creates a new relationship between prophecy and reason. To be sure, Bar Ḥiyya made use of the findings of gentile thinkers, and he was familiar with the external source of the philosophical terminology that he employed. But he felt no need to prove the assertions of the Torah through reason (as Saadia had done), but rather to plumb the deeper implications of the Torah through the tools of reason. In his view, it is the purpose of reason to decipher the mysteries of Torah insofar as it is within human power to attain knowledge of the divine. Beyond this, the Torah enables the believer to catch a glimpse of the vistas of worlds that are hidden from the eye of reason. In contrast to Baḥya, Bar Ḥiyya argues it is not reason that delivers us from the world of perishable things, but only the Torah.

Negating the Religions of the Gentiles and the Gentiles Themselves

The note of apologetic disputation is already prominent in Bar Ḥiyya's remarks about the superiority of Torah, because the wisdom of Torah is unique to Israel and implies their superiority over other nations. The idea of Israel's chosenness contains two elements—negative and positive.

The negative element in his thought is the rejection of the gentile religions. Bar Ḥiyya expressed open enmity against Islam and Christianity. He differed with Saadia, who in his view gave Islam too much credit, and his attack on Christianity is sharper and more vehement than Saadia's. He did not arrive at any general theoretical formulation, and his arguments are dogmatic and emotional. Thus he argued that according to his astrological calculations, the periods of Jesus and Mohammed were periods of great decline for the world, and that in time to come all the gentiles will be wiped away and the world will be filled with the resurrected Israelites of all generations. Such an extreme position was clearly an expression of the hostility and spirit of confrontation that were unleashed in the wake of the Crusades.

Israel's Special Status

The affirmative side in Bar Hıyya's notion of chosenness was the idea of Israel's special status. In his view, the choice of Israel rests on the absolute uniqueness of the Sinaitic revelation. In this respect he was close in thought both to Saadia and Halevi: "All the peoples of the earth were in awe of Israel, as is signified [in Deuteronomy 28:10 by the similarity of the words]: 'And all the peoples of the earth *shall see* [*ve-ra'u*] that the Lord's name is proclaimed over you, and *they shall stand in fear of you* [*ve-yar'u mimekka*].' This is a reference to the revelation of Sinai, *that was visible to the whole world.*" The public character of the Sinai revelation gives it the highest level of certainty, in contrast to the revelations of all other religions. But there also appears in his thought the idea that Israel has a substantive superiority to other nations: "Just as God separated the human race from all other animals and gave them a higher status, so too did He separate one nation from all the others, so that they should be dedicated to His glory." He thus comes close to Halevi's position, as we shall see later on. There is, however, a philosophical difference between them, for Bar Hıyya bases the superiority of Israel on a neo-Platonic historical difference that is different in principle from Halevi's position.

According to the neo-Platonic doctrine of the soul, a human being has three levels of soul: the vegetative (or vital) soul (that governs the functions common to all life, whether plant or animal), the animal soul, and the pure soul that is unique to humans. According to Bar Hıyya, the first human beings were created with the human soul ruling over the other two, but because of their sin it fell in status and came under the control of the vital and animal souls. The Flood atoned for the sin, and the pure human soul was released from bondage to the vegetative soul and started circulating among the bodies of selected individuals, and (from Jacob onward) an entire family. At Sinai the damage of the sin was repaired in its entirety, and two things happened: the pure soul was redeemed also from the bondage to the animal soul, and it started being embodied in an entire nation. All the other nations were not released from the animal soul, and they are to Israel as the husk is to the kernel.¹ Therefore they are not called "man" in the proper

¹ "Husk" = *Kelipah*, a term that would have great significance in the kabbalistic literature as referring to the realm of unredeemed matter or the demonic.

sense, and they will perish in the end of time.² This is Israel's substantive superiority to the other nations of the world.

When we discuss Halevi's thought we will show how differently he developed this motif. It is worth dwelling on the fact that Bar Ḥiyya's version builds on the notion of "original sin" in a way that its Augustinian-Christian origin is rather obvious. This is instructive, for it reminds us that Bar Ḥiyya's hostility to Christianity was born of the friction of close proximity, and in such cases imitative influence can be the byproduct of competition. In Halevi's thought, this motif is absent.

His Conception of History

Bar Ḥiyya's notion of the basis of Israel's chosenness was the starting point of his view of the historical process. Saadia accepted the biblical and rabbinic outlook concerning the transition from exile to Messianic times without any additions or revisions, and he saw no logical principles at work in history other than simple providence as the Bible describes it. But Bar Ḥiyya, who saw the status of Jewry in exile as a religious problem, was forced to grapple with the historical reality of the crisis, and he utilized his philosophical tools in order to present an all-encompassing outlook of the law of historical process. To this purpose is directed the principal part of his work in the book *Scroll of the Revealer* in which he sought to predict the time of the future redemption.

In Bar Ḥiyya's view, one should look for the allusion to the end of days in Genesis rather than in the prophetic books. He assumed that there is a connection between the creation and the redemption. The redemption is the completion of creation, and history is the process in which everything that is given in creation moves from potentiality to actualization. This is the fundamental idea of Bar Ḥiyya's historiosophy. To explain his assumption he used the Aristotelian notions of form and matter, but he took them out of their original context. In his view, God presented the whole future that would be revealed in human history implicitly in the work of creation, just as the plant is found entirely in the seed, so that humanity should arrive at perfection in gradual stages. To be sure, in Aristotle's view all the world's creatures proceed from

² The wholesale destruction of the gentiles is a deviation from the standard Jewish view that "the righteous of the gentiles have a portion in the World to Come." (LL)

potentiality to actuality, but this is a cyclical process that repeats itself and does not advance humanity beyond a delimited, finite horizon. Cultures also develop and decline, and later cultures do not achieve any greater perfection than the earlier ones. But Bar Ḥiyya did not share Aristotle's view. In his view, the time required for full actualization is the whole sweep of human history. There is no cyclicity, but the line of development that ascends toward complete perfection is stretched to the end of days—all events of history must find their place and be interpreted within this scheme.

Determinism

This conception leads to the conclusion that history develops in accord with the logic of its own proper principle. If Aristotle consigned history to the realm of the accidental, Bar Ḥiyya believes in an absolute determinism. The course of history is determined in advance. This outlook was of course influenced by Bar Ḥiyya's interest in astronomy and astrology. The layout of the heavenly bodies determines the order of the times, and it is possible to read in them the fate of humanity, whether of peoples or individuals, from the beginning to the end of time. We have two tools for predicting the future: the book of Genesis on the one hand, and the configuration of the heavenly bodies on the other.

One may see in these theories a first draft of Halevi's historical outlook. Halevi also depicted a general process operating from the beginning to the end of time, but without historical determinism, without astrology, and with a substantially different view of the mission of Israel in the human context.

As we said, in Bar Ḥiyya's theory astronomy and astrology occupy a central place. He had recourse to them to prove that Christianity and Islam arrived during periods of decline, and that the suffering of exile and the ascendancy of the gentiles over the Jews were decreed in advance. Most of all, he thought that it was possible to deduce from astronomical laws how far each period was from the future end of days. On this basis he proved conclusively that the crises of his day fit the description of "the birth-pangs of the Messiah," and that the redemption would come very soon.

In all the respects that we have discussed, we can see here the inchoate beginnings of a historical way of thinking. The historical situation of the Jewish people and its religious fate became the subject of theological

thought. Consequently there emerged a historical-philosophical dimension in religious thought, and the historical elements that were unique to Judaism became a central topic. But the most important thinker who developed the historical model on a theoretical level that was influential for generations was R. Judah Halevi.

CHAPTER SIX

R. JUDAH HALEVI

Rabbi Judah Halevi was born about 1075 in Tudela in Christian Spain. He received his Jewish and scientific education in the centers of Jewish and philosophical learning of Arab Spain. He was a physician. It is clear from his work *The Kuzari* that he was well-versed in philosophy. After his studies he returned to Christian Spain. In 1140 he set out for his famous journey to Israel. He arrived in Egypt and spent some time there in preparation for the final stage of his journey. We have ample information from the documents of the Cairo Genizah about the period that he was in Egypt, about his preparations and his departure by sea to Israel, apparently to Acre. According to an epistolary poem that was recently discovered in the Cairo Genizah, we may surmise that he arrived in Jerusalem in order to pray facing the site of the Temple, and it seems that he died there, though the circumstances of his death remain obscure.

The Relation of His Philosophical and Poetic Writings

R. Judah Halevi is known as one of the greatest Jewish poets. His poems were published widely and were included in the liturgy. His sole philosophical work, *The Kuzari* (or to give its full original title: *A Book of Proof and Argument on Behalf of a Despised Religion*) was secondary in its influence to his poetry, although it was one of the most influential philosophical works that shaped the conception of Judaism not only in the Middle Ages but also in modern times, to our own day.

The connection between the religious-experiential world of his poetry and that of his philosophy is obvious and pronounced, both as to the traditional Jewish themes developed in them and their expression of his personal religious experience. This experience was purposely laid out as the starting-point of his discursive work, and served as the basis of his consistent struggle against philosophy, turning its own conceptual tools against it.

The Kuzari

Halevi worked on his book for nearly twenty years. According to one of his letters, he began to write it as a response to the query by a Karaite thinker that was referred to him. As the argument against Karaism is focused in the third part of the *Kuzari*, and as this portion has an independent structure, we may assume that it was written first, and that later it was incorporated in the general structure of the book.

As we said, Halevi was born and lived most of his adult life in Christian Spain but was educated in Moslem Spain. The clash of the two worlds that were fighting a “holy war” against each other (speaking of the *reconquista*—the reconquest of Moslem Spain by the Christians with the force of a crusade) is important background for understanding Halevi’s theoretical work. We may say what we have said of R. Abraham bar Hiyya: he had issues to settle not only with Christianity alone or with Islam alone, but with the two religions together, arising from the experience of the bitter fate of the Jewish people, which was crushed between these two world powers.

In the *Kuzari*, there is sensitivity to the fact that the religious disputation is not only theological and dogmatic, but it is translated into the language of political and military confrontation. Supremacy and power have become a decisive argument in the controversy of the faiths, for victory in the battlefield was considered a victory for the religion of the victorious army, a proof that God was on their side.

In this context it is clear that a special sensitivity was raised concerning the situation of the Jewish people, situated between the two warring camps, persecuted by both, despised and humiliated by them, and unable to respond in the language of force. The historical question of the meaning of Exile became a vexing theological question. The experience of exile was sharpened not only by the persecutions themselves, but also by their religious implications.

This situation stands at the basis of the *Kuzari*. At first the Khazar king does not want to speak to a Jewish sage, because Judaism is so low in status. He relies on the testimonies of the Christian and Moslem faiths, which have divided the world between them and are at war with each other. He listens first to the Christian and the Moslem, until he is forced by the logic of the discussion to invite a Jewish sage. The Khazar king represents a typical stance toward Judaism which was doubtless a serious problem for the Jews themselves.

Halevi's response is based on the situation of the Jewish religion in his generation. He argued from the double standard that Christianity and Islam adopted to the Jewish sacred writings. On the one hand, they persecuted its current practitioners. In Halevi's view, the Jewish people's perseverance in the face of this trial attests to the superiority of their faith. Indeed, whoever studies the sources of Christianity and Islam in depth will find that their own saints valued perseverance in their holy faith, not territorial conquest. And now in that very generation, all the people of Israel withstood a similar trial and thus bore witness to the truth of their faith.

Similarly, Halevi countered the challenge of the wars of Christianity and Islam for the conquest of Jerusalem through the Jewish people's own initiative to return to the land of Israel in order to be redeemed in it. His pioneering migration to Israel was a call to his whole people, and he referred to it explicitly at the end of his book.

The Internal Confrontation

In addition to his struggle against Christianity and Islam, Halevi fought on two other fronts: against Karaism and against philosophy.

At the start of his book Halevi calls the Karaites "sectarians" (*minim*). In Halevi's late years, the Karaite community in Christian Spain was suppressed by the governments as a consequence of the intervention of the rabbinic Jewish leadership. But before that, there was a strong Karaite community, and there were many disputations between them and the rabbanite Jews.

As we said, Halevi began to write his book as a response to a Karaite sage, and he devoted the entire third portion of the book to this debate. We may say that he was fighting on an internal front as well as the external. In truth, despite his unequivocal rejection of the Karaite position in his book, his relation to the Karaites was not one of total rejection. He adopted some of the Karaites' arguments, and he was close to them on the issues of the land of Israel and mourning for Zion, for the Karaites were more zealously committed to the return to Zion and mourning the destruction than the rabbinic Jews of his time.

The Confrontation with Philosophy

On the fourth front, Halevi contended with philosophy, or more precisely with Aristotelianism. We should stress that Halevi appreciated the

merits of Aristotelianism as the most convincing philosophic method, in contrast to the Arabic Kalam and the neo-Platonic philosophers. In this respect the confrontation was bound up with his agreement with a part of the philosophical argument, as we shall see later.

Halevi is the first Jewish thinker who contended with the dangers that philosophy presented for the religious life, based on his thorough acquaintance with Aristotelian philosophy. He was the first to testify that the Aristotelian movement had already penetrated deeply and was influencing the community of Jews with a general education.

Halevi felt that Aristotelian metaphysics presented an intellectual alternative to revealed religion. It posed a threat to belief in a personal God, in prophecy conceived as transmitting the word of God to humanity, in revealed Torah, and in the absolutely binding character of its commandments. Nevertheless, he recognized the achievements of Aristotelianism, especially in the sciences, and he recognized in effect that there were areas in which its path was the way to the truth. What is more, he developed his own views, in his fashion, on the basis of principles that he appropriated critically from Aristotelian philosophy.

The Polemical Motive in the Kuzari

The need to confront these four antagonists of Judaism is declared explicitly in the introduction to the *Kuzari*:

People asked me what arguments and refutations I have to present against those who differ from us among the philosophers, the [other] Scriptural faiths, and the sectarians who disagree with the mass of Jews....

The philosophers are the Aristotelians; the other Scriptural faiths are the Christians and Moslems; and the sectarians are the Karaites.

The fruit of this fourfold disputation must necessarily be a book that is polemical and apologetic. The title of the book testifies to this, for it is directed “on behalf of the despised religion”—in other words, as an “apologia.” Indeed, one ought not to treat the *Kuzari* as a philosophical work. It was not intended as such, and it does not regard the status of a philosophical work as a virtue to boast of.

Nevertheless, it is proper to discuss this work in the context of the history of Jewish philosophy no less than the works of Saadia, Bahya, Ibn Gabirol, and Bar Hiyya, maybe even more so. The disputation against the four opponents is not carried out separately, but is integrated in the statement of a single standpoint against all the avenues

of attack on rabbinic Judaism. As a result of this systematic integration, the emphasis is placed on the construction and justification of the Jewish conception and not on external polemical considerations. The religious debate is framed in the terms of the philosophic debate. Aristotelianism is set in the focal point of the discussion, out of the assumption that rejection of the Aristotelian position on the basis of the Jewish religious outlook is the basis for all the other lines of argument. The debate with the Aristotelian position is framed on the basis of intimate knowledge of it, using premises that were taken from it. In other words, in his refutation of the philosophical position, Halevi proceeds as a philosopher.

Halevi's Sources

The result of this composite literary structure is a body of thought that is clearly unique and quite original. Some see in Halevi the most profound thinker who lived in the Middle Ages. It is impossible to count him in any of the general schools that stood at the focus of religious thought in this period—the Kalam, the neo-Platonists, or the Aristotelians—even though Halevi came in contact with all of them and learned from all of them. He sought to base himself directly on the testimony of the Torah and to voice its own outlook in matters of history, social values, and religious observance fully and directly.

Structure of Dialogue in the Kuzari

Understanding the literary structure of the book is a precondition for understanding its contents, for it follows directly from the process of his thought.

The book is structured as a dialogue between the Khazar king and the Jewish “ḥaver.”¹ It is based on the historical narrative of the conversion of the Khazars as it was recounted in the famous correspondence that took place between R. Samuel the Prince and the king of the Khazars in his time. But we should note that Halevi made use only of the fact the king of the Khazars, who was originally an idolator, adopted the Jewish religion as the result of a conversation with a Jewish sage,

¹ *Ḥaver*: the term denotes a fellow of a Talmudical academy, or scholar-rabbi.

and made it the religion of his kingdom. All the rest of the details of the frame-narrative are the deliberate literary artifice of Halevi, and important for understanding his purpose.

According to the frame-narrative, the Khazar king had a prophetic dream that recurred night after night. In his dream an angel appeared to him and said, "Your intention is pleasing, but your deeds are not pleasing." The king finally realized that he was being required to change his religion to one of the religions that were to be found around him, and it was up to him to choose which was the true religion that the angel intended. For that purpose he conversed first with a philosopher, then with a Christian sage and a Moslem sage, and finally with a Jewish sage who is called the *haver* (scholar-rabbi), who successfully persuaded him to accept his religion.

The king then switched in his role from searcher to student and asked various questions that pertain to the Torah and the fate of the Jewish people. The scholar-rabbi responded to these questions, but we should note that the Khazar king did not turn into a submissive student. He remained a king with an independent, critical mind. A true dialogue ensues, and the question is whether there is a methodical structure in the transition between one subject and the next and in the manner of the deliberation.

Given that Halevi began the composition of his work as an answer to the question of a Karaite, it follows that Part 3, which is the focus of the debate with Karaism, was the first part that he wrote. Afterwards he wrote the four other parts and combined what was written first in the place that seemed most appropriate to him. Nevertheless, Part 3 has an independent dialogue structure, and the seam binding it is artificial, for it repeats what was said earlier in the present edited format; one also detects a digression from the general progression of the discussion. Also from a literary standpoint there appear to be signs of late "stitching." At the end of Part 2 and Part 3, for example, Halevi is forced to draw a connection between the order of topics, which he does not need to do in the transition between Parts 1 and 2, or between Parts 4 and 5.

Examples from Part 3

Part 3 is worth examining, because it sheds light on Halevi's method in the other parts, and especially on his relationship to Platonic dialogue, which influenced the medieval writers of philosophical dialogue gener-

ally. Plato used this literary form with a definite artistic goal. His dialogues typically include a dramatic sub-plot, and in order to understand the author's intention one must interpret the words of the characters with reference to their role in the story. Medieval philosophical dialogue generally loses this literary plasticity (as we showed by example with reference to Gabirol's *Fountain of Life*). An authoritarian teacher-student relationship takes the place of true dialogue. We cannot say that Halevi avoids this tendency entirely. The "scholar" speaks from an authoritative position, as one learned in Torah, and as a Jew for whom the Torah was given. But as we saw, the scholar needed to prove his authority to the king throughout the first half of the first part, and in the following parts the dialogical relationship is preserved, for the king is an independent student who has his own expectations and prior positions stemming from his previous spiritual journey. Even when he is sure that the scholar will find an answer to his questions, he presses him on issues that truly bother him, and he is not satisfied as long as his doubts are not fully resolved. Moreover, the scholar-rabbi, who has become the king's teacher, is not inclined to give frontal lectures like the teacher of the *Fountain of Life*. He has an ironic attitude to his student, in a positive way. Sometimes he will say something to provoke him to a question or to a certain reaction, and sometimes he avoids a direct answer in order to suggest a condition to a forthcoming response. Sometimes he sets up a test for his student to determine how ready he is for a more forthright revelation. These quirks of the student and of the teacher bring life to the dialogue throughout the work, so that Halevi comes close to the spirit of his Platonic prototype.

Part 3 is of interest from the perspective of a particular famous Platonic dialogue. The king asks in what way one should serve God according to the Torah. The question is clearly addressed to the controversy with the Karaites, who dissented from the oral Torah and its prescribed way of worship. In opposition to the oral Torah, the Karaites proposed direct rational understanding of the Biblical text. Halevi wished to prepare the groundwork for this discussion, but he approached it from a very remote avenue.

In his first answer to the king's question, the rabbi gave a negative answer. He first criticized the ascetic methods of the Christian monks and the Moslem Sufis, which were generally regarded as shining examples of devoted worship of God. Jews do not practice such things, and the king might think from this that the Christians and Moslems surpass the Jews in their devotion, while the rabbi would appear close

to the philosophic outlook in its advocacy of the golden mean and its rejection of asceticism. The rabbi was then at pains to explain the difference between the habits of the Jewish pietists of Temple times and current diaspora practice. He did so in order to explain incidents in the Bible that appeared like extreme asceticism, such as Moses's seclusion in Mount Sinai for forty days and nights without food and water, or the prophet Elijah's ascetic fasts. Halevi maintained that this was not ascetic monasticism but rather a high degree of spirituality. We are speaking of individuals whose spirit was detached from their bodies, so they did not suffer at all from their fasts, for they transcended their bodily needs. But it was only possible to achieve such an exalted state by way of a special connection between God and His people, which ceased with the destruction of the Temple. It was not possible in exile. In order to corroborate these reports, which might seem sensational and incredible to the Khazar, Halevi cited the conduct of the students of Socrates. They also secluded themselves in the company of their students in order to arrive at a spiritual state, not for abstinence's sake. Now the king ventures to ask about the worship of the pious individual at the present time, and instead of answering directly, the rabbi cleverly asks the king what is the correct conduct for a ruler towards his realm. As a king he should know this, but clearly in the rabbi's view the rule of a righteous king over his realm should be a proper example of the correct service toward the King of the world: the pious person should be strictly in control over all his soul's faculties, in order to be devoted to his creator and perform His commandments. This presents an instructive parallel to the opening of Plato's *Republic*, but the argument is in the reverse order. Plato considered an individual's control over the soul's faculties as paradigmatic of the proper way to rule the state, whereas the rabbi wants to draw the lesson from the governance of the state to control of oneself. At any rate, it is clear that he uses the Platonic dialogue deliberately in order to go beyond it. The political order for him is a condition for the order above it. Indeed, on this point the king senses the trap that has been set for him, and he replies, "I did not ask about the ruler, but about the pious man." In other words, the question is about religious conduct. Of course the rabbi has expected this question, for by it the student has come to understand an important principle; one cannot simply equate the realm of political law or the realm of ethical conduct with the realm of religious conduct. These are separate domains. To be sure, ethical perfection is a prerequisite of religious perfection, but religious perfection is a separate realm, and it

must be considered in its own terms. The political and ethical realm are considered through reason, but the religious realm is based on revelation, which is beyond reason, though not in contradiction to it.

This dialogue assumed Plato's argument as its true starting-point, in order to surpass and transcend it, and this clarifies how the opening is connected with the Karaite debate. The Karaites argued that one can consider the Torah on a purely rational plane. Halevi sets the realm of worship outside of discussion based on rational principles. The principles here are taken on authority. In order to bring his student to this realization, the rabbi engages in a preparatory discussion, and once the principle has been clarified, one can move on to discuss the details.

The General Structure of the Book

The central thread of the book is the confrontation between the philosophical position, as ideally embodied in the Aristotelian system, and the religious-Torahitic position, represented ideally by the Torah itself.

Halevi's main exposition develops two motifs in parallel. On the one hand, he subjects Aristotelian philosophy to critical examination, and on the other hand he develops his original conception of prophecy. These two motifs progress side by side and shed light on each other. The more he fills out his conception of prophecy, the more he advances his argument against the Aristotelian position. If we examine the structure of the book with this in mind, we can identify a connected line of argument proceeding through parts 1, 2, 4, and 5 (skipping over Part 3 that was spliced in the middle).

The Progression of Argument in the Book

The lines of argument are laid out in Part 1 by the prophetic dream and the philosopher's speech: thesis and antithesis. As we shall see later, the philosopher's contentions are not refuted but circumvented. Halevi demonstrates the propriety of this procedure, but as a result all the discussions between the religious sages and the king are conducted in the shadow of the intellectual doubt that the philosopher has cast on revelation.

After the king has accepted Judaism on the basis of the certainty of the historical experience of the Sinai event (which is the foundational revelation on which all the monotheistic faiths rely), he asks the questions that arise from the troubling contradictions between the Torahitic

and philosophical positions. Thus in Part 2 he asks about the divine attributes, but the rabbi shrinks from it and responds briefly with the argument that this is a topic of secondary importance, in order to transition from this discussion to a discussion of the conditions for the existence of prophecy according to the Torah, for whatever we know about God comes from prophecy, not from philosophical analysis.

In Part 4 there arises the question of the divine names and the anthropomorphic images in the prophetic descriptions of God. This is a continuation of the discussion of the question, what we can know about God. The king asks the philosopher's questions, for this is what is familiar to him, while the rabbi responds on the basis of prophecy and explains the difference between it and philosophy, for in his view only from prophecy can we know the truth about God, who gave it.

Only after a thorough grounding of the theory of revelation is the rabbi prepared to confront the philosophical argument directly, in order to prove that this argument is not relevant as applied to the true religion, and this is the central thrust of Part 5.

Thus Halevi passes from the historical grounding of the truth of the Sinaitic revelation to the conditions of prophecy, and from the conditions of prophecy to the substance of prophecy. In similar fashion, he passes from circumvention of the Aristotelian position in Part 1 to contradiction of its theological premises in Part 5. In this way he describes a principled and systematic thought-process, despite apparent digressions to side issues, although the systematic presentation is not one of philosophy, but of religious thought based on revelation as an experienced fact.

The Frame Narrative: Why the Khazars?

We turn to a detailed examination of the structure of Part 1, in which the direction of the dialogue is set, along with the basis of its method.

Why did Halevi choose the conversion-story of the Khazarite king as his point of departure? We note first of all that this is not an attempt of the author to project the responsibility of his words onto a higher authority. The rabbi is an obvious literary device, and Halevi accepts full responsibility for every word that purportedly comes from his lips. He does not try to conceal the fact that this is a literary fiction. The intent is apologetic from the outset. Halevi wanted to exploit the fact that a powerful king, together with his people, accepted the Jewish

religion. He was not interested in demonstrating the physical strength of the Jewish people, but he wanted to show that despite Judaism's lowly status and the prejudice stemming from that fact, it prevailed. The conceit of the gentiles attests to their weakness, in contrast to the suffering (i.e., the weakness) of the Jews, who bear holy witness unto death to God's truth. Thus one accords proper credit to the proper status of the Christians and Moslems.

By means of the frame narrative Halevi wished to determine the topical framework of the debate. He did not want philosophy to be the privileged judge over religions, for in that way it would arrogate to itself a higher status than religion. But philosophy was itself on trial. Who, then, could be the objective judge? Halevi's brilliant solution was to find a man who was not a philosopher, but who also had no prior leaning toward any of the competing religions, an objective and discerning individual who nevertheless had a deep personal interest in the matter. Clearly, Halevi thus defined precisely the qualities that he sought in his readers.

The Ideal Student and Teacher

We now ask about the king's character: What are the qualities required of the ideal reader in order to judge Halevi's arguments fairly?

The Khazar is a righteous king. He rules his realm justly, and he also controls his passions. He is a pure-hearted man, well-intentioned and possessed of common sense. (He is *not* a professional philosopher!) He is also a person of deep religious sensitivity. These, then, are the qualities Halevi looks for in his ideal reader.

And what are the qualities of the "scholar-rabbi"—in other words, the author?

The rabbi is a sage of the Torah who also has a superior philosophical education and wide knowledge of other religions. He also has the qualities of an ideal teacher—he is patient; he can anticipate his student's reactions, for he is familiar with the stages of reasoning that he must go through to judge correctly. He elicits reactions and sets up situations that require deep, complex consideration in order to answer his questions. He exhibits another trait of the Socratic teacher, serving as midwife to his student to bring forth the truth, showing the student that he has already known the truth but was unaware of it for whatever reason.

We must add another quality of the ideal reader: he does not enter into consideration of matters of faith without prior preparation. As opposed to the philosophical starting-point which is the curiosity to know, Halevi poses as his starting-point a man who has had a prophetic dream. We readily see that the dream takes the place that revealed tradition plays in the origin of the historical religions. A true dream is after all a certain rung in the ladder of prophecy.²

Thus the consideration of religion begins not with a skeptical and curious intellectual attitude, but with direct religious experience. Still, we should remember that the religious experience of the Khazar king is entirely personal. Nobody else can share it, and so it is impossible through it to persuade anyone else but the dreamer, who alone has the basis to trust that he has dreamed a true dream.

Foundations of Religion

The dream establishes the starting-point of inquiry. It provides an indication of the basic assumptions of religion as it is simply accepted (and for Halevi, simple faith is the best kind!).

In the dream we find the following three assumptions:

1. The foundation of religion is experience (the dream).
2. Religious experience is self-validating (the dream recurs several times).
3. The content of religion is expressed in deeds (“Your intention is acceptable, but your deeds are unacceptable”).

Equipped with these three assumptions, the king sets forth to investigate what is the religion to which the angel refers. He clearly represents the book’s readers—Jews educated in the tradition (= dream), whose simple faith has been disturbed by the disputes with Christianity and Islam and by the philosophers’ arguments, so that they need theoretical reinforcement for it.

From this starting-point, the king’s actions and words follow naturally as a drama of errors that flow from his situation: in other words, the typical errors of an educated Jew of his generation, to whom Halevi directs his book, uncovering his errors in order to correct them.

² See Maimonides, *Guide* II, 45, degrees 2–6.

The King's First Mistake: Inviting the Philosopher and His Speech

The first mistake is turning to the philosopher. This is the original sin of Halevi's generation. Even though the educated Jew may be a dreamer, and the dream (i.e., religion) directs him to seek the true deeds, he nevertheless gives credence to the philosopher, who is adept neither in deeds nor in religious experience, as if the keys to the truth lie in his hands.

The Khazar king knows that the philosopher lacks the secret of true action. The formulation of his question attests to this, for he asks the philosopher only about his belief (in contrast to his approach to the Christian and the Moslem, whom he asks concerning their beliefs and practice). We may well ask: if the angel directed the king to inquire about correct religious practice, why did he turn to the philosopher, who belittles ritual, and frame his inquiry in terms of correct knowledge (corresponding to intention)? We may entertain two hypotheses. Firstly, he is required to leave behind his own tradition, and so he cannot rely on its beliefs in choosing a new, unfamiliar religion. It is thus natural that he will want to hear the view of an objective philosopher who operates out of universal considerations. Secondly, there is the high prestige in which philosophers are held on account of their knowledge and wisdom. When a lay person listens to them, he is convinced that they know the truth. It is only natural that the king will want to appraise what he had heard in his dream by the yardstick of experts in universal truth. This consideration reflects Halevi's own experience (and many of his contemporaries). In his youth he was attracted to the philosophers and learned their doctrines in order to appraise the truth of his own religion, and only after a process of learning and maturation did he take a critical position. This is represented in the person of the rabbi.

What did the king hear from the philosopher? The philosopher's speech at the opening of the *Kuzari* is a precise and accurate summary of the Aristotelian outlook on religious matters as it was expressed in the writings of the Arab commentator Al-Farabi. But Halevi arranges the philosopher's arguments so that they form an antithesis to the assumptions proceeding from the king's dream. The philosopher knows that there is an eternal God who is the cause of the world, but he rejects the notion of voluntary creation for a specified purpose. The world proceeds necessarily from God's essence, which is that of an intellect that knows itself and is concerned only with itself. Therefore God does not know the particulars of existence outside Himself.

He has no desire, for desire is a function of a creature who lacks external things and is dependent on them, whereas God is perfect and self-sufficient. In that case, it is clear that God does not issue commands, or exercise providence, or issue reward and punishment, or listen to prayer. In other words, we have here a systematic denial of the image of a personal God shared by all historical religions; all the rest follows from this. God “creates” only in a metaphysical sense, for He is the cause of existence. Prophecy is not the speech of God to humanity, but the human ascent to intellectual perfection. This—and not the service of God—is the goal and perfection of humanity. Immortality of the soul is immortality of the “acquired intellect,” in other words, a person’s achieving knowledge of eternal truths; an intellect that attains to such truths becomes immortal.

One may see in this philosophy an attempt to overcome the personal and particular character of human existence, rooted in our bodily nature. This is a transient existence, in contrast to the eternal aspect of humanity that one finds in universal reason. In that case, what matter the precepts of religion? In the philosopher’s view, they have only a political value. They unify the people and train them in obedience, and thus they aid the conduct of the state. They are useful in this regard and thus worthy of preservation. But all religions are equal in this regard; the philosopher advises the Khazar king to choose the religion that will seem most advantageous from political considerations.

The Basis of Halevi’s Method: The Opposition between Philosophy and Religion

When the philosopher arrives at this point, the opposition between his position and the dream has been laid bare. The philosopher’s position contradicts the assumption that there is a religious (ritual) practice that is true in itself. His views on prophecy contradict the truth of the king’s dream, which he regarded as prophetic, as well as the very assumption of divine revelation to human beings as an expression of God’s interest in humanity. Through his logical arguments, the philosopher has contradicted the basic assertions that are at the basis of religion in general.

In the philosopher’s speech, Halevi has thus demarcated the polar positions between which the intellectuals of his generation vacillated.

He set forth in perfect clarity the fundamental opposition between the religious position, which was the basis of social education and the political structure of medieval Europe, and the philosophical enlightenment. In contrast to the philosophical party, who were interested in obscuring the difference, if only for political reasons, Halevi wanted to highlight it, especially on those points where reconciliation seemed possible. The philosophers also affirmed God and prophecy in their way, and they spoke of the obligation of religious precepts. But Halevi wished to lay bare the fact that the God of the philosophers was not the God of the believers, that the philosophical notion of prophecy fell short of revelation, and that the purpose of the precepts in the philosophers' view was not religious. Precisely where they appeared similar, their absolute difference was exposed. Halevi relied on it.

The King's First Response

How does the king respond to this challenge? He is understandably thrown into confusion, for he has a solid basis for thinking that both the dream and the philosopher speak the truth. The dream is true because it has recurred repeatedly as a wholly tangible fact, and a rational person does not deny empirical certainty even if its causes are unknown to him. The philosopher's words are true, for they are logical and consistent and without any contradictions; his arguments force themselves on the intellect. Therefore the Khazar king says to the philosopher, "Your words are convincing, but they do not respond to my question." They are convincing, because they appear logical and the king cannot contradict them. But they do not respond to the question, because the question derives from the angel's words in the dream, and the king is sure that he saw an angel and heard his words.

It is possible to understand this antithetical opposition between the dream and philosophy as if we have two comprehensive truths presented to us, each well grounded, but with no reconciliation possible between them. This is how it appears from the king's vantage point, but we should emphasize that that is not how Halevi saw it.

In his view, the philosopher's views are not at all convincing. They only give the impression of truth. Halevi thus shows that the intellectuals of the generation give philosophy too much credit. Because its accomplishments in physical science are so impressive, people think that

its metaphysical and theological claims are equally demonstrative. But whoever examines their arguments more closely knows that they are full of contradictions, doubtful claims, and even absurdities.

All this will become clearer in Part 5. The king cannot know this yet because he is not expert in philosophy. He is also unable to communicate to another his confidence in the truth of his dream, because only he saw the dream, and therefore it possesses certainty only for him. The philosopher denies that this dream is revelatory. He considers it the fruit of the king's naïve imagination, and the king cannot convince him otherwise. The king thus lacks two attributes for standing up to the philosopher that the scholar-rabbi possesses: he lacks the necessary philosophical erudition, and he has no knowledge of religious experience that has universal validity.

The Point of the Confrontation: The Validity of Belief in Revelation

What is the way out? The king can circumvent the philosopher's words and give them no consideration, and to explain why he is entitled to do so. We thus arrive at Halevi's primary intention in creating this dramatic situation at the opening of his book: he is defining the crossroads which the member of his generation must confront. Most people are unable to deal with the philosopher's speech, and they are entitled to decide that the philosophical discussion has no weight for them one way or the other. In other words, they must decide on the basis of the intrinsic validity of the religious experience itself. They will not arrive at this through accepting the philosopher's argument or through contradicting it. The religious experience is to be accepted *a priori*. This is a prior experience and decision, and that is the course that the king takes after his first mistake. He hesitantly returns to the right path, but he makes a few more false turns, though with lesser consequences.

The Arguments that the King Raises against the Philosopher

1. The philosopher's arguments contradict what he heard in his dream.
2. According to the Christians and the Moslems, who fight each other over the correctness of their mode of action, there is a correct mode of action. The Christians and Moslems comprise the majority, whereas the philosopher is in a minority.
3. Prophecy, as described in Scripture, is given not to philosophers, but to those persons whom God has chosen.

All these arguments have a basis of truth, but they lack demonstrative force, and the philosopher need not accept them. The evidence of Christianity and Islam is correct insofar as he regards experience as a criterion of truth, but the king uses this in a way that Halevi cannot accept. The king will use the consensus of the majority as a reason to forgo consulting a Jew. Halevi would be able to identify with the philosopher's ironical response: "The Christians and Moslems are fighting with and slaughtering each other, so how can they both be right?"

The last argument concerning the prophets is correct, of course, but in order to convince the philosopher of it one would have to validate historical prophecy and explain it from the religious perspective. Until this is done, the philosopher could argue: "Whoever is not a philosopher, is not a prophet." But the king is not able to provide comprehensive historical evidence or a substantive religious explanation, for he was not educated in a revealed religious tradition.

Therefore the result of their encounter is that the two part without influencing each other. The philosopher is sure of his own position (and rightly, for he has heard nothing that should change his position), and the king is sure of his (and rightly, for from his personal standpoint he cannot deny the truth of his dream).

Thus the primary decision has been made in the direction of religious experience. The king has passed his first test and corrected his first mistake. But only after he recognizes the true religion will he be able to take issue with the philosopher's views of religion and refute them.

In addition to the primary importance of the decision between religious experience and rational argument, Halevi has succeeded in using the polar confrontation between the philosophical and religious positions in order to suggest rational criteria by which it will be possible to decide which of the competing religions is the true one, but without making the philosopher the judge. How? We pay attention to the lesson that the king derived from his encounter with the philosopher. Had he not had a prophetic experience that was valid from his point of view, he would have had to agree with the philosopher that all religions are based on illusion and error. Revelation is at best error borne of naiveté. Nevertheless, his experience was private, and so he could not convince the philosopher. This means that only a religion that is based on revelatory experience that can be proven in the manner that one proves scientific experience publicly and not just for a single scientist can one withstand the doubt that philosophy raises against it. It follows that when he stands and listens to the presentations of the various religious

sages, he will have to confront them with this philosophical argument and to observe if they are able to counter it in a way that will convince him. This is a huge polemical achievement. Halevi was able to use a philosophical argument to refute Christianity and Islam, without having to adopt philosophy as a basis of the Jewish religion.

The King's Second Mistake

The king's first mistake was to invite the philosopher even though the dream pointed him to the sages of the religions. The king's second mistake was that he preferred to turn first to a Christian sage and then to a Moslem sage. He should first have turned to the Jewish religion, if only because it preceded the other two historically. (After all, it was for this reason that he invited the Christian before the Moslem.) Moreover, both these religions claimed to be the legitimate heirs of Judaism. Nevertheless, the king thought that he could skip the Jewish religion because its adherents are few and it is lowly and despised. Therefore he turned to the strong reigning religions.

This is an error in judgment that one may see as typical for a king who is asking about a religion with political needs in mind. Halevi saw it, however, as a typical and natural error for his contemporaries, that he wanted to address at the beginning just as he needed to address the Jewish intellectuals' admiration of philosophers. Still, this error was less grave than the previous. The king turns now to the religions which have a teaching about correct practice, and this is in keeping with what was said to the king in his dream. This is recognizable also in the formulation of his question—for now he has asked about both belief and practice.

The speeches of the Christian and the Muslim are carefully thought out. In a certain respect they argue the opposite of the philosopher's position, presenting religion as revealed in all its aspects. But they are also similar to the philosopher's in method. They start out with beliefs that they present as universally valid: God is presented as the Creator who governs all humanity, not as the particular God of Christians or Moslems. The full implications of this procedure are revealed after we read the words of the rabbi, who starts in a totally different way, as we shall observe later. The speeches of the religious sages each consist of two parts. One part is compatible with Judaism. The other part is opposed both to Judaism and to philosophy, though Judaism is hardly identical to philosophy. Thus there is established an opening position for confronting the two rival historical faiths.

The Christian and Moslem Positions

Halevi presents the theology of Christianity and Islam with admirable brevity, just as he had presented the philosophical position, in a systematic, compact and correct fashion. He represents these faiths accurately but ignores the divergent streams that comprise them and focuses on their basic common elements. Though he is portraying dogmatic faiths that he regards as mistaken, there is no trace of irony in his words, but he tries to present their doctrines just as a believing Christian and Moslem would present them. This is no game, but a faithful expression of his outlook. Rationalist criticism of Christianity in particular can present it in a mocking fashion. Jewish polemicists were in the habit of doing this. But Halevi was well aware that the same method could easily be employed against Judaism. All religions have non-rational elements, for that is their nature. If he were to mock the rival faiths, he would himself be falling into the trap of philosophical rationalism.

As we said, we can divide each speech into two parts. The first part includes the fundamental assumptions of religion in general and the historical premises that each religion has in common with Judaism (for they were adopted from it): the creation of the world, God as creator, Biblical history, and the revelation of God to Israel. To be sure, there are dogmatic differences between the Christian and Moslem sage in the first part of their speeches as well. The Christian does not mention the unity and incorporeality of God, but only His eternity and role as Creator. The Moslem emphasizes God's unity and the denial of God's corporeality. This difference is not accidental, but is rooted in the essential difference between the two faiths. But it is characteristic that Halevi does not remark on this difference between Christianity on the one hand and Judaism and Islam on the other in the first part of his speech. Although he does not have the Christian mention divine unity and incorporeality, he refrains from portraying Christianity as problematic in these respects. Thus in the first part of their speeches the Christian's and Moslem's views appear compatible with the Jewish outlook. This fact emphasizes the intention of Halevi's literary structure. He sought first to establish the common elements of the faiths, so that he could point to the dependence of the two later faiths on their Jewish source.

In the second part Halevi emphasizes these two faiths' points of departure from Judaism. Here he has the Christian remark on the divine incarnation in the person of Jesus, the Virgin Birth, the Trinity, the crucifixion, and the claim that Christianity supersedes Judaism and that

Christians are the true Israel in spirit. In the Moslem's speech Halevi emphasized the belief in the divine revelation of the Koran, whose divine character is self-evident; the belief that the Koran supersedes the previous scriptures; and the belief in bodily reward and punishment in the world to come. Thus the second parts of the Christian and Moslem speeches depart from the historical basis of Judaism, in which is focused Halevi's dispute with them.

Thus the king's mistake is uncovered: he skipped the Jewish religion because of its lowly position in the present, but from the words of the religious sages to whom he turned it becomes clear that were it not for Judaism, there would be no Christianity or Islam. This is the dramatic paradox to which Halevi builds. It becomes clear that the despised religion is honored even by those who disparage it. Its tenets, which seemed superfluous, are the root, the foundation. We will encounter this kind of dramatization repeatedly throughout the book. This is Halevi's classic apologetic tactic.

The Demand for Historical Certainty

In parallel to his reaction to the philosopher's words, the king does not contradict the words of the sages of the two religions, but he cannot accept them either. He remains in doubt. But the parallel to his response to the philosopher's words reflects a different situation. The philosopher's convincing words tend to undermine the principal tenets voiced by the religious sages. This is especially obvious in the case of the Christian sage, so that the Khazar king says, "Reason contradicts these things." In the case of the Moslem he is especially sensitive to the premise that God has converse with human beings. What he had heard from the philosopher renders this possibility unlikely, and therefore he cannot receive the religious sages' claims. But he cannot refute them either, because given the opposition between his dream and the philosopher's arguments, and his preference for the truth revealed in the dream despite the philosopher's criticism, he cannot dismiss the religious sages' claims entirely. Therefore he says, "This is no place for reason." In place of rational explanation, he demands from the sages religious certainty that is rooted in experience, and his chief complaint against them is that they have not provided this certainty. How can he believe in the truth of a religious history replete with strange matters in which he was not raised, whose sources are a closed book to him?

The purpose of Halevi's narrative structure is thus clarified. It is to enable the king to deduce for himself that whatever the Christian and Moslem say, other than their verification of the Mosaic Torah, lacks the certainty of universal historical experience. The Khazar king considers that both Christianity and Islam are historically based on Judaism. They continue in its path and rely on it. If he wishes to examine the validity of their claims in their own right, he must examine their historical basis, which is the Jewish religion. Therefore he suspends his discussion with them without either accepting or rejecting them. He must investigate further, and this investigation inevitably leads him to the religion that he originally sought to omit.

The Opposition between Philosophy and Religion

By means of his well-thought-out literary structure Halevi succeeded in avoiding having to set up the philosopher as the final arbiter of the truth-value of the religions. Reason cannot determine which religion is true, for the philosopher's reason contradicts all the historical religions.

Nevertheless, Halevi succeeded in making purposive use of the philosophical method in his debate among the religions and to exploit it to his needs. Philosophy casts doubt and demands the verification that is to be found in experience. In Halevi's view, neither Christianity nor Islam can offer experiential verification in and of themselves, for both rely on the religion of Israel. Whoever wishes to investigate them must investigate the Israelite religion first, in order to verify them.

Clearly, even if we succeed in verifying the divine revelation to Israel, we can only provide a basis for what Christianity and Islam have in common with Judaism, i.e. only the first portion in the speeches of the religious sages. In the point at which they depart from the Jewish tradition, historical verification is denied them, and they remain suspended in a doubtful status. Only the Jewish religion verifies itself through its own history. Only it offers a certain alternative to philosophical reason.³

³ It is noteworthy that in the 18th century in his book *Jerusalem* Moses Mendelssohn would juxtapose "truths of reason" and "historical truths" as the two important dimensions of teaching in religious doctrine. In Mendelssohn's view, all religions were basically united in teaching the "truths of reason" (God, freedom, immortality, and basic ethics), while they differed in the "historical truths" that were unique to each tradition (the Sinai revelation, the Incarnation and Resurrection, the prophecy of Mohammed, etc.). In Mendelssohn's view (unlike Halevi's), there was no way of rationally establishing the universal validity or preference of one religion's "historical truth" over another;

Attack on the Authenticity of Christianity and Islam

There follows from here an important difference that pertains to the relationship between Judaism on the one hand and Christianity and Islam on the other. In Halevi's view, these are not entirely false religions. They have a portion of truth, but they have added to that truth some mistaken elements that mar it. However, it is especially important that in his criticism of the "untrue" elements in these religions, he does not impugn their religious sincerity. The believers in Christianity and Islam direct their thoughts in a pure spirit to the true Creator God, Who reveals and exercises providence, not to the God of the philosophers. His essential criticism is directed at their ritual practices, which differ from the Jewish religion because they are not the command of God. The books on which that ritual is based—the New Testament and the Koran—are not the divine word. More precisely, in Halevi's view they cannot be demonstrated by experience to be the word of God.

Thus Halevi's argument is that Christianity and Islam are a counterfeit addition to the true Jewish religion. Originally there was a partial similarity between Christianity and Judaism (and it was possible then to describe the Christians as gentiles who had accepted the basic ethical commandments). But afterwards, in the course of appealing to the masses, it absorbed elements of idolatrous worship so that the source became entirely falsified. Since it is Halevi's fundamental assumption that the essential criterion of true religion is not correct intention but correct action, it follows that this basic error, which consists in a departure from the correct ritual and religious way of life, must result in ultimate sin. One can only arrive at religious perfection through the right deeds.

Nevertheless, Halevi envisions the possibility that these religions may become purified of their adulterations and return to their perfect source—Judaism. To give substance to this idea he offers the parable of the seed (Israel) that originally appeared to be rotting in the earth, but in time to come it will succeed in sprouting and producing trees like itself. (We should point out that the source of this parable is in the New Testament!)

they thus had to agree to disagree. Mendelssohn's philosophy would lay the basis for the liberal pluralism characterizing modern Western societies such as France, England, and the United States. (LL)

Deviant Sects in Judaism

In the same way—and in a train of association that is instructive—Halevi deals with all the sects that split off from Judaism. Jeroboam the son of Nebat was one of the first to lead Israel astray, and though he deviated somewhat from correct ritual practice, nevertheless in Halevi's view he was faithful to the Mosaic Torah in its essentials. This can be said even more truly of the Karaites, who departed from the Oral Torah tradition, which was also given at Sinai. The emphasis is on the authenticity of practice, to which only prophetic authority, verified historically, can attest. In Halevi's view, such verification can be found only in the Jewish religion.

Thus we return to the basic antithesis with which we started: On the one hand, religious experience that is self-verifying; on the other hand, philosophical teaching that is verified through reason. But in place of the prophetic dream, we must put revelation, which has the force of generalized experience.

Verification of the Sinaitic Revelation

How is the Jewish religion verified by historical experience that is universally valid?

We shall attempt to answer this question by looking at the continuation of the drama. We saw that the king was forced to correct his second error after his conversations with the Christian and the Moslem. He had to investigate the truth of Judaism, if only to weigh the claims of Christianity and Islam. It would turn out that the religion that was originally despised would turn out to be the most important. But this conclusion is not arrived at directly either. It must also be approached by a route that is dramatically crafted and fraught with significance.

The scholar-rabbi opens his presentation as follows:

We believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who led the Israelites out of Egypt with signs and miracles; who fed them in the desert and gave them the land of Canaan, after having made them traverse the sea and the Jordan in a miraculous way; who sent Moses with His Torah, and subsequently thousands of prophets, who exhorted the people to follow His Torah, promising reward to those who observed it and severe punishment to the disobedient. We believe in all that is written in the Torah—a great deal to speak of.⁴

⁴ *Kuzari* I, 11.

This is the essence of the rabbi's dogma, and the difference between his speech and that of the previous religious sages is clear. The Jewish sage omits the theoretical preamble, and plunges right into the historical narrative. He presents the Torah's testimony in its entirety as indisputable truth.

Why does he follow this procedure? Is it because he does not believe in the origin of the world, its creation, or the unity and incorporeality of God?

This is certainly not the case. He believes in all these things, and he believes that these truths are included in Moses's Torah, which he has accepted in its entirety. But precisely because he accepts these truths as items included in the Mosaic Torah, he is not ready to start out with them, for the Torah validates them—they do not validate the Torah.

The sages of the other religions begin with theological truths lacking any connection with revelation, and then it is possible to discuss their premises by way of reason, and it is very doubtful whether they may be rescued from philosophical doubt. By contrast, the rabbi starts from historical experience—from God's direct revelation to the Israelite people when they left Egypt, the giving of the Torah and the prophecy that exhorts them to observe the Torah.

The Most Ironic Turn in the Comedy of Errors

We stand now before the third stage, the most ironic of all, in the comedy of errors that comprises Part I.

It is clearly evident that the beginning of the rabbi's speech is nothing else than a parallel to the Khazar king's opening soliloquy—in other words, a parallel to the dream that is a stand-in for revelation. Furthermore, the king is just now emerging dissatisfied from his conversations with the Christian and the Moslem. He sought a verification of historical experience, and since he did not wholly find it in their words, he turned to the Jewish sage. At first sight he ought to have been overjoyed with the rabbi's words that presented to him exactly what he was looking for, but the Khazar king's reaction is the opposite from the expected. Precisely these words strengthen him in his prior assessment that he ought not to have investigated the Jewish religion:

I had decided not to inquire of a Jew, because I knew of their wretched reputation and lack of sense, for poverty and degradation left them with no good virtues. Should you not have said, O Jew, that you believe in God the Creator of the World, Who orders it and guides it, who has created

you and provided for you, and such like claims, which are the standard argument of any religious believer?⁵

The Khazar king prefers after all the opening of the two previous religious sages, even though they could not satisfy him! This is clearly a mistake. Its irony is especially sharp, because it stands in such clear opposition to what the king is seeking, based on his dream and his previous conversations.

And it is in fact clear that this mistake is not accidental. The king's mistake is understandable from his dream and his situation. He stands outside the domain of the particular history of the Israelite religion, and therefore he asks concerning the universal, concerning that in which he is able to participate directly as a human being. That is why he turned first to the philosopher; that is why he skipped over the Jew, who represents a despised minority. That is why he turns on the Jewish sage when he first hears the exclusive doctrine of the chosen people: "I see you quite altered, O Jew, and your words are poor after having been so rich."⁶

In all this we see again the general tendency of the contemporary Jewish intellectual. He seeks a universal basis for religion, and here comes Judaism and bases its verification on particular historical experience—the experience of a small, oppressed people.

The Contrast between Judaism's Importance and Its Lowly Status

If we examine the meaning of this process in depth, then the king's hostile response in the first exchange with the rabbi becomes more understandable.

Halevi prepares us to expect in the rabbi's historical opening the only available way out of doubt in the area of religious life, and despite this he prepares us for the king's initial disappointment. This is the visible surface of an inner paradox that constitutes Halevi's religious doctrine.

Why was the king not satisfied with the words of the Christian and Moslem sages? Because they did not provide sufficient experiential verification. Why could not the historical experience to which they pointed

⁵ *Kuzari* I, 12.

⁶ *Kuzari* I, 28.

satisfy him? Because it lacks universal validity. He himself cannot participate in this experience! Here is what he says to the Christian:

As for me, I cannot accept these things, because they are new to me and I have not grown up with them.⁷

And to the Moslem scholar he says:

And if your book is a miracle and it is in the Arabic language, a foreigner such as I cannot recognize its miraculous character, for when it is read to me I cannot hear any difference between it and any other discourse in Arabic.⁸

The king demands historical verification that will be recognized universally. This requires verification before the masses. To be sure, the Christian and Moslem start with universal premises, but they conclude with particular evidences that are based on their own religious education and are unable to persuade an outsider.

That is the reason why the king reacted negatively to the rabbi's words. He does not feel that he has been given an adequate answer to his question, for it seems at the outset that this answer too is based on a particular tradition that does not address him.

The Nature of the Paradox: Particular Experience, but Universally Valid

And this is the paradox: In order for the experientially-based answer to be persuasive, it must be based on a given particular experience—an event that occurred to certain individual human beings. But nevertheless it must be meaningful and available for verification by anyone. Such an experience is possible only if we are speaking of certain individuals who have a special status for humanity, people whose existence and collective experience as a people has meaning for all human beings, in other words, a special (“chosen”) people, whose every happening affects everyone directly, so it comes about that everyone recognizes it.

Halevi was one of the most enthusiastic proponents of the Chosen People idea and one of its greatest interpreters. This message is already hinted at in the rabbi's opening lines. But the message is composite. Just as he sought to demonstrate that the religion that appears despised and far from the truth is alone true and honorable, so he sought to

⁷ *Kuzari* I, 5.

⁸ *Kuzari* I, 6.

prove that the religion that appears the most particularistic of all is truly universal in content and universally valid, while other religions that pretend to universality and hold sway over the world are only the product of historical accidents and incapable of imparting universal validity to their experience.

Halevi's paradox stands out in the very attempt to persuade a non-Jew of the truth of the religion that is unique to the Jewish people. Only from the assumption that this particular identity has universal validity and meaning is it possible to explain this unusual confrontation. The paradox is manifested also in Halevi's depiction of the conversion to Judaism of a man who in principle cannot be a Jew in the perfect sense because he was not born Jewish.⁹

The Historical Verification of the Sinai Revelation

The rabbi was easily able to show the king that in effect he was asking him to begin his words in a manner proper to a philosophical argument fraught with many doubts, and that only in his way was it possible to arrive at that experiential certainty that the king was seeking. He thus demonstrated that the difference between the rabbi's opening speech and the opening speeches of the previous religious sages establishes the superiority of the rabbi's approach.

He opened with a historical event that occurred before the whole Israelite people. Crowds of people were present to witness it. What persuades the Jew to believe in the Mosaic Torah is an experience that occurred before an entire people, and in our time not only can all Jews know of it, but all humanity, on the basis of incontrovertible historical evidence.

On what basis do Jews rely on their tradition? Halevi's answer is: on the basis of the universal consensus of the parents and teachers of every Jewish person, who all received the same tradition based on the unanimous testimony that was handed down from generation to generation. But we should add that in each and every generation this testimony was verified by the life experience of all who testified that through their observance of the commands of the Torah they merited

⁹ We should observe that Halevi's view of the imperfect Jewish status of converts (see *Kuzari* I, 27) is his individual view and not the official view of Judaism, which generally recognizes converts as fully Jewish in all respects. (LL)

the same experience of God's presentness to His people through their study and their prayer. We should emphasize that Halevi expressed in this claim a consensus that passed from generation to generation without challenge. This consensus was not challenged until the foundations of Jewish communal authority were challenged. For that reason it was entirely persuasive in the eyes of Jews who were educated in the Jewish community from birth. Only when the authority of the tradition was challenged, and scientific (secular) historical scholarship raised doubts as to the reliability of the facts to which the tradition attested, then Jews also started to ask questions and to deny the authority of the testimony that affirmed the Sinaitic revelation from generation to generation.

This certainty is expressed in the rabbi's speech, but Halevi may well have understood that the validity of the tradition for a Jew who was raised in Judaism would have been different from its validity for a person such as the Khazar king who was raised in a different religious tradition, and who is seeking universal validation for the particular tradition to which the rabbi testifies. He is therefore not satisfied with the occurrence of the Sinai revelation in the sight of the Israelite people, but he tries to demonstrate that the fundamentals of this tradition are based on the culture of all humanity, and there is a universal tradition that testifies to it.

Halevi's Historical Outlook

Judaism is the Foundation of Human Culture

The king, though critical, was persuaded that it would be worthwhile to listen to a long and complicated lecture from the rabbi after he was convinced of his error in angrily rejecting words that answered to his expectations. But we should note that the king still does not convert. Before he takes this step, he must be convinced that the revelation of which the rabbi speaks relates to him as well. For he has a stake in the historical experience attesting to it insofar as he is human, without tie to the people and lineage that was educated in it. This is indeed the first discussion in which the rabbi begins propounding his special doctrine: the place of the Israelite religion in the development of general human culture.

The assumption which Halevi seeks to establish through his historical digression is that the Israelite religion is rooted in that single primordial

bedrock from which all national cultures developed. He bases himself of course on the historical evidence of the book of Genesis. But since the Khazar king still needs to be persuaded of the objective reliability of this testimony, the rabbi must resort to evidences relating to the foundational points of agreement of all cultures. First he deals with the question of language—the instrument by whose help culture is formed. How did the various national languages come to be? Languages are consensual verbal-symbolic structures. But it is impossible to come to consensus without the facilitation provided by language itself. This is a vicious circle from which one cannot escape without assuming that at the basis of all languages was one language not created by human beings but given to them. This language (argues the rabbi) is Hebrew, and this is attested not only by the Genesis narrative, but also by its special linguistic qualities. (Halevi devotes a detailed discussion to this topic, which we pass over here.) From Hebrew, all other languages were derived (referring to the Tower of Babel story). The rabbi notes that despite the great differences among national cultures, there is universal agreement on certain basic issues, such as the decimal system of numbering, counting time by weeks, months and years, etc. Such agreements can only be explained on the assumption that all cultures proceeded from one mother-culture, to which the Torah testifies. Only after the Khazar king was persuaded that the Genesis narrative relates to him as a cultural human being and testifies about the development of the culture in which he himself was raised, was he finally persuaded that he should accept the Israelite religion in order to learn the Torah properly, as an insider learning the basics of his own culture.

The Importance of Study of History

From what we have said before we can learn the importance that Halevi attributed to the study of history. God is revealed in history. The Torah that is the foundation of Judaism was revealed in historical time and verified by history. Through historical testimony we can distinguish between the original religion and the religions that seek to displace it. The centrality of the Israelite people and its Torah—its status as chosen people—is expressed in the centrality of Jewish history in world history. The history of Israel unifies around it the history of humanity, but the learning that is required does not stop with the knowledge of important facts, but includes also questions of structure, the inner logic and end-goal toward which that history strives.

Halevi does not emphasize the idea that history is a direct continuation of the Genesis narrative (an idea that we saw emphasized in R. Abraham bar Ḥiyya), but he alludes to it in several places. In Part 1 Halevi juxtaposes the discussion of the world's creation with the discussion of the historicity of the biblical narrative. He assumed a connection between them: there is a clear parallel between the divine activity of creation and the divine revelation to God's people at Sinai. This parallel assumes the notion that history comes to complete creation. The creation narrative attests to perfection of the "natural principle," while history depicts the ascendancy of perfection of the "divine principle" superimposed on nature. This idea is alluded to in the institution of the Sabbath, in the creation narrative and also in the giving of the Torah.

Furthermore, Halevi did not accept bar Ḥiyya's deterministic conception of history, nor did he search the creation narrative for the plan of history. Nevertheless, he saw in its progression what he saw in creation: revelation of the divine will that governs the world. But there is a difference between the divine revelation in creation and that of history. Halevi did not accept astrological interpretation. The laws of nature do not hold sway over history, and it has no predetermined course. Rather, human beings in their free will create it in complex reciprocal relation with God, who educates humanity to do His will through reward and punishment. Thus Halevi returns to the biblical conception of history.

Removing the Motive of Sin from the Historical Narrative

In keeping with this purpose Halevi offered his interpretation of the biblical historical narrative, which combines with his previous evidences that the Torah attests not just to God's revelation to His people but also to His revelation to all humanity. At the foundation of his approach is the Torah's assumption, expressed in Genesis, that the revelation of God to the people of Israel is the outgrowth of a series of prior revelations, and in this way the Israelite religion has its roots in the primordial religion that was intended to be the religion of all humanity, except that humanity at large was not able to arrive at it in one attempt. Its propagation requires a prolonged educational process, and that is the central task of history.

In order to explain this fact, the rabbi is driven to adopt a new concept pertaining to the question of the manner of God's revelation to

human beings and the manner of drawing them near to Him. This is the notion of the “divine principle.”¹⁰ The rabbi assumes that the king will understand this concept and accept its content as true, because he had a quasi-prophetic experience, and he knows that a dream of the kind he had—the revelation of an angel—is not a common, everyday experience. Not everyone is privileged to have it, but only individuals with a special spiritual quality that disposes them to be particularly devoted to the worship of their God. The king is portrayed as such an individual, one who approached the worship of his gods with true devotion. Nevertheless, he knows that the revelation of the angel is not his own doing. He did not seek it by his own initiative. It was the angel who appeared to him. The “divine principle” is then the special spiritual quality for receiving revelation, not the revelation of an angel mediating between God and man, but of God Himself. Just as all human beings have an intellectual faculty that distinguishes them from other animals so some human beings have a prophetic faculty, and they bring God’s words to the people.

The question of the nature of this quality will occupy the rabbi later on. Here resorts to the fact itself in order to explain why the original true religion has not spread to all humanity. According to the biblical narrative, it was first attained by individuals such as Adam, Noah and Abraham. Starting with Abraham it became the characteristic of a family, from which grew an entire people, and presumably in time to come the knowledge of God will spread to all humanity through the agency of this people. But we should note that nevertheless, in the rabbi’s view, according to the Torah, this is a quality that passes by inheritance from father to son, first to a single one of them, then by stages to all of them.

Still, we should emphasize again that according to Halevi prophecy depends on the one hand on the psychological disposition that fosters religious devotion in a person, so that he is prepared for prophecy, and on the other hand on God’s will to reveal Himself and communicate His word.

¹⁰ *The divine principle*: Arabic ‘*amr ilahi*, Hebrew ‘*inyan elohi*: divine word, influence, or notion, one of Halevi’s central concepts.

Israel—The Heart of the Nations

This conception explains the relation between the history of Israel and the history of the world. One people is at the heart of history, and the other peoples are the body that the heart sustains. Israel's mission is the emanation of the divine principle to all humanity. It is nevertheless clear that this conception requires that we pay attention not only to the history of Israel, but also to the history of the other nations, and for this purpose he introduces a distinction between two kinds of history. The history of the other nations conforms to the orders and principles of nature. It was determined by God at creation until the inception of the "divine principle" through Israel's involvement, whereas the people of Israel is governed by the "divine principle," i.e. direct divine providence, which exempts it—when God so desires for the sake of His mission—from the laws of nature. In other words: the miraculous dimension is a constant presence in Israelite history. This assertion fits well with Halevi's defense of the despised religion, and it provides the background for the explanation that he gives the king for the facts that led him originally to pass over the Jewish religion: the victories and defeats of the natural nations can be explained in a natural way, but they do not prove at all that God is with them or that their religion is the true religion. Not so the victories and defeats of the Jewish people. If we examine them in detail, we discover that the laws of nature cannot explain how this small nation succeeded in freeing themselves from slavery and the yoke of a power such as Egypt, and later settled in a land in which dwelt seven nations greater and more powerful than themselves. They cannot explain the expansion of the kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon. But by the same token one cannot explain the unparalleled fearsome calamities that it has endured, much less how this people managed to survive and persist in its mission despite such calamities. All this indicates that though these people are persecuted and despised, divine providence has not abandoned them. All this confirms their true mission.

The Meaning of Suffering and Exile

All the important transitions in Israelite history—the transition from an individual to a family, from a family to a people—were fraught with great suffering and the readiness to withstand it in order to bear witness. The tragedy of the flood, which Noah escaped, Abraham's

flight from his land of origin and his many trials; the enslavement in Egypt, and the Babylonian Exile. In that case, what is the explanation for all the exiles of the past, and the most recent exile that has been so prolonged? Should one see in all these evidence that God despises His people for their stiff-neckedness and for a sin heavy beyond endurance, as Christianity and Islam argue?

Halevi did not entirely reject the argument that exile includes an element of punishment for the sins of the people against God. After all, the prophets proclaim this constantly. But Halevi explains the severity of these punishments on the basis of the people's special status and mission. If we compare the moral sins of the Jewish people to those of other peoples, they are relatively slight. But in the case of other peoples, God leaves them to the inevitable process of nature: their destructive evil will bring about their downfall. But God punishes His people with extra severity because they perform His mission. Thus the severity of the punishment attests to the people's greatness and importance, not the opposite.

Halevi's Vision of the Present

In this connection there is also considerable interest in the explanation that Halevi gives to the unusual length of the most recent exile, an explanation that distinguishes Halevi as one of the precursors of Zionism. Is the length of the exile a consequence of the severity of the sin? Surely (responds Halevi) the destruction of the second Temple came as a punishment for the sins that the rabbis enumerated, but these sins were not as severe as those which the prophets mentioned in connection with the destruction of the first Temple. Idolatry was prevalent in the former time, but not in the latter.

If those sins were atoned for in seventy years and the people returned to its land and rebuilt its Temple, then why has the second exile been prolonged so far? Halevi's marvelously simple answer is that the whole matter depends on the will and initiative of the people. The people who underwent the Babylonian Exile (but evidently not all of them) returned to their land of their own initiative after their sin was expiated, whereas in the second exile the people held fast to their exile long after the sin had been expiated. There had been several opportunities, and if the Jews had wanted, they could have returned to their desolate land that awaited them. This was their sin—the sin of holding on to exile, for despite the suffering one could not deny that for long

periods the Jews prospered as individuals (though not as a people) in exile, whereas return to the desolate land would have required heavy personal sacrifices...

These words had clear and present significance. Halevi anticipated in his time a powerful historical event by which the "divine principle" would be manifested in the world. The struggle between the Christian and Moslem peoples for conquest of the Holy Land clearly testified to this, for Christianity and Islam—though they seemed to Halevi inauthentic substitutes for the Jewish religion, or maybe precisely for that reason—would fulfill the mission for spreading the "divine principle" throughout humanity. The moment must come when these two religions would acknowledge the undimmed truth of the original religion in whose name they have operated. This was in his view the meaning of the return to the Holy Land, the land of the chosen people. But for that reason the people of Israel must also contribute its part and return to its land, in which alone could its Torah be fulfilled in all its splendor, as a testimony to all humanity.

It is clear from this that Halevi saw in the historical events of his time, which he regarded as manifest miracles (just as the conversion of the Khazars was a miracle to him) a clear sign to the people of Israel that they are commanded to leave exile behind and return to their land. But they must do this of their own volition and initiative, thus proving themselves worthy of the miracle of redemption, which will come without delay.

The "Divine Principle" and Prophecy

From everything that has been said so far we can learn that with respect to the task of philosophy of religion, the key issue is prophecy and its relation to ordinary human intellectual knowledge. How do prophets differ from other people? Are we speaking of a clearer and more developed intellect, as the philosopher argued, since in his view prophecy was identified with knowing metaphysical truth? Or are we perhaps speaking of a supra-rational faculty that enables the knowledge of supra-rational reality?

Indeed, Halevi developed his theory of the essence of prophecy out of his confrontation with the Aristotelian philosophy of his time, according to the interpretation of the Arab Aristotelians. According to their view, prophecy was a natural human perfection, and whoever

is properly prepared for it achieves it. In other words, prophecy is the highest level of attainment of the human intellect—knowledge of the eternal truth, including the concepts of all reality as the content of one cognition. What, then, distinguishes philosophers—who are people who have achieved perfect knowledge—from prophets, who have a social mission? The answer lies in the developed imaginative faculty that enables them to express truths through sensory images, by which they are able to bring the truth to the masses in a form and degree in which they can comprehend it, and in this way to fulfill the role of legislators and spiritual leaders. (We shall deal with this issue in depth when we come to Maimonides's teaching.)

Halevi was especially sensitive to the fact that the Aristotelian theory of prophecy had no room for the notion of revelation as understood in the Bible—God's personal turning toward human beings in order to command them and guide them. According to the philosophical outlook, man turns to God and attains His truth and the laws that derive from it, and when he does this he transcends his particularity and becomes pure intellect. In other words, prophecy is not a dialogue but a particular level of identification between divine and human intellect. In Halevi's view, this negates the Biblical view of divinity, and ignores the experiential content of the divine-human encounter, whether in prophecy or in prayer. He therefore saw a need to refute the Aristotelian view and to develop in its place a scientific view that affirms the biblical experience.

At the first stage of the discussion Halevi seeks to prove by historical experience that actual prophetic revelation was different from the philosophical description of prophecy. He acknowledges that reason dismisses the notion that God, who is too exalted above human understanding, should stoop to have discourse with human beings. But the unequivocally verified facts (prophecy is a frequent phenomenon—even the Khazar king had a quasi-prophetic experience) prove that God does indeed speak with human beings. Since God is omnipotent, we have no cause to doubt this evidence of experience.

At the second stage, Halevi attempts to describe the conditions and circumstances in which this revelation occurs. It becomes clear that within certain limits, Halevi accepts something of the philosophical position. In what respect? In the assumption that prophecy requires prior preparation from the human side. Indeed, God reveals Himself to whomever He wants, but only if the recipient has prepared for it. And how does he differ from the philosophical position? In respect of

the kind of preparation required. Philosophers make prophecy conditional on ethical and intellectual perfection, and Halevi agrees that prophets must be completely moral and wise people. But he adds the requirement of religious perfection expressed in worship of God. In addition, he argues that by the evidence of the Torah prophecy was generally propagated among the members of a particular family and then within a special people, in a special land, when the Temple was in existence (except for a few cases, of which one can say that the exception proves the rule).

All this supports the view that we are not speaking only of an intellectual perfection that can subsist in any person, any place, or any time. In that case, the “divine principle” depends on a very different kind of quality—an empirical, supra-rational quality.

The Substantive Difference between Israel and the Nations

On this point Halevi takes a surprising turn in the course of the discussion, at least from the king’s point of view. According to the philosophical outlook that became the scientific consensus in the Middle Ages (and would certainly be accepted as such by the king), there are five levels of reality: inanimate matter, plants, animals, human beings with speech and reason, and angels (disembodied intellects). Halevi discloses that there is another level between human beings and angels, namely prophets, who possess the supra-rational faculty. Clearly, if the prophets embody a substantive quality that distinguishes them from ordinary people in the same way that human beings are distinguished from animals, then we are speaking not of individuals but of an entire group. The individuals who are designated as prophets are merely the most developed exemplars, just as the philosophers are the choicest representatives of rational mortals. Who, then, constitute that group in which this special quality is expressed? We must conclude—the people of Israel, who carry the quality of prophecy in its potential form.

Jews are thus distinguished from other peoples by an ontological difference, not simply a national or religious difference. But surely it is not Halevi’s purpose to exclude his people from the category of humanity! Jews are human beings like everyone else, and as such they are not necessarily wiser or more ethical or superior in any human respect, for differences in all these parameters are purely individual. Jews are special only in possessing the potential for a certain kind of consciousness, which they carry as if it were an organic trait, just as

the eye carries the potential of sight and the ear carries the potential of hearing. Therefore, whoever is born into the Israelite nation has the potential for prophecy, and this secures for Jews the absolute advantage of being able to achieve tangible closeness between themselves and God, an advantage that is expressed particularly in their religion and in their ritual practice.

The Prophet's Religious Superiority to the Philosopher

This theory, which adds another level to the chain of being—one that the philosopher can detect through his ordinary sensory and intellectual faculties—enables Halevi to employ the tools of philosophical analysis to establish the superiority of prophecy to philosophy. It is a straightforward empirical deduction. The philosopher is limited in his knowledge by his sensory and intellectual capabilities. He cannot know what is beyond the reach of his sensory perception and his ordinary logical reasoning, and so he has no way of knowing about the existence and essence of God except what reason demonstrates, namely that God exists as the cause of existence of all reality that is grasped by the senses and by reason. Of God's essence he can know nothing. Clearly in this mode it is far-fetched to suggest that what is exalted beyond all knowledge will reveal itself to human beings and speak to them. This is knowledge by extrapolation that ends with our realization of our ignorance. By contrast, the prophet knows God face to face. This is the instructive parable that the rabbi offers the king: The difference between prophet and philosopher is like the difference between one who has heard by report that there is a king with extraordinary powers, and one who knows the king by face-to-face encounter with him.

If we push the parable to its logical conclusion, its existential import becomes obvious. In all likelihood our face-to-face encounter with the king will not provide us with any more cognitive or conceptual knowledge than the hearer of the report has, but the king's immediate presence not only gives absolute certainty, but is itself an experience affecting the entire person. It is this experience that the prophet knows better than the philosopher and expresses through his worship.

The Philosophical Basis

Thus Halevi employs the tools of philosophy to establish the superiority of prophecy to philosophy. Indeed, Aristotle prefers observational,

sensory-based experience to knowledge based on logical inference. Even if inferences are demonstrative and irrefutable, they lack the certainty of direct experience, for whatever we know of reality is based on our senses in the last analysis. Therefore in any conflict between the conclusions of logic and those of experience, we should prefer the conclusions of experience even if we do not know how to explain them. Thus the debate with philosophy is reduced to a single epistemological issue.¹¹ The philosopher argues that real experience of the transcendent is impossible in principle. Halevi responds that indeed philosophers do not have that kind of experience, but the prophets of Israel do indeed have such an experience. You cannot convince the philosophers through the argument that this is an experience beyond their understanding. But when they meet people who are able to prove empirically that they have experience of the divine presence through miraculous events that point to supernatural intervention, a proper philosophical method should acknowledge the fact and retreat.

Developing an Epistemology of Prophecy

We now come to the crucial stage of Halevi's theory of prophecy—developing an epistemology of prophecy. True to form, he builds on the Aristotelian conception. He assumes the existence of a set of internal senses in the prophet structured in parallel to the external senses. Just as the external senses represent physical entities, so the internal senses represent spiritual entities. These are ethereal essences that belong to the supernal divine world through which God is manifested.

The prophetic vision is thus an experience of being in the presence of spiritual entities, through which God expresses His will. This is not all. In addition to the ordinary prophetic experience, there is also an experience of being directly in God's presence, and this is the summit of prophecy. It is to this experience that the name YHVH (whose root meaning is "being") alludes.

¹¹ For a contemporary update of this discussion, see William Alston, *Experiencing God*. (LL)

The Divine Perfections

Halevi attaches no importance to the theory of divine attributes, for it deals with the question of God existing as a conception of human thought. On the other hand, he ascribes great importance to the divine names. A name is not an attribute but signifies the presence of some essence in its fullness. When we say "the man with the blue eyes," no personal presence is indicated, but when we say "Reuben," the name conjures up the personal presence of a certain individual to whoever knows him. The name YHVH indicates the presence of God, which the prophet experiences directly, without the mediation of the ethereal forms perceived by the inner sense. This is the highest level of prophecy.

Ranks of Prophetic Experience

It is possible in this fashion to describe a hierarchy of prophetic experiences, each higher than its predecessor, forming a kind of ladder. They have in common the notion of immediate presence of God, which is a direct experience more certain than any intellectual proof.

Halevi argues this not in order to give preference to the prophets' outlook over the philosophers' outlook. His primary purpose is to legitimate the experience of divine presence as a variety of true knowledge. Halevi thus displays the poetic side of his doctrine. The philosophers describe pure knowledge, stripped of all material and sensory aspects, as the summit of bliss that intellectual man can attain, and they identify love not as a feeling but as intellectual bliss. But Halevi decidedly prefers the experience of presence and the feeling of love even when speaking of the experience of sensory beauty and the love of flesh-and-blood humans. No abstract conceptuality can do justice to the richness and plenitude of the experience. Whatever the intellect grasps from analysis and distinctions, experience grasps instantaneously as a whole. Not the abstract knowledge that the prophet derives from his experience is important, but the sense of presence before God. This is the highest bliss. The litmus test is the readiness to undergo the decisive test of faith—the test of martyrdom ("sanctification of the Divine Name").

According to this version the motive of the prophetic vocation is different from what the philosophers think. Essentially, the mission of prophecy is not to reveal the truth to the masses in accordance with their level of comprehension, as the philosophers think. It is rather to reveal the means by which all people can attain to the rank of the

religious experience—each according to his level, of course. Here we find the point of connection between Halevi's doctrine of prophecy and his doctrine of the religious way of life constituted by revealed commandments.

The Purpose and Value of Jewish Practice

Correct Religious Practice

Describing prophecy as metaphysical experience transcending intellectual perfection enables Halevi to explain the fundamental assumption that was already implied by the angel's speech in the king's dream: there is a kind of religious action that is intrinsically correct. It is correct not by virtue of the intention accompanying it or the idea symbolized by it, but by virtue of the action itself, i.e. its experiential quality.

Already in Part I Halevi cited a parable that he borrowed from the Moslem philosopher Al-Ghazali (who was very similar to him in his view of the opposition of religion and philosophy): the commandments of the Torah in matters of divine worship are like a physician's remedies. Their purpose is not to influence one's thoughts but various processes in the body or—by analogy—in the life of the soul. Medicines are not discovered by logic but on the basis of experience, and on that basis one determines how much, when and how they are to be administered. Even after the fact we cannot explain logically why a particular medicine works in such a way and not otherwise. The same applies to the commands of the Torah that affect the life of the soul that is connected to the body. They assist the emotional preparation for the experience of encounter with God, whether through prayer or prophecy, and they must be learned through experience. It is the prophet who has that experience. Indeed, that is his primary mission.

"Active Living" in the Religious Realm

Behind this interpretation of ritual commandments is an entire outlook. Halevi developed it as a kind of second story on the foundation of the philosopher's ethics and in parallel to it. Similarly, he replaced the philosophical ideal of a life of theory and contemplation with the prophetic ideal of active living particularly in the religious realm:

service of God in human society out of a positive relation to physical and worldly existence.

Based on this conception Halevi develops a very interesting synthesis of the Kalamitic position, represented by Saadia Gaon's teaching, and the Platonic position represented by Bahya's *Duties of the Heart*.

Halevi's pronouncements on the way of life of the believing Jew are concentrated principally in Part 3 of his book. We discussed the structure of this part earlier, and we shall examine its content now in more detail.

Part 3 starts with the question: "What are the traits of an observant worshipper in your faith?" The answer begins with a criticism of what is regarded as exemplary piety in Christianity and Islam. These find the ideal of perfect piety in the monk who withdraws from the world and takes on afflictions in order to strengthen his feeling of dedication and devotion. Judaism sees things differently. Halevi says:

The pious person in our faith does not cut himself off from the world, so that he should not be a burden on us nor a burden to himself, nor should he despise life which is a part of God's beneficence...but he loves the world and longevity because this life is the means by which we acquire eternal life.

This outlook recalls Saadia's, though it proceeds from a clearer affirmation of this-worldly life. But even in the polemical context there is a special emphasis here. It becomes clear that those who have abandoned the laws of the Mosaic Torah, which alone provide the path to religious fulfillment, necessarily tend to express their religious feeling in a life of austerity. The monk is sincere in his religious impulse, and he expresses it in his monasticism as he lacks the means to achieve religious perfection. The Jew who possesses God's commandments does not need to resort to this, so he shuns the monastic path.

Halevi nevertheless recognizes that there were recluses among the prophets and the early Jewish pietists, but he argues that they did this not out of a negative valuation of this world, but because they arrived at a higher level in which they had no bodily needs. Thus their reclusive practice was not for ascetic motives. But this level of spirituality was possible only in the land of Israel, during the time when the Temple was in existence. In exile, religious austerity is connected with sufferings that lead to decline and degradation. At any rate, Halevi definitively rejects the monastic ideal.

The Golden Mean

After rejecting religious monasticism Halevi discusses the philosophical ethic. As we said, Halevi develops an argument from Plato's *Republic*, but with an opposite twist: "The just man takes care concerning his realm, giving all inhabitants their just portion. Thus he satisfies their needs and acts justly towards them." When the Khazar king objects, "I asked about the pious person, not the just ruler," the scholar-rabbi responds, "The pious person rules over his senses and faculties—whether spiritual or physical—and conducts them with the proper discipline, as the proverb says, 'Better one who rules his spirit than one who captures a city.'"¹²

In other words, political justice is a parable for proper individual conduct. This is a position that can be affirmed in agreement with Plato's teaching and Aristotle's as well. Indeed, from here on Halevi presents the philosophical doctrine of the "golden mean" as a true doctrine, with which he agrees in the ethical domain: one should grant each of the soul's faculties its necessary satisfaction, but deny its request when it seeks more than its just desert, for this would cause harm. A person exercises voluntary control over his urges by giving them satisfaction in the proper measure, and he can then act in every matter in accordance with ethical and legal norms, not by the dictates of his lusts and pleasures. In that case, the ethical ideal is governance of the soul's faculties by the intellect working through the will.

But as important as this self-governance is to Halevi, it is not the goal but a means to the goal. And in this regard Halevi constructs an argument parallel to that of philosophy:

When a person has provided for the needs of all of these—satisfying his basic vital needs through rest and sleep, and his animal needs through waking activities in worldly occupations—then he will call to his "body politic" like a responsive ruler who calls to his obedient troops to assist him to take control of a higher strategic position—

Halevi's departure from the philosophers' position is found only in the next phrase. In Plato's and Aristotle's view, the harmony of the soul's faculties is a means to ascend to the level of intellectual contemplation. But Halevi goes on to say: "That is to say, to ascend to the divine level, which is above the intellectual level." To clarify his idea further, he sets

¹² *Kuzari* 3:5 (and so the next several quotations).

the harmony of the terrestrial faculties of the soul in opposition to the higher harmony: "He should arrange and order his community in a manner similar to that by which Moses arranged the Israelite community around Mount Sinai"! The community is a parable for the soul's faculties over which the pious person exercises control.

Intellectual Life is Subordinate to Religious Purpose

Setting the divine level above the intellectual level does not imply negation of intellectual perfection. On the contrary, Halevi requires it as a part of religious perfection, but he subordinates it as a means to the higher goal. Thus he continues his exposition:

He orders his will to process carefully every command issued by him, and to carry it out in a timely fashion. He employs his faculties and limbs to do as they are instructed without resistance, and orders them not to be distracted by temptations of thought or fancy, not to yield to them or give them credence until the intellect has passed judgment on them: if the intellect certifies them, they can act on them; if not, they should renounce them.

The intellect discriminates what should be accepted as a divine command and what is not worthy of this status. But the true rank of piety consists in being active in compliance with the higher command, after one has ordered the faculties of his soul in accord with the principles that the human intellect apprehends independently.

The difference between Halevi and the philosophers is apparent also in his positive valuation of the imaginative faculty, which the philosophers regard as a nuisance but Halevi sees as an asset:

He directs the imagination to project the most impressive images available from memory, that represent the sought-after divine principle, such as the Israelites standing at Sinai, Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, Moses's Tabernacle, the sacrificial ritual, the descent of the divine glory on the Temple, and the like.

The worshipper of God perfects the harmony of his souls' faculties aimed at direction of his bodily conduct. Afterwards he removes his attention from these earthly matters and focuses it on the elements of correct faith, in order to know what he is commanded in that regard. With this focusing of his thought he raises up in his imagination an image of holiness dealing with matters of revelation, and thus he arrives at a state of consciousness of being commanded by God.

This focusing of consciousness is necessary for him to recognize his practical obligation.

Halevi greatly emphasizes the importance of the person's full awareness of being commanded by God, that transforms the serenity of contemplation into an obligation to act. When a Jew stands in prayer, that is like a soldier standing at command:

After this preparation, the will musters all the limbs that serve it eagerly, energetically and joyfully, and they stand without reservation, and bow at the time to bow, and sit at the time to sit. The eyes look with the look of a servant toward his master, and the hands cease from their labors and wait in position. The legs stand straight. All the limbs are poised in anxious reverence to perform their master's command, without consideration for pain or loss.

Submission Leads to Exaltation

When a person recognizes that God commands him, his assumption of the posture of commandedness raises him to an unsurpassed status of inner bliss and plenitude. Thus Halevi says of the time of prayer:

That moment becomes the heart and fruit of his time, while all his other times are as means to arrive at that time. He longs for the approach of that hour in which he resembles the angels and is far from the animals. The choicest fruit of his day and night are those three times of prayer, and the choice fruit of the week is the Sabbath day, because it is set aside for connection with the divine principle and to serve God in joy, not submission.

The Reasons for the Commandments—Aids to Spiritual Harmony

How does Halevi understand this inner plenitude that results from recognizing one's utter commandedness? He does not recommend submission from fear and inferiority, but rather an obedience that proceeds from understanding the value of God's commands. We notice here a basic difference between him and Saadia, who based the reason for the arbitrary commandments on the very act of obedience. In Halevi's view, the obedience to these commandments, which have a quasi-medical value as we said, has a beneficial and enriching influence on the person who performs them. They give him a feeling of inner harmony and a sense of inner responsiveness to the divine presence. The whole personality is thus activated by fulfilling the mitzvah. An inner harmony is fostered

between the faculties of the body and soul from their devotion to God. Halevi resorts to another bodily metaphor: just as satisfying the needs of the body restores one's physical powers, so do the mitzvot do for the soul. The service of God is sustenance for the soul:

All this stands in the same relation to the soul as food to the human body. Prayer satisfies his soul as food nourishes his body. The blessing of one prayer sustains him to the time of the next prayer, just as breakfast sustains him until dinnertime. The longer that the soul has been deprived of prayer, the more it is darkened by the assault of worldly affairs.

Halevi describes the level on which the believer experiences the "divine principle" as a level above normal human perfection. A person experiences something divine in God's presence: this is no passive reception of a divine effluence, but rather a spiritual act that purifies, clarifies and renews the person. In modern terms we would say that by serving God through the mitzvot, the soul of the believer achieves not only exaltation, but self-actualization.¹³

On this basis Halevi is able in the sequel to give a detailed explanation of all the rules governing prayer and worship, to explain their source in prophecy, and to refute the approach of the Karaites, who interpret the Bible in an individualistic, rationalistic way.

Fulfillment in the divine light comes from the highest activity of the soul, not from passivity. It comes from affirmation of the world and affirmation of human society, not from asceticism. The believer's way is a set cycle in which he passes alternately through states of lowliness and exaltation: the three daily prayers, the weekly Sabbath, the festivals, the Day of Atonement. The yearly calendar is a complete cycle of life through which the observant Jew passes repeatedly, turning on the axis of connection to God just as the heavenly planets turn in their orbits in harmonic imitation of eternity.

Summary of Halevi's Position Against Philosophy

We may summarize Halevi's teaching as he concluded it in Part 5 of his book: a frontal confrontation against the detailed philosophical

¹³ See especially Abraham Maslow's discussion of the religious aspect of self-actualization in *Towards A Psychology of Being*.

argument which he avoided, as it were, during the central presentation. After the scholar-rabbi has taught the king all that he must know from the Torah, the time has come to show him that the philosophical argument in matters of religion is far from convincing even from an intellectual standpoint.

It would seem that there is no need for this move, but Halevi understands that a person who has once struggled with philosophy will not be entirely secure in his faith and will retain a smidgen of doubt if he does not receive a satisfying answer for the problems that once bothered him.

The Preference for Debate with Aristotelianism

In accordance with the dialogical structure of the book, the scholar-rabbi turns to deliver a frontal refutation against philosophy at the king's request. But even here Halevi highlights the dialogical process through a confrontation between the student-king's request and the teacher-rabbi's response. The king, who was already aware of the scholar-rabbi's opposition to the philosophical position on religion, is careful to request a discourse that would support him in the manner of the Kalamic sages who sought to validate religion through philosophical arguments, as Saadia did. He assumed that the rabbi would consider this request legitimate, but to his surprise it turns out that he miscalculated again. Just the opposite! It is the rabbi's view that if he wants to clarify definitively the relationship between reason and revelation, it is better for him to deal consistently with the best fruits of pure reason, not with a method that compromises with revelation at the outset and therefore deserves the scorn that the philosophers accord it. Furthermore, the king learns to his surprise that even the scholar-rabbi, who agrees that the position of the Mutazilite Kalam is religiously kosher, finds it philosophically lacking. Therefore, instead of discoursing on the Kalam position, the scholar-rabbi returns to the philosopher's opening speech and seeks to refute it philosophically.

But we will not plumb the full depths of Halevi's position here unless we point out another reason for which he wished to question the Kalam's scientific pretensions. The Karaite sages based themselves on Kalamic arguments before Saadia, who came to fight them with their own weapons. The Kalamic approach was the basis for their rationalist interpretation of the Bible, which they counterpoised to rabbinic

interpretation. This was why they remained faithful to the Kalam when it passed out of fashion among Moslem and Jewish thinkers alike.

It is of interest that even Saadia did not follow the Kalamic method on a number of issues but preferred the Aristotelian alternative view (for instance, in preferring the form-and-matter theory to Kalamic atomism), and his dispute with the Karaites may have been at the basis of this. In any case, from Halevi's standpoint the philosophical discrediting of the Kalam was meant to be the last nail in the coffin of the Karaite-rationalist critique of the rabbinic Oral Law.

The Basis of the Debate with Philosophy

We mentioned above the common basis of Halevi and the Aristotelian philosophers: the recognition that all our knowledge is based on sensory experience or inference from what was learned from sensory experience. Aristotle's classic statement on this matter was that "there is nothing in the intellect except what was in the senses." Therefore things that we have learned from critically-evaluated experience will stand the encounter with theories that we arrived at from logic. Whenever experience contradicts a logical theory that we arrived at on the basis of other sensory knowledge, we must go back and examine the theory, and to develop another theory that will explain all our knowledge without exception.

It was on the basis of this Aristotelian stipulation that Halevi based his conclusion that prophetic experience refutes any countervailing metaphysical theory. Prophetic experience has the force of sensory experience (though it is based on internal rather than external experience), while metaphysics has only theoretical force. But in order to establish this argument definitively, it was necessary to address Aristotelian metaphysics substantively, for philosophers regarded it not only as true and certain, but as a kind of truth that one could not arrive at from the senses, but only with a clear and developed intellect. Therefore they regarded prophetic theories such as Halevi's as based on delusion and fantasy, and they regarded the argument of internal sense as a theory lacking any realistic basis.

Halevi's response to the last argument is familiar to us. The philosophers were not favored with internal senses because they were not Jewish, and so their experience, based only on external sense, did not validate the existence of the other. But this is the same kind of

argument that one blind from birth might deploy against seeing people who speak about colors and shapes. To be sure, the seeing cannot share their experience with him. But they can nevertheless convince him that they have a different experience through their behaviors that are based on their knowledge. They can also give him some concept of their experience by drawing a parallel between the sense of sight and other senses such as hearing, which is also sensory experience operating at a distance. It was Halevi's intention with prophetic experience to draw a parallel between inner sense and imagination. Prophets resort to imaginative representations in order to make their experience vivid to their audience, for instance in the case of Ezekiel's descriptions of the Chariot. The difference between ordinary imagination and prophetic experience is that the experience of the prophet does not use the memory of ordinary sensory impressions, but it derives from the presence of spiritual entities that transcend him, just as ordinary sense reflects the reality of external objects.

How Reliable is Reason?

In his summary philosophical discussion Halevi extended his argument that the prophet has metaphysical experience, and on that basis he extended the further argument that philosophers' metaphysical speculation that rests directly on physical experience is not worthy of credence, not only because its conclusions are incompatible with the data of prophecy, but because they have no intrinsic validity. The philosophers maintain that metaphysics is a kind of knowledge: a conceptual framework that captures supra-sensory reality. But in truth it provides only a conceptual abstraction of a conceptual abstraction, without touching the reality to which the concept refers, for such a reality can only be grasped by the senses.

In this way, Halevi came to an essential epistemological conclusion. A conceptual conclusion and logical considerations that follow from it capture substantive reality only when they refer directly to sensory objects. All conclusions that relate to supra-sensory reality, when they are derived from second-order abstraction (abstraction from an abstraction), recede from reality without arriving at another reality. They are not doubtful, but empty, because the abstracting intellect expresses nothing but itself. Indeed, metaphysical reason only demonstrates that the reality of the angels and of God above them is a reality of a sort

beyond our reason, nothing more. It follows that philosophy's daring attempt to grasp metaphysical truth is impressive, riveting and marvelous, but irrelevant to reality.

What Is Philosophy's Domain of Validity?

This argument is philosophical, and it is not a categorical deligitimation of philosophy. On the contrary: it expresses considerable appreciation of philosophy, and Halevi concedes that he learned from it many truths that one cannot find in the Torah and whose study the Torah does not oppose, but the contrary. It encourages it. The purpose of the discussion is the precise definition and delimitation of what one can attain through the conceptual tools of philosophy: scientific knowledge that describes earthly reality conceptually. Whatever cannot be achieved by these tools can only be attained through prophecy.

Re-examining the Philosopher's Speech

From this point on the scholar-rabbi reviews the philosopher's speech, breaks it apart into its components and examines each part in order to show that what first appeared logical and convincing to the king is shown after critical examination to be a collection of suppositions for which one can substitute others, none of which has the certainty of experience.

Halevi's structural literary art shows itself also at this stage of the discussion. The scholar-rabbi presents the philosophical doctrines faithfully, but this time ironically to test his student: will his critical ability stand him in good stead after learning the Jewish Torah, in order to detect for himself the weak-points lurking in them?

In the first stage of his journey the king passed the test, but in the second stage he fell into the characteristic errors of the generation—uncritical faith in philosophers—so that the scholar-rabbi was forced to point out the weak points himself.

The Source of Halevi's Arguments against the Philosophers

We need not elaborate on the details of Halevi's critical discussion. At this stage Halevi relied on the famous Moslem source that we alluded to earlier, namely Al-Ghazali's *Destruction of Philosophy*. In general,

it demonstrates that Aristotle's doctrines of primordial matter and the elements are mere hypotheses, and that the description that the philosophers offer for the coming-into-being of entities in our world suffers from many ambiguities and imprecisions (the use of the word "nature," for instance), and that the biblical assertion that the creation as presented is the fruit of the divine will is simpler and more reasonable than any philosophical theory. He similarly shows that the philosophers' views on the immortality of the intellect as a substitute for the religious doctrine of the immortality of the soul is only an elegant evasion of the problem, for if they mean that after the death of the individual all the truths that the individual learned remain true, this does not imply the survival of any remnant of the individual personality. Finally he shows his student that in all matters pertaining to the metaphysical domain there is no consensus of the philosophers supporting one doctrine (in contrast with the case in physical science). Each of them proves his hypothesis by means of proofs that seem convincing at first, but their disputes prove that they are subjective and subject to refutation with only a slight effort.

But we should emphasize that even in the metaphysical realm Halevi did not totally disqualify the value of philosophical speculation. First of all, it satisfies a human need that is worth satisfying. Second, it is useful in the critique of religion and in the conversation between religions, and finally, if one resorts to it on the basis of guidance from the Torah, it can be fruitful for understanding the Torah's own doctrines.

Conclusion of the Kuzari

But we should emphasize at the end of our inquiry into Halevi's thought that the importance of philosophical thought for him was only secondary and instrumental. He objects to the philosophical approach that presents the acquisition of truth concerning all reality as the be-all and end-all of human existence. In Halevi's view this is intellectual idolatry. The purpose of human existence is achieved through serving God, and Halevi concludes his book by the scholar-rabbi's announcement that as a result of his discussion with the king he decided himself to move to the land of Israel in order to fulfill there the commandments that are connected with the land of Israel, which in Halevi's view were among the most important, as well as being indispensable for prophecy. This conclusion is fascinating from the standpoint of closing the circle of

the dialogue: while the scholar persuaded the king to accept the Jewish religion, the king (who had by now faithfully carried out the angel's charge) persuaded him to draw the practical conclusion that followed from the Torah, which commanded him to ascend to a higher level in serving God.

Summary

In the conclusion of the chapter on Ibn Gabirol we said that the specific content of Jewish tradition—particularly its historical dimension—were not expressed in his theoretical philosophy, but only in his poetic creation, for this content did not raise for him any problem with which he had to deal theoretically.

Just one generation later, in Rabbi Abraham bar Ḥiyya, these issues took center stage. The claims of the tradition became problematic and difficult, but not in the same way as they were for R. Saadia Gaon. The question of the relation of reason and revelation was not the main issue, but rather the historical existence of the Jewish people among the nations. In R. Judah Halevi's thought, this struggle reached its climax. But together with it—on account of the interfaith debate that was thrust into the center—the first problem that occupied Saadia was reopened in another manner, that rendered his solution insufficient. The revealed Torah was challenged by the Aristotelian philosophy, which offered a complete alternative to religious truth.

The new challenge undermined the solution that treated philosophical investigation as a mere tool for supporting religious certainty. One needed to make a prior decision in favor of revealed truth or philosophical truth.

R. Judah Halevi set these two ways opposite each other and sharpened the confrontation between them. Only after deciding in favor of revelation solely on its own basis was he able to accept from philosophy too the truth that he found in it and to use it in order to strengthen his support of revelation. But this was only a first stage of confrontation with the Aristotelian philosophy, which became the central philosophical stream in European culture. Just as in the Moslem and Christian worlds, so in the Jewish world there were philosophers who saw in this stream the way to knowledge of general truth, which was important to them in itself. Thus arose once more the challenge of establishing and reconciling the truth acquired through reason and the truth of

revelation. The central personality in this struggle was Maimonides, the greatest Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages.

In the next section of this book we shall therefore deal with Maimonides's thought and that of his students and his major critics.

PART TWO

MAIMONIDES

CHAPTER SEVEN

MAIMONIDES'S PERSONALITY & OEUVRE

Maimonides's Life

Maimonides was born in Cordova, Spain in 1135 to a distinguished family of rabbis and judges. His father was a judge. In childhood he was educated in Jewish law and general sciences. In 1148 Cordova was conquered by the Almohads. Because of the fanaticism of these rulers, who forcibly converted the Jews to Islam, the family was forced to wander for about ten years among the southern cities of the Iberian peninsula. In 1159 the family settled in Fez, which was also under Almohad rule; there too they had to keep their Judaism in secret. In 1165 they left by sea and arrived in the land of Israel. They stayed there about half a year. After the father's death they settled in Egypt. Maimonides was supported financially by his brother who traded in jewels. After his brother's death Maimonides supported himself through his medical practice. He regarded it as forbidden for scholars to earn a livelihood from Torah; it was incumbent on them to learn a marketable skill. Thus he became one of the most renowned physicians of his generation, and was appointed as physician in Saladin's court, a position that won him great influence in the community.

A Universal Personality: Legal Authority, Communal Leader, Philosopher

Already in 1171 Maimonides was appointed leader of the Egyptian Jewish community, serving in that capacity until 1177 and again from 1195 until his death in 1204. His formal authority was limited to Egyptian Jewry, but he engaged in general and legal correspondence with the Jewish communities from Yemen to the southeast as far as Spain and Germany to the northwest. He was recognized as the leading halakhic authority of his generation, thus being invested, in effect, with the authority of the Geonim, the presiding officers of the Babylonian yeshivas of a prior era. It is worth emphasizing that Maimonides sought through his many-sided literary activity to fill the vacuum that was

created as a result of the dispersion of Jewish communities to remote lands from that center, and the consequent decline of Geonic authority. The key to his life's work is the emergent need to create a practical substitute for that bygone leadership, so that the Jewish people should not become fragmented for lack of a central authority.

This was a critically fateful time, as Maimonides understood full well. He possessed the rare combination of talents required to create the vital alternative. This explains the warm admiration that even his opponents accorded him. In his own time, Moses Maimonides was already regarded as the successor to the biblical Moses, and after his death it was said that "from Moses to Moses there arose none like Moses."

Maimonides's unique genius was expressed in the fact that he united in his person—in rare perfection and marvelous balance—the two universal legacies that comprised Western civilization in its highest manifestation at that time: the monotheistic religious legacy that prevailed in the social and political sphere, and the Greek scientific and philosophical legacy that prevailed in the cultural sphere. Between these two components of the high culture of the Mediterranean countries there existed an internal tension that carried the constant threat of conflict and collapse. The survival of these cultures was dependent on finding a *modus vivendi* between them. Moslem and Christian philosophy took on this fateful task, and Maimonides assumed the same task in the Jewish realm. Since the Jewish scriptures stood at the foundation of Christianity and Islam, Maimonides was engaged in intellectual dialogue with both these cultures, and his influence on them was far from negligible.

Synthesis of Tradition and Philosophy: A Source of Controversy

Maimonides's intellectual project was revolutionary in its scope. This fact was at the source of the two controversies that it provoked: on the one hand between him and his opponents, and on the other hand among his interpreters. Some saw him as restoring the Torah's integrity. Others saw him as bringing about a profound schism in the Jewish people. The Maimonidean controversy led to a major parting of the ways in the understanding of Judaism. It ran its course for the rest of the Middle Ages, and its effects have been felt even in the modern period.

Survey of Principal Works

The best introduction to Maimonides's teaching is a survey of his principal works. It is possible to list the categories of his writings, although it is not always easy to decide in which category a particular work belongs, for they overlap.

Medical writings—As we said, Maimonides was a renowned physician. He composed several works in this area. He had some important new ideas, particularly in the realm of preventive medicine, but on the whole his medical works offer a clear and systematic summary of the prevailing tradition.

Letters—The second category worth mentioning is the many letters that Maimonides wrote as the communal leader of his generation. Some of his letters are essentially independent essays on fundamental halakhic issues on the communal agenda of the day, for instance the "Epistle to Yemen" that dealt with the issue of Messianism; the "Letter to the Sages of Marseilles," that dealt with education; the "Letter on Apostasy (or Martyrdom)," that dealt with the status of forced converts; and the "Letter on Resurrection," that dealt with a theological topic that was philosophically very problematic. Nevertheless, these letters form a distinct genre that stands midway between philosophy and halakhah, and they testify to Maimonides's rare ability to speak to different sectors of the community in a language that each of them can understand. Some hold that Maimonides said materially different things to different audiences, depending on their intellectual level. I do not believe that this view is correct. The things that Maimonides said in the Epistle to Yemen to simple folk, he also said to the enlightened and the scholars. He did address each audience in its own language, in accordance with the rabbinic dictum, "the Torah speaks in human language." Thus he exhibited the rare gift of a true spiritual leader.

Halakhah—The third domain is halakhic writings, in which one should include his Commentary to the Mishnah, the *Mishneh Torah*, and his halakhic responsa. However, the first two also touch directly on speculative matters. We shall deal with the relationship of his philosophical and halakhic views from our perspective—i.e., from the philosophical side.

Philosophy—What, indeed, are the Maimonidean works which deal directly with philosophy? We have first his early work *Explanation of Logical Terms* (*Be'ur Millot ha-Higgayon*), which is a clear summary of the theory of Aristotelian logic as it was understood by the later interpreters

of Aristotle (Alfarabi and Avicenna), meant as a guide for beginners in the study of philosophy.

Second, there is the *Commentary on the Mishnah*. (This book was written originally in Arabic, and translated twice into Hebrew, most recently by R. Joseph Kafih.) This book was also known as the “Book of Enlightenment,” a term of endearment given by its students. This book was intended foremost as a commentary in the straight sense, but its philosophical implications are interwoven with the halakhic discussion. *It is generally Maimonides’s intention in his commentary to point out the consistency between truth, as conceived by the philosopher, and the words of the sages.* To that purpose, Maimonides devoted several prefaces to selected chapters of the Mishnah:

1. His general introduction to his Commentary on the Mishnah, which forms the opening to the Order *Ẓera’im*. In it, Maimonides articulates his approach to the tradition of Oral Torah, the status of the prophet in the halakhah, the methods of interpreting the words of the Sages, and the logical plan of the Mishnah. His words here set forth important principles for understanding Maimonides’s political philosophy.
2. Maimonides’s preface to Mishnah Sanhedrin Chapter 10 (*Helek*—“Who Has A Portion in the World to Come”), in which Maimonides deals with the question of the nature of the afterlife, and gives the first classic formulation of the principles of Jewish belief.
3. The preface to Tractate *Avot*, which took on a life as a separate work under the title *Maimonides’s Eight Chapters*. It is Maimonides’s highly influential attempt to demonstrate the consistency of the Aristotelian and rabbinic views in the field of ethics.

The “Book of Prophecy” and the “Book of Correspondence”

By his own account, Maimonides planned to write a series of works in which he would demonstrate through interpretation the consistency between philosophy and the Torah. The prefaces in his Commentary to the Mishnah were to be just a first layer, in which he discussed the least problematic part—ethical and political philosophy. It was easy here to demonstrate the similarity between the authority of halakhah and the authority of the Platonic state, or between Aristotle’s golden mean and the opposition of the rabbis to the extremes of asceticism

on the one hand and hedonism on the other. However, difficulties came up regarding theoretical issues that went beyond applied philosophy. These did not fit the agenda of the Commentary of the Mishnah, and Maimonides contented himself with promising to write afterwards two works, one to be called the "Book of Prophecy" and the other the "Book of Correspondence." He intended in these works to explain in detailed fashion the words of the prophets and the sages in a manner compatible with the truth that Maimonides understood as a philosopher.

In the end, Maimonides changed his mind. He explained his reasons in his introduction to the *Guide to the Perplexed*. They are important for understanding the tension underlying his whole thought. Maimonides perceived a great danger in dealing openly and in detail with the philosophical interpretation of the Written and Oral Torah. Such an open and detailed discussion would reveal to the non-philosopher the material contradictions between true philosophy and the simple sense of the words of the Torah and the rabbis. This would lead either to contempt for religious scriptures or rejection of philosophy as heretical. Either of these outcomes would have been harmful in Maimonides's view, and he wished to prevent them, for Torah is the foundation of political life, and philosophy is the goal of life altogether. Therefore he changed his original plan and committed himself to writing his two greatest and most important works: the *Mishneh Torah* ("Review of the Law") and the *Guide of the Perplexed*.

The Mishneh Torah and Guide of the Perplexed

Maimonides's two greatest works are very different in their content, their method of composition, their language, and their intended audience. In content, the *Mishneh Torah* is a halakhic work that aims to summarize the Oral Law as it had developed up until Maimonides's time. The *Guide of the Perplexed* is a theoretical and exegetical work that aims to demonstrate the ways in which the views of the Torah can be reconciled with the philosophical views of Aristotle.

In form, the *Mishneh Torah* is a paragon of order, whose plan is easily grasped and user-friendly. By contrast, the *Guide of the Perplexed* is purposely labyrinthine. It has a plan, to be sure, but one calculated to conceal Maimonides's philosophical method and the underlying unity of its positions, and to reveal it only to one who succeeds in breaking the code through study.

As to language, the *Mishneh Torah* was written in Hebrew and the *Guide* in Arabic. Finally as to the intended audience, the *Mishneh Torah* was written for Jewish scholars of the traditional type who were well-versed in the written and oral Torah but had no philosophical education, whereas the *Guide* was intended for Jewish scholars who had philosophical education and wished to advance further in that area. Certainly the difference in language derives from the differences in content and audience. Hebrew was the natural language of choice for halakhic presentation, for it was the principal language of the traditional halakhic sources, and still is. Philosophy was more readily communicated in Arabic, which was the language of the speculative literature available to Maimonides—the Arabic translations of Greek philosophic works, and the original works of the Arabic philosophers. It stands to reason that we have here two works that were intended to fulfill very different missions, and apparently they represent two different dimensions in Maimonides's spiritual world. Nevertheless, Maimonides sought to integrate his spiritual world, not to compartmentalize it. His writing was devoted to that purpose: to harmonize philosophy with the Torah. If this is so, then these two very different works must have a common denominator.

Theological Dogma within the Law of the Ideal State

Indeed, it is not hard to find the connection. First of all, even in his halakhic work Maimonides set aside a special place for a summary of his theological views, at the very outset of the work. The *Mishneh Torah* starts with the *Sefer Ha-Madda*, the “Book of Knowledge,” which is entirely devoted to explicating the true doctrines that the Torah teaches. The justification here is similar to that in Bahya Ibn Pakudah's *Duties of the Heart*—before summarizing practical obligations, one must first define the obligations of faith, or more precisely the obligations of knowledge, by which one enters the world of the Torah. This stipulation raises a delicate problem from the philosophical perspective. One can command actions, but is it possible to command knowledge and one's understanding of the truth?

We shall deal with this problem later. For now, we will simply note that by prefacing faith-obligations to practical obligations, Maimonides is being consistent with his political views, which were influenced by Plato. Maimonides assumes that the Mosaic Torah represents the law of the ideal state, whose purpose is to realize the human ideal: attain-

ment of eternal truth, and a life consistent with that truth. In order for all the state's citizens to live in prospect of the realization of this goal, every one of them must partake of that truth to a degree keeping with his station and abilities. We should emphasize that in the *Book of Knowledge* Maimonides did not present a philosophical formulation of the eternal truths, but only a dogmatic formulation. In other words, these matters are not presented as a series of proofs proceeding logically from assumptions to conclusions, but only as cut-and-dried propositions which summarize the bottom line. Such a presentation is proper for a legislator, and Maimonides makes this distinction knowingly and intentionally. *The philosopher as legislator must express himself dogmatically, for a proper philosophical presentation will not be understood by the masses.* If we said earlier that the *Mishneh Torah's* systematic method extends to doctrines as well, we should now clarify that the "system" here is dogmatic rather than philosophical. The work presents doctrines in order of importance, but does not derive them logically from one another.

In any case, the differences between the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide* highlight their common denominator: both works advance knowledge of philosophical truth, but by different methods. Thus in the *Mishneh Torah* we do not only find certain philosophical views expressed, but we also find that the writing of the work is based on philosophical assumptions that are elaborated in the *Guide of the Perplexed*.

The Mishneh Torah as a Halakhic Work

Understandably, these words need qualification. Maimonides did not write the *Mishneh Torah* in the same spirit as Plato wrote his *Laws*. In his formulation and systematization of the halakhah, Maimonides is dependent on halakhic sources more than on his theoretical principles. But first of all, Maimonides tried to justify this very dependence on the basis of his own method, and to justify on that basis his preference for the legislation of Moses over any other legislation; and secondly, despite that dependence, it stands to reason that Maimonides's philosophical stance determined quite a bit of his method of exposition of the laws of the Oral Torah. Despite Maimonides's avowed fidelity to the halakhic sources which he followed both as to general principle and the detail of the law, the *Mishneh Torah* constituted a great revolution in the history of halakhic literature. The controversy which it aroused is testimony to this fact. How was it revolutionary? In two ways: (1) Maimonides sought to derive systematically laws which in the tradition

were presented as cut-and-dried. (2) Maimonides cites these laws in his work without referring to their sources, and without presenting the process of deliberation which preceded his decisions.

Whoever pays attention to the classic literature of the Oral Law—Mishnah, Talmud, the commentaries on these works, and the Codes—will take note of the sharp departure here. Rather than simply setting forth legal decisions to guide practice, the literature of the Oral Torah presents deliberations and arguments to be studied. These are theoretical rather than practical works; therefore they record different views. When they come to make legal decisions, they cite sources and set forth their rationale. This is certainly not accidental. It expresses a religious ideal quite characteristic of rabbinic Judaism—the ideal of *Talmud Torah* (“the study of Torah”), which is a supreme religious value. If Maimonides departed from this mold, it is surely because his conception of this ideal underwent change, in respect of content and intellectual method. We find this expressed in a clear distinction between two kinds of “Torah wisdom”: (1) ordinary Torah wisdom, dealing with religious law; and (2) “the true wisdom of Torah,” dealing with eternal truths. Based on this distinction, Maimonides argues that the injunction “to study it day and night” applies to Torah wisdom not in the ordinary, but in the philosophical sense.

Guide to the Perplexed: *Reconciling Torah and Philosophy*

Whereas the *Mishneh Torah* is addressed to the student of “ordinary” Torah wisdom, the *Guide of the Perplexed* is addressed to the student of “true” Torah wisdom. The students of the first type are not yet “perplexed.” Only one who has progressed beyond halakhic Torah-study to philosophy is perplexed by the contradictions he encounters, and therefore requires guidance as to how the oppositions can be reconciled. To such a reader is the *Guide to the Perplexed* addressed. It seems to offer a reconciliation. But we have already seen that Maimonides saw a great danger in dealing openly with these issues. There is no danger, understandably, in openly dealing with either Torah or philosophy separately, for the oppositions are not yet evident. But dealing with both together reveals them.

Is this danger not aroused by the very writing of the *Guide*? Indeed yes. But Maimonides tried to control it through his method of composition. Instead of a detailed commentary, he provides only keys; instead of a systematic exposition, he builds his book as a masterpiece

of obfuscation. How did he come by this method, which has no analogue in Christian or Muslim philosophy? According to Maimonides, he followed the example of the Torah and the prophetic books, and clearly so. In any case, Maimonides read the Torah (and imitated it) as to the way that it reflected philosophical truth in its presentation, though it is evidently not philosophical at all. The “illuminations” of eternal truth are found among many matters that seem irrelevant to it, and occasionally among matters that seem to contradict them. Only one who knows how to piece together these illuminations and to reinterpret the apparently contradictory passages through a sophisticated exegetical method, whose rules are learned from oral tradition, arrives at the deeper truth. Maimonides imitated this method in his book, but for the opposite goal of deciphering the riddle, for the truth that he concealed turns out to be the true philosophical interpretation of the Torah itself!

The Importance of Religious Law: Ordering Individual and Social Life

The preference for “true Torah wisdom” is not meant to denigrate the ordinary kind that is familiar to the traditional scholar. Maimonides dedicated the best of his life to the traditional learning. All the time that he had not finished writing the *Mishneh Torah*, he was not free to write the *Guide*. We may deduce that he considered the halakhic law the one and only way to arrive at the goal of truth. To be sure, he assumed that the halakhah was the means and philosophy was the goal, but whoever has internalized the teaching of the philosophers knows that man, unlike God, is always on the way to the eternal truth. It is impossible to arrive at the goal, but only to approach it. In that respect, the essential thing is to be on the right road. In that case, halakhah is the first stage of the road to the truth, and without it we shall never get to the second stage. Moreover, the road is not divorced from the goal but flows from it, for only thus can it lead to it. This, at any rate, is the importance of halakhah as a religious law: it shapes all a person's way of life in such fashion that he can approach the true goal to the best of his ability.

Moreover, in this notion of the task of halakhah, the obligation of gifted individuals to approach the eternal truth is directed at all members of their society, for they all participate in enabling the conditions required for arriving at the truth: they must all take care that all members of society may approach the truth to the best of their ability.

For that reason one must teach it in a way that it will be understood by everyone to the best of his ability. Halakhah is the instrument that makes this possible. In that case, in his book *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides discharged his obligation to his society to pave for all its members the way that he himself traveled to arrive at his goal.

The Mishneh Torah: The Republic and the Laws

These considerations help us to define the place of the *Mishneh Torah* in the context of Maimonides's philosophical system. If we compare him with Plato, whose outlook he followed, we may see the *Mishneh Torah* as combining the functions of Plato's *Republic* and his *Laws*. In that sense, the *Mishneh Torah* is not at all external to Maimonides's philosophical project, as most modern scholars argue, but the opposite: it is an organic part of the system. Only in this way can we properly understand the revolution that Maimonides wrought in writing his major halakhic work. His purpose was to present the halakhah as a systematic whole, which served both to educate the people and to enable its teachers to rise above preoccupation with halakhah as if it were "study of Torah for its own sake," and to enable them to fulfill their role as rabbis and judges without it suppressing their progress toward the true spiritual goal.

The Source of Tension in Maimonides's Thought

Maimonides's method of writing the *Guide to the Perplexed* reveals the tension that characterizes his thought. What caused it? The difference between the literal sense of the Torah and its philosophic truth does not exhaust the matter, for the tension is found not only between the Torah and philosophy, but within philosophy itself. There is an opposition between dogmatic indoctrination, which is a requirement of education and practical duty, and philosophical enlightenment, which is not bound in advance to any authority beyond the rules of logic, which are not "above" reason but flow from it. Halakhic instruction is authoritative and dogmatic. Philosophic instruction recognizes no authority but logic. But dogmatic indoctrination seems necessary for the goals of philosophical instruction. How can this contradiction be resolved, either from the dogmatic or the philosophic standpoint?

Differences with Kalam

Raising this conflict to philosophical consciousness constitutes the fundamental difference between Maimonides's Aristotelian outlook and the thinkers of the Kalam. The thinkers of the Kalam philosophized on the basis of the Torah from the assumption of the complete agreement of Torah and rational inquiry, an agreement which ordinary students can comprehend, and not only the select few. Therefore they wrote their book for the broader public, and not only for the select few. Maimonides cannot assume complete agreement, for his philosophy is not based on the Torah. He learns philosophic truth from its own proper sources, and from that standpoint he then comes to reconcile it with the Torah's words. Inevitably there develops a powerful tension between the Torah and philosophy, one which the previous systems of thought did not perceive.

Maimonides's Relation to the Previous Tradition of Jewish Thought

This train of thought leads to the problematic conclusion that we cannot arrive at the true understanding of truth through the ordinary study of Torah. This implies a radical break with the tradition, which raises the question of the relation of Maimonides to his predecessors in Jewish thought. However, this question has two aspects: (1) How did he conceive the relation between sacred traditional literature and philosophical inquiry? (2) To what extent was he influenced in fact by the philosophical works of his predecessors? We will attempt to answer these questions separately.

The Relation between Tradition and Philosophy

Maimonides derived his essential philosophic views from the works of Aristotle and his commentators, especially the Arab commentators Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Ibn Bajja (Avempace). He clearly recognized the non-Jewish source of his views. However, we will fail to appreciate his way of thinking if we do not recall that despite this, *he saw philosophical inquiry as an authentic part of the original Jewish tradition*. Furthermore, this assumption was a fundamental assumption of his world-view, and it is indissolubly linked to the interpretation he gave of the essential identity of the Jewish people and of its Torah. Therefore it is worthwhile to elaborate somewhat on these matters.

As an Aristotelian, Maimonides was remote from Judah Halevi's version of the Chosen People idea. He believed that the Patriarchs and especially Moses were extremely gifted intellectually, and that the Torah of Moses represents a unique intellectual accomplishment. But he thoroughly rejected the notion that there was a material, ontological difference between the Jewish people and the other peoples of the world. The Jews for him were simply people like anyone else. Their uniqueness consisted in their recognizing truths that other nations did not recognize, which God chose to reveal to them in his Torah. This is, if you like, a material difference. Nevertheless, Maimonides does not deny the uniqueness that is found in *the history of the People of Israel*. According to Maimonides Abraham, the father of the nation, arrived with his own intellect at the recognition of the monotheistic truth. Having arrived at it, he went on his journeys and converted people to his way of thinking. Exceptional individuals from various peoples, who were able to arrive at recognition of the truth, flocked to his banner, and so there came into being a tribe of philosophers. This unique event stood in good stead for the people of Israel, who would thereafter have recognition of the truth as their special inheritance. This is a philosophical-elitist version of the idea of chosenness, which serves as background for understanding the unique achievement of Moses. This man, who was revered in Israel as "Rabbenu" (our Teacher/Master/Rabbi), and as the "greatest of the prophets" whose like never did or will arise—was indeed the "lord of the sages," the greatest philosopher in history, who gave the ideal law to his people. Therefore the people that observes this law in its entire way of life is a truly chosen people.

Given these assumptions, all subsequent events of Jewish history are the episodes of a conflict between a nation dedicated to Torah versus the gentiles who live by the laws of an idolatrous faith. It is an inevitable conflict, for the true religion challenges the verity of the pagan faiths. It aspires to a future in which the kingdom of God will hold sway over all humanity. Thus in his "Epistle to Yemen" Maimonides distinguished between three principal stages in this struggle: (1) The attempt to destroy Israel and its Torah by force (the period of the First Temple, culminating in the Babylonian Exile). (2) The attempt to refute the true religion through pagan philosophy (the Second Temple period). (3) The attempt to expropriate Israel's heritage through plagiarizing imitation in the form of the quasi-monotheistic false religions of Christianity and Islam (Maimonides's time). Maimonides described

here an evolution that defines by stages the trials that the Jewish people must undergo, which is at the same time a stepwise evolution of the propagation of truth among the gentiles, for even an imposter of the true religion brings about some absorption of its values. The larger task of the Jewish people in the ongoing trial of sanctifying the divine Name is to reveal the lie and falsity of idolatry. That is how we should understand Maimonides's sweeping statement that whoever denies idolatry is considered as if he has fulfilled the entire Torah.

We see from this account that Maimonides regarded philosophy as an internal Jewish tradition. Philosophy is not originally a gentile invention, though the pagan gentiles perverted it in order to refute Judaism; rather it was conceived by the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. Just as there is an Oral Torah in the halakhic realm, so too was there a philosophical tradition in Israel which was not taught publicly to all, but was communicated privately to properly qualified individuals, from teacher to student. This is how Maimonides understood the Mishnaic notions of "Secret of Creation" and "Secret of the Chariot": "Secret of Creation" is the science of physics, and "Secret of the Chariot" is the science of metaphysics. It was halakhically forbidden to teach these matters in public or to put them in writing, in case they should come into the hands of unqualified people. No wonder that these traditions became lost or garbled in the circumstances of the exile! By this (to us strange) series of assumptions Maimonides justified his attempt to reconstruct the lost or garbled tradition and put it down in writing in the *Guide to the Perplexed*. He deliberately overrode the halakhic prohibition but justified it as a temporary exigency, because the loss or corruption of the esoteric Torah tradition was worse than the danger that some might err on account of it. Nevertheless, he tried to write it in a way that would approximate as much as possible the communication of a teacher to individual students who had proved their mettle.

In our view, Maimonides wrote the *Guide of the Perplexed* as written lessons to a private student, who had started to study with him in person but was forced to travel abroad. He implicitly addressed all those who had the qualities and prior preparation of his student. In the sequel, he cautioned that his lessons were written in a manner that only those students who had studied and understood both the lore of Torah as well as the sciences and philosophy, would be able to decipher their "secret."

Maimonides's Relation to His Jewish Predecessors

Maimonides may justly be regarded as the founder of a school of thought, and as such he subjected his predecessors to severe criticism. He was equally critical of the general philosophical literature of his own day. Maimonides accepted the Aristotelian philosophers and rejected sharply the other schools: the varieties of Kalamitic thought and mystical Neo-Platonism. Since most of his Jewish predecessors were to be counted within these two schools, he wrote in opposition to them. He expressed his views definitively in a famous letter to the Hebrew translator of the *Guide*, Samuel Ibn Tibbon: he did not regard them as philosophers, though he recognized their stature in other areas—halakhah, medicine, poetry. Reading their theoretical works was to him a waste of time and mental obfuscation. They validated his argument that the circumstances of exile had caused the tradition of esoteric speculative Torah to be forgotten, and that one needed to reconstruct it with the help of superior philosophical writings, that meet the highest standards of logical reasoning. One should start on the foundation of logic. (Indeed, Maimonides's first work was a primer on logic.)

Nevertheless, Maimonides refrained from attacking explicitly the Jewish Kalamitic thinkers that preceded him, particularly R. Saadia Gaon, and contented himself with a general critique of the Kalamitic school. He did not want to criticize the Geonim of Babylonian Jewry, especially R. Saadia, because of their revered authority in the domain of halakhah. He did not want a disparagement of their philosophical competence to lead freethinkers to challenge their halakhic authority. A close reading will show that he often criticized specific views of Saadia vociferously—for instance, his making proof of creation a key foundation of his proof of God's existence—without mentioning his name. This is the most striking example, but it is not unique.

Nevertheless, Maimonides did not break completely with his predecessors, just as he did not accept without qualification the Aristotelian tradition that had come down to him. On several issues where the Kalam reflected Torahitic positions that Maimonides also regarded as essential, he accepted their position and distanced himself from the Aristotelian position. Examples of this are his position on creation, on affirming the divine will, on miracles, and to some extent on providence. Moreover, on several issues Maimonides offered, in addition to his primary philosophical position, a more moderate position reflecting the standpoint of non-Aristotelian theologians. He was willing to tolerate

such a position, despite its lack of philosophical precision, as long as it did not commit the sin of anthropomorphism. An example of this is the doctrine of the divine glory as a medium of prophecy.

It follows from all this that Maimonides took an independent stance as a religious philosopher. Though he accepted the Aristotelian method generally, he did not refrain from parting ways and criticizing it when he saw it as conflicting with the truth of the Torah.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MAIMONIDES'S EARLIER PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS—THE INTRODUCTIONS TO THE MISHNAH

General Introduction

It follows from what we have said that Maimonides wrote his books intentionally in a pre-planned order. He progressed from Torahitic treatises with a philosophic goal in view, to philosophic treatises that refer to Torah. It will therefore make sense to discuss his books in the same order.

We start with his commentary to the Mishnah. The general introduction tells us little about Maimonides's philosophy. Nevertheless, it is worth summarizing its primary ideas:

1. Establishing the authority of the Oral Law as equal to the Written Law.
2. The unique, non-recurring nature of Moses's legislative prophecy. From here on, no prophet has any halakhic authority in his capacity as prophet. On the contrary, the halakhah determines what is true and false prophecy.
3. The highest attainment of mankind is intellectual perfection. Culture exists for its sake, and society is dedicated to creating the conditions for the activity of the philosopher, who fulfills its purpose in his life activity.

In that case, why did the rabbis say that "God has nothing else in this world but the [four-cubit] domain of halakhah"? According to Maimonides, this should be understood as a means to the end-goal. When the entire society observes halakhic norms—i.e., the commands of God—then privileged individuals can come to knowledge of Him.

How should one interpret the aggadic saying of the rabbis which appear strange and unenlightened? Maimonides deals more explicitly with this question in his Introduction to Sanhedrin Chapter 10, where he distinguishes three approaches to these sayings. The first is that of the ignorant, who accept the rabbinic saying literally. The second is worse than the first, for it is that of the self-styled "wise" who reject

the rabbinic sayings because they mistakenly think they are to be taken literally. The third is the correct view, of those who recognize that these sayings have an exoteric and an esoteric meaning and keep the latter to themselves, for it is fruitless to expound to the masses a truth which they cannot grasp.

What is the guiding plan of the Mishnah? Maimonides assumes that the Mishnah has a logical structure, embracing all topics of legislation in correct topical order, as befits a divine legislator. He deduces from this that the first purpose of this legislation is to establish a social order that extends to ethical and religious perfection. This is the background for the next topic, to which he devoted his second introduction.

Introduction to Sanhedrin, Chapter 10 (Helek)

The introduction to Chapter *Helek*, in which Maimonides first formulated his theory of the “principles” of Judaism, is devoted for the most part to explaining the meaning of the concept, “a portion in the World to Come.” This association of ideas has its source in the very text he is interpreting (Sanhedrin 10:1), which first asserts that “all Israelites have a portion in the World to Come,” and then goes on to enumerate those who have no portion in the World to Come: “He who says the Resurrection is not from the Torah, or that there is no Torah from heaven, and the Epicurean.” From these three heresies enumerated in the Mishnah, Maimonides deduces three categories of obligatory faith-principles which amount to thirteen principles in all. However, in the course of his discussion Maimonides develops an independent train of thought.

Five Traditional Jewish Understandings of “World To Come”

Maimonides starts by enumerating five schools of thought pertaining to the understanding of “World to Come”: (a) Material reward in a material world. (b) Material prosperity transcending natural causes in our world. (c) Bodily resurrection. (d) Return of the exiles and restoration of the Davidic dynasty by natural means. (e) All of these in combination.

One sees readily that there is a progression here from views that Maimonides rejects to those that he finds acceptable. (Resurrection is very problematic from a philosophical standpoint, but since the halakhah mandates this belief, Maimonides accepts it as a miraculous

fact.) However, in the course of the discussion, Maimonides establishes that each of these views can find supporting evidence from scriptural verses or rabbinic sayings, understood in their literal sense. He does not explicitly state which of these views is true or mistaken. Instead, he raises a new question directed at all of them: Is the reward spoken of here the purpose of serving God according to the Torah, or is it perhaps only a means to the end?

We may deduce that on the one hand Maimonides will not bring himself to negate any of these views utterly and unequivocally—not even the first, which is apparently so repugnant to his way of thinking. On the other hand, he is not ready to accept any of them at face value—not even the fourth, which is so much in agreement to his way of thinking—but only conditionally. The dialectical character of his thought here is striking.

Why cannot Maimonides reject any of these views out of hand? Because each has a basis in the Torah and in the sayings of the rabbis. And why can he not accept any of these views unambiguously? Because each conceives of reward as an extrinsic consequence of the fulfillment of the mitzvot, not an intrinsic result. A payoff cannot be one's true just desert. In a philosopher's view, only the attainment or botching of human perfection can be proper recompense.

The truth of the matter is that true recompense is that eternity which is acquired through attainment of eternal truth, and this is a person's "share in the World to Come." Punishment consists in forfeiting this eternity. Understanding the "true wisdom of Torah" brings about the actualizing of human intellect from its potential state, and this is the recompense that is embodied in the commandments themselves. Maimonides cannot accept any of the views mentioned earlier, because none of them points explicitly to this notion.

Understanding the Traditional Views

Nevertheless, Maimonides does not totally reject any of them either, and this for a good philosophical reason: they may all be regarded as the means to that same end. Some can be regarded as a means to an end in their literal sense, and others only in a figurative sense. In this way, each of the scriptural and rabbinic sources can be explained.

Views Literally Accepted

Let us first consider the views which Maimonides accepts literally, namely the third and fourth. The third view, though it is philosophically problematic, he accepts as a dogma. He cannot disagree with the explicit dictate of the Mishnah, nor will he treat a halakhic pronouncement as merely figurative. This is a line he cannot cross, for if one dared to interpret laws figuratively, one would undermine the authority of the Torahitic imperative irreparably. Maimonides's view here is identical with Plato's political philosophy, even though the content of the halakhah is problematic. In that case, we do not know how this promise will be fulfilled, and there is no reason why we should puzzle out the details, but it is important that we should know that this miracle is not the end-goal for whose sake we live, but only a means toward achieving it. By contrast, the fourth view is easily compatible with a philosophical standpoint. As we saw earlier, the achievement of human perfection is conditioned on the existence of well-ordered social conditions that tend toward that goal. These are identical with the laws of the ideal state—the Torah republic—whose purpose is to further the bodily and spiritual well-being of all its citizens. The Torah promises that in Messianic times, the Jewish commonwealth will be renewed on the basis of Torah (which is the ideal law), and its citizens will then be able to achieve their destiny and perfection.

Views Accepted Not Literally but Figuratively

We will now consider those views which Maimonides cannot accept literally. The key for understanding these is given in the parable cited later in the introduction: "When one is a child, they encourage him to learn by promising him sweets, etc." In this parable, the child at each stage takes the end-goal (the ideas he is acquiring) as a means to receive a reward, and he takes the means (the extrinsic reward) as an end-goal. However, his teacher's intention is the opposite: to exploit the child's natural but mistaken inclination as a means to advance him toward what is truly good for him. Similarly, the Torah in its literal words presents people with an external reward which is but a means to the true reward, because at the start of their journey people are not able to appreciate the value of the true end-goal, and if they were told that it is incumbent on them to learn because that is their purpose, they would not learn at all.

These words contain a dialectical tension that borders on the paradoxical. The literal words of Torah teach views that are not true, in order to serve the higher truth! Is this not purposely deceptive? Does reason permit such a procedure?

But Maimonides will answer that there is no deception here, but rather a figurative concretization of the truth, in the manner of the saying, “the Torah speaks in human language.” The Torah’s words are not to be taken literally. The descriptions of sensual pleasure are only a parable of the spiritual delight which comes from knowing the truth for its own sake. If we interpret the Torah’s promises not literally but as parables for spiritual fulfillment and delight, then the truth proclaimed by philosophy and by the Torah are fully compatible. We should emphasize that in Maimonides’s view it is necessary to teach the non-philosophers as well that the promises of sensory pleasure in the Garden of Eden or physical punishment in Gehenna are only a parable of a pleasure or suffering beyond imagining, which they will only fully appreciate when they have progressed in their learning from the stage of extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. Therefore Maimonides directed the sharpest criticism at those naïve preachers who were lavish with their pictorial descriptions, which they presented as the literal truth, thus leading the people into error. It is only permissible to present descriptions which allude figuratively to the truth, and to present them honestly as such. In that case, what purpose do they serve? The answer is as follows: *The ordinary person cannot conceive of spiritual bliss. If we wish to have an effective influence on him, we must use sensual imagery, or he will remain indifferent and we will fail to achieve our goal.* We must avail ourselves of sensual imagery. Moreover, when the listener knows that this is only imagery and allusion, he will nevertheless grasp what he is able to grasp—namely, material delight. But he will not be led into error, for he will know that what he has grasped from the Torah is only an allusion, and he will realize that beyond the sensory dimension are domains of spiritual experience that he cannot yet grasp. There is no harm in this, if through what he does grasp he comes to the performance of the mitzvot and study of the Torah, through which he will merit the truth and (on his level) a portion in the World to Come.

In this way, all the views which Maimonides enumerates are incorrect if they are understood literally as the end-goal, but they are correct if they are grasped figuratively as a means. Furthermore, ordinary Jews will understand the end as means and the means as end, but they should know that their comprehension is incomplete. Accomplished Jews

will understand that what was thought to be means is end, and what was thought to be end is only means. The same ambiguity reappears immediately after in Maimonides's formulation of dogmas.

The Role of the Thirteen Principles: Attaining a Portion in the World to Come

Why does Maimonides mention his theory of dogma here? One may respond on the basis of the previous: If knowledge of the truth is one's portion in the World to Come, then these 13 principles, which encompass truth in its religious formulation, are themselves the end-goal to which all should strive. Knowledge of them *is* one's portion in the World to Come. If one asks, why does the denier of Torah-from-heaven, Resurrection, and God's existence have no portion in the World to Come?—the simple answer is: These truths are themselves the “portion in the World to Come,” and whoever denies the one forfeits the other. But we shall see that Maimonides was not satisfied in positing the immanent reward in the act of knowledge, but he established a legal-political sanction in addition: Acknowledging the 13 principles is a condition of belonging to the Torah-republic, represented by the community of Israel. Whoever denies them is ostracized from that society.

But this political determination raises a major difficulty: *Can one command correct knowledge the same way that one can command correct behavior?* Can one compel oneself to regard as true something which he intuitively thinks is untrue? By the Aristotelian epistemology to which Maimonides adhered, the answer is negative. It is possible to teach, to demonstrate, and to persuade someone, but it is not possible to command belief. Commandment can direct the will to search for the truth to the best of one's ability, but this is up to the conscience of the individual, and a religious institution can only command public profession of principles that are a condition for membership. If Maimonides established the 13 principles as obligations of faith, it must be in this sense: *The citizen of the state must profess to believe what is laid down as the foundation of his state.* This is a condition of the existence of that ideal state, whose task is to aid him and direct him toward the realization of his life's purpose.

But in this way we are led to another problematic ambiguity: Maimonides presents the 13 principles as the truth which is the end-goal of humanity, yet he exploits their formulation as a means to influence and educate people so that they should wish to progress toward their attainment! Maimonides is aware that whoever knows the truth does not need to be commanded, for he cannot think otherwise.

Whoever is in need of commandment does not yet know the truth, even if he repeats the words and professes them. Can one say that one attains his portion in the World to Come by mere profession? Epistemologically, the answer is no. But Maimonides declares otherwise: all the *community* of Israel have a portion in the World to Come. Knowledge of the Torahitic truth resides in the community of Israel, and every individual who chooses to be a part of that community by fulfilling the commands of the Torah wholeheartedly, has earned his place in the World to Come—each according to his ability and his level.

The Thirteen Principles

In keeping with the Mishnah's tripartite formula, Maimonides's 13 principles fall into three groups: general theological principles, Torahitic principles, and political principles:

Theological Principles

1. The knowledge that there is a God, who is the cause of all existence, but who transcends it and is independent of it.
2. The knowledge that God is one and *sui generis*.
3. The knowledge that God is incorporeal (and that all the material figures of God in scripture are not to be understood literally).
4. The knowledge that God is primordial, i.e. prior to every existing thing. (This does not mean temporal priority, as God transcends time, but causal priority and priority of rank.)

Torahitic Principles

5. That only God is properly to be worshipped. This definition brands as idolatrous any worship directed at the beings that are intermediate between God and the terrestrial-human realm, such as the angels or the celestial spheres, inasmuch as they are only intermediaries, and even on the supposition that we were unable to address God because of His transcendence. Worship is to be directed only to God. We should remark on the thematic connection between this principle and the preceding. The formulation of the fourth principle—knowledge that God is primordial—appears superfluous in itself, since the affirmation of God's absolute priority is only a reformulation of the first principle, which affirms God's

existence as the independent cause of existence of those beings caused by Him. Rather, the fourth principle is intended to lay a foundation for the fifth principle. God's priority explains why it is only proper to worship Him, even if He is beyond human understanding.

6. The sixth principle is also related to the fifth, but makes the contrary statement that intermediaries are *required* for relation to God: in order to worship God properly, it is necessary that there be prophecy, which consists of receiving a divine "flow" to the human intellect. This is possible only through intermediaries. However, in the act of worshiping God, one must direct one's thoughts only to God, in the knowledge that between us and God is an unbridged gap. By making this distinction clear, we avoid the danger of drifting into idolatry.
7. The faith in the prophecy of Moses, which is superior to all the prophecies which preceded or succeeded him. Here Maimonides adds an extended digression on the four features which distinguish Moses's prophecy from all other prophets:
 - (a) He prophesied without an intermediary.
 - (b) He prophesied during the daytime in a state of total wakefulness.
 - (c) He prophesied without betraying any trace of physical weakness or fear-and-trembling.
 - (d) He prophesied whenever he wished.

Maimonides's lengthy treatment indicates that this principle was important to him not only as an essential link in the current argument, but in its broader context. In general, Maimonides expressed himself at greater length when he was responding to opposing views. Thus he expanded on the issue of God's incorporeality, because some of his contemporaries wanted to understand prophetic figures of speech literally, or at least did not regard such interpretations as heretical. Similarly he expanded the argument here in order to refute Christians and Muslims and to establish Moses's Torah as a unique, absolute gift which remains unsurpassed.

8. The eighth principle is the belief in Torah from Heaven. Here too Maimonides expands to clarify his intention. The command is to know that the entire Torah as we have it in hand is a divine product. Moses received it prophetically, and he put it down in writing in the manner of a scribe writing from dictation. This

formulation is important, for Maimonides wants to exclude the view that the Torah was handed to Moses in written form. This is an essential distinction. He wishes to emphasize that Moses was not a passive intermediary, but an active agent. The Torah came about through Moses's mediation. This means that indeed it was given by God, but it was received—i.e., it was understood and explicated, in human language by a human being. This has implications for the understanding of the nature of the Oral Torah as well.

Indeed, Maimonides emphasizes that everything written in the Torah, including the narratives, came from God and did not originate with Moses. Therefore, whoever maintains that a particular part of the Torah was written by Moses of his own volition, is considered a heretic. Everything is from Sinai, and everything is essential. Moreover, every utterance in the Torah hints at marvelous insights intended for the initiated.

This leads to a third idea, that the received commentary on the Torah, namely the Oral Torah, was communicated to Moses at Sinai, and has the same authority. It is easy to infer that the length of these remarks hints at controversies in the community. From this point on, the formulation is brief:

9. The Torah of Moses is of divine origin, and therefore allows of no addition, subtraction, or change.

Principles of Reward and Punishment (Political Principles)

10. God knows all deeds of humankind.
11. God gives reward to those who fulfill His commandments, and punishes the sinner.
12. In Principle #12 Maimonides expands, again because of current controversy, on the coming of the Messiah, which he interprets in his fashion, and expresses strong opposition to calculating the date of redemption.
13. Finally, the belief in the resurrection, which despite its problematic character in Maimonides's thought he propounds without adding any explanation. The brevity may suggest that this belief defies philosophical explanation.

The Order and Structure of the "Principles"

What guided Maimonides in selecting his principles? We have already given part of the answer. Each principle is a link in a chain. The emphases and expansions respond to opposing views. There is also a negativity in the formulation that is characteristic of Maimonides, for he seeks to define error and thus come to a clearer understanding of the truth.

A deeper understanding of the "principles" requires further examination of their tripartite structure, which reflects the Mishnaic formulation:

1. The first group consists of the theological principles. These comprise a connected series, whose religious significance is summarized by the last principle: the exclusive worship of God. This group corresponds to the Mishnaic statement that whoever denies God's existence—namely the Epicurean—has no portion in the World to Come.
2. The second group comprises the Torahitic principles, which are connected to the first group through the belief in prophecy, and establish the Torah's authority as commanded. This group corresponds to the Mishnaic statement that whoever denies "Torah from Heaven" has no portion in the World to Come.
3. The third group comprises all matters of reward and punishment. This recalls the preceding discussion concerning the meaning of "a portion in the World to Come." Both are related to the Mishnaic statement that whoever denies that the Resurrection is proved from the Torah, has no portion in the World to Come.

How the "Principles" Relate to Philosophy and Common Sense Understanding

We have so far demonstrated how the Thirteen Principles parallel the tripartite formulation of the Mishnah. But they follow an interesting logical progression in their philosophical implications as well.

In the first group, there is complete identity between the Torahitic formulation and their philosophical content. Philosophy and Torah are in agreement here. But we see also that Maimonides emphasizes the erroneous views that are negated by these principles: God is not immanent in nature, God is not multiple or composite, God is not material, intermediaries may not be worshipped. This is because a non-philosopher will understand the negative formulation, though he may not fully appreciate the positive.

The second group may have some connection with the Aristotelian theory of prophecy, but it is not subject matter for philosophy *per se*. It cannot be verified or falsified philosophically. These principles establish religion as an autonomous discipline on the basis of revelation. We emphasize the importance of the idea of prophecy in Maimonides's thought, for it is the connecting link between philosophy and religion.

Finally we have the third group of principles, which in their plain sense are clearly unacceptable to Aristotelian philosophy. Yet precisely here we find the principles which he discussed in the whole first part of this Introduction, namely reward and punishment. We may say that the principles in the first group comprise one's "portion in the World to Come" in the philosophic sense; the second group deals with the means to bringing people to that truth; and the third group provides the motivation by which the Torah gets people to avail themselves of those means. But for the simple believer, means and ends are reversed—acknowledgement of the principles in the first two groups is the means for acquiring the reward promised in the third group. For the simple, the reward is the main purpose, whereas from the Torah's viewpoint the reward is merely an incentive to the purpose of knowing the truth.

In other words: *the third group is justified for the philosopher as a means to the higher goal of truth, and indeed in the Guide Maimonides speaks of these principles as politically necessary beliefs.* The belief in reward is necessary for the ordinary people who live by the Torah, as an incentive for their fulfilling the commandments.

Are these "necessary beliefs" also true, in Maimonides's view? This is a question on which the opinions are fiercely divided. Some voice the extreme view that Maimonides saw it as politically necessary to lay down principles which he disbelieved. I see this view as without foundation and unlikely. It is more correct, in my opinion, that Maimonides gave a popular formulation to propositions which have a more complex philosophical interpretation. If he had presented these matters in their philosophically correct formulation, with the necessary demonstrations, they would not have had the desired political effect. Therefore he spoke "in human (popular) language," though in a manner transparent to philosophic understanding. In other words: *In his opinion, this is the truth insofar as the general public can understand it.* This is an application of the pedagogical approach that he advocated in the example given above. A precise conceptual formulation will not be understood by the

masses, and may lead them to err; whereas a simplified rendition may give them at least a superficial understanding. If they are told that it is a simplified presentation, they will not be in error, but will be led toward the truth.

Agenda: Politics, Psychology, Ethics, Prophecy, Theology

The introduction to Sanhedrin Chapter 10 is the first step that Maimonides takes toward the philosophical truth. Maimonides presents the next step in the third of his "Introductions" in the Commentary on the Mishnah, namely the Introduction to Tractate *Avot* ("Ethics of the Fathers"), which is also known as the "Eight Chapters." In this introduction he enters the domain of philosophy properly speaking, dealing with topics of which everyone has experience and background for understanding, namely psychology, ethics, and the implications of both for politics and theory of prophecy.

In expounding on these, we shall draw on the whole gamut of Maimonides's writings in order to expand on the concise presentation that he gives in the *Eight Chapters*.

CHAPTER NINE

MAIMONIDES'S POLITICS, PSYCHOLOGY & ETHICS

Politics

*Platonic Theory of the State*¹

Though Maimonides adhered generally to the Aristotelian philosophy, he followed Plato in his political theory. This may be because Aristotle's *Politics* had not yet been translated into Arabic. More importantly, Plato's political theory was more compatible with his Torah-based outlook.

Plato and Aristotle shared the common assumption that man is a political creature by nature, in the sense that he cannot survive outside society, and more especially he cannot survive *as man* outside society, for the highest human perfection is enlightenment, and he cannot achieve this perfection outside of society.

Maimonides stressed two aspects of man's dependence on society. The first is functional: *Man cannot survive as man outside society: in that sense it is natural to him.*

Second, Maimonides strongly emphasizes society's intellectual purpose: *Society exists so that those who are capable shall arrive at apprehension of the truth.* Intellectual perfection is not just an individual achievement, but rather a collective achievement in which intellectually-gifted individuals express the aspirations and purpose of society as a whole.

Man's Egoistic Nature Requires Political Subordination

Though man is by nature a political animal, human beings do not congregate readily and naturally in orderly herds as many lower animals do. People vary widely in their preferences and characteristics,

¹ Schweid's discussion of Maimonides's political theory follows closely the argument of Leo Strauss in *Philosophy and Law*. See also Shlomo Pines, "The Philosophic Sources of the *Guide of the Perplexed*," in Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, University of Chicago, 1963, Vol. I, pp. lvi–cxxxiv. However, Schweid dissents from Strauss's thesis of the predominance of Maimonides's esoteric views in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.

and they do not acknowledge authority readily, but tend to rebel against it in pursuit of their individual happiness. But an orderly society cannot survive without acknowledging authority and submitting to leadership. Indeed, Maimonides made the principle of authority central to his political theory. This is the basis of his insistence that the Mosaic law is eternally valid and unchangeable, and that the prophets who came after Moses are subject to his laws and may not change them.

Politician and Prophet as Legislators

It follows from this that human society requires legislation and means of enforcement that will induce individuals to obey the constituted authority. This is the justification for the existence of the state. But how is it to be established? Maimonides's second assumption is that to elicit obedience, a quality of leadership is required, with which certain individuals are especially endowed, who are conscious of their calling. Looking at historical reality, he deduced that the existing states were established by one of two kinds of leadership: political or prophetic. A politician is a person possessing practical (as opposed to theoretical) wisdom and imaginative capabilities which give him a consciousness of mission and the power to influence people. Through his practical wisdom, he understands better than the common people the conditions of social reality and the ways of coping with them. Through his sense of mission, he persuades the masses, who suffer from lack of security, order and stability, to follow him and accept his laws. The driving motivation for him and his followers is of course the pursuit of material advantage and bodily satisfaction; such is the purpose of those states that are established by politicians.

The prophet, on the other hand, is endowed with all the qualities of the politician, but additionally with the theoretical-intellectual quality of the philosopher. He is an emissary of God—the emissary of religious truth—and his purpose is to bring people to spiritual perfection—their portion in the World to Come. He establishes an ideal state that aims at achieving material prosperity as a means to spiritual perfection, which is the true fulfillment. Maimonides availed himself of Plato's notion of the philosopher-king, but he accommodated it to the Torah: Moses is the legislator and ruler who established the ideal republic by the strength of his mission.

Purpose of Laws: Benefit of the Community

We shall emphasize here another important principle in Maimonides's political theory: the law should operate for the benefit of the community, not just of the individual—be they one, many, or all individuals. I have already said that the intellectual perfection of the elite individuals is regarded by him as a fulfillment of the human community. This justifies their focusing their efforts on his behalf, to educate him and enable him to reach his perfection. But by the same token, the perfect individual is obligated to lead the community, and the ideal law that he gives them is directed at the good of the community, even at the occasional expense of individuals. In this manner Maimonides explains, for example, the matter of the apparently cruel conduct of Moses in the episode of the Golden Calf, and more generally the vengeful and harsh treatment of idolatry. Idolatry impinges not only on the human perfection of its practitioners, but of the whole human community of which they are a part; therefore the representatives of the community are required to uproot it entirely. In the same vein Maimonides explains why the laws of the Torah should not be changed even when their benefit is not apparent, even when they are an encumbrance and an annoyance in changing times. In Maimonides's view, the laws of the Torah are applicable in an ideal sense for the community as a whole, i.e. for most of the individuals most of the time. Therefore it is proper to keep it in its given state.

*Psychology**Aristotelian Psychology*

If Maimonides tends toward Platonic views in politics, he follows Aristotle in psychology. He rejects the notion that the soul is a separate immaterial entity, forcibly attached to the body though not a part of it. He rejects the ethical conclusions which follow from such a view (for although Plato himself was far from ascetic teachings, his psychology underlay the ascetic tendencies of the medieval world). In contrast to this view, Maimonides accepted the Aristotelian definition of the soul as *the perfection of the material organism, composed of faculties which serve as instruments for the functions of life*. In another formulation: The soul is

the form of the body, from which originate the activities of the various faculties. By this conception, one cannot differentiate in practice between body and soul. They comprise one whole. The body without a soul is no living body but a corpse, whereas the soul without a body is nothing. This notion is opposed to asceticism, for the soul cannot achieve its perfection by afflicting the body. But this notion of body-soul reciprocity would seem at first sight to rule out the survival of the soul after death, not to mention bodily resurrection. We shall have to deal with this issue later.

Emphasizing the Soul's Unity

The ancient philosophers agreed in noting that man embodies in his life three levels of activities: some which parallel the functions of plants, others which parallel those of animals, and a third level that is unique to human beings. Maimonides agreed with Aristotle against Plato that one need not posit a separate soul for each of these domains of activities. It is a single human soul that distinguishes humans from plants and animals and performs these functions by means of distinct bodily organs. He uses the analogy of how three dark places can be illuminated variously by a candle, by the moon, or by the sun. The common task of illumination is thus performed in three different ways. The plurality of functions—the vegetative, animative, and human—is achieved by the differentiating medium of the body, with its various organs. We may update the analogy by referring to an electric current which performs various functions through the different appliances that are attached to it. From a single source we can heat water, bake bread, light or heat a room, etc. This notion of a unitary soul in relation to the body assumes the Aristotelian definition of the soul as the form of the body.

The Aspects of the Soul

Once the relation of soul to body has been determined, there comes a more detailed discussion of the “parts” of the soul, or rather its essential functions. Here too Maimonides follows Alfarabi, the Arabic commentator on Aristotle, and presents not Plato’s threefold division but rather Alfarabi’s fivefold division: the nutritive, sensitive, imaginative,

emotional,² and rational³ faculties. We shall consider each of these faculties as it relates to our investigation of Maimonides's doctrines of ethics and prophecy.

The Nutritive Faculty

The nutritive faculty comprises those faculties of the soul which have their parallel in plants: growth and reproduction. Maimonides does not describe them at length, because they are of medical interest, that is to say, one can affect them only by acting directly on the physical organs, and therefore the human will can only govern them indirectly. Nevertheless, Maimonides does not belittle the importance of medical care, and in his ethical doctrine he includes principles that bear on preserving the proper functioning of the nutritive faculty.⁴ Physical health is a prerequisite of human perfection in his view.

The Sensory Faculty

The sensory faculty comprises a function parallel to that of animals. We speak of sensation as a characteristic that distinguishes animals from plants. As the animal is capable of locomotion, the animal requires these senses to aid its growth and reproduction. Through them, it attains a higher level of existence and aspires to a higher purpose. This teleology is reflected in the gradation of the senses themselves. Just as the soul is one though its activities are many, so too sensory perception

² We translate *ha-koah ha-mit'orer* as "emotional faculty" (and occasionally "motivating faculty") rather than "appetitive faculty." "Emotional" is used here in the original etymological sense of "initiating motion," and is quite distinct from "feeling." Emotion is the connecting link between sensation and action. "Emotion" focuses on the active aspect of this transition, whereas "passion" (a word not in Maimonides's vocabulary) emphasizes its passive aspect. In Maimonides's view, when we act irrationally we are not the victims of alien passions, but the authors of our own misfortunes, deluded by our imaginations. There is an obvious genealogical link between Maimonides's view of emotions and Spinoza's (see Spinoza's *Ethics*, Parts 3–4). Each sees training the emotions as the path to ethical progress. (LL)

³ "Rational" and "logical" are synonymous in this discussion. The Hebrew *medabber* (from "*davar* = word") is etymologically parallel to the Greek *logikos* (< *logos* = word). Greek and medieval philosophers identified reason with the ability to use words to identify concepts. Linguistic and conceptual ability are the distinguishing traits of the human species. With the possible exceptions of the borderline cases of use of sign-language in chimpanzees and obedience to verbal commands in higher animals, these distinctions are still largely valid.

⁴ See *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Ethical Qualities," Chapter 4.

is one functional activity which is expressed variously by the different organs, ranging from the lowly and diffuse to the higher and clearer. Sight is the most noble of the senses, while the sense of touch is the most common. Why? Because sight grasps things from a distance and embraces whatever is present to us; therefore it most resembles intellectual apprehension. Touch experiences only what is directly closest, and even that thing not in its entirety. Moreover, the pleasure involved in seeing is contemplation of beauty, which is spiritual, whereas the pleasure of touch is of a bestial variety. In other words, the sense of touch represents the satisfaction of the nutritive need directly, as if it were derived straightway from it, in contrast to the spiritual contemplation of sight.

But it is of interest to note that Aristotle is ambivalent on this issue. In the *Ethics* he praises sight and denigrates the sense of touch. But in *De Anima* he establishes the primacy of the sense of touch which is identified in practice with the life-giving faculty, for it cannot be negated without negating life itself. He identifies the superiority of humans with the refinement of their sense of touch. Maimonides is oblivious to this ambivalence. He gives unequivocal preference to the sense of sight. We shall see later that his difference from Aristotle on this issue has implications for their moral philosophies.

The sensory modalities comprise a point of origin for the next two mental functions which humans also have in common with animals: the imaginative and emotional faculties. This also follows from the nature of sensory perception. It has a passive aspect: the external world impresses itself on the sensory organs (even sight is to be explained on this model). But it also has an active aspect: the soul grasps this impression and responds to it with sympathy or antipathy. Imagination presents more purely the passive aspect of sense, and the emotional faculty its active aspect. Let us consider this now in more detail.

The Imaginative Faculty

"Imagination" in its primary sense is the impression of the perceived object on the senses, which persists even when the object is absent. It is analogous to the impress of a sealing-stamp on wax or other material, which preserves the form a shorter or longer time depending on the properties of the substance. This persistence underlies several important features of mental functioning. First of all, *imagination makes memory possible*. The act of memory calls forth an image and presents

it to thought. Secondly, *imagination makes conceptualization possible*. Inasmuch as the senses mix images in a constant flow, they cannot isolate a single impression, analyze it, or abstract its essence. Thirdly, *imagination makes predictive judgment possible*, for the connection between certain images from the past creates the possibility of imagining the future, and this constitutes prediction. Fourthly, *imagination has a creative aspect*. To be sure, Aristotle and (following him) Maimonides determined that imagination comprises only what is in the senses, and adds nothing new by itself. But it can put together combinations of images that were not found in reality. This process can lead to error. But if it is done in a principled and purposive way, it can serve creative processes—of tools, structures, artistic works. It is of interest that Maimonides's son Abraham, in his commentary to the *Eight Chapters*, stresses the creative function of imagination in the invention of tools, though neither he nor his father deals with its creative function in the artistic realm. The reason for this becomes clear in retrospect. According to Maimonides, the prophet is distinguished by having a strong imaginative faculty, which enables him among other things to enter into understanding with common people in order to lead and instruct them. He accomplishes this by combining bodily impressions that are familiar to ordinary people from sensory experience, conforming to some principle, and thereby creating an image that expresses metaphorically concepts that have no sensory embodiment in and of themselves, such as God, angels, and the human soul. Moreover, the imaginative faculty plays an important role in predictive judgment. We shall need to treat all these matters in greater depth later.

On the other hand, one must emphasize the dangers that arise from the imaginative faculty. It misleads, for it does not preserve the sensory impression exactly, and when it combines impressions randomly and without respect to some rational principle, it leads to much strange nonsense. Madness has its source in the dominance of the imaginative faculty.

As we said, the imaginative faculty is a further development of the passive aspect in sensory perception. The emotional faculty, representing the various feelings, represents the active aspect. Through it the person responds to his environment, being either drawn to it or repelled by it. It is therefore of great importance for ethical theory.

The Emotional Faculty

The emotional faculty is the soul's response to reality, as it encounters it through the senses and imagination. It is rooted in sense itself, inasmuch as a sensory experience conveys not only information about the perceived object but also pleasure or pain derived from it. Pleasure and pain are already a kind of reaction, or a pre-reaction expressed in attraction or repulsion, sympathy or antipathy. It is important to bear this in mind, for Maimonides later determines that *the domain of ethical obligation encompasses the emotional faculty and the sensory faculty that is subservient to it*, and it is the relationship of the emotional and sensory faculties that explains this judgment.

But we must remark now on an important difference between the emotional faculty and the preceding. We said that the nutritive faculty gives no occasion for free choice. The same applies to the sensory and imaginative faculties. We have no control over a mental image as such, though we can make intelligent use of it once it is formed. Nor do we have control over sense perception as such. Neither the data gathered by the senses nor the pleasure and pain associated with them, are subject to choice. All these are the immediate result of external stimuli. But with the emotional faculty there is a difference. To be sure, sympathy and antipathy are based on the automatic reflexes of pleasurable or painful sensations. But it is possible to regulate them through conscious direction of one's bodily movement. This fact enables one to prevent the triggering of the pain, or to endure it in accordance with one's judgment.

Our ability to choose between suffering pain and avoiding it, serves as the foundation for a second level of choice, between what is objectively good or evil. If we conclude that an object that causes us pain is nevertheless useful to us because of its consequences, we may choose it. This choice is exercised by our reason, but it is based on the activity of the emotions, because in human beings there is no necessary causal connection between a sensory response and the decision to act according to its dictates. The will enters as a mediating factor between them.

We may describe the psychological process as follows: feeling generates pleasure, and pleasure sympathy—i.e., a positive relationship. But once the person has the memory of this sensation, it is possible that alongside this attraction to the source of immediate pleasure will also be awakened the memory of a greater suffering that was caused as a result

of the same pleasure. The result will be a conflict. According to Aristotle, such a conflict is also generated among animals, but among them the resolution is automatic—the stronger tendency prevails—whereas in human beings the matter is carried to the deliberative process of practical reason, from which the response follows.

This analysis leads us to the Aristotelian definition of the will. The will is not identified with the emotional faculty, although it is associated with it, and its criteria are rooted in sensation. The will itself is a function of the practical reason. It is expressed in the decisions that follow on deliberation in response to emotional impulses.

Reason

In the preceding we have already touched on the fifth faculty of the soul—the logical (< Greek *logikos*, speaking = Hebrew *medabber*) or rational. We see that in this stage too is a transition marked by continuity. *Indeed, Maimonides distinguishes between two activities of the reason, continuous with the twofold hierarchy we have described previously.*

The active aspect, which proceeds from feeling through the emotional faculty, is manifested in the activity of *practical reason*. The passive aspect, which proceeds from feeling through the imagination, is manifested in *theoretical reason*.

Practical Reason

What is the defining task of practical reason? It distinguishes between good and evil in order to direct human action through deliberation. Memory presents, for each stimulus, an image of the results that ensued from responses to such stimuli in the past. Practical reason evaluates the proper response by weighing these consequences. It weighs the benefits of immediate gratification against the possible long-term harm, and against the general social consensus of what is desirable and proper. Since every action affects the specific properties of changing entities, it is impossible to determine universally infallible rules of conduct, whether prescriptive or proscriptive. Only the accumulation of much experience reduces error and enables probable correct judgment of the propriety or impropriety, possibility or impossibility, of a given action. Practical reason also evaluates the suitable means for realizing goals. It thus plays a part in the practical arts and technology, which

according to Aristotle are included not in theoretical reason but rather practical expertise.

Theoretical Reason

By contrast, theoretical reason is pure reason, which distinguishes true from false. It includes the sciences and philosophy as methods of knowing for its own sake. This knowledge constitutes the actualization of human reason from its potential state. Since according to Aristotle intellect is the human essence, its actualization is a person's very life. Therefore acquisition of knowledge of eternal truth is achievement of the goal of human existence, which endows its possessor with timeless eternity. Maimonides accepted this view, though as a Jewish philosopher he added such actions as benefit others and bring them also to the perfection of knowledge. Thus man walks in the ways of God, whose perfection is expressed in His relation to creation and humanity.

Intellect as the Soul's Form

The immortality that ensues from the perfection of knowing the truth is of supreme religious importance. This leads us back to the topic of the soul's survival. Therefore it is proper to probe deeper the question of the essence of the faculty of theoretical reason. The question that occupied many Aristotelian thinkers in the middle ages is: Is reason simply one of the various mental faculties, or does it have a unique status by virtue of ruling over the other faculties and constituting their end-goal? This is a critical question, for if the intellect is only one of the soul's faculties, and its action is conditioned absolutely upon the physical organs (the senses and the brain), then it will perish when the body dies, the same as all the other faculties of the soul.

Maimonides's determination that the soul is unitary and that the intellect is one of its functions tends at first sight to agree with this view. But in his subsequent argument we see a Neoplatonic turn. Maimonides suggests a distinction between the human intellect in its potential state (the ability to understand, rooted in the senses, imagination, and memory) and in its actual state (the totality of knowledge of truth that a person has acquired). The potential intellect is indeed only one of the soul's faculties, but when the intellect becomes actual, it attains the higher status of an independent spiritual being, no longer

dependent on its bodily organs. In Aristotelian terminology: Just as the human body is a material substance whose form is the soul, so the soul is a material substance whose form is the intellect. In this way, the intellect is conceived both as a faculty of the soul and as an essence transcending it. It is able to exchange its original dependence on the bodily organs for a spiritual dependence on the intellectual knowledge that flows from the divine thought.

The Actualization of Reason

This view is supported, in Maimonides's view, by a substantive difference between the maturation of animals and human beings. Animals are born with the full complement of their mental faculties: the nutritive, sensory, imaginative and emotional. A human being is also born with all these faculties. An infant is already capable of growing, feeling, imagining, and displaying emotions. But the infant lacks reason. He knows nothing. Like an animal, he has the potential of knowledge and thought, but the actualizing of this ability depends on continued development through learning.

This process points to the special status which distinguishes reason from the other human mental faculties. It also points to the duality which is part of human existence. Man—alone among animals—is not born with his identifying features. He must make himself into that which he is destined to be. His perfection consists in a task that is assigned him—to develop his own ethical and intellectual personality. This fact is of crucial importance for understanding Maimonides's ethical and religious philosophy.

However, let us go back and complete the structure. The child is born as potentially rational. In medieval terminology: he has a *hylic intellect*. *In what does the hylic intellect consist?* What supports this function? The answer is: those mental faculties which condition consciousness: the senses and imagination. For senses and imagination are knowledge in potential, for we know nothing except by means of them. The child who deploys his senses and imagination starts to learn, and through that learning is manifested the actuality of reason in its first stage. He forms concepts for those objects that he encounters. Still, we have far from exhausted the notion of “hylic intellect.” Other animals also have feelings and imagination, yet they are not rational beings. If a person learns through them, it follows that his senses and imagination possess a unique quality. This is a characteristic example of the ambiguity of

the term “potentiality” in the Aristotelian system. It refers at once to a thing’s absence and its genesis. Just as the eye before it begins to see has the potential of sight—its possibility—but actually has the capability of seeing, so too the mind before it becomes rational has the capability of knowing. This capability is foreshadowed in certain patterns of recognition—axioms and premises—of which the child is at first unaware, but once his knowledge and thought reach certain critical proportions, they rise to consciousness.

In summary: The ability to know, which is carried in the senses, the imagination, and in the primitive constructs of logical thought, is hylic intellect. When a person learns—when he forms concepts of the objects he encounters—he achieves the first aspect of active intellect. Maimonides—following the example of the Arabic commentators on Aristotle—called this “natural reason.”

*The Final Process of Enlightenment, Highest Goal of Humanity:
The Acquired Intellect*

The natural intellect, perfection of the hylic, still has not achieved independent existence. It depends on the sensory impression, and it stands in relationship to material individuals that are changeable. On this level it is permissible to speak of reason as one of the five faculties of the soul. But this is only a transitional stage. In every knowledge that is based on experience of material entities, there is implicit a higher conceptual knowledge that cannot be derived directly from experience, but rather from logic, which is the very essence of the intellect. This knowledge pertains to intellectual objects that transcend materiality. When the human intellect focuses on the knowledge of such objects, it becomes like them: pure and eternal, independent of material vehicles. This is what Maimonides (again following the Arabic commentators on Aristotle) calls “acquired intellect”—the intellect that a person acquires by activation of his natural intellect, and through which he ascends to the state of eternity.

Achieving Eternal Knowledge

We may well ask at this point how a person can achieve this crucial knowledge. Does metaphysical knowledge subsist potentially in our first natural knowledge, so that it is possible to derive it by means of reasoning? When we consider this question carefully, it becomes clear that the

process of derivation is a vital issue. We are led to the conviction that natural objects have a source that transcends nature, and our thoughts become focused on that source. But to know this, we must rise to a higher level and comprehend it in its essence. Such comprehension is possible only if the metaphysical object be made present to the student tangibly in the same way as natural essences are present to the senses. In short, where does metaphysical knowledge come from?

The answer given by Aristotelian epistemology is that we learn the concepts of things that we always experience from someone else who already knows them. We are familiar with this fact from the process of learning in school: the teacher transmits to his student the concepts that he is familiar with, and every teacher learns from a previous teacher. But one can conceive new concepts, and this fact is evidence that at the basis of the process of instruction there is a continual flow of conceptual understanding from the "Active Intellect," conceived either as the divine intellect (by Aristotle) or as an intellectual entity mediating between God and man (according to the medieval philosophers). Through this process, human beings grasp the truth. It may be compared to the light flowing continually from the sun, through which people are able to see. "Acquired intellect" is thus the individual's internalization of the intellectual flow that emanates from the "Active Intellect."

The Meaning of Immortality: Intellect as Man's Eternal Part

Apparently it is proper to explain here: if we said in our discussion of Maimonides's dogmatic theology that man's "portion in the world to come" is knowing the truth, we have here the fuller explanation of this statement. When the human intellect identifies with eternal truth, it becomes eternal. But this has far-reaching implications for Maimonides's theory of prophecy. The prophet is the one who achieves perfection of the acquired intellect. The revelatory aspect of prophecy is the emanation or flow that flows from the separate Intellects to the human intellect. Moreover, true worship of God is identified with achieving the acquired intellect, and ethics is also enlisted as a means to the same end-goal.

*Ethics**Ethics Deals with the Soul's Perfection*

From Maimonides's psychology we derive the basic assumptions of his ethics. First of all, what did "ethics" mean for Maimonides? It did not mean, primarily, the regulation of interpersonal relations, which, though supremely valuable, was the domain of politics. Ethics deals rather with the good and perfection of the individual, especially with those "virtues" whose possession brings about harmony, wholeness, and happiness.

Ethics deals primarily with the soul's perfection. Just as the bodily physician must be expert in the human body to know wherein its health consists, so must the spiritual physician be expert in the soul to know what is its health. To be sure, Maimonides's "spiritual healer" is not identical with the modern "psychiatrist," nor is his notion of "spiritual illness" the same as our "mental illness." In any case, Maimonidean ethics deals with perfection of the soul, i.e. the proper exercise of all the psyche's faculties insofar as this is dependent on human choice.

The Object of Ethical Discourse: Habit or Virtue

From the previous assertion, the next follows: Ethics is primarily interested in a person's actions as indicators or formative causes of that person's moral state. Since a person has free will, it is possible that he will act out of various motives without each action revealing his moral disposition. The ill-tempered person can occasionally act patiently, and vice versa. Ethics is not interested in the character of the isolated act. It is interested in the soul's long-term disposition, its basic constitution. It is the supreme goal of ethics that a man not merely do good deeds, but be himself good.

Let us then define, what is a "moral virtue." According to Maimonides, a moral virtue—as distinct from inherited dispositions on the one hand, and from voluntary actions on the other—is a set disposition to act in a particular way, i.e., a characteristic that has been acquired by repeated action. Everyone is born with dispositions that are conditioned by his biological inheritance, that cannot be effaced or reversed. But they are not compulsory, and it is possible to restrain them through voluntary decisions that build up contrary habits. Thus a person may be predisposed to anger or patience, rashness or cowardice, because of

the balance of humors that affect the emotional faculty. But these are biological tendencies, not moral dispositions. If the individuals act on them repeatedly, they may turn into moral dispositions. It is likewise possible to prevent this outcome through voluntary decisions to create contrary habits, though this would require a sustained effort.

In short, a moral virtue or vice is a kind of second nature or acquired nature, first of all from the influence of one's social environment that sets norms of conduct, and later through self-education. Whoever acquires this nature is good on his own account, good always, whether he is active or in a state of rest. We can count on him whenever he is called on to act, that he will do the proper thing. We should recall what we said about the human being's uniqueness as an intellectual creature: unlike other animals, the human being does not display his essence in his instinctual actions, but in those traits that he has acquired through social education and self-education. He is a creature who is in a process of continual self-formation.

The Domain of Ethics: The Emotional Faculty and the Senses that Serve It

Which of the previously discussed psychological faculties fall within the domain of ethics? Ethical judgment applies directly only to those behaviors over which we exercise choice. This criterion excludes the nutritive faculty from ethics and puts it in the category of medical hygiene. Similarly with the imaginative faculty: we exercise no voluntary control over our imagination (especially while we are asleep). The senses also operate automatically; we cannot control what we see, hear, or feel.

It turns out that ethics deals directly with the emotions. Inasmuch as emotions consist of reactions of pleasure or pain to sensations, ethics deals indirectly with the sensitive faculty as well. But this formulation is not unproblematic. Is it indeed possible to transform the reactions of the sensitive and emotional faculties, or to control them? Is it not more correct to say that ethical virtue resides in the practical reason, by which a person judges good and evil? Maimonides answers this question in the negative. Aristotelian ethics assumes that the will is always oriented towards the good. Indeed, there is no one who does not desire what is useful and beneficial for himself. There may well be a misguided will, but the notion of an "evil will" is meaningless. In that case, whence does error arise? We must conclude: from desires, passions, and impulses. But these are all functions of the emotive faculty.

When this faculty functions in a disordered and misguided way, when its yearning for imagined pleasures overwhelms real material needs, or when it shows exaggerated distaste for things truly needful for a person, then it is necessary to correct its predilection by inculcating correct habits, so that it shall be attracted to the truly desirable and repelled by the truly harmful in the appropriate measure. Maimonides clearly assumes that a person has the power, through voluntary choice, over the formation of the emotional faculty itself.

The Emotional Faculty

We should add here, however, that through the emotional faculty ethics touches on the constitution of the proper action of the other mental faculties, to the extent that the deployment of these faculties is indirectly conditional on the satisfaction or denial of emotional impulses.

For example, it is impossible to exercise direct voluntary control on the process of digestion, which belongs to the nutritive faculty. Nevertheless, one can affect it through eating or fasting, which are activities under the direction of the emotional⁵ faculty. Therefore the rules of health maintenance are an integral part of Maimonides's ethics, especially with respect to preventive hygiene.

Similarly we cannot exercise voluntary control over sight or the other sensory modalities, but directing the senses and coordinating impressions are both voluntary activities of the emotional faculty. We can train our senses to function better.

We can similarly influence the coordination of the senses and the imagination.

Moreover, although to be sure we cannot command our theoretical reason, our readiness for knowledge of the truth depends on the inclinations of the emotional faculty, for one possessed of excessive appetites will not successfully free himself for the contemplative life, whereas restraining those appetites can strengthen the will and the ability to learn.

⁵ Recalling the original etymology of "emotional" in the sense of "activating motion," being the link between sensation and action. Here is the exception where "appetitive" would seem the apt translation of *mit'orex*. Yet it points up how it is not the biological appetites over which we have moral control through training, but the psychological constructs of desire and sentiment that are developed on their foundation. It is more plausible to regard training of the emotions as the moral task, rather than training of the appetites.

The Supreme Goal of Humanity: Developing Theoretical Reason

We come finally to determining the purpose of human life, which is also based on psychology. As the human soul is one, so the purpose of ethics is to preserve the soul's unity despite the multiplicity of activities whose source is in connection with the bodily organs. This means preserving harmony among the various mental faculties. Harmony is unity amid multiplicity. As the quality that gives definition and unity to the soul is the intellect, it follows that the intellect should turn out to be the principle that determines the harmony of the parts of the soul and rules their actions, as well as the final purpose of all those activities. But let us assert once more that the final goal—knowledge of eternal truth—transcends the knowledge of good and evil that guides ethical discourse. Thus one should see ethics as just a means to a higher end.

*The Nature and Cause of Evil*⁶

We previously discussed ethics as an empirical question, but it raises two metaphysical questions that are crucial to its very possibility: (1) the origin of evil in human life, and (2) the question of free will.

In Chapter 12 of Part III of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides lists three causes of the evil which plagues human beings in this life.

The first is the evil which they experience because of the material nature of their existence. This includes their physical vulnerability, their being subject to illness, pain and death, various natural catastrophes, etc. These are evils that cannot be avoided. Maimonides believes generally that nature is oriented to the welfare of living beings, that it is preponderantly for the good. This can be argued from the fact that the more beneficial the elements are to life, the more abundant they are. For example, air, water, food. But finitude is part and parcel of the nature of the terrestrial world. To wish that man not be vulnerable to suffering, illness and death is to wish that he not be human.

The second cause is evil that is caused by man's flawed social nature, such as war and hatred. These are evils that human beings inflict on each other.

⁶ See *Guide* III, 9–12.

Maimonides responds to these in the same way as to natural disasters: they cannot be prevented, but one can take protective measures against them; the more perfected a society is, the better it protects against them. However, it is not possible to prevent them because they are part of human nature. Eliminating such evil would again be a contradiction of the human condition.

The third class of evils is evils that a person perversely brings on himself through his own deficiencies: lack of proper deliberation, uncontrolled urges, deception of the imagination, and the like. These bring individuals to consider what is harmful beneficial, and cause others and themselves great suffering. In Maimonides's view, the great preponderance of evils of which human beings complain as if they were God's responsibility, stem from this source, and people have only themselves to blame for them.

It is precisely this third class of evils that reveals the general source of all evils in nature: all result from the fact that natural creatures as such are not perfect. They have many and varied defects, and the more developed and complex they are, the more defects they have. As man is the most highly-developed and complicated creature, so are his defects more numerous and grave. It is well known that human beings are more highly differentiated from each other than other living species. As they are differentiated precisely by their deficiencies, so it is no surprise that they harm each other a great deal—and themselves as well.

What, though, is the root of imperfection in nature? Aristotle answered (and Maimonides agreed) that it is rooted in that aspect of matter to which all being owe their material existence. This theory distinguishes between the matter and form of each entity. The form represents the generic character of each species. By being expressed in matter, it generates the various individuals of that species. It follows that all human beings are equal and indeed identical with respect to the form that defines their humanity. They are differentiated from each other by the matter that comprises their bodies, and inevitably by the degree of perfection by which the form is manifested in the matter, which is determined by the degree of its readiness or adaptation. Matter that is better adapted enables the expression of the form of humanity in greater perfection, whereas matter that is less adapted results in its more defective expression. We must remember, however, that the very expression of form in matter is defect-prone by its nature. Perfect material creatures are impossible in principle. Perfect human beings are impossible in principle. There can only be human beings

that strive for perfection to the limits of their potential. Even Moses, the most perfect of human beings, did not correct all his faults, as was demonstrated by his fits of anger.

It follows from all this that evil is not a positive essence with an independent existence. Evil is imperfection, in other words nonbeing. Thus it is absurd to maintain that God is the source of evil in our world. God created whatever is, and being or existence is good as such. We should emphasize that this conclusion does not lead Maimonides to ignore the very real suffering that natural creatures endure, especially human beings, because of their deficiencies. He especially does not ignore the need to confront suffering and to reduce it as much as possible. For that very reason he emphasizes that the good in nature outweighs the bad, that God prefers creation to nonbeing, for existence is good in itself. Thus God gave human beings the absolute metaphysical criterion for distinguishing good and evil. Good is the preponderance of being over nonbeing and life over death, of happiness and prosperity over suffering and failure. This is humanity's mission in nature. Therefore God created man in His image, that is to say, he conferred on humanity an intellect capable of confronting suffering. Moreover, God endows human beings with the ability to transcend their material existence and to live a spiritual life, pure and perfected, even while ensconced in their pain-ridden, suffering bodies. This is the true good for which the world was created.

Achieving this goal is of course the higher purpose of ethics.

Human Free Will and Its Limits

We now face the second issue: free will. We saw that Maimonides, following Aristotle, assumes this freedom as self-evident. What does he base it on? We must say: on immediate experience. From our own inner experience we know that every time we perform an action, we face the choice of refraining from it and performing a different action. Indeed, in Chapter 8 of the *Eight Chapters*, which Maimonides devotes to this topic, he assumes that free will is a self-validating intuition. Our consciousness attests to it, and common sense requires it. Moreover, the Torah affirms it forthrightly, no less than theoretical reason. From all these aspects, the question need not bother us. Nevertheless, Maimonides knows that there are certain difficulties, even within the Torah's domain—rabbinic dicta and scriptural verses that would seem to contradict this view. So, too, in the theoretical domain: there are

some general principles whose consequence would tend to contradict the principle of free will.

Therefore Maimonides approaches this problem with great reluctance in order to resolve these difficulties. Characteristically, he resorts to a Torah-hermeneutic method in order to indicate his own solution of the theoretical problem, though it is beyond the comprehension of the simple reader. In other words, he identifies hermeneutic problems with their theoretical counterparts and solves them at one stroke. This is an instructive example of Maimonides's method in reconciling philosophy and Torah.

Refuting the Pseudo-Scientific Belief in Astrology

Maimonides assumes free will at the outset because direct experience testifies to it, and because it is presupposed by the religious precepts, as by law in general. To be sure, anyone familiar with the endless debate on this question in antiquity knows that direct experience, however clear, cannot decide the issue. Though we arrive at our decisions as the result of deliberation, it can be argued that our very choice is determined by considerations that necessarily dictated a particular choice and no other. By the same token, law and sanctions can be seen by reverse logic as constituting determining factors in our decision-making process. Thus it is equally possible to justify law, judicial process and retribution on the assumption that human nature determines human action.

Maimonides was familiar with these arguments, though he did not mention them explicitly. It was on account of them that he stood by his view that free will could not be proved logically but only intuited from direct experience. But to clarify the meaning of this outcome to non-philosophical readers, he stated the problem in terms of the best-known popular variant of a deterministic world outlook, namely astrology. According to the astrologers, a person's character and fate are determined in accordance with the astral configuration at the time of his birth. This determinism of character and fate does not follow a consecutive causal sequence affecting the course of his life directly in the present, but rather a prior arbitrary determination from the outside. Against such a view, the argument from immediate experience of free will was strongly convincing. That is why Maimonides was able to voice his short and sharp retort: "Such a view is against reason and experience, and tears down the wall of the Torah." Indeed, there is no way to prove a known direct causal connection between the configuration

of the stars and human destinies, but this is only the first stage of the argument. When Maimonides has assumed the existence of free will in human action, he shows the other side of the coin and clarifies its limits. He leaves the field of the astrological discussion and bases his analysis on a more profound theoretical framework, though ostensibly in a hermeneutic mode.

Rabbinic and Scriptural Pronouncements

In the second stage of his discussion, Maimonides pits this assumption of free will against some rabbinic sayings that seem at first sight to contradict it. We note first that Maimonides progressed from the easy to the hard, starting with rabbinic examples and proceeding to biblical ones, starting with general objections and proceeding to specific cases. Through such a progression he was able to present his outlook systematically through interpretation of traditional sources.

The first topic for discussion is offered by the saying, "All is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven." The first part of the maxim seems to deny free will. What is Maimonides's reply? Indeed, a person performs actions within a context of natural givens over which he has no choice. He is born with a body of a certain size with certain tendencies, talents, etc. All this is "in the hands of Heaven." But actions of religious and moral valence fall in his view under the second half of the sentence, "except for the fear of Heaven." Indeed, all of a person's voluntary actions ought to be done as a means of acquiring eternal truth, which for him is equivalent to worship of God, i.e. "the fear of Heaven." But free will is not unlimited; it is bounded by a context of natural givens over which we have no choice.

The next hurdle is a more extreme rabbinic dictum: "No person turns a finger down below, unless they announce it from on high."⁷ How can one explain away such an explicit deterministic view? Maimonides replies that indeed that which is included in the category "fear of Heaven"—what is given to our choice—is also within the category of a natural given, in such a way that our choice is bounded by some context of lawful regularity. It is within our choice to cast a stone or refrain from casting it, but the action itself is possible within a context

⁷ BT Hullin 7b. Maimonides does not cite this dictum directly, but only paraphrases it.

of unchangeable natural law, and once we have cast it, we cannot prevent it from falling. In other words, we have another limitation of free choice within the context of natural givens and natural law.

Indeed, with respect to human actions Maimonides identifies the "will of God" with those natural laws which limit our actions and condition them. Not that God intervenes in those actions directly, but the divine will as expressed in the laws of nature conditions them from the outset, without contradicting the freedom that operates within that given context. It is proper to explain here that Maimonides explains those interventions in human affairs that we call "miracles" and "wonders" in a similar fashion. A miracle is not a direct intervention of God in human affairs, but a prior determination, conditional from the outset on the material structure of existence. This hints clearly at the correlation of the Torahitic and philosophic planes of the discussion. What is called "the hands of Heaven" or "the divine will" in Torahitic terms, translates philosophically into the determinism of natural law.

In the next step of the discussion, Maimonides moves from the general to the specific. First he cites the divine promise to Abraham about Israel's fated sojourn in Egypt: "They shall serve them and afflict them four hundred years." Is this not predetermination? Maimonides replies that the prior determination of the wickedness of a particular generation does not negate the free will of each individual. Free choice is an individual prerogative. Put another way, by analyzing the present we may predict certain social and political developments in the future. Human nature and cultural characteristics, institutions and traditions enable us to predict with a high degree of certainty whether and when such a society will reach the degree of corruption that will cause a particular outcome. But each individual is still responsible for his own actions.

We should note that Maimonides's theory of prophetic prediction is based on precisely such considerations as these. Prophecy generally predicts only those events whose conditions are rooted in present realities. Surely such developments have an influence on individual behavior. It is easier to conduct oneself justly in a state whose laws are well-ordered and which is on the path of progress rather than decline, by the same token that it is easier for a person to develop proper habits if his natural appetites are moderate. But even if we can predict with certainty that the majority of Egyptians will be wicked, this does not deprive each Egyptian of the possibility, as an individual, to be righteous. He makes his choice and is responsible for it.

Maimonides now proceeds to the last and most difficult hermeneutic step. Scripture depicts God as intervening directly in human affairs to the extent of explicitly depriving certain individuals of free will. God's hardening Pharaoh's heart is the most blatant example of this. How can one dispel such a cogent objection? At first sight Maimonides's remarks on this topic seem random and unsystematic. He argues that God occasionally punishes the sinner by withdrawing the freedom of repentance—he is not punished for his forced actions, but this compulsion is itself the punishment for previous freely chosen sins. This ad-hoc explanation hints at a more systematic idea. In Chapter 3 of the *Eight Chapters*, Maimonides distinguished among three categories of the “spiritually ill”: (1) those who recognize their condition and recover; (2) those who do not recognize their condition, but if they did, they would have a chance of recovery; (3) those who even though they recognize their condition, cannot recover. In speaking of one who is punished through deprivation of free will, Maimonides is referring to the third type. When sin becomes habitual, if one does not break the habit in a timely fashion, it becomes a compulsion. At a certain point, one loses the capacity to change, even though he knows he is at the point of self-destruction. The examples of alcoholics and drug addicts spring to mind. We do not say that their fate is an unjust punishment. They chose their path freely at first, and they are responsible for the deeds that brought about their punishment, for the punishment is the inevitable consequence of the sin.

We should note the implications of this interpretation for the doctrine of providence. It suggests an outlook that denies direct divine intervention in the affairs of nations and individuals, and interprets reward and punishment as immanent aspects of the natural order of the world. A good deed is beneficial in itself, and has beneficial consequences. This and nothing more is its reward. A bad deed is harmful in itself, and has harmful consequences. That is how one should understand the biblical hardening of Pharaoh's heart as a punishment that flows necessarily from his previous actions. More generally, choice plays a part in a causal pattern that cannot be ignored. Historical and biographical factors are part of that causal pattern. Any way we look at it, free choice must find its place in that unchangeable causal network.

The Question of Choice in Its Philosophical Formulation

So far, Maimonides has treated the problem of free will philosophically by implication, by confronting the issues raised by popular understanding and by the Torah. The argument from direct experience may seem adequate against the astrological hypothesis, but when one has considered the limitations of freedom the question is raised afresh: *How is free will possible in the context of a world that operates in accordance with fixed laws? What is the relationship between free will and the rational order of nature, that operates of necessity by eternal rules?* That is the philosophical formulation of the problem. Maimonides raises this question in his summation of the problem, but here too he prefers a theological formulation: How can one reconcile human free will with the belief in general and specific providence, which implies that God has foreknowledge of all human actions? It can easily be shown that this question is identical with the philosophical version, as the divine will was for Maimonides identified with natural law. He also identified divine providence or foreknowledge with the determination of events in accordance with eternal law; an event is susceptible of foreknowledge by virtue of following of necessity from the chain of causes producing it. Thus we can ask philosophically: How can the contingency that makes free choice possible come about within a framework of necessary rational law? Or in religious language: How is free choice possible if God knows all human actions in advance?

The Contradiction between Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will

How does Maimonides resolve this? A complete answer would require a full exposition of his theology; therefore Maimonides's reluctance to enter into this topic is evident. He cautions that it is impossible for him to explain his views in full in the Eight Chapters. We shall not complete our answer to this question either until we have discussed Maimonides's theology. However, we can set forth its basic assumptions. It is possible to prove free will not only from our inner experience, but also from external experience, because although things happen in accord with natural law, there is much that happens by play of chance without contradicting the fabric of causal necessity. Thus there is a realistic basis to affirming the play of free will within the limits of natural law. When we say that God has foreknowledge of everything, we mean that God is the cause of existence and the cause of the law-governed character

of nature. If freedom and chance exist naturally, one may say that God is their cause in the sense that He has foreknowledge of them, but how can God “know” chance and freedom without contradicting them? To this question, no answer is possible. God is the creator and knower, whose wisdom encompasses what mere human creatures cannot know. They know the reason for their ignorance, and should rest content with that.

This line of argument may appear as an evasion of the problem. In my opinion it is not an evasion, for Maimonides does not simply plead, “we cannot know.” He *proves* that we cannot know. He does not merely plead, “The resolution of the contradiction is beyond our power.” Rather he argues that it is beyond our power to establish that there is indeed a contradiction here, for though the contradiction between foreknowledge and free will is a necessary stipulation of *human* knowledge, if we claim that *God’s* foreknowledge contradicts our freedom, we are assuming the equivalence of human and divine knowledge, which is erroneous. However, the full understanding of this issue must await our grappling with Maimonides’s entire theological position.

It is at any rate clear that we have here an *antinomy* which Maimonides presents logically and forcefully. By the end of the argument, we have no evidence for freedom beyond our immediate experience, but the relationship between freedom and eternal natural law is beyond human comprehension. A philosopher must rest content with this answer when he has exhausted the resources of his reasoning and perceived its limits. But it is clear why Maimonides is not comfortable dealing with this problem in the open, outside the context of religious hermeneutics, for whoever is not a philosopher will become perplexed by the very act of dealing with an undecidable antinomy, whether in the Torahitic or the philosophical domain of discussion. This is a classic example of Maimonides’s method of reconciling Torah with the conclusions of reason. We shall see that many topics of Maimonides’s theological system are connected with this topic and illuminated by it.

The Golden Mean

We return now to ethics. We established its scope and purpose, and we established the content of virtue and vice, each of which is a habit of action. We must now determine how to evaluate deeds and character traits. What is the criterion of good and evil?

Maimonides's position on this issue in the *Eight Chapters* is ambiguous. He appears to emulate the Aristotelian formulation of the classical "golden mean," which was the gold standard of ethics in the middle ages, but he presents it in a simplified and schematic, almost mechanical way: The right way is the mean between two bad extremes. The extremes of excess and deficiency are bad; the mean between them is good. Or in his language: "Good deeds are such as are equibalanced, maintaining the mean between two equally bad extremes, the too much and the too little." For example: cowardice is bad, and foolhardiness is bad, but courage, which is between them, is good. Gluttony is bad, and abstinence from food is bad, but eating in proper measure, which is the mean, is good, etc.

Difficulties Arising from the Schematic Character of the Mean

It can easily be shown that this whole description is purely abstract, and that it is insufficient to provide a useful guiding rule for everyday life. In principle one may ask: "Why should the good be defined as the mean between two opposite evils, rather than simply as itself the opposite of evil?" In practice one can ask: "Does the definition of the good as situated between two evils tell us at what point of the spectrum it resides? How do we know where the extremes are located, if not by prior reference to the mean? And how can we locate the mean, if not by prior reference to the extremes?" Whoever opens Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* will see that Aristotle did not propose *a priori* norms of behavior, but conceded that such a procedure is impossible. Only experience can provide us with the expertise to calibrate the norms in each area of endeavor, taking account of its peculiar conditions. Aristotle qualified his adherence to the golden mean by defining the good and bad as opposites in respect of the utility or harm that each act brings to a person's total being. The proper criterion is ultimately determined by the principle of harmony of the full ensemble of needs whose satisfaction is necessary for a person's preservation, happiness, and perfection, so that "excess" is defined as impinging on other needs and disturbing the harmony of all the soul's faculties. Surely such a definition cannot automatically set a precise norm of behavior applying to every person in every domain. But it does provide a kind of guidance applicable to everyday life.

In Maimonides you do not find such guidance, neither in the *Eight Chapters* nor in any of his other works. Why not? On the one hand,

Maimonides does not require that his ethics provide concrete guidance for behavior. For that purpose, he has recourse to the Torah, which is far more specific than Aristotle in setting forth a general norm of behavior that embraces the ethical realm as well. It is enough for Maimonides to indicate that the Torah and rabbinic prescriptions point to the same conclusions as Aristotle, and for that purpose his simple formulation is quite sufficient.

On the other hand, Maimonides's objective is not simply to present the Aristotelian outlook, but to oppose an outlook which was prevalent in medieval thought generally and also among Jews (for instance, German-Jewish pietism): the ascetic outlook. The thrust of Maimonides's words in Chapter 4 of the *Eight Chapters* is evidence that they were addressed to this controversy. The model of the golden mean between two vicious extremes is meant to refute the ascetics, who maintain that there can be a good extreme as well as a bad extreme. On the contrary, Maimonides maintains that every extreme is bad. If people err and think that a certain extreme tendency is good, it is because they celebrate extreme resistance to man's natural instincts as a kind of heroic virtue. Maimonides objects that it is a mistake to see the whole goal of ethics in this struggle against the bodily drives, as the hermits⁸ and ascetics maintain by ascribing moral and religious value to self-sacrifice. Maimonides sees the intellect as the goal of human perfection, and self-denial has no value in itself, but only harm. When the struggle against the bodily urges is waged for its own sake, it detracts from the task of intellectual enlightenment no less than surrendering to those urges.

The Purpose of Ethical Conduct

Up to this point it is possible to interpret Maimonides as endorsing Aristotle's position: aspiration to harmony of the soul's faculties, keeping the virtues, opposing asceticism. Thus far one may identify the Aristotelian and Torah positions without a problem. But when one

⁸ "Hermits": Schweid uses the Hebrew word *Nezirim*. There is a homophonic coincidence between the Nazirite of Numbers 6:1–21 (who abstained from wine and haircuts) and the Nazarene ideal (derived from Jesus of Nazareth and developed as a literary type by Heinrich Heine). Though asceticism is more prominently associated with Christianity in the Western tradition, it makes its way occasionally into Jewish practice as well, as Schweid points out.

turns from Chapter 4 to Chapter 5, one sees that Maimonides cites Aristotle's authority in order to embrace an extreme position, thus transforming Aristotle's this-worldly eudaemonistic ethics into a doctrine of religious austerity.⁹

The background for this transition has already been explained. Maimonides interpreted man's intellectual perfection as the highest objective, in a profoundly religious sense. He equated this goal with the love and service of God, thus transforming it from the first-among-many to the exclusive goal. All human actions can be justified only as means to this end, not as ends in themselves, not even subsidiary ends in a hierarchical sense. In accordance with this assumption, Maimonides classified all human actions in three categories:

1. *Purposeless actions*—frivolous actions (dancing, games that do not lead to self-improvement nor serve a function such as rest and relaxation between strenuous tasks). One could (in Aristotelian mode) argue that such activities have purpose in their very enjoyment, and need not be judged in terms of extrinsic goals. But Maimonides is unwilling to accord independent value to any action that does not actualize a potential that is specific to the human essence, even if it realizes a general perfection of animal existence.

2. *Actions that are means to an end but not part of the end*—eating, maintaining social relations, etc. It is obvious that when these actions distract from their higher purpose and become ends in themselves—such as pursuing money or health for their own sake—they also become frivolous.

3. *An action that one performs for its own sake*—This is the activity of intellectual enlightenment, to which everything else is subordinate and instrumental. But we should note that even in the sphere of intellectual enlightenment, Maimonides distinguishes between instrumental knowledge—craft-expertise, mathematics, logic, and natural science—and the higher knowledge—physics and metaphysics—through which human nature finds its perfection, as we learned in the discussion of psychology.

⁹ There is a fine line between the asceticism (*safganiut*) Maimonides condemns and the austerity (*perishut*) he recommends. The former sees sensual pursuits as bad in themselves. The latter sees them as neutral in themselves, but as tending to be bad because they distract one from intellectual and religious perfection. Of course, *perishut* is associated with *perushim* (Pharisees), who from a Jewish point of view were the exemplary pietists of the Second Temple period and forerunners of the rabbis.

It turns out that according to Maimonides, the maxim of the golden mean applies only to actions of the second category. These are activities that are under the jurisdiction of the emotional faculty, with which ethics is primarily concerned. As for actions performed for their own sake (the third category), Maimonides prescribes absolute and exclusive devotion. There is no limit to knowing the truth or performing the good of the community. The more, the better.

Divergence from Aristotle: From Eudaemonism to Austerity

Subordinating all actions to one purpose is a basic deviation from the Aristotelian outlook. Whereas Aristotle set up a hierarchy of purposes, Maimonides set up one purpose. Whereas Aristotle accorded value to friendship, generosity, and courage as end-goals desirable in themselves (on condition that they not detract from the others), Maimonides saw them as only instrumental to a higher end. Thus Maimonides was at odds with Aristotle's ideal of this-worldly happiness (*eudaimonia*), which included intellectual perfection along with other elements. In Maimonides's views, all forms of this-worldly happiness are instrumental to the one true goal that is beyond earthly human happiness, in the sphere of pure spirituality. It is easy to see that this conception of the true goal reintroduces a tension between man's bodily existence and spiritual destiny. Bodily existence is experienced as a stumbling-block that must be overcome. If this does not result in hermitism and asceticism, it leads at any rate to austerity.

The Differences between Philosophical and Religious Ethics

Though Maimonides departs from the Aristotelian outlook in his ethical teaching, he does not dismantle the foundation of intellectual Aristotelianism on which it stands. Identifying the worship of God with the striving after eternal truth marks a revolution in the understanding of the notions "love of God" and "worship of God" that are so central to the Bible and rabbinic teachings. This tendency achieves blatant expression in Chapter 6 of the *Eight Chapters*, in which Maimonides prefers (under the designation *Hasid*, or "pious person") the person without an urge to evil, over the person who conquers his urge. This preference goes against many rabbinic utterances, including the one that Maimonides struggles to adapt to his viewpoint: "Whoever is greater than his colleague, his urge is greater." It is clear in Maimonides's view

that any sensual urge that is greater than necessary for bodily self-preservation is a deficiency and an impediment, no source of advantage. Even though the effort required for overcoming such an urge is a sign of strong will power, nevertheless it distracts one from the major goal of enlightenment. Indeed, Maimonides's distance from the biblical and rabbinic positions can be seen in the various motives for which they were opposed to asceticism. The rabbis were opposed to asceticism because they saw in the body an instrument through which to perform the divine commands of civilizing and perfecting the world. Saadia was closer to the rabbinical position on this than Maimonides.

The rabbis' opposition to asceticism did not contradict their view that there is ethical and religious value in the strength of will power that is manifested in the inner struggle over doing the right thing. They valued the latter because they did not identify "worship of God" with intellectual perfection, but with performance of the practical commands. Such an enterprise accords considerable religious value to the effort that a person invests in the performance of a mitzvah. If he sacrifices his own interest to that task, the rabbis count this as piety. According to this outlook, *there is value in withstanding temptation, and the person who expends considerable effort to perform a mitzvah that he finds difficult for whatever reason, is preferred over one who performs even a great mitzvah without having to overcome any internal or external obstacle to perform it.* Apparently such considerations underlay the rabbis' praise of the penitent. But from Maimonides's Aristotelian standpoint, the notion of temptation has no standing, and there is no religious value to overcoming obstacles in order to perform mitzvot. Maimonides's attempt to interpret the rabbinic dicta on this topic illuminates clearly the difference between his viewpoint and theirs.

Positive and Conventional Commandments

How, then, did Maimonides explain the rabbinic dictum on overcoming temptation? He was forced in this instance to have recourse to R. Saadia Gaon's distinction between rational and positive¹⁰ commandments, even though he did not accept it in its entirety.

¹⁰ "Rational and positive commandments"—*mitzvot sikhliyot ve-shim'iyot*. *Shim'iyot* (from *shama'* = "to hear, obey") has the connotation: these precepts are to be obeyed simply because they are posited as law, with no further explanation given. "Arbitrary commandments" is another possible translation.

This was another expression of the gap between Maimonides's viewpoint and that of the Bible and the rabbis. Maimonides rejected the term "rational commands" because in his view practical precepts of action were on a different level than intellectual reason's judgments of truth and falsity. Practical reason rests on the relativity of experience. In Maimonides's terminology, R. Saadia's "rational mitzvot" translate into "social conventions," i.e. the determination of empirical experience as to what is useful or harmful. Knowledge of these is important from a social-ethical standpoint, but is irrelevant to intellectual perfection.

Thus, Maimonides accepted the difference between mitzvot that have ethical reasons and follow from social considerations, and ritual mitzvot that lack this characteristic. In Maimonides's language, "were it not for the Torah, [the latter] would not be considered bad at all." He was able through this distinction to interpret the rabbinic dicta praising one who resists temptation. According to him, this does not apply to one who has a strong natural urge to violate ethical precepts, but to a person whose ordinary appetites tempt him to actions that are ritually forbidden, which are not evil in themselves, such as eating milk-and-meat mixtures or pork, but who shrinks from such actions because he regards them as bad in themselves. The reason for this is that only one who knows the true reason for the prohibition of such actions performs them for their true religious reasons.

One may well doubt if such an interpretation captures the intention of these rabbinic remarks. When one examines them in context, it is clear they are talking about the ordinary temptations of individuals who achieved greatness: desire for office and honor, competitiveness, irascibility, and envy of the greatness of others. In any event, it is clear that Maimonides deliberately ignored these contexts in order to refute unequivocally the implication that there is intrinsic religious value in withstanding temptation or suppressing one's urge, because for him the true religious value was intellectual perfection and knowledge of the truth. By his yardstick, a person of well-tempered emotions is superior in every respect to one who scrupulously observes religious precepts. Such a person can devote himself without hindrance to pursuit of intellectual enlightenment, and when he is called on to refrain from actions that are ritually forbidden but not bad in themselves, he can fulfill his obligation of "suppressing his urge" for the right reason.

Ethics as Prerequisite to Prophecy

We find the same ambiguity—deviation from Aristotle's ethics out of fidelity to Aristotle's intellectualism—also in the final stage of Maimonides's ethical discussion: the view of ethics as prerequisite to prophecy.

This is an idea that Maimonides repeats several times in the Eight Chapters. He alludes to it in the Introduction. He repeats it in Chapter 5 in a formulation begging for interpretation: "And when there happens to exist a person of this condition" (i.e., one who subordinated all his actions to the one purpose of understanding God), "I will not say that he is on a lower level than the prophets." We note that he does not phrase it positively ("such a man is on a level with the prophets") but negatively, for reasons we shall consider. At the end he devotes the whole of Chapter 7 to prophecy viewed from the standpoint of ethics.

What, indeed, is the connection between ethics and prophecy? The answer that we find in Chapter 7 is this: It is one of the prerequisites of the prophet that he should be perfect in all intellectual virtues, and in this respect prophetic insight is no doubt identified with full comprehension of the truth, i.e., with intellectual perfection in the Aristotelian sense, but it is also dependent on the perfection of the preponderance of one's ethical virtues. Maimonides does not set up the perfection of *all* the moral virtues as a condition, for such a requirement is beyond human ability, but he does require their preponderance. Furthermore, Maimonides correlates the prophet's degree of intellectual insight with his moral perfection. Each virtue that is not perfected is a kind of obstacle that obscures and clouds the prophet's understanding and obstructs his vision. The more imperfections are removed, the clearer his prophetic vision becomes, until one arrives at the level of Moses in the cleft of the rock. At that moment Moses had rid himself of every obstacle except for the last one that cannot be removed in this earthly life, the one that follows inescapably from the connection between human reason and its bodily receptacle. Therefore Moses was privileged with a degree of prophecy that was nearly uninterrupted from a temporal standpoint and approaching transparency in its clarity.

Prophecy was regarded by Maimonides as an intellectual illumination, but we cannot evaluate the full significance of this until we explain how Maimonides understood the limits of human cognition of the divine. We shall then be able to explain his remarks in Chapter 7 about seeing God's "back," and how this differs from seeing God's "face." Here we must

consider the connection between ethical perfection and the clarity and continuity of prophetic illumination. The intellect is compared to a lens through which the divine emanation is refracted. In order for prophecy to be clear and continuous, the lens must first of all be pointed directly at its objective, and it must also be internally transparent. It follows from this that the difference in capabilities between different intellects results from their orientation and their inner transparency. The higher Intellects, which operate independently without material substrates, are always oriented toward the divine Source and are perfectly transparent. They suffer no occlusion. By contrast, those intellects that are bound to bodily receptacles are forced to interrupt their concentration from time to time in order to tend to bodily needs. Thus the continuity of pure intellectual contemplation is interrupted. At the same time, their attachment to their bodies is strengthened, which dims their clarity of vision, for care is being given chronically to those same bodily needs. Thus the more addicted the person is to bodily appetites, the greater is his distraction from intellectual concerns.

Now we can understand why Maimonides gave a negative formulation in Chapter 5. Ethical perfection is a necessary but not sufficient condition for prophecy. Self-orientation and removal of obstacles is a prerequisite, but one also needs intellectual perfection, which is a separate qualification.

Ethical Perfection as Prerequisite to Prophecy in Maimonides

It is particularly important to emphasize moral perfection as a condition of prophecy for Maimonides, for this is at the root of the essential difference between the prophet and the philosopher. I point out first of all that the emphasis on moral perfection is a central motif in Maimonides's thought. He emphasizes it repeatedly whenever he examines the different aspects of his theory of prophecy. Clarity of intellectual illumination is conditional on overcoming bodily constraints, and on subordinating all one's actions to one goal. In the introduction to the *Guide*, Maimonides compares prophecy to flashes of lightning that break through the clouds of materiality—the thicker a person's material exterior, the feebler the resulting illumination. In Part I of the *Guide* Maimonides returns to the theme that human error in grasping truth is caused primarily by one's being subject to urges that impel one to deny inconvenient truths and to pursue the appearances of the imagination that rationalize self-indulgence. Finally, in the famous

parable of the seekers of the castle in Part III Maimonides emphasizes the part that sensual temptation plays in distracting people to idolatry and other false beliefs. Only one who has trained his ethical virtues and strives continually to perfect them, deserves to enter the inner palace and enjoy the king's presence.

Thus concentration on one exclusive goal and adherence to an austere ethical standard are criteria that differentiate the prophet from the Aristotelian philosopher.

CHAPTER TEN

MAIMONIDES'S THEORY OF PROPHECY

By summarizing what we have learned on prophecy from our investigations in politics, psychology and ethics, we arrive at Maimonides's views on the essence of prophecy, its role and its mode of operation.

Image of the Prophet as Ideal Leader

From political theory we learned that the prophet is the ideal political leader. In the most fully-developed example—Moses—we see the ideal legislator, whose legislation is the best for all humanity, i.e. for most people most of the time. The purpose of the ideal law is twofold: securing material bodily prosperity and also spiritual excellence. In the less-developed case of the other prophets, we see them as leaders and educators who direct their compatriots to the truth in the Mosaic Torah. In this task, they embody the traits of the statesman: consciousness of an authoritative mission, charismatic influence on ordinary people, perfected practical reason and the ability to predict the future as the consequence of the people's proper or improper actions. All these traits combine practical reason with creative imagination.

To be sure, the prophet is more than just a statesman. He possesses a theoretical thinker's breadth of knowledge, therefore his practical wisdom is deeper than that of the ordinary politician, for it is based on the laws that God determined at creation. He possesses moreover that perfection that renders him a paragon for emulation, as well as the specific perfection of knowing God to which he is devoted. Thus the prophet guides his people as God guides all of creation.

Prophet as Paragon of Acquired Intellect

As we have said, the prophet is distinguished from the statesman not only in the political and moral perfection of his legislation and leadership, but also in his psychological perfection, which he strives to impart to all his followers. Therefore he must have arrived at intellectual

perfection similar to a philosopher's. The prophet must always strive for attainment of eternal truth, and he must know how to impart it to those who are not philosophers. How does he achieve this? Here psychology comes to our aid. We learn from it that the prophet must have achieved perfection of the acquired intellect, and that *he is able to impart that truth that he has attained in his philosophic capacity by virtue of the imaginative faculty that serves him, not just in his capacity as statesman, but also in his capacity as teacher and educator.* He creates allegorical images, through which he imparts that truth to simple people according to the level of their understanding.

Prophet as Ethical Exemplar

In summary: the prophet is both philosopher and statesman, perfect in the development of his practical and theoretical reason, and in his imaginative capacity to assess events and to educate, which places him above the ordinary statesman and above the philosopher.

As we learned at the end of the discussion on psychology, this advantage is bound up with that ethical perfection that is a condition of prophecy. The prophet is a perfected human being in every aspect, and by virtue of this he perceives the perfection of his life with unconditional devotion to that ideal which transcends it: the service of God and walking in His ways, out of responsibility to the benefit of the world that God has created.

Criteria For Distinguishing Grades of Prophecy

However, this general description of the essence and goal of prophecy is insufficient from the political-religious perspective. From the religious standpoint, one can ask the question of the various prophets' degrees of authority. If all prophets with authenticated missions are equal in degree and authority, this is liable to cause dissension and schism, as indeed occurred at the appearance of the prophets of Christianity and Islam, which maintained the independent authority of their founders.

What are the criteria by which the authority of the prophets is determined? Apart from their differences in intellectual and moral attainment, Maimonides distinguished among different types of prophetic mission. There are prophets whose attainment was only for themselves, and there are prophets who were designated for themselves and for others.

The latter stand on a higher level. This demonstrates the general principle that Maimonides sees no opposition between a person's own perfection and his influence on others.

That influence is a direct consequence of intellectual perfection. The more perfect one is, the more he influences those around him. Therefore there is no opposition between a prophet's aspiration to cleave constantly to truth, and his aspiration to influence his compatriots so that they conduct themselves in a way that will bring them to the truth. If we consider the matter carefully, this is the deeper meaning of the notion of practical imitation of God: God has a continual influence over all existence by virtue of His absolute perfection.

But there are also many gradations among those prophets who influence others. The level of the patriarchs is not that of Moses, and the level of the later prophets is different from that of Moses and the patriarchs. Moses is the supreme prophet in perfection and authority, for he alone was entrusted with the giving of the Torah. The institutional consideration expressed in this judgment is clear and unequivocal: there was no prophet like Moses and will be none like him, because God's true Torah is one, just as truth itself is one and there is no other.

Indeed, in order to justify this assertion Maimonides added another criterion for ranking the prophets, a distinction in the source of prophecy. Most of the prophets did not receive their prophecy directly from God, but through the Intelligences that mediate between God and the world (which are the same as the angels). Moses surpassed them, and indeed God said in the Torah that He spoke to Moses "face to face."

"Face to face" revelation is revelation without an intermediary. It is hard to give this a philosophical meaning. The one clue that Maimonides gives us is his argument that all the prophets achieved prophecy through their creative imaginative faculty. It aided them to express their message to their non-philosophical audience, and it also aided them in approaching an understanding of God and the divine will. By contrast, Moses received prophecy without the mediation of prophetic visions, but as a purely intellectual illumination or intuition, without words or images.

Psycho-Physical Uniqueness of Moses's Prophecy

In the end, Maimonides specified a psycho-physical difference in the prophetic phenomenon of Moses's prophecy as compared with the other

prophets: *all other prophets achieved prophecy in a state of sleep or hallucination.* This is a state in which the senses are not directed to the outer world, and the intellect, which remains fully awake during the prophetic vision, operates directly on the imaginative faculty, which is then completely free of the influence of external sensory impressions that normally occurs in a waking state. *But Moses was so free of dependence on bodily states that he was able to prophesy in a fully waking state.* Furthermore, all the other prophets experienced prophecy in a state of bodily convulsion and trembling, because the prophecy excited their sensory imaginative faculty in a manner opposite to its normal tendency that is directed to external physical objects, whereas Moses prophesied without any psychological symptoms of this kind.

Though all these features are above and beyond the basic characteristics of prophecy defined earlier, we can easily identify the common thread: *all these distinctions among various prophets are different aspects of one basic distinction: The prophets vary with respect to the degree of their overcoming their material bodily condition.* The imagination is also a bodily function, and the difference in the source of illumination is rooted in a difference in the purity of illumination. These many distinctions, in particular the details of the psycho-physical conditions of the prophetic experience, direct our attention to the meaning of this overcoming of materiality. In the ethical domain we identified a certain tendency to austerity in Maimonides's approach. The discussion of prophecy points to a tension that becomes more intense the more we ascend in degree of concentration on the spiritual life. The prophets live in continual tension. Only Moses was able to overcome it. Maimonides presents this fact as having supernatural implications—Moses's prophecy was a miracle.

The Prophet-Philosopher and the Biblical Prophet

But now a serious objection may be raised. Is Maimonides's philosophical description of the prophet compatible with the depiction that arises from the Bible? In several respects we may respond positively. Maimonides gives a thorough discussion of the phenomenon of the prophet as a legislator, as political leader and educator, as one who foresees the future that will befall the people for their sins. He also discusses the prophetic vision, the voices that the prophet hears, and the psycho-physical conditions of prophecy as they are depicted in the Bible.

But does he discuss the prophet as the bearer of God's word, in the direct and simple sense of this notion? Here the matters are more complicated, for they require prior agreement with certain basic assumptions of Maimonides. If one accepts these assumptions, the answer will again be positive: the prophet intuitively grasps eternal truth, which is the intuition of God's reality from contemplating the works of creation. This general contemplation is the foundation of ideal legislation and leadership, and it is the basis of the truth that the prophet teaches other people, and in that sense he hears the word of God and transmits it to human beings.

Does this interpretation agree with the biblical depiction of God turning to the prophet at the divine initiative? In Maimonides's view, it is the prophet who directs himself to God in order to receive the eternal emanation! Maimonides's answer to this question is that prior preparation and readiness on the prophet's part are indeed a necessary prerequisite to prophecy, and it is not possible that the spirit of prophecy should rest on one who was not prepared for it. Still, prophetic enlightenment is a divine emanation that emanates from God and seems to overpower and inundate the prophet's intellect. The divine knowledge comes to him and reveals itself to him when he is prepared for it. Indeed, the definition of prophecy in the *Guide* is: "An emanation from God by means of the Active Intellect to the prophet's intellect, and from there to his imaginative faculty." In other words, prophecy is an intellectual energy radiating from God in the same way that physical light radiates from the sun. This energy activates the prophet's pure imagination, and it is thus rendered a medium of divine emanation to other people.

Revelation of Divine Will in Prophecy

Maimonides himself sensed that this explanation does not bridge the gap between his definition and the biblical picture. The sun's light radiates of natural necessity. In the ordinary Aristotelian view, the intellectual emanation proceeds from God in a similar manner, without any special intention. But according to the Bible, God turns to the prophet and to the people through him, by choice and not of necessity, in other words, out of beneficent divine will. This is the same divine will by which God created the world, and the same will by which God works supernatural miracles that express His governance.

Recognizing this fact necessitated another modification in the Aristotelian outlook, one that is presented in Part II of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Maimonides distinguishes first of all between two positions: the Aristotelian position according to which whoever prepares himself for prophecy attains it, and the popular interpretation of the Torah according to which God reveals Himself at will to any person without requiring any special preparation. Between these two positions, he presents what he considers to be the correct view of the Torah: God reveals Himself only to one who is properly prepared, and for the most part whoever prepares himself properly is granted prophecy. But the outcome is still dependent on God's free will: God can deny prophecy from one who is prepared to receive it. Maimonides cites as an example the words of Baruch the son of Neriah, who took the trouble to prepare himself but did not attain it. We must admit that it is difficult to accept this argument at face value, given what we know about Maimonides's theology and psychology. Nevertheless, we may look for an explanation as follows. Prophecy was withheld during the Jewish exile even from one who had prepared for it, on account of the tribulations that are an impediment. Also, a person who has not been blessed with the requisite imaginative faculty from birth is prevented from prophecy, because it is impossible to develop this faculty at will. In such a case, it is possible to say that God has not "willed" to grant prophecy to such a person. There are commentators who grasp at these remote possibilities to explain Maimonides's views. However, such explanations distract us from the main point. We shall see later that there is an essential and profound difference between Maimonides's view and Aristotle's in understanding the concept of "divine will," and that is the key to understanding his remarks on this question as well.

What is the Difference between Prophet and Philosopher?

It follows from what we have said so far that prophecy is a kind of intellectual and metaphysical understanding. This raises the question: What distinguishes the prophet from the philosopher with respect to the substance or quality of knowledge of eternal truth? The fact that the prophet can also be decked out in the robe of the statesman or educator, or the fact that God can prevent one from being a prophet, does not add up to a material difference between the prophet and philosopher in their intellectual capacity.

This is a question for which Maimonides was fiercely attacked. His opponents argued that according to Maimonides's presentation, it is difficult to say how Moses, the greatest of the prophets, differs from Aristotle, the greatest of the philosophers. In that case, what is so special about prophecy as a unique phenomenon of the Jewish tradition? This is indeed a difficult question. However, it seems to me that only in the superficial mind-frame born of polemics is it possible to argue—as did Maimonides's critics of the 13th and 14th century, and some Maimonidean scholars of today—that he did not distinguish between the prophet and philosopher with respect to their understanding of God and attachment to Him. The difference is fundamental, even though it is based on an Aristotelian psychology that does not recognize any possibility of supra-rational understanding.

Our starting point should be Maimonides's conception of *the uniqueness of the Jewish tradition, and the fact that prophecy appeared only in it, and not in any other religious tradition*. We said above that Maimonides did not accept Halevi's outlook, according to which the nation of Israel stands on a higher intellectual plane than other peoples. The nation of Israel is distinguished only by virtue of its having received the Torah. Abraham attained the divine truth on his own, and by virtue of that fact merited prophecy. He gathered around him a tribe of thinkers, and their merit—the merit of the tradition in which their children were educated—was such that there could arise from their midst a man such as Moses. By virtue of Moses's Torah, which was accepted by the people, Israel merited that prophets should arise in their midst. What follows from all this? In Maimonides's view, a whole regimen of life—directed entirely at attainment of the truth as the exclusive purpose of life—is a fundamental condition for the phenomenon of prophecy in the most gifted individuals who have internalized the instruction of the Torah and identified with it.

We can learn from this that the fundamental difference between prophet and philosopher is in the orientation that is established by a regimen of life devoted to the service of God: attachment¹ to the knowledge of God as an absolute obligation and exclusive goal.

¹ "Attachment": Hebrew *devekut*, a term of mystical connotation, identified with mystical union between the worshipper and God, a goal that religious philosophers and mystics pursue by different paths. For the biblical roots of this idea, see Deuteronomy 4:4 and 10:20 (where *davek* is variously translated as "cleave" or "hold fast" to God).

This attachment explains first of all the political difference between prophet and philosopher that was discussed earlier. The prophet is also a statesman, legislator and leader. The difference does indeed involve the special gift of the imaginative faculty, but we saw that it is additionally related to the prophet's dedication to the service of God by recognizing the obligation to imitate God through deeds, and to impart to all human beings the same understanding and the same sense of obligation. Philosophers do not sense the same obligation. They rotate on the axis of their own essence and strive to perfect themselves for their own sake.

These differences comprise the source of a difference in the form of understanding. *To differentiate from the philosopher, the prophet attaches himself systematically to the single purpose of knowing God.* He is drunk with the love of God. This is noticeable in his conduct, in how he bends all his actions to the one purpose, and thus he makes himself a paragon of conduct. This is noticeable also in his intellectual activity. Whatever he knows, he turns into an occasion for knowing God further. The philosopher also studies physics and metaphysics, but the prophet turns physics and metaphysics into objects of contemplation for the sake of understanding God through them. This is the same absolute absorption in understanding God, by which the prophet surpasses the philosopher, whose perfection is merely human perfection. By a special effort the prophet breaks through to a superhuman state. He transcends materiality and manages at times to become, as it were, the embodiment of a supernal intellect. This is the true prophetic illumination.

This conclusion is what explains the conditioning of prophecy in the Torah tradition: The society that conducts itself by the Torah is a society all of whose living arrangements are set up to direct human activities toward the knowledge of God. Therefore every person who lives in it and observes its precepts, to whatever extent he can, is elevated to communication [with God] to that extent. The prophet personifies the perfection of that society. This is at any rate the immanent tendency in the whole fabric of life that is both a creation of prophecy and a preparation for prophecy. It is clear that the religious idealism which we have singled out as a characteristic of Maimonides's teaching in ethics, appears here as the root of the difference between the prophet and the philosopher: reaching out for the transcendent, subordinating everything to the one goal of knowing God. This subordination creates an actual difference between the philosopher and the prophet, and from it is perpetuated also a social difference: the philosophers

study the same metaphysics, but the prophet rises by its means to the spiritual sphere that transcends materiality, and turns himself into a mirror in which the incomprehensible divine essence is reflected. Can we say nevertheless that the prophet comprehends with his intellect a supra-rational metaphysical truth? To answer this question, we must turn to the next topic: Maimonides's theology.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FOUNDATIONS OF MAIMONIDES'S THEOLOGY

For systematic reasons, one ought to start the discussion of theology with proofs for the existence of God. In the Introduction to Part II of the *Guide*, Maimonides presented a summary of propositions in Aristotelian physics that he regarded as physical truths that were demonstrated with certitude both empirically and logically. On its basis he offered four proofs for the existence of God. If we compare this approach to that of R. Saadia Gaon, the theological problem latent in it stands out at once. We recall that R. Saadia Gaon first demonstrated that the world was created *ex nihilo*, then drew from this the necessary conclusion that the world has a Creator. By contrast, Maimonides sought to prove God's existence on the basis of the empirical fact that there is a world governed by physical regularity. But was this world indeed created *ex nihilo* as R. Saadia determined? Maimonides avoids this question before he has demonstrated God's existence, and bases himself on the doctrines of physics that had brought Aristotle and his students to the opposite conclusion, that the world is primordial and not created *ex nihilo*, for being cannot proceed from non-being. Thus the original matter (*prima material* = *hyle*) had prior existence, and the eternal God has imprinted forms on it through infinite time without beginning or end.

What explains this choice? Maimonides explains that the proofs of the Mutakallimun (including R. Saadia) for the creation of the world *ex nihilo* are indecisive. In his view there are no decisive proofs either for the Kalamite doctrine of the world's creation or for the Aristotelian doctrine of the world's eternity. Therefore if one wants to certify the most important truth—that God exists—one should base oneself on absolutely certain assumptions. Aristotelian physics was absolutely certain in his view, as well as according to the independent secret philosophical doctrine of the Mosaic Torah, inasmuch as Maimonides identified Aristotelian physics with the secret Doctrine of Creation (*Ma'aseh Bereshit*), which in his view had been transmitted from the patriarchs and from Moses to the succeeding generations.

In connection with Maimonidean theology, we should emphasize that Aristotelian physics was not only the foundation of his proofs of

God's existence, but of his discussion of God's nature. In Aristotelian epistemology, knowledge of an object is based on knowledge of its existential causes. Thus Maimonides made Aristotelian physics a necessary precondition for understanding the Torah's theology.

The Four Principal Proofs for God's Existence

We shall not give a detailed exposition of Aristotle's physics here. This prevents us from giving a thorough analysis of Maimonides's proofs. We shall content ourselves with presenting their logical flow.

The first proof is based on two physical principles:

1. Every effect ("movement") has a cause ("mover").
2. The chain of causes and movers must be finite, because there can be potential infinity but not actual infinity. (Theoretically one can count *ad infinitum*, but it is impossible for one to have actually counted an infinite number of items, or for an infinite number of items to coexist.)

It follows from these two assumptions that of the hierarchy of moved and moving entities that we perceive, there must be one mover that is not itself moved, i.e., a mover whose movement is not caused by any other entity, but which moves another without itself being moved. This "unmoved Mover" is God.

This was not enough for Maimonides. In his view, the "unmoved mover" must exist transcendent to all "moved movers." The fundamental quality of this Primal Cause must be essentially different from that of all who receive movement from Him. His relation to the world cannot be compared to that of a captain who stands on his ship and moves with it, or to the soul's relation to the body. God as "unmoved Mover" is absolutely transcendent to the world. His existence is in no way dependent on that of any outside entity. This emphasis distinguishes Maimonides's outlook from Aristotle's. This is the essential difference between transcendental monotheism and pagan henotheism.

In the same context, Maimonides proceeds to demonstrate that the unmoved mover cannot be a body or a power in a body. (If God is the cause of movement and there is no prior cause, He must be incorporeal, for corporeal beings cause movement by virtue of an external factor.) Furthermore, the unmoved mover is non-composite and indivisible, therefore He is a simple unity not situated in space or

in time. He is eternal. All these conclusions follow together from the same philosophical considerations.

The second proof is based on the physical finding that if one part of a composite entity can exist separately, then the other part can exist separately as well. (If honey and vinegar are found mixed, and the honey can exist separately, then the vinegar can exist separately.) Many things are a component of moving and moved, and there exist some that are moved but do not move, so there must be one that moves but is not moved.

In our opinion, this is a condensed version of the first proof: that movement to which our experience attests requires that we assume an unmoved mover, separate from the series of those moved by Him. We arrive thus similarly at the notion of God as unmoved Mover, from which follow the same consequences as in the previous; the unmoved Mover is necessarily incorporeal, non-composite and unique. This proof has the advantage over the previous that it is based not on many premises but on a single premise. It is relatively simple, and one may suppose that a reader who is not expert in Aristotelian physics might understand it.

The first two proofs represent the classic Aristotelian manner of thought. They are based not on the idea of existence but on the idea of motion. The world is assumed to be in constant motion. This motion embraces Aristotle's conception of the material world, which is identical with the notion of becoming: a constant process of generation from potential to actual and the reverse. Nothing is said here of God as cause of existence in the absolute sense, i.e. as cause of matter. We see realized here Maimonides's assertion that he will prove God's existence "according to the view of those who believe in the world's eternity." But Maimonides felt that these proofs were insufficient, and he offers two additional metaphysical proofs that are based directly on the concept of material existence.

The third proof opens with the experiential determination that there are "existent entities." A portion of these entities are such as are generated and perish. Thus attests immediate experience. But this fact proves that there must be a being that is not generated and does not perish, that is a condition for the perseverance and continuity of the process of becoming in our world. It is indeed instructive that Aristotle used this argument to support his view that the heavens are eternal, for they support the continual movement of being in the sub-lunar world.

By contrast, Maimonides proves directly from this premise the existence of God as a necessarily-existing being—that is, a being not dependent on any external cause, but on which are dependent all other beings, which are therefore “contingently existing” or “potentially existing in themselves.” Thus Maimonides does not follow Aristotle directly, but rather his Arabic commentator Avicenna, who determines empirically that our world possesses in itself only contingent but not necessary existence, so that it needs a necessarily-existing being to actualize it. Of course, this necessarily-existing being must be incorporeal, non-composite, and independent of any external cause, and therefore pre-existing.

The fourth proof is similar to the preceding, in the same way as the second was similar to the first. Experience testifies that material entities proceed from potentiality to actuality. Something that exists only potentially cannot actualize itself. One must therefore assume the existence of a being that is always actual, that actualizes other beings that are potential. Again, this being is incorporeal, non-composite, etc.—in other words, outside the series of beings for which it is the cause of existence.

What do these two proofs add to the two first ones? Whoever examines them carefully will see that the first series embraces the second series, for the God who is the cause of motion is also the cause of being, and being “unmoved” is the same as being self-caused. It is also clear that existence is understood here as coming into actuality from potentiality, and nothing is said here of God as the absolute cause of existence. We are still dealing with proofs that assume the eternity of the world. What is added here is merely another aspect of the understanding of the God-world relationship that sees God as universal cause, expressed variously as “the unmoved mover” and the “necessary existent.” Nevertheless, the term “necessary existent” takes us one step closer to the thought-style of monotheistic religion.

Departures from Aristotle

One might indeed maintain that in the matter of proofs for God’s existence, Maimonides bases himself directly and unqualifiedly on Aristotle. Nevertheless we can indicate two essential differences.

First of all, Maimonides emphatically stresses God’s transcendence. *God is set apart from the world that owes its existence and motion to Him.* This is not the case in Aristotle, who identifies God simply as the “form” of the existing world. That is why Maimonides omits Aristotle’s insis-

tence on the eternity of the heavens, and that is why he emphasizes repeatedly that the same evidence that proves God's existence also proves his incorporeality, unity and eternity. In other words, these are different aspects of the fundamental assertion that God—conceived as the cause of all existing beings—exists. These are consequences of God's transcendence.

The second difference, which Maimonides shares with all medieval religious Aristotelian philosophers, is this. According to the Aristotelian conception, God is the final cause of the world, in the sense that the world strives toward God to achieve its own perfection, but for Maimonides God is the efficient cause of the world's existence as well. By virtue of existing apart from the world, God exercises intentional influence on it. This is a fundamental change that has its source in the monotheistic notion of God. It is an intentional departure, for in Maimonides's view the doctrine of the emanation of the deity into the world is idolatrous. Furthermore, this complements and explains what was said above about the difference between the prophet and the philosopher. Prophetic apprehension includes the effort to reach beyond the limits of physical and metaphysical knowledge.

Proofs for God's Unity, Eternity, and Incorporeality

After these four proofs for God's existence and the proofs for His unity, eternity and incorporeality, Maimonides offers additional special proofs for God's unity, eternity and incorporeality. We shall skip them, for his essential method consists in the assertion that all these findings with respect to God can be proved instantly and grasped together, for they unpack the content of a single notion. This begets the question: How are we to understand these concepts as applied to God? When we predicate existence, unity and priority of God and of any other existing being, can we naively assume that we understand these terms in the same way? Or could it be that we use the same words simply because we have no unique vocabulary with which to describe God, but these words now have a substantially different connotation, because God "exists," is "one" and is "eternal"¹ in a substantially different way than any other

¹ The Hebrew *qadmon*, translated "eternal" when applied to God, means simply "prior" or "pre-existing" and can be used in a relative sense (as in "matter as such is prior to its specific concretization in the world and in specific forms"). The translation

being? This is indeed the critical question that will provide us with the transition from the topic of proving God's existence to the topic of the divine attributes. What can we know about God? Indeed, Maimonides anticipated this question by dealing with it in Part I of the *Guide*, when he dealt with the issue of interpreting material and anthropomorphic images of God in the prophetic and rabbinic writings.

Thinking Correctly about God

We should emphasize at this point that raising the question of the divine attributes signifies a major turn in philosophical thought. In Aristotle, the discussion proceeds from physics to metaphysics. The theological discussion takes place within the metaphysical arena, without raising the question whether the notion of "God" can be defined or understood. The question is assumed as answered in the affirmative. However, this question was indeed raised in the Neoplatonic school of thought. It follows that Maimonides shifted at this point from the assumptions of Aristotelian epistemology in the realm of physics to Neoplatonic assumptions.²

This shift is expressed in the assumption that we encountered in Part I, in the doctrines of Israeli, Ibn Pakudah, and Ibn Gabirol. Though God is transcendent, He relates to the world, and the world attests to Him. But from the perspective of the world and its creatures, God is transcendent and cannot be conceptualized. We can indeed attempt to reach out and draw nearer to Him, but this is an endless process. Methodologically, this means that we cannot arrive at a final set doctrine of divine attributes, but only at procedural guidelines. Maimonides expresses this conclusion when he says that it is his purpose to "guide our thoughts aright concerning God." The chapters in the *Guide* devoted to this inquiry (I, 50–60) are a paradigm of this method. It is up to the students to enter into this process and ascend from one stage to the next, for only in this way can they understand and absorb its lessons.

"eternal" is inescapable in its theological sense—an instance of how the same term may have radically different significations as applied to God or to finite creatures.

² For the importance of the Neoplatonic background to Maimonides's thought on these issues, see Alfred Ivry, "Maimonides and Neoplatonism: Challenge and Response," in Lenn Goodman, ed., *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, SUNY 1992.

What is True Belief?

The opening discussion of the divine attributes brings us back to an issue that we discussed in connection with principles of faith, but it now comes up in an epistemological context: What is the difference between true and counterfeit faith? The problem on which Maimonides wants the reader to reflect, and to apply to his own situation, is the following: Does the acknowledgment of true propositions as true attest to what the professing person truly believes, with respect to the content of the words? We should emphasize that Maimonides is not referring to the case of purposive deception, but rather of sincere profession of faith. It is quite possible that underneath the mouthing of the correct words lurks an incorrect understanding, confusion, or even total incomprehension of their conceptual content. Clearly, framing the issue in this way casts serious doubt on the utility of dogmatic formulations of faith. In any case, in the current context Maimonides seeks to motivate the philosophical reader to shake loose of dogmatics and to enter into a process of true deliberation.

Maimonides's definition of true belief supports this interpretation. He defines it as complete agreement between a person's inner mental representation and the things themselves on the one hand, and the words that he articulates on the other hand. The person's inner mental representation is the real indicator of what he believes to be true, rather than the words uttered. If there is a gap between the correct sense of the words and his mental representation, this is evidence of a mistaken or false belief, even (and especially) if he is unaware of it.

This assertion of Maimonides seems simple and obvious. Its significance in the context of the theory of the divine attributes becomes clear when Maimonides uses it to level criticism at the thinkers of the Kalam, including R. Saadia Gaon. Prior to Chapter 50, Maimonides has dealt with the denial of corporeal attributes of God, and the proper interpretation of apparently corporeal expressions in biblical and rabbinic texts. In that respect, Maimonides expressed complete agreement with the Kalamitic thinkers. But when he turns to the issue of attributes in general, the gap between their positions is revealed, and it then becomes clear that the prior agreement was illusory, for there was a profound gap between the words that the Kalamitic thinkers professed and the notions that they entertained. First of all, they ascribed certain attributes to God in a positive sense—One, Wise, Powerful, Willing—without differentiating the senses by which these words applied

to God and to human beings, and thus they unconsciously ascribed anthropomorphic and corporeal attributes to God. But in Maimonides's view, the issue is simple: If God is the bearer of such attributes, each of which is understood in the specific sense applying to human beings, then we are ascribing to God a plurality of qualities, negating His unity and incorporeality at the same time.³

We may conclude from this that Maimonides approaches the discussion of the attributes from the background of his discussion of Biblical interpretation, and from a polemical objective directed against the interpretations of the Kalam. The question is still not "How do we come closer to an intellectual understanding of God?" but rather, "How may we understand the prophetic utterances concerning the God who was revealed to them?" But the hermeneutic problem is also a theoretical problem for Maimonides. Let us not forget our previous guiding principle: The prophetic image expresses the truth insofar as a person can grasp it at a particular level of his development. Therefore the transition between one stage and another of the hermeneutic discussion is at the same time a transition between one stage and another of each person's intellectual progress towards the truth. Refuting the error of outright corporeal representation of God is the first stage. Refuting the error of indirect material representation is the second stage.

Refutation of All Positive Divine Attributes

In Chapter 51 Maimonides drew the conclusion that follows from the previous discussion in the form of a simple negative formula: It is forbidden to ascribe positive attributes to God. Maimonides considers this negative result self-evident even to ordinary people who are not philosophers: If we ascribe to God attributes that add on to His basic existence, we ascribe plurality to Him. Even if we say that He exists and is one, the addition of "one" results in plurality. This is a logical contradiction that any person with common sense can understand.

³ Maimonides believed, like Aristotle, that compositeness or plurality presupposed corporeality. For instance, any common physical object—a table, a flower, a car—has multiple functional attributes which are made possible by its multiple physical parts, which depend on physicality for expression. This is not necessarily the case, especially if we consider such things as mathematical entities—proofs, complex numbers, and bodies of knowledge—as existing in a Platonic ideal realm, which would presumably exhibit plurality and compositeness while remaining incorporeal. But then he was an Aristotelian. (LL)

In that case, what misled the Kalam thinkers, who were certainly not ignoramuses?

To this, Maimonides provides two complementary answers:

(1) The error of the Kalam thinkers was that they took the Biblical texts literally. The Torah predicates positive attributes of God. The Kalam thinkers set out to philosophize on the basis of the Torah, in order to validate its plain assertions as much as possible. They were unwilling to depart from the literal sense of expressions that did not appear obviously corporeal, and thus—according to Maimonides—“they denied the corporeal sense but left the attributes in place.”

(2) *The source of error in ordinary people is their imaginative faculty.* “People were misled by their imagination, and conceived God as corporeal and possessed of attributes.” Even though lay people can understand the negative formula that one must deny positive attributes of God, they cannot grasp something positively existing without an image associated with it, and this applies to God as well. They form an image of God, because without an image God is absent from their thought.

Is there a contradiction generated, however, in ordinary people's thinking? Perhaps the reader will expect Maimonides to answer in the affirmative, but in that case a surprise awaits him, one that will signal entry into his dialectical thought-process. From the standpoint of an intellectual novice, there is no contradiction here but two aspects of an intellectual process that need to be resolved through further development. It is easy to understand the negative formula that God is not corporeal. It is easy to understand that one must not ascribe positive attributes to Him for they engender multiplicity. It is difficult to give positive content that may take the place of the affirmations that were negated, when the ordinary believer attempts to direct his thought to that essence without corporeality and bereft of attributes, for he cannot describe it. He involuntarily imagines something, e.g., he involuntarily ascribes positive attributes to God, even though he has previously understood that one should not do so. *Fundamentally, the Kalam error in interpretation is bound up with that of the ordinary person.* Each of them forms a positive image of the divine, and an opposition is generated between the negative formula and their intellectual representation.

Thus the hermeneutic background presents a theoretical difficulty, one that we encounter at all stages of intellectual development pushing toward the apprehension of God: the negative stipulation, simple at first sight, is overlaid or at least obscured by the positive representation that necessarily follows in its wake. This *dialectical process* is the key to

understanding Maimonides's theory of divine attributes, as will become clear in the sequel.

Refutation of All Types of Divine Attributes

The first step in human thought towards understanding God is precisely the most radical negation: the determination that one cannot ascribe any positive attribute to God because God cannot be defined. Maimonides proves this proposition systematically: he first shows that it is impossible to define God, and then that it is impossible to ascribe any kind of attribute to Him.

(1) It is impossible to define God's essence. The proof is based on the nature of definition. According to Aristotle, the definition of any subject comprises two parts: (a) a statement of what the subject has in common with other subjects of the same category, and (b) a statement of what differentiates it from other subjects of that category. In Aristotelian terms: one must name the genus and the specific differences. For instance, Aristotle defines "man" as "rational animal," where "animal" is the broader category including man, and "rational" differentiates him from the other members of the category. God cannot be defined in this way because He is absolutely unique and thus absolutely Other. He is not found in any commonalty with other beings, nor does He resemble other beings in any respect, for He is the cause of all beings. Thus we cannot say in what respect He differs from them. Note that the determination that God is their cause follows from our knowledge that they are not self-caused. This defines them but says nothing about God (for example that the ability to bring other beings into existence differentiates Him from them). We should emphasize again that despite the employment of the Aristotelian form of definition, Maimonides's argument for God's absolute otherness is not Aristotelian. In Aristotle's view, God is defined as a "Separate Intellect," and he knows of only one "Separate Intellect," namely the "Active Intellect." But in the Neo-Platonic conception, there is a series of "Separate Intellects" (or angels) between God and Man, and God is the unknown infinite Intellect who escapes definition by His absolute separateness from all other intellects.

(2) It is impossible to ascribe qualitative attributes to God. It has already been easily established that one cannot ascribe corporeal qualities to God. By the same token, it is impossible to ascribe emotional qualities to Him, such as compassion, anger, etc. It is also impossible

to ascribe intellectual qualities to Him, such as wisdom or will. Why? Because by Aristotle's logic, every quality pertains to a defined essence, without which it is meaningless, and is superadded to that essence, bringing about plurality and composition. But God, being absolutely One, has no definition to which qualities may be added. In this respect, God is distinguished from all the qualities of whose existence we learn from other entities.

(3) We cannot ascribe relational attributes to God in the same way as we describe a man as father to his son or son to his father. Indeed, we know that God is the cause of all entities. But again, our knowledge is restricted to those entities that are not self-caused, and this knowledge does not enable us to say anything about God Himself. Maimonides offers this argument on the premise that entities may be described as related to each other only if they are of the same order of being (such as father and son sharing common humanity), but we have seen that God is incommensurable with His creation.

(4) We cannot describe God in attributes of action in the same way that we describe a man as a carpenter, shoemaker, teacher, etc., which are activities that characterize him as distinct from other men. The reason is similar to those for the exclusion of the previous kinds of attributes. Nevertheless, Maimonides sees a need to soften this denial. In a certain respect it is possible to describe God relative to those specific manifestations which we can identify in ourselves and in our world knowing that God is their cause. Indeed, from our vantage-point as creatures in the world we cannot avoid such descriptions. However, we should be cautious what significance we ascribe to them. When we say that a man is a carpenter, we mean not just that he happens to make furniture, but also that "carpenter-hood" characterizes him as a person even when he is not making furniture. In that respect, it is forbidden to describe God in terms of his actions; however, we may describe God's actions themselves, and this is very useful to us, particularly when we can speak in terms of God's mercy, justice, and governance. Still, we must guard against the innocent inference that these attributes of action are attributes of the Creator Himself.

The Dialectic of Negative Attributes

If we review this discussion in summary fashion, we discover that despite the categorical negation of all kinds of descriptions of God, Maimonides brings us to a double awareness: firstly, of the increasing

difficulty of avoiding them, and secondly of the dialectical possibility of using them despite their negation.

It is easy to understand why God is indefinable. But when we come to the question of qualities, there is a hesitation. Every logician will agree that God cannot be described by the qualities of physical bodies: red, big, etc.—for all agree that God is incorporeal. But when it comes to denying psychological qualities, we hesitate. Scripture ascribes to God qualities such as Gracious, Merciful, and Slow-To-Anger, and these have entered the liturgy. Indeed, it is impossible to pray without recourse to such attributes, and ordinary people cannot understand why they would be in error. Therefore, Maimonides must explain that when the prophets and sages included such terms in the prayers, they employed metaphoric language that describes the emotions of human beings, not of God Himself.

But the difficulty is greater in the denial of relational attributes. Common sense suggests that we should describe God in terms of His relationship to the world, of which He is the cause. Indeed, Maimonides admits that this negation is more difficult than the preceding, and that a certain leniency is in order. One who describes God relationally is not to be judged as idolatrous in the manner as one who ascribes to Him corporeal qualities. It is nothing more than innocent misunderstanding, which one should patiently try to correct.

The same logic applies even more in the case of attributes of action. Here Maimonides admitted that even a philosopher cannot refrain from employing them, and one even has a positive reason for doing so. He contents himself with the qualification that one may describe God's actions as long as one does not regard them as substantive characterizations of the divinity. Thus the deliberation is dialectical. It starts out with negation but moves towards affirmation. If the negation were absolute, it would empty the notion of divinity (and even a philosopher must have a notion of divinity) of all content.

Reconsidering the Kalam's Doctrine of Attributes

At the beginning of Chapter 53 Maimonides makes the reader aware of the dialectical nature of the discussion in the previous chapter. He points out the progressive difficulty of the denial of attributes and of the ever-increasing leniency expressed in the canonical literature of Judaism: the Torah, the prophets, the rabbinic lore, and the prayer-formulas instituted by the rabbis. All this requires one to reconsider

the Kalamic scholars' theory of divine attributes, which was originally rejected sharply as simplistic and unenlightened. It now becomes clear that there was after all a certain logic in their view, and we cannot proceed further without clarifying it.

In fact, Maimonides points out in Chapter 53 a difference between the way he himself presents the Kalamic position and the way they presented it in their writings. According to Maimonides, they only affirmed the divine attributes in order to be faithful to the plain sense of Scripture. They, however, claimed that they did so for philosophical considerations. Maimonides thought they were erroneous considerations, whose deeper purpose was rooted in faithfulness to the biblical text. But now that he has shown the philosophical difficulty in avoiding positive descriptions of God, it is necessary to clarify in principle what was their error, so we shall not fall into the same mistake.

Maimonides therefore presents the Kalamic arguments in logical order, from simple to more sophisticated:

(1) If we do not assume that the one God has diverse characteristics, we cannot explain how diverse and even contradictory actions arise from Him (such as lovingkindness and retribution). Maimonides resolves this difficulty with a parable: Fire effects through one characteristic—blazing heat—many opposite results: it burns, it melts, it hardens, it blackens, it whitens. The action of the fire is one. The various results proceed from the diverse qualities of the substances affected by it.

(2) A second, more subtle difficulty is as follows. Even if we recognize that different actions, described by different attributes, do not proceed from a plurality of divine characteristics, nevertheless the attributes that describe these actions are taken as attributes of God Himself, for these are His actions performed by His will and intention. Maimonides replies that this is a typical instance of counterfeit belief as described in Chapter 50: professing a view without truly believing it or without understanding it correctly. This is at any rate a contradiction, to say that God is one but to ascribe plurality to Him. Maimonides does not identify the target of his criticism, but it is undoubtedly directed at Saadia Gaon's *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, which maintains that God is one but possessed of wisdom, power and will that may be distinguished from each other without the plurality of these faculties implying a plurality in God. Clearly, Saadia acknowledged the truth of God's unity, but in his mental representation there remained a plurality.

In order to dispel this difficulty, which undoubtedly represents a certain position through which every thinking person must pass on his

way toward the truth, Maimonides offers a second parable: the intellect is one and it exercises a single function though it knows many things. There is a plurality in its objects, but when the intellect knows them, they become the content of one inclusive knowledge.

(3) Even if we agree that plural actions do not imply plurality in the actor, the very notion of divinity requires our reason to ascribe several positive attributes to Him:

We shall mention that as to which all of them agree and consider to be cognized [as necessary to the divine essence] by the intellect and in which there is no need to follow the text of the word of a prophet: There are four such attributes: Life, Power, Wisdom, and Will. They say that these are distinct notions and such perfections that it would be impossible for the deity to be deprived of any of them. Nor is it possible to suppose that they belong to His actions.⁴

Now it is clear that these attributes do not proceed from those matter that God knows externally or from His influence on objects of different characters. If we do not conceive of God as living, powerful, wise and willing, we empty the notion of divinity, which we derived from the fact of God's being the cause or creator of the world, of all content.

In Maimonides's consideration of this difficulty, we detect a slight change in his stance towards the Kalamic sages. He admits that we cannot conceive of God as cause of the world's existence without ascribing these attributes to Him. In that case, it is clear that their error did not proceed from a simplistic reading of Scripture, but from a genuine theoretical difficulty. Nevertheless, the Kalamic sages did not succeed in dealing with it correctly, given the philosophical tools at their disposal.

What, then, was their error? Maimonides sees it as another case of anthropomorphizing God—but this time not on the plane of the senses or the imagination or the emotions, but on the plane of the intellect: a simplistic equation of what is required by the human intellect, when it strives to comprehend God as the cause of creation, and what is required by God Himself in the act of creation. In other words: the fact that we cannot conceive of creation without resorting to these anthropomorphic concepts (Living, Powerful, Wise, Willing) is no proof that God is possessed of life, power, wisdom and will in the same sense that we picture in our minds.

⁴ *Guide* I, 53, Pines 121–2, with slight modification.

Maimonides thus rejects once more the Kalamic doctrine of divine attributes. But we should note that this time it is not a decisive rejection but a dialectical one, for by admitting that man must conceive of the Creator-God as living, powerful, wise and willing he introduces these attributes to the category of relational attributes and endorses their employment in the same way as he endorsed the use of the attributes of action.

The Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy

The outcome of the dialectical confrontation with the logic of the Kalam comes to its climax in a hermeneutically-oriented chapter that focuses on a prophetic encounter of foundational significance for grasping the biblical conception of divinity: God's revelation to Moses in the cleft of the rock after the episode of the Golden Calf. The outstanding feature of this chapter lies not in any revelation of the divine will or command to humankind, but the revelation of God Himself to His chosen prophet. Such an event unquestionably calls for an explanation in the context of the theory of divine attributes: in what sense was Moses able to know God Himself with his human intellect?

The first philosophical-hermeneutic question that should arise with respect to the account of this event in Exodus is the following: If Moses was indeed, according to Maimonides, the "prince of the sages," the greatest of all philosophers who ever lived, how is it possible that he should ask God to reveal Himself to him? Did he not know what every mediocre philosopher knows, that a human being cannot know God through his intellect? Didn't he already know in advance that he would be told, "Man cannot see Me and live"? In that case, what did he really ask for? And what answer did he receive?

According to Maimonides, Moses made two requests on that occasion. The first was to know the ways of God, His actions and the management of the world. The second was to know God's essence and glory. He received a positive answer to the first question. Human beings can comprehend the "ways" of God, which are the divine attributes of action. By contrast, the reply he received to his second question was at first sight negative: "Man cannot see Me and live." Nevertheless, Moses found a vantage point by means of which he was able to come closer to apprehending the essence of God. This explains why Moses made his request which appeared at first sight impossible. On the contrary, Moses's request comes to teach us that despite the infinite gap between

human knowledge and divine knowledge, the very striving to approach God Himself by apprehending Him in thought is obligatory and required. It is the highest religious value, and therefore the very striving provides an opening point for participation in an ongoing process of drawing closer. As this discovery marks a critical turning-point in the dialectic of Maimonides's thought, we cite his words:

His saying, "that I may find grace in Your sight," indicates that he who knows God *finds grace in his sight*, and not he who merely fasts and prays, but everyone who has knowledge of Him. Accordingly those who know Him are those who are favored by Him and permitted to come near Him, whereas those who do not know Him are objects of His wrath and are kept far away from Him. For His favor and wrath, His nearness and remoteness, correspond to the extent of a man's knowledge or ignorance.⁵

This is a dramatic turn: Maimonides emphasizes that knowing God is the highest obligation incumbent on one, precisely at that stage of the argument where it would be possible to conclude the opposite! For we have learned from his critique of the Kalamic doctrine of attributes that the "permitted" attributes of action and relation do not yield actual knowledge of the divine essence. In that case, how is it possible to obligate all human beings in that respect? For we note that Maimonides did not direct his words concerning this religious obligation just to prophets. On the contrary, Moses is presented as an example for all Israelites to follow—in an enterprise that seems impossible!

In order to answer this perplexity, we must solve the riddle of Maimonides's intention in speaking of the "vantage point" that Moses found, and to this end he offered a hint in Chapter 54.⁶ He refers there to the scriptural texts that attest that besides revealing His attributes of action in the character of a paragon of ideal conduct, He passed before Moses's eyes "all His goodness." What is this plenitude of divine goodness from which Moses was able to intuit the divine "aftermath"?⁷

⁵ *Guide* I, 54, Pines 123–4.

⁶ Indeed, the number of places where Maimonides refers to Exodus 33–34 in the *Guide* is remarkable. The important references include Part I Chapters 4, 8, 15, 16, 21, 37, 38, and 54; Part II Chapter 45; and Part III Chapters 53–54. The figurative interpretations of "place" (I, 8), "stand" (I, 15) and "rock" (I, 16) are crucial to the notion of "vantage point" that Schweid elaborates here. (LL)

⁷ Maimonides famously interprets the vision of God's "back" in Exodus 33:20 as referring to the aftermath or effects of God's actions; hence, by understanding the world that God has produced, we come to indirect understanding of God.

The text hints that God passed before Moses all that He had created, the entirety of existence, of which it had been said in Genesis, "that it was good." That is the goodness of God. We learn from this that by attaining perfection in the knowledge of the totality of existence that God created, it is possible to approach closer to knowledge of God Himself.

From Negating Deficiencies to Affirming Perfections

Chapter 55 is especially important because it offers a new methodological suggestion for implementing the turn that he arrived at in the previous chapter. The central principle of this new method is the recognition that God transcends our understanding because of His absolute perfection, in contrast to our human understanding that is fragmentary, limited, and deficient in every respect. This notion implants an ideal conception of God in human thought: God is ultimate perfection, in contrast to the finite, limited world. In that case, the objective is to overcome the limitations of our awareness in order to advance to knowledge of perfection and to strive to achieve it to the extent of our ability. The conclusion that follows from this is that the more we progress toward the ideal of human perfection in all its aspects, and especially in its intellectual aspect, the more we approach the attainment⁸ of God's infinite perfection. Or in negative terms: the more we repair our deficiencies—and especially our intellectual deficiencies—the more we approach the attainment of God's infinite perfection. According to Maimonides, this is the purpose of the Torah and the prophets in ascribing positive attributes to God: every attribute that is an aspect of perfection to humankind is ascribed to God as its infinite source, for in that respect He is beyond human understanding.

Thus the argument proceeds to a new level, which enables us to understand the rationale of the previous level. Up to Chapter 54 Maimonides was engaged in correcting the intellectual errors of simple believers—those who express their conception of God in material attributes, because they innocently think of these as expressing human perfection. From Chapter 54 onward, we are dealing with believers who

⁸ Schweid here uses the word *hassagah* which has a double meaning: "attainment" and "comprehension." Thus it unites two synergistically related goals: our intellectual understanding of the divine perfection, and our moral imitation of the divine attributes of action. (LL)

have corrected this error, but at the same time they are caught in the characteristic error of simplistic rationalists: they identify God with the world that He has created, and ascribe the perfections that they find in creation to God, unaware that the perfections of God cannot be equated with those of creation because He is their source.

To be sure, we have said that in Chapter 54 Maimonides explained the revelation to Moses in the cleft of the rock as teaching that Moses came to know God through appreciation of the perfection of creation and its relation to God. Nevertheless, this was not a vision of God's "face," but rather of God's "back." The Kalamitic sages erred in ignoring this distinction. Indeed, the first step toward understanding God's essence must be one of positive identification, but only in order to negate it through the contrary insight that there is no identity between God and creation; this last step leads us from the knowledge of the created world to knowledge of its Creator-God.

Radical Incommensurability of God and World

Chapter 56 expands and comments on what was briefly alluded to in Chapter 55. It points out the contradiction between professed faith and mental representation in the minds of those who ascribe positive attributes to God. The source of this contradiction lies in the simplistic equation of human perfection with divine perfection. So far, this adds nothing to the argument of the previous chapter. The new insight, which marks a further progression of the argument, is the negation of a new category of positive attributes that had not been mentioned previously, and that would not have occurred to the simple believer or simple-minded rationalist to deny to God in the sense that human beings understand them. These are the attributes of existence, unity and eternity. Maimonides now declares that even these attributes, which he himself had enumerated in his Thirteen Principles, are predicated of God and of His creatures "equivocally." That is to say, we use these words in both contexts because we have no others, but their meaning is substantially different. The proof of this, which is likely to confound dogmatic believers, is presented simply in order to be readily understood. Every proposition that unites a subject with predicates not included in the definition of its essence, thereby adds something to it, resulting in plurality. If we ascribe them to God in the same way that we ascribe them to other subjects, we thus create composition and plurality in our representation of God, thus in effect ascribing corporeality to Him.

This is a serious failing. But the difficulty it poses is equally serious, for if we deny these attributes of God in the usual sense, we must apparently empty our concept of God of any content at all. We cannot even ascribe existence to Him in our usual sense, for it is blasphemous to think that God exists in the same way that we exist. And if we add unity to that, we have then made Him two in our thoughts!

From the simplistic-rationalistic perspective, Maimonides has set a trap here from which there is no escape. On the one hand, we *must* think that God exists, is one, and is eternal. Had we not proved this at the outset? Willy-nilly, we understood these attributes in the same sense as with any subject. On the other hand, it is forbidden for us to ascribe these attributes to God! This is a perplexing antinomy, but from Maimonides's perspective it points the way to the "vantage point" by means of which it is possible to transform our progress in knowledge of the world that God has created into progress in our knowledge of Him. This requires the dialectical transformation of positive attributes to negative attributes. The discussion in the succeeding chapters will prove this.

Positive and Negative Attributes Pertaining to God

What is a negative attribute? The primary meaning is the determination that a given subject is different from another subject that we know possesses a certain characteristic that can be defined precisely. For example, Subject A, which still needs to be defined, is different from Subject B, whose definition we know, for Subject A lacks traits such-and-such that are found in Subject B. Maimonides determines that such a distinction between an undefined subject and something else, gives us information about it without defining it and without generating a representation of it that has plurality. This information sheds a certain light on its nature, for it pertains to the definition of a subject that is familiar to us. We should note two things that follow from this, though Maimonides does not state them explicitly. First, when it is clear and certain to us that there is or must be some unidentified object, whether because reliable people testified to its existence or because we infer its existence from the behavior of known objects, we form in our minds some conceptual or pictorial representation of that object. Otherwise, we could not think about it. It is now incumbent on us to add content to it, to refine and clarify the concept or image so that it shall agree with reality. Negative contrasts aid us in this task. Second, comparing the unidentified object

with familiar objects which led us to assume its existence, teaches us something about this object, and when we draw distinctions between it and others, we clarify further the relationship between the identified and the unidentified object. Therefore, the more such comparisons we can make, the more we can approximate the correct positive definition. In Chapter 60 Maimonides explains this process with an example that we may mention here. We see an unidentified object floating in the sea. We try to identify it by comparing it with other objects that float in the sea, and we find that it lacks certain characteristics that define those objects, until only one alternative remains: the object in question is a ship.

To be sure, we shall be guilty of a grave error if we equate the process of searching for the definition of an unidentified object, which is in principle capable of definition and whose like we have seen many times, with the search for definition of a being which is indefinable in principle by us, whose essence only He Himself can define. Nevertheless, Maimonides maintains that by negating those characteristics that distinguish the concept of God in our mind from the clear concept that we have of ourselves, we progress toward a correct definition of God without actually arriving at it. Why? Because we know that there is a relation between ourselves and God, for it is this relation that has made us believe in God.

It is this understanding that leads Maimonides toward a second, more complex notion of the negative attribute. As mentioned in the previous discussion, it is forbidden to us to ascribe to God in our minds attributes that are in the nature of deficiencies that characterize human beings and other creatures in relation to God, such as corporeality, passions, drives and desires, but it is proper for us to attribute to Him that which is a perfection for us, such as wisdom, power, and will. This procedure leaves us open to the error of confusing our wisdom with the divine wisdom and our will with the divine will, but we can overcome this error if we express the positive attribute in a negative way. In other words, God is the cause of these perfections that we find in ourselves. It is therefore impossible that they should be absent in him. Thus the superior type of negative attribute—the one that brings us closest to knowledge of God on a philosophical level—is the “negation of privations.” It is rooted in a definite content that is familiar to us, and it relates it to God in such a way that no plurality is formed in our concept of God. Thus the more that our human wisdom, power, and

will are expanded and perfected, so will our knowledge of God, since its source is in these perfections, yet it is not defined by them nor will it suffer multiplicity on their account.

Progress in the Knowledge of God

The question that one may ask at the conclusion of the previous argument is this: What is the positive content of progress in the knowledge of God, if the way is endless? What is the substantive difference between the knowledge of someone who is at the beginning of the way, and one who has traveled some distance along it, if both are equally distant from the final goal?

Maimonides's answer invites the actual inquirer to retrace his steps and examine the path that he himself has traversed from the start of the discussion on the attributes. First he denied material attributes of God, thus advancing beyond sheer superstition. Even though one does not at this stage know God Himself, the distinction between him and the corporealists is quite significant, for the latter are not truly thinking about God, though they apply the name "God" to an entity that is the exact opposite of the divine essence. The one who knows that God is not corporeal is at least directing his thoughts toward God. Next, this quenter denied all passions and emotions of God. Next, he denied the positive attributes, and every positive comparison between God and the created realm. Through all these steps, important realizations were accumulated, whose positive content is knowledge of the reason why one must deny all these characteristics of God, which are in effect human deficiencies that differentiate between man and God. If he understands that these are deficiencies, then he has learned something important about himself. If he understands that one ought not to ascribe these deficiencies to God, then he has acquired an unfolding notion of perfection that has no final limit.

One of Maimonides's great critics, R. Ḥasdai Crescas, argued against this interpretation, that in the accumulation of these negations there is no real progress, because the point of each of the negations is identical, and in fact trivial: all positive attributes are denied because they create plurality in God. But we should recall that Maimonides himself determined in Chapter 51 that the logical proof is simple and straightforward even for a non-philosopher. On the other hand, he showed that all the succeeding negations proceed one from the next in

ascending order and in increasing difficulty. The Kalamīc sages knew that one had to deny corporeality and compositeness of God, yet they still came to grief.

The stumbling-block that they failed to surmount was the difficulty of denying positive attributes of God without emptying one's mental representation of God of all content. It is easy to say that God is not corporeal, and it is easy to prove it. But it is very difficult to conceive of an immaterial entity. Maimonides demonstrated this in the beginning of his discussion of the attributes. Most people say in all innocence that God is incorporeal, but the representation in their minds is of something material. This applies with greater force when one comes to negating the passions, the positive attributes, and the similarity of God and the world. Internalizing the positive significance of these negations by creating a new concept or a new representation of God in our minds, even as we know that we shall have to negate it as well—this is the true progress. We shall appreciate it if we recall the metaphor of the lightning-flashes of illumination that attended the prophets' enlightenment. These represent intuitive leaps of insight that occur more frequently when one has removed the barriers of erroneous ideas caused by our intellectual finitude.

In the conclusion of Chapter 59, Maimonides summarizes this insight in the formulation that the ultimate in human understanding of God is expressed in silence. Those who are remote from true knowledge of God feel that the more they engage in extravagant terms of praise, the better they can express their awareness of His greatness. But the wise person knows that God's perfection is beyond all this, and he expresses this through silence. This silence is not the absence of thought, but a transcendence towards what is beyond all expression because it is beyond definition.

The Via Negativa

The idea that is expressed metaphorically through the formulation that the ultimate in human understanding of God is expressed in silence, marks the transition from the most advanced standpoint of Kalamīc thought to Aristotelian philosophy, which in Maimonides's view embodied the truth.⁹ Maimonides therefore endeavors to clarify the substantive

⁹ By "Aristotelian" here is meant the medieval Aristotelian tradition that had incorporated marked neo-Platonic elements. (The pseudepigraphic Arabic *Theology*

difference between the Kalam's use of negative attributes, which at first sight comes very close to the outlook he propounds, and his favored approach. The Kalamic thinkers maintain that one may ascribe to God attributes of perfection, so long as one qualifies this by distinguishing between their meaning as applied to human beings or to God. Thus, they say that God is "wise, but not by human wisdom"; "existing, but not by human existence"; etc. In the preceding chapters, Maimonides has allowed that one may tolerate and condone people who resort to such attributes, because their intention is innocent and they do not actually corporealize the deity. However, philosophically they are in error.

The distinction between the formula we have just given and Maimonides's formula in Chapter 58 ("God is not non-existent," "God is not lacking in wisdom," etc.) is indeed quite subtle, and whoever is not a scrupulous philosopher will have difficulty understanding it, but in a philosopher's view it is substantial and decisive. To be sure, the formula of the advanced Kalamic thinkers avoids overt anthropomorphism, but it still conceives God in terms of distinct positive attributes, which give us an impression of plurality and compositeness, and this is still anthropomorphic by implication, though in a subdued fashion. Thus there is still the same gap in Kalamic thought between their declared faith and the mental representation that expresses it. Only through "negation of privations" in God can we transform our own self-perfection in human wisdom into progressive knowledge of the divine perfection that is its source. Only thus can we illuminate the model of divine perfection in our thinking from the absolute clarity of saying nothing about it, in our knowledge that whatever we say about it by virtue of the concept we have formed of it, relates not to it but to some other entity, for it is out of such worldly concepts that we have built our concepts of God.

Maimonides's Dialectic

The doctrine of negative attributes that we have articulated in such detail is the most instructive example for illuminating the philosophical enterprise as a path to truth and to a life informed by truth in Maimonides's thought. We should therefore summarize, in his fashion,

of Aristotle was a paraphrase of Plotinus's *Enneads* Books 4–6.) Maimonides's negative theology here is one of the supreme expressions of the Neoplatonic influence within the medieval Aristotelian tradition. (LL)

the characteristic features of this approach before we proceed to consideration of the rest of his theology.

Three characteristics stand out in the transition from the initial certain, dogmatic knowledge that there is a God who is single and eternal, to the consideration of what human beings may know of God's essence:

(1) *There is a hierarchical progression from one level of the argument to the next, skipping nothing in between.* Throughout the *Guide*, Maimonides cautions the reader to follow this method scrupulously without deviating from it. Every hasty skip will lead to error. The further we progress, the more subtle will the transitions be, and the more prone to error. The transitions progress in difficulty from denial of materiality to denial of passions, and from there to denial of any plural positive attributes, to denial of similarity between God and creation, denial of "attributes" of existence and unity, and denial of positive assertions even in an equivocal sense.

(2) *There is a tension between opposing requirements throughout the discussion.* First, there is the requirement that we must rid our God-concept of corporeality, passion, similarity to creation, etc. through clear arguments that can easily be grasped by anyone on a first reading. Afterwards, a positive mental representation arises from this negative requirement, whose implications are hard to assimilate despite the ease of its proof. This is the source of the errors and misconceptions that arise at every stage of the discussion.

This duality is reflected in how the discussion as a whole is framed by two complementary approaches. On the one hand, we have an analytical argument which is negative in its import: a critique of mistaken views, particularly the Kalam's, in which Maimonides distinguishes different levels of articulation, and with which he has to contend at each stage of his own argument. On the other hand, we have a hermeneutical argument which is positive in its import: Maimonides interprets verses from Scripture to justify the expressions of the prophets and the sages that seem to be at variance with philosophical truth. This is necessary, because all the errors that Maimonides seeks to dispel have their original source in the Kalamic thinker's effort to be true to the plain sense of Scripture. In this way, Maimonides presents his intellectual opponents as representative of his readers, to whom his book is addressed: people whose thought is developed to a certain extent, and whose views are a mixture of truth and error, whose declared faith is therefore inconsistent with their mental representation. It is therefore Maimonides's

aspiration to guide the reader to a more correct conception that will more faithfully conform to the negative requirement that he is trying to follow.

(3) *The discussion reflects back on itself.* At each stage, Maimonides examines the preceding course of the argument. The doctrine of negative attributes is itself a reflection on the deliberation that leads to it, in which Maimonides dispelled from God in turn corporeality, passions, and similarity to creation. This is the path that leads to truth. In this sense, it is possible to relate affirmatively to this misconception, if it is presented as a temporary convenience for dispelling previous error, and one does not intend to stay with it, but rather to pass through it and leave it behind. In other words, this conception is not offered for acceptance, but for critical evaluation. If one is conscious that it is but a provisional stepping-stone, it will aid one in arriving at the truth and will not lead to error. In any case, every stage in the journey to truth points to the final goal, and reveals how far we are from it even as we draw nearer to it. This perspective is the key to resolving all the difficulties that come up in the course of his discussion.

Dialectical Consideration of the Divine Attributes

Let us first identify those difficulties that derive from apparent contradictions in Maimonides's presentation:

(1) Maimonides justifies the prophets' figurative depiction of God, in which they ascribe to God positive attributes and a resemblance to human personality and intellect. In his view, these are useful and necessary means for guiding ordinary Israelites' notions towards the truth insofar as each of them can grasp it. But afterwards he argues that whoever ascribes positive attributes to God does not merely "fall short" of apprehending Him, nor is he merely guilty of "associating Him" (with created beings) or of "erring" in describing Him, but does not truly believe in God at all.¹⁰

¹⁰ See I, 60 (Pines 145). The first three errors that are named here combine partial truth with partial error. Each is of the form "God is X" where the believer correctly apprehends the term "God" but errs in that the predicate is either less than God's true essence or includes an admixture of not-God, or is otherwise incorrect. Maimonides says that the believer has not even grasped the first part "God" correctly, so he does not truly have God in his thoughts at all.

How, then, does the prophetic utterance lead the common Jew to the truth? Is not such a person incapable of conceiving an essence that is incorporeal and devoid of positive attributes?

(2) The same argument can be made from the last chapters of the discussion concerning the attributes, in which Maimonides denies any common denominator of similarity between God and the created realm, whereas when speaking of the prophets he justifies their comparison of God with His creatures. Furthermore, it is precisely the defining trait of the prophet, that he is able to portray the Creator imaginatively in terms drawn from creation, to lead common people to the truth. As for the vision of God's "back" that Moses attained, Maimonides interprets this as understanding God from His creation. How can one reconcile these two mutually exclusive requirements?

(3) Maimonides furthermore allows the attributes of action only because they do not pertain to God's essence. Nevertheless, he argues that by attaining knowledge of God's "ways" (which he equates with the attributes of action), Moses was able to approach closer than any other prophet to the true understanding of God.

(4) Maimonides proves God's existence on the grounds that God is the cause of all existing things. Nevertheless, he does not allow the relational attribute, that posits a causal relationship between God and the world.

(5) Finally, Maimonides speaks of a continual process of negation. In the most extreme formulation, he demands utter negation and denial even of the stipulation that God is possessed of perfections beyond our understanding. Nevertheless, he ascribes to all the prophets and sages (in their respective degrees) a kind of "illumination." This may indeed be a metaphor, but it still seems to indicate a positive apprehension of God of a high order.

Taken together, these difficulties seem to be aspects of one general difficulty. In that case, the same solution may apply to all of them.

Each According to One's Level of Understanding

The solution of the difficulties enumerated above is rooted in Maimonides's self-appointed task as a philosopher in the Torah tradition: To guide all his kinfolk, who have a portion in the world to come, to attainment of the truth, each according to his ability. This is the same task that all the prophets and sages of Israel assumed. Maimonides followed in their path—according to his philosophic understanding of it,

to be sure—but fully identifying with that tradition. He proceeds from the assumption that they all shared a common starting-point, which was their knowledge of the one God, whom it was incumbent on them to serve according to His Torah. They each had an initial conception of God, and it was their task to verify it, to refine it, to illumine it as much as possible. To that purpose, each one must grapple at his own level with the difficulty appropriate to it.

The simple believer, who receives this injunction by way of revealed tradition, cannot help imagining some image of God's being. At the elementary stages of thought, one imagines all things as having physical characteristics. Prophecy that is addressed to the simple believer accommodates to him and speaks in language that compares the Creator to His creation.

It does so in order to reinforce the believer's initial conception and to imbue it with positive content that he can comprehend, so that he will be certain that God exists and is one and eternal. If taking these things to heart requires tangible imagery, it may be provided. Still, this positive stipulation is a starting-point and foundation for directing one's thought-process beyond it through the negative stipulation, which is true without qualification. Nevertheless, the negative stipulation will not achieve its goal if it does not contain an allusion to a positive representation that comes to take the place of the more primitive positive representation that is to be superseded. Where is the substitute image found? Maimonides answers: In the body of the tangible imagery that the prophet uses, if his listeners understand from their negative knowledge that they ought not ascribe a tangible image to God, and that it is therefore forbidden to take the prophet's words literally, for they embody another truth. If they apply themselves and learn in depth, they will attain it. It follows that the truth is not revealed in the literal sense of the prophetic image, but it is hidden in it as a challenge for further thought. Whoever is able, will immerse himself in it, and whoever is not able will at least understand that the image that he is able to grasp is not the final truth but only an allusion to it. Thus he too is saved from error and merits his portion in the world to come through fulfillment of the divine commandments with the pure intention of serving his Creator. In any case we must credit that Maimonides requires even simple believers and schoolchildren to exercise a certain amount of critical reflection, by which they avoid erroneous belief.

To be sure, the philosopher is at a more advanced stage of intellectual development, but in principle he finds himself in a similar situation.

His knowledge that God exists and is one and eternal comes not from revelation but from philosophical proofs of God's existence, unity, incorporeality and eternity. Nevertheless, he too has a certain mental conception of God and of His existence, unity and eternity. Thus the same danger threatens him as the simple believer, and precisely because of his greater intellectual sophistication it is harder for him to overcome it. He is liable to identify the divine essence with a spiritual essence that he conceives in his mind. He is compelled to picture God in such a fashion, but he ought immediately to do also what the prophets and sages required of the simple believers: to subject his notion to criticism, to negate it and to discover through the dialectical process that proceeds from affirmation to negation the next conception, that will be closer to the truth.

The Kalamic sage or theologian stands midway between the simple believer and the philosopher, but his advantage over the former has become an impediment. He uses his scientific reason, which relies directly on sense experience, but he does not know the philosophical path that proceeds from elementary sciences to physics and from there to metaphysics. Therefore he continues to rely on the literal sense of the prophets, even though he understands that when a contradiction appears between Scripture and scientific reason, one may interpret Scripture non-literally. The result can be quite dangerous, and that is why Maimonides was severely critical of the Kalamic sages. Their intention was honorable, but they invented an erroneous physics¹¹ to conform to their conception of the Torah's meaning. On that basis, they developed a mistaken theology and argued that it was philosophically correct.

Resolving the Contradictions

We seem to have resolved the first difficulty posed earlier. This answer gives a solution to the second difficulty as well. Maimonides endorses the prophets' comparing the Creator with His creation as a vital means

¹¹ Maimonides may have been unduly harsh on the Kalamic sages in this regard. He dismissed as absurd the Kalamic belief that matter and time are composed of atoms, and that there is a vacuum. (*Guide* I, 73) Yet the hindsight of scientific progress shows that these propositions are not only possible, but verifiable (though maybe only "quarks" qualify as "atoms" philosophically speaking). Though the Kalamic thinkers cannot have known of these evidences, an objective intellectual-historical perspective might credit them with honest speculative attempts, not mere wish-fulfillment. (LL)

for guiding the simple believers, but he absolutely rejects it when the Kalamic sages offer it as the scientific truth. Thus the same pedagogical consideration is the basis for endorsing the practice of the prophets but for rejecting that of the Kalam.

We can explain Maimonides's interpretation of Moses's "vision of the back" in the cleft of the rock in a similar fashion: Moses recognized God's wisdom in creation. Does this mean that Moses equated his own wisdom in understanding the world with divine wisdom? At first sight the answer would seem to be positive. The basis of this identification is unavoidable even for the greatest philosopher,¹² because he is human and possessed of human intellect. But this is only the first stage of the dialectical process leading to the "negation of the privation" of wisdom in God. Thus Moses advanced considerably toward knowledge of God.

In order for us to plumb the depths of Maimonides's meaning in this passage, it will help us to recall what we said in connection with his psychology. The human intellectual faculty is not a totally separate entity. It is bound up with bodily functions, and its knowledge is not self-generated but is gathered from outside itself through the sensory organs. This is the source of the absolute difference between divine and human reason. God is the cause of all existence, and therefore knows it independently. This is a kind of knowledge that a human being not only cannot attain, but cannot understand what it is. In that case, the human has no other way but learning in stages, depending on sensory organs, and therefore requiring a pictorial image which by its very nature requires modification. This corrective process makes it possible for the prophetic insight, which has its source in the intellectual emanation that flows from God, to be absorbed across those barriers that have not yet gone away, and will never completely dissolve so long as the intellect is bound up with the body, "for man cannot see Me and live."

Content of the Illumination

We thus arrive at a more nuanced philosophical explanation of the mystery of "silence" that is the climax of the knowledge of God in

¹² Aristotle. But Plotinus situated "wisdom" as an emanation slightly inferior in status to the divine One (and so would the Kabbalah, making Wisdom the second Sefirah). Maimonides's argument at this point seems to follow Plotinus rather than Aristotle.

human mental representation. We see that Maimonides is referring to that prophetic illumination that Moses attained when he arrived at the highest level that a philosopher can achieve, namely the cognition of the entirety of the “Work of Creation”—physics as the totality of all terrestrial sciences—as one unified knowledge. In human knowledge, however, this unity is composite and multi-faceted.¹³ However, we must emphasize again here that aspect of Aristotelian epistemology that Maimonides had emphasized strongly in his discussion of prophecy, though he seems to ignore it in his discussion of the attributes: Prophecy is an emanation that flows from God to the intellect of that human being who has prepared his intellect so that it may be a polished lens to receive that enlightenment from above. It thus becomes clear that when the prophet negates the privation of wisdom—which he learned from his terrestrial-scientific contemplation concerning God who is the source of that reality—he has prepared himself for receiving that illumination of divine wisdom in human wisdom, and that is the perfection of knowledge that he attained.

The Dialectical Thought-Process beyond the Attribute-Doctrine

The fact that Maimonides developed his doctrine of attributes on the basis of considerations of pre-prophetic stages of thought, without explicitly addressing the notion of that emanation that flows from God Himself by the mediation of the Active Intellect to the human intellect, brings the discussion to another dialectical turning-point, this time beyond the doctrine of attributes, for it reveals the source of that confused and erroneous notion that is found in the mind of every person with a flickering of intellect. We recall that just as the light of the sun enables a person to see the world, so the emanation of forms that comes from the Active Intellect enables a human being to identify the forms of objects whose matter is perceived by his senses. This detail of Aristotelian epistemology leads one to the following turn in the argument: If by reason of a person’s dependence on sensory organs for knowledge one cannot ever identify divine and human wisdom, so that

¹³ Indeed, the knowledge of mathematics and physics as systematic disciplines are prime examples of entities that embrace unity and multiplicity at the same time, and (on a Platonic view of truth as an ideal realm) could be advanced as a counter-argument against the oft-reiterated Maimonidean argument that anything characterized by plurality must be corporeal. (LL)

one can only speak of them “homonymically,” nevertheless inasmuch as human intellect is forever dependent on a higher source, namely the “Active Intellect,” that receives its flow from God, that identification must be not only possible, but necessary!

R. Ḥasdai Crescas, whose critique of Maimonides's doctrine of attributes was mentioned earlier, directed this criticism at it as well: Aristotle demonstrated that whatever we find present in an effect must derive from the cause. Thus whatever is found in the effect must be in the cause as well. But if God is the cause of reality, then whatever we discern in reality must be found in Him as well. The conclusion that follows from this is that when a person gains knowledge and develops his “acquired intellect” as a separate entity, it is constituted from those items of knowledge that derived from the “Active Intellect” and is to that extent identical with it! But Crescas ignored the fact that Maimonides himself mentioned this in his theory of prophecy, and explained in this way that creation of man “in the divine image” refers to his being created as a rational being, for reason is the common element in God and man, despite the substantive difference between them.¹⁴ On the contrary, it would appear that without this additional idea, Maimonides's exposition of the “negation of privation” as the way to knowledge of God and his wonderful understanding of Moses in the cleft of the rock, would be missing an essential part. Is this a contradiction in Maimonides's thought? Certainly not. It is the dialectical turn that will bring us to an even profounder explanation of the difference between the philosopher and the prophet.

The Attribute of Existence

Before approaching this idea which takes us beyond the doctrine of attributes proper, let us look again at the most difficult part of the “negative attribute” theory—denying the attributes of existence, unity, and eternity as positive attributes of God. It is especially hard for the simple believer to deprive God of the attribute of existence. If we tell him that it is forbidden to say “God exists” in the same sense that he exists, he feels that God is absent. The convoluted assertion that “God is not non-existent” is a doubtful remedy for his sense of alienation. Nevertheless, he enters this discussion with the prior certainty that God

¹⁴ *Guide* I, 1, and see also I, 72.

exists, even though he has never seen Him, and he has a notion or image of this existence. What is its source?

First of all, we should mention the reason for saying that existence is predicated of man and God in different senses (“equivocally” or “homonymically”). Maimonides argued that with respect to all other beings, existence is something additional to their definition, not included in it, which adds to their plural and composite nature, whereas we know that God is one with an utterly simple unity. The essential consideration in this formal argument is a distinction that we find enunciated in the Kalamite thinkers, and is included in the foundation of one of their proofs for God’s existence: All created beings have contingent existence, and require a cause to bring them into existence. That cause—namely, God—must exist necessarily, i.e. His existence is identical with His essence, and does not create plurality in Him.

This conclusion sounds logical and even simple. But can we grasp it in our minds? Let us first try to understand what it means, that in our own existence we add existence to our essence. Is it possible to distinguish between the essence and existence of things familiar to us? Is it possible to know an essence of a thing without existence? Didn’t that thing exist outside of our thought before we learned of it, and now that we have learned of it, it exists in our thought as well? Here is a solution to the riddle: By “existence” we mean two things: (a) existence of something (of a certain essence) outside our thought, and (b) existence of that same thing within our thought. This demonstrates that some things exist only in our minds, such as the idea of a work of art in the mind of an artist before he creates it on canvas or clay. But it then exists in the same way that we exist in God’s mind before we are created—not as material entities, but as pure ideas.

This notion will help us to understand the assertion that God exists necessarily, for He is the cause of our existence, as an idea that includes in perfect unity the ideas of all entities of which He is the cause. It is obvious that He does not exist only as an entity external to His thought, but in perfect identity with that thought. Indeed we are not able to conceive such a mode of existence, but we are able to understand why we cannot conceive it: we exist in the mind of God who created us. Our physical existence is only a contingent one, and so we cannot conceive how God had us in mind before we were created. We certainly cannot conceive how God exists in His own mind, but our awareness of that ignorance enables us to approach an understanding of God’s existence as the negation of its privation. Furthermore, our

awareness of ignorance prepares us to receive that divine illumination that is beyond conceptual expression (in silence), that gives a positive meaning to the negative conception. This is the source of the notion of God that is implanted in our minds, and the source of the certainty that if we exist, He exists, though in a manner of existence beyond our comprehension.

Receiving the Divine Emanation

The dialectical understanding of the difference and connection between divine existence and human existence will enable us to complete our investigation of the doctrine of attributes from the standpoint of the divine emanation that is received by the human intellect. On the one hand, the human intellect, dependent on bodily organs, and learning the very ideas by which it is constituted from an external source, cannot arrive at a knowledge that is unified, complete, contiguous and enduring. Its dependence on the body is a barrier that cannot be surpassed except through annihilation of that human individuality whose source is in the body. Therefore, "man cannot see Me and live." But on the other hand, all the essences of which a person has knowledge have an ideal existence in the mind of God who formed them, and they exist necessarily on that level in the same way that God exists necessarily.

All the forms that exist accidentally and separately outside God's mind also exist necessarily and unified in their source. Therefore whoever cognizes these forms, the more that his knowledge achieves completeness, unity and continuity, the more closely he approaches the understanding of existence as it is in the mind of the One who caused it. Since God knows all of reality with a knowledge that is identical with His essence, such a person approaches an understanding of the divine essence. No one can arrive at such a goal in his lifetime, but he can approach it ever more closely by advancing his knowledge of physics and metaphysics, and by endeavoring to dispel from these ideas the alienating features that arise from the accidental medium in which they are expressed.

The objective of contemplating the negative attributes is this: To refine the intellectual idea by freeing it from its dependence on the material process that generated it. This is a process of correcting or redirecting the human intellect in the direction of the divine intellect, which flows toward and penetrates all reality on all its levels and in all its aspects. When human intellect is properly directed, the divine

essence is reflected in it, and the clarity of that reflection is dependent on the extent to which one is purified from materiality, as well as on the level of each person's general intellectual attainment.

These ideas are familiar to us from the parable of "lightning illumination" in the Introduction to the *Guide* and from the discussion of the qualities of the prophets, but the definitive summarizing exposition is found in the end of Part III of the *Guide*. He presents there the famous parable of the people who approach the king's palace. Some do not know where it is, and they have their backs to it. Some know the general direction, while others are standing next to the walls. Only the privileged few—the prophets—are face-to-face with the king in His chambers:

If, however, you have understood the natural things, you have entered the habitation and are walking in the antechambers. If, however, you have achieved perfection in the natural things and have understood divine science, you have entered in the ruler's place into the inner court and are with him in one habitation. This is the rank of the men of science; they, however, are of different grades of perfection.

There are those who set their thought to work after having attained perfection in the divine science, turn wholly toward God, may He be cherished and held sublime, renounce what is other than He, and direct all the acts of their intellect toward an examination of the beings with a view to drawing from them proof with regard to Him, so as to know His governance of them in whatever way it is possible. These people are those who are present in the ruler's council. This is the rank of the prophets. Among them there is he who because of the greatness of his apprehension and his renouncing everything that is other than God, may He be exalted, has attained such a degree that it is said of him, "And he was there with the Lord," (Ex. 34:28) putting questions and receiving answers, speaking and being spoken to, in that holy place. And because of his great joy in that which he apprehended, "he did neither eat bread nor drink water." (*ibid.*) For his intellect attained such strength that all the gross faculties in the body ceased to function. I refer to the various kinds of the sense of touch. Some prophets could only see, some of them from close by and some from afar, as [a prophet] says: "From afar the Lord appeared unto me." (Jeremiah 31:3)¹⁵

¹⁵ *Guide* III, 51, Pines 619–620.

The Essential Difference between Philosopher and Prophet

Aside from the added emphasis on the connection between the level of a person's general understanding of reality and his level of knowing God, and aside from the repeated parallel of the hierarchy of the statuses of believers, from the simplest to the prophet, which have the common denominator of directedness to the truth, this passage also offers a definitive summary clarification of the central issue of the essential difference between the sage (or philosopher) and the prophet. Do they stand on the same level in Maimonides's view? Do they come equally close to seeing the King's face?

It follows from our entire discussion that with respect to their understanding of physics and metaphysics, there is no difference between the philosopher and the prophet. Both have achieved complete knowledge of these subjects and have arrived at the limit of human knowledge in that respect. Nevertheless, there is a significant difference in their closeness to God, or rather in God's closeness to them.

One may approach the task of physical and metaphysical enlightenment from three different motives: (a) Learning for its own sake out of intellectual curiosity, which is a human perfection. (b) Learning for the sake of instruction and leadership that strives to bring all humankind to the same perfection. (c) Learning that strives to arrive at that volitional cause that established all existence, in order to do its will and achieve its purpose in creation.

In Maimonides's view, the philosopher learns mostly from the first motive and occasionally from the second, but not from the third, which is the most important and elusive. We should emphasize that Maimonides does not intend any personal criticism of the philosopher in this respect, for he sees a close connection between the various motives and the cultures in which people are educated. The philosopher is the product of a terrestrial culture that defines human goals, even of the spiritual variety, within the limits of one's natural perfections. Whatever is not within the realm of man's proper natural perfection is beyond the horizon of one's recognized obligations, for the real hidden motive is personal perfection, conceived as personal happiness, not as responsibility to the world that God created. Indeed, we may say that this completely characterizes Aristotle's outlook. It is in this spirit that Aristotle conceived God as a perfect intellect that contemplates itself for its own sake and has no interest outside itself. If He is the final cause

of all reality, that is because the potential forms embedded in primal matter strive toward Him in order to arrive at their own perfection. That is the outlook of the philosopher as well.

Not so the prophet. The culture shaped by the Torah directs him to an ideal of leadership that is legitimated by his closeness to God. He must rid himself of the materialistic, egoistic preoccupation with personal happiness and material prosperity. He must purify his intellectual notions of the material limits that pose a barrier between himself and God, whose will has called him directly to seek His closeness and do His will, which is the transcendental perfection for which the prophet strives. Not for his own sake, but for God's sake. Not for the prophet to ascend and become divine—in Aristotle's words—by assimilating metaphysics, but to return and act in the world as God acts, for the sake of achieving good. To be sure, the level of existence that he achieves by assimilating physics and metaphysics affords him a higher standing, for he does not rest content with it but is able through it to absorb the divine emanation that does not consist of new conceptual knowledge but rather a spiritual illumination that passes through him and by his agency enables the divine truth to be revealed in the midst of his people and humanity generally.

Moses's Unique Achievement

What was just said applies especially to the unique manifestation of Moses,¹⁶ the greatest of the prophets, who laid the foundations of the Torahitic way of life which was the basis of the activity of the other prophets. The special, unique aspect of his prophecy is inseparable from his primary role as founder. One may see a special grace operating here. To be sure, Moses prepared himself with the help of the tradition that had been received from the patriarchs of the nation, but the attainment that he achieved in his founding role bordered on the supernatural. Maimonides regarded it as a true miracle: a perfection that can only be explained as the revelation of the divine will on the same level as was manifested in the creation of the world.

¹⁶ The philosophical purport of this account (excluding the miraculous aspect) does not depend for its validity on the historicity of the Biblical accounts regarding Moses. The critical Biblical scholar need only substitute for "Moses" whoever were the religious teachers who in fact shaped the religious culture of ancient Israel and developed the religious-ethical teachings of the Bible. (LL)

It is therefore fitting to reexamine the question of the uniqueness of Moses's prophecy in light of the theological considerations we have just discussed.

Reconciling Two Views of the Prophet

In Chapter 7 of the *Eight Chapters*, which considers the prophet from the standpoint of ethical theory, Maimonides argues that Moses disciplined all his faculties to the point that there remained no physical impediment to his spiritual goal, with the exception of the final barrier, which was the very connection of his intellect to his body.

In the continuation of Chapter 54 of Part I of the *Guide*, Maimonides did not mention Moses's moral perfection, which was assumed as a given, but emphasized the notion of ideal political leadership.

The revelation in the cleft of the rock occurs after Moses's severest test as leader of his people. Moses passed that test by displaying his readiness to act in terms of anger, vengeance, compassion and mercy in the proper proportions without being motivated to do so by subjective passion. He thus rose to the highest level of true leadership, which is imitation of God through actions. To be sure, one cannot operate on this level without first achieving moral perfection. Just as the simple believer should imitate his leaders, so should the true leader in guiding his community imitate the action of God in nature.

Just as God in nature performs diverse actions without changing His single purpose of the general good of the world, so the ideal leader must perform diverse actions without deviating from the overriding goal of the general good of the community, which is to fulfill its purpose in creation. This is the meaning of the revelation by God to Moses in the cleft of the rock of the thirteen attributes of mercy. We discussed this topic in connection with the divine attributes. But the divine attributes of action may be revealed to anyone who strives for this, whereas Moses achieved a unique distinction in his personal revelation. What is that distinction?

Maimonides answers this question in Chapter 54 of Part III. He seems at first sight to be repeating what he had said in Part I. But he reverses here the order of topics implicit in Moses's requests. Moses first requested knowledge of the ways of leadership, and when that was granted he proceeded to the more exalted request of knowing God Himself, and was given a vantage-point from which to attain it in a certain fashion. But in Part III, Chapter 54 the order is reversed:

For when [Jeremiah in 9:22–23] explains the noblest ends, he does not limit them only to the apprehension of Him, may He be exalted... But he says that one should glory in the apprehension of God and in the knowledge of God's attribute, by which he means His actions, as we made clear with reference to the dictum "Show me now thy ways, etc." (Exodus 33:13) In the present verse, he makes it clear to us that those actions that ought to be known and imitated are "lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness."¹⁷

Near the end of this chapter that concludes the entire work, he says:

It is clear that the perfection of man that may be truly gloried in is the one acquired by him who has achieved, in a measure corresponding to his capacity, apprehension of Him, may He be exalted, and who knows His providence extending over His creatures is manifested in the act of bringing them into being and in their governance as it is. The way of life of such an individual, after he has received this apprehension, will always have in view "lovingkindness, righteousness, and judgment" (Jeremiah 9:23), through assimilation to His actions, may He be exalted.¹⁸

Thus the apprehension of God's essence is taken here as a means to proper governance, and not the reverse. Therefore some scholars find tension and even contradiction between these two passages. But it seems on the basis of what we said earlier that it is more correct to say that these two conceptions are not contradictory but complementary, expressing contrasting aspects of a common problem.

In order to judge this, we should note that also in Chapter 54 of Part III Maimonides states unequivocally that man's highest goal is "the conception of intelligibles, which teach true opinions concerning the divine things."¹⁹ It is impossible to assume that Maimonides contradicted his own words so blatantly in the same chapter. The solution is as follows. Maimonides presents the intellectual goal as a true philosophical doctrine. The prophets and the rabbis confirm this doctrine, in his view, but they add to it the influence that a perfected man exercises, in accordance with his degree of perfection, on those who are led by him. The latter is the Torahitic-prophetic view of perfection.²⁰ This throws into relief the matter by which prophecy is distinguished

¹⁷ *Guide* III, 54, Pines 637.

¹⁸ *Guide* III, 54, Pines 638.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Pines 635.

²⁰ It also agrees with the view of Plato's *Republic*, transmitted to Maimonides through Alfarabi, that the philosopher who has achieved enlightenment must return to the "cave" to lead his fellow-humans out of it. (LL)

from philosophical contemplation. This is not a contradiction between the prophetic and philosophic outlooks, but it shows clearly that the prophetic outlook is based on the philosophic outlook and transcends it. The evidence for this is found earlier, in Chapter 51 of Part III, in which Maimonides describes the uniqueness of the patriarchs, and especially of Moses. Their special greatness was expressed in their ability to conduct themselves, together with their families and their people, in earthly matters without disrupting their intellectual attachment to God. It follows that among these exemplary individuals, both perfections were of a piece. That is the superiority of the prophets over the philosophers, for normally when a person is devoted to one perfection he cannot apply himself to another, even though these two perfections are interdependent in Maimonides's view. How, then, did the patriarchs, Moses, and perhaps the other great prophets, succeed in arriving at this level? The answer is that they overcame their bodily nature and freed themselves of it, thus ascending to a status comparable to the Active Intellect. Just as the Active Intellect knows itself actually and directs the world on the strength of its self-intellection, so the prophet on the level of the patriarchs and Moses knows his intellectual vision and on the strength of that leads his community, and there is no contradiction between these two activities which he performs together as one. In the same vein we can say that the appointed prophet embodies on his level with respect to the people the same role that the Active Intellect embodies with respect to the world. In other words, he embodies in his own person God's providence in the world.

Moses's Uniqueness as Prophet: Withdrawal from the Material

If all this is correct, then we will be right in the judgment that in Chapter 54 of Part I Maimonides assumes the same dependency between Moses's perfection as ideal leader and his perfection in knowing God. We already saw that his understanding of God's ways and his knowledge of God's "back" are the consequence of contemplating the same knowledge from different aspects. The knowledge of all God's "goodness" (i.e., the world) is on the one hand a condition of ideal leadership, and on the other hand a condition for knowing God. Whoever withdraws from material preoccupations and conquers them merits both of these. It follows therefore that Moses attained complete knowledge of physics and metaphysics as a philosopher, perfected his ethical faculties, concentrated his entire thought on God, withdrew from

material concerns, and so was privileged with revelation and leadership. All this is understandable. Still, how are we to explain Maimonides's claim that Moses's prophecy was such an exceptional event that it bordered on the miraculous, and that no prophet before or after him attained such a rank?

From everything we have said so far, only one answer is possible: Moses freed himself of the connection between his intellect and his physical faculties to an extent that defies possibility. He completely conquered his sense of touch, and transcended the requirement to satisfy his bodily needs all the days that he was on Mount Sinai. Afterwards his face was radiant with light, an expression of the spirituality that he achieved. From that point on he withdrew from the camp and conducted himself and the people without letting go of his attachment to God. In truth, this degree of abstinence from materiality surpasses human nature. As a consequence, Moses is able to "stand on the Rock" or to stand with God and be with Him face to face. This means that unlike other prophets whose intermittent illumination is compared to flashes of lightning, Moses persists in a state of continual enlightenment, so that one revelation follows another almost without interruption. We may say that Moses's superiority to the other prophets is like the prophet's superiority to the philosopher. It is not a matter merely of content or mode of apprehension. Rather, his complete perfection transforms a difference of degree into a difference of essence. The other prophets experienced their apprehension as a dream or a vision through the mediation of the imaginative faculty; their prophecy was accompanied by fear and trembling, and it was intermittent. Moses prophesied in a waking state, without the mediation of the imaginative faculty, without fear and trembling, and with complete continuity. All these are different manifestations of a difference in rank. Moses transcended human nature and achieved while still alive the status of a disembodied intellect. One barrier alone kept him human in his uniqueness, and it was removed by his death—the death by a divine kiss.

How can a human being sustain such a level, according to the Aristotelian conception? This is a question we shall not deal with here. But there are compelling reasons for Maimonides's claim that Moses's prophecy was unique of its kind and supernatural, both with respect to his leadership and his apprehension of God. For this event expresses divine providence in human affairs, and the Torah that was given by such a prophet can never be replaced by another. Furthermore, such a Torah is not susceptible of addition or diminution.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CREATION AND PROVIDENCE IN MAIMONIDES

God as Creator and World-Guide

Our philosophic understanding of Moses's uniqueness completes our presentation of Maimonides's theological views with respect to human knowledge of the divine. Prophecy combines humanity's relation to God and God's relation to humanity. But it is proper to consider this central theological issue in its own right: What do we know about God's relation to humanity and to the world, as its cause or creator, its director, its legislator and judge? At the center and foreground of these issues stands the problem of divine will and the relation of God's will to His wisdom. Maimonides's Aristotelian psychology not only raises the problem we raised with respect to the divine attributes—namely, ascribing wisdom and will to God as two distinct attributes. It also poses the question whether “will” is a perfection that one may ascribe to God in the form of a negative attribute. In Aristotle's view, “will”—which expresses a person's need to obtain something from his environment—is a major lack. God, the Necessary Being, lacks nothing. He has no needs to be satisfied from His environment, and thus He has no interest in it. He knows Himself, and that is His perfection. This is a profoundly pagan outlook, and the opposition between it and the Torahitic outlook, based on the notion of a good and beneficent God, Whose perfection is expressed precisely in His active interest in the world and in humankind, could not be more pronounced. If from the standpoint of the human obligation to know God it was possible to establish full compatibility of the Torah and philosophical outlooks, with respect to God's relation to the world and humankind a contradiction stands out that is very hard to reconcile. Maimonides could overcome it only by departing from Aristotelian theology and combining it with Neo-Platonic elements.

God as the Unity of Intellect, Knower and Known

Investigation of these topics should start with Chapter 68 of Part I. After completing several loose ends of the theory of attributes (in particular the names of God), Maimonides opens here a new stage of his philosophic deliberation by proposing the Aristotelian idea that God is a unity of *nous*, *noesis*, and *noeton* (in Hebrew, *sekhel*, *maskil*, and *muskal*—intellect, knower, and that-which-is-known). This applies to every process of knowing, including human knowledge. Before one learns some new item of knowledge, one's intellect (the sum of a person's present actual knowledge) differentiates between the "knower" who has not yet learned the new item and the "to-be-known" item that has not yet been learned. After the new item has been learned, unity is effected between the "knower" and the item that is now "known." The difference between the human and divine intellect is that the human being is always in a state of becoming, whereas the divine intellect is eternally the same. Some commentators see in Maimonides's adoption of this view a contradiction with his theory of attributes, inasmuch as it affirms the similarity of divine and human intellect and ascribes positive attributes to God. However, after his discussion of the attributes of existence as applied to God, it is not necessary to show again how such a contradiction can be reconciled dialectically. The problematic that Maimonides sought to raise through this notion becomes focused on the question of the will, for in the perfect actual unity of "intellect, knower, and known" the aspect of will is wholly superseded.

Philosophy as Authentic Torah-Tradition

It thus becomes clear that Chapter 68 does not continue the discussion of attributes that was started in Chapter 50, but rather constitutes a systematic introduction to the next topic of deliberation. We should pay attention to an instructive difference between the way he opens the discussion of attributes in Chapter 50 and the way that he starts the discussion of divine will in Chapter 68. Chapter 50 starts with interpretation. It sets out from the Biblical narrative and moves gradually towards philosophical understanding by grappling with the interpretative methods of the Kalamic thinkers. Here, by contrast, Maimonides has arrived at an advanced theoretical topic, which in his opinion requires unequivocal departure from Kalamic methods. They had tried to philosophize on the basis of Scripture, but found themselves chained to its

literal meanings and missing the proper theoretical tools to overcome them. It follows from this that when one comes to treat a topic in which the novice reader will notice a substantive difference that appears as a glaring contradiction between the philosophical and Torahitic views, it is proper to start with an independent presentation of the philosophic outlook itself. One must first learn metaphysical truth through its own methods, and only on that basis can we return to the interpretative problem in order to show how it is possible to interpret the Torah and prophets in accordance with the truth we have discovered.

To be sure, such a daring decision requires explanation and justification from the Torah's standpoint. A philosopher of religion who thinks in this way must first prove that the Torah affords one the latitude to follow this path, and that it is even obligatory to do so. This intention is clearly revealed in the continuation of the discussion, especially from Chapter 71 onward. In that chapter Maimonides summarized the relation of the Mosaic Torah to the sciences. He seeks to demonstrate that scientific philosophy is a central component of the ancient Torah tradition, and moreover originated within it and not from outside sources. He then explains the reasons why this tradition was forgotten in the process of oral transmission over the generations in exile. On the basis of this argument he rejects vehemently the science and philosophy of the Kalam and accepts the true philosophy, which is the Aristotelian, which according to Maimonides derived from the ancient tradition of Israel's prophets. Therefore, it is a reliable basis for knowing the truth and for understanding the words of the prophets.

From here on, Maimonides presents in broad outline the theory of reality according to the Aristotelian outlook, and the contrasting physical and theological theories of the Kalam. He depicts the Kalam as an arbitrary attempt to impose on reality concepts which originate in a simplistic understanding of the prophetic teachings. He shows that Aristotelian philosophy is based on empirical research, and that its truth is established not by the philosopher's authority but by the force of his proofs. Let us note, however, that through this argument Maimonides prepares the reader for the transition signaled by the opening of Part II of the *Guide*, which we started to consider: the presentation of the major principles of Aristotelian physics as a foundation for the proof of God's existence, unity, and primacy. This proof proceeds on Aristotle's assumption that the world is eternal and not created *ex nihilo*, and contrasts with the Kalamitic procedure of proving God's existence on the

basis of the prior proof of the world's creation *ex nihilo*, a proof which is itself (covertly) based on a simplistic understanding of Genesis.

Creation and the Divine Will

A look at the structure of the argument in the transition from Part I to Part II of the *Guide*, which will deal centrally with problem of the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, helps us understand the role of Chapter 68, which presents the notion of the unity of “knowledge, the Knower, and the known” in the deity. The problem that Maimonides wants to raise to philosophical reflection is God's relation to the world as its cause. This is clarified in Chapter 69. There Maimonides mentions the argument of the advanced Kalamic thinkers against Aristotelian philosophy: The Aristotelian conception of God as an intellect knowing itself in absolute unity leads necessarily to the view that God is the final cause of the world but not its efficient cause, and that God's relation to external reality is limited to His being its all-embracing form, in the sense that God cognizes the intellectual forms of reality external to himself in absolute unchanging unity, but does not relate to that reality in the way that it is apprehended by man, i.e. as perpetual becoming on the material plane and in physical time. These latter dimensions derive from the form being impressed on matter, and such a process—argue the Kalam—would be not the voluntary action of God, but rather the result of the tendency of matter in a potential state to become actualized by taking on the intelligible forms, which God knows in perfect unity.

If truth be told, this critical contention of the Kalam seems well-directed against the original Aristotelian philosophy, but the Arab Aristotelian philosophers, where were Maimonides's immediate sources, struggled a great deal with this issue, not only because Aristotle's view contradicted their religious tradition, but because it is obscure and not explicit, both with respect to understanding the nature of matter's potentiality (does it have a predisposition to receive form?—and where does this come from?) and with respect to understanding how the divine intellect, focused on itself, can be the source of form. Already in Avicenna Maimonides found explanations that present God not as “final cause” but also as “efficient cause” through the notion of emanation that was adopted from the Neo-Platonic tradition and grafted onto the Aristotelian foundation. On the basis of this modified Aristotelian position, Maimonides determined unequivocally that the Kalam

interpretation of Aristotle was erroneous and simplistic. A more profound and nuanced understanding of Aristotle would reveal complete compatibility with the deeper philosophical understanding that one can find in the Torah beneath the surface. The essential philosophical meaning of the doctrine of the unity of the “knowledge, Knower, and Known,” according to Maimonides, is that God is the source of all forms that are actualized in the physical world. Understanding God as the “form of existence” implies that God is indeed both the final and the efficient cause of the world—not directly as the Kalam maintain in their theory of creation, but rather through the agency of a series of Intelligences that mediate between God and the “Active Intellect.” They also direct the movement of the heavenly spheres, whose refined matter does not vacillate between potential and actual states but keeps its form permanently and has an influence on the terrestrial elements.

Divine Will in Guide Part II

In Chapter 69 of Part I, Maimonides was content with the view that there is no contradiction between the Aristotelian and Torah views of God’s relationship with the world. In order to prove his contention, he was driven, as we said, to compare first the Aristotelian conception of the structure of reality with that of the Kalam theologians. Nevertheless, the fact that he saw a need to present the Kalamic physical theory in order to refute it in detail, shows that he took their contention seriously. This is because despite his agreement with Aristotle in epistemology, physics, and metaphysics, he agreed with the Kalam that according to the Torah the world is not pre-existing but created *ex nihilo*, and that furthermore from the Torah’s standpoint the claim of creation *ex nihilo* is fundamental and substantive. The presentation of God as ruler, commander, and legislator is dependent on it.

Furthermore, Maimonides agreed with the Kalamic thinkers on the proposition that divine rulership of the world as manifested by supernatural miracles, revelation of divine commands, and especially the direct giving of Torah to the entire people could be asserted only on the basis of voluntary intervention of God in the natural order in order to bring about substantive changes, and undoubtedly the revelation of divine will of this kind is not obviously compatible with conceiving God as the unity of Intellect, Knower, and Known, for if God is the “form of existence” that He knows with absolute unity, it is improbable that there should be an alteration in the laws of nature by

means of a divine will that is sovereign over the laws of nature. This is the problem that he must wrestle with in Part II of the *Guide*, and he starts with an unequivocal determination that God is possessed of will in the same sense as the Kalam meant, even though he is careful to distinguish his position from theirs: "If the act has no purpose whatever except to be consequent upon will, that will has no need of incentives. And the one who wills is not obliged, even if there are no impediments, to act always. For there is no external end for the sake of which he acts and that would render it necessary to act whenever there are no impediments preventing the attainment of the end. For in the case envisaged, the act is consequent upon the will alone. Someone might object: All this is correct, but does not the supposition that one wishes at one time and does not wish at another time imply in itself a change? We shall reply to him: No, for the true reality and quiddity [essence] of will means: to will and not to will." (II, 18) On this basis, Maimonides establishes creation, miracle and commandment on the principle of the divine will.

It follows clearly from these words that Maimonides's conception of the will is derived from the Torah and is not of the same stamp as the conception of the will that Aristotle developed on the basis of his epistemology and physics. If despite this Maimonides held to both these views unequivocally and proved the existence of God and the divine attributes on their basis, it is up to him to solve this dilemma through open philosophical deliberation.

God as Origin of Form and Matter

In this point, the unique importance of the discussion on the question of God's existence becomes clear, as well as the material difference between God's existence and the existence of the world as it exists outside of God's thought. The distinction between these two kinds of existence is based, as we said, on the Aristotelian distinction between matter and form, and the Aristotelian determination that God is the source of the forms, whereas matter bears those forms outside of God's thought. However, on this point Maimonides departed—knowingly and openly—from the Aristotelian theory, which had posited the existence of matter as a separate premise independent of God. Indeed in this respect matter is no more than pure potentiality, and it is perceptible only when there is manifested in it a form whose source is in God.

Nevertheless, it has a necessary status. True, it is clear that matter, being external to God, cannot be regarded as a necessary emanation from God's thinking the ensemble of thoughts embedded in His intellect. Matter cannot flow from a causal necessity in God, if there is a cause for its existence, and if that cause is in God, it can only be an efficient cause that is manifested as a voluntary decision in the same active sense as was defined above: God's wisdom necessitates a will to do good. Beneficence is an action proceeding from the benefactor to the recipient, not from a need to perfect himself, but from the need to manifest the good for its own sake. It is the decision of a free will that has no cause necessitating it, neither in God nor outside Him. Note: In this way God is conceived as the supreme cause of all existence in its particulars. This includes that contingency which is the necessary consequence of the nature of materiality, as well as those deficiencies which occasion evil in the world, and also the basis which was laid with the creation of the world for the supernatural intervention of God as director, Who wishes the good of His creatures.

It follows, then, that nature in its lawful order reflects the wisdom of the eternal God Who never changes, but in its existence outside God it reflects the free divine will. Inasmuch as the will to do good is part of the nature of the divine wisdom, it would be correct to determine that these two attributes—wisdom and will—which in human thought are conceived as two separate attributes, are one in God, just as the divine essence and existence are one with the divine perfection.

Summary

It seems we can now say something about the mixture of the Neo-Platonic elements (the doctrine of the attributes) and the Aristotelian elements (the doctrine of the "knowledge, Knower, and Known") in Maimonides's thought. It is close to Neoplatonism in its consistent and radical demand for unity: an absolutely unified God is the cause of all reality, and there is no other primordial given limiting His action. But it does not accept the Neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation. The flow that comes from God is pure form, and it is self-identical at all times. On the other hand, Maimonidean thought is close to Aristotelianism in its physics and the metaphysics on which it is based. But it does not accept the premise of the primordial eternity of matter. Matter is an element that is brought into being. The result is a doctrine of divine

will that cannot be classed as either Neo-Platonic or Aristotelian. It is actually close to that of the Kalam, which chose the Torah outlook as its point of departure.

Let us mention that the affirmation of divine will already appeared in Maimonides in his theory of prophecy: God can prevent one from attaining prophetic insight even if he is psychologically prepared for it. It appeared, too, in his discussion of the divine names, with the purpose of refuting the magical interpretations that some gave to them. Maimonides proposed the notion of the sovereign will of God as the unifying explanation of everything that happens in nature. But the principal topic in which Maimonides dealt directly with the difference between his theology and Aristotle's was the problem of the creation of the world *ex nihilo*.

Creation Ex Nihilo

The question of creation, as a formative, voluntary action of a sovereign, omnipotent God, the fulfillment of whose will is not conditioned or restricted by any external principle, was the most difficult test of the project to reconcile philosophical Aristotelianism with the truth of the revealed Torah. We saw that Maimonides assumed as a sweeping generalization that there would be no contradiction between the true philosophy and the true Torah. We also saw that on the basis of this assumption Maimonides presented prophecy as a summit of intellectual achievement that took philosophy as its foundation. But when one examines this assumption against the difference between the Aristotelian conception of God as the final cause of the world and the Torah's view, one cannot help admitting an irreconcilable contradiction between the two. Aristotle concluded definitively from his physical theory that matter is co-eternal with God, that the confluence of forms emanating from God and this matter must have been going on in the world since time immemorial. Time itself has no beginning but proceeds cyclically with the natural life-cycle from the endless potentiality of the past to the endless potentiality of the future. We saw that Maimonides accepted Aristotle's physics as true and preferred it as the basis of his proof of God's existence, unity and eternity, even though Aristotle proved it from the eternity of the world. Did Maimonides therefore accept for himself the conclusion that the world was eternal?

We should be alert from the outset to the fact that many of Maimonides's medieval interpreters and modern scholars were convinced

that his true views agreed with Aristotle on this point. The fact that Maimonides explicitly professed the opposite view and offered rationales for it did not persuade them otherwise. After all, he said explicitly in the Introduction to his book that he concealed his true view on several problematic topics, hinting at it by means of contradictions that only careful readers could uncover. In the view of these interpreters, the issue of creation *ex nihilo* is the major secret that he sought to conceal. He proclaimed his public acceptance of the rabbinic view that was so vital for the believing masses, and hinted at his true view only to philosophers. In truth, there are no conclusive proofs in this debate, and it continues to this day. But in order to arrive at a well-founded position on this issue, let us examine how Maimonides supported his decision that the view of the Torah and the prophets favors creation *ex nihilo*, and that the issue is a secondary one from the philosophical standpoint but essential and substantive from a Torahitic viewpoint.

The Assumption of Creation

What indeed led Maimonides to determine that according to the Torah, based on prophecy, the world *is* in fact created from nothing? We should emphasize here that in contrast to the Kalamic sages, particularly Saadia, who based their affirmation of creation on a plain-sense reading of Genesis, Maimonides argues vociferously not only that there is no problem interpreting the Torah in accord with an “eternal world” outlook, but that even the plain sense of the text of Genesis is indeterminate. Nowhere in Genesis does it say that the creation is *ex nihilo*. One can easily interpret it as depicting the impression of form on pre-existent matter.

Maimonides surprises us with the argument that it is a philosophical consideration from the Torah’s perspective that necessitates his preference for the view that the world was created *ex nihilo*. He emphasizes this point against the Kalamic sages, just as he had emphasized the superiority of Aristotelian physics as a basis for the proof of God.

What, then, is this Torahitic philosophical consideration, and on what grounds is it based? It is the Torah’s self-presentation as a direct revelation of a divine will that seeks to establish an obligatory social order for an entire people. We saw that prophecy—including that of Moses—was conceived by Maimonides as a natural human perfection. But the Sinai event, in which God revealed Himself to an entire people in order to establish in it a new obligatory social order in perpetuity

for the fulfillment of the human purpose in history, is a supernatural event,¹ comparable in its supernatural aspect to the creation of the world, an event revealing the divine will that established nature with its laws. Only the sovereign will that governs nature could bring about such an event.

Maimonides's philosophical consideration follows necessarily from this assumption. If Aristotle's assumption of the world's eternity is correct, then the laws of nature are inviolate and cannot be overridden by a factor of will, purpose or higher destiny. The miracle of the Sinai revelation would then have to have been an illusion. Yet we know with experiential certainty that it occurred, supported by indubitable, reliable testimony. In conclusion, if the revelation of Sinai occurred, and the assumption of the creation of the world *ex nihilo* is a necessary precondition of that event, then we must accept the creation view against Aristotle's.

We should emphasize that this Torahitic-philosophical consideration focuses crucially on the question of the Sinaitic revelation and the legitimation of the Torah. However, the same consideration applies to all the principles of the Torah's theology: God's knowledge of human deeds, God's providence over humanity and Israel, and all the historical promises associated with these.

Different Views on Creation

If we accept Aristotelian physics as correct, but we also accept the Torah's doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* on the basis of the reliable historical testimony of Sinai, we are forced to the following conclusion. We must reexamine Aristotle's view that the world is eternal, to see if it indeed follows with demonstrative certainty from his physics. To clarify

¹ Or (to update the argument) we may say with Teilhard de Chardin that such an event is an *emergent* phenomenon, in which a new hierarchical level of the cosmic order becomes actual at a given point in historical time. The key point here is not whether any previous natural laws were superseded for this event to occur, but that the new reality (in this case, the divine-human social covenant) constitutes an innovation that is ontologically significant in the history of the created world. To Teilhard's emergent milestones—ontogenesis, biogenesis, noogenesis—we must add another: *nomogenesis*—the beginning in time of society governed under a divine mandate. The cosmological implications remain similar. Only in a world based on a creative divine will, and not just on natural necessity, can human morality claim to be grounded on a divine cosmic order. (LL)

the issue, Maimonides presents a typology of all the available theories concerning the creation of the world, stated precisely, that will aid in understanding the problem:

(1) First, there is the Torah's view of creation *ex nihilo*. What does this mean philosophically? Firstly, the expression *yesh me-ayin* ("something from nothing") does not imply that "nothingness" is the source of the "something." Such an idea is absurd. "Nothingness" cannot be thought to be the cause or source of substance. However, Maimonides also rejected the Neoplatonic alternative view that the world was emanated from the divine substance, which can be called "Nothingness" from the standpoint of human incapacity to conceive it. He concludes that the world was created *after* a prior nothingness, as an independent entity, at the will of God. Maimonides admits that such an assertion can only be understood by us in a negative sense. But we have no grounds for denying this possibility of God, who is omnipotent. Secondly, if the world has a beginning, then time also has a beginning. This follows from Aristotle's physical definition of time as the measure of motion. In the absence of material entities, there is no physical movement, and therefore no time. Thus time began with the creation, which may be said to have taken place a certain measurable time-interval prior to the present. But we cannot speak of what occurred "before creation," because that expression is meaningless. Time begins with creation.

(2) Next, we have the view that Maimonides attributes to Plato. The world was created from primal chaos (the *tohu* and *bohu* of Genesis 1:2), a primal matter preceding the Aristotelian four elements—pure potentiality lacking any form to make it actual. This is not exactly Plato's view that we glean from his writings, and we do not know on the basis of what sources Maimonides attributed it to Plato, but it is clearly meant as a middle position between the Aristotelian and Torah views. The world was not created from absolute nothingness, nor from a definite substance. Maimonides rejects this view offhandedly as absurd. This can be taken as evidence of his serious identification with Aristotelian physics on the one hand, and with the Torah outlook on the other hand. Compromise may be an attractive alternative in practical matters, but there can be no compromise in the domain of truth and falsity. A matter that is not actualized, eternally depending on God to give it form, is hardly matter at all; it is immaterial.

(3) Finally, we have Aristotle's view. God is eternal and matter is also primordial. Thus the world is coeternal with God.

It thus falls to philosophy to adjudicate between the Torah's view and Aristotle's.

What Led Aristotle to His View?

What indeed led Aristotle to the conclusion that the world is eternal? Maimonides reformulates the Aristotelian arguments and divides them into two categories—physical and metaphysical.

Physical Considerations

1. The relation of motion to time: We cannot conceive of a beginning of motion, because all motion depends on a prior motion that caused it. Thus motion is conceived necessarily as perpetual, and if motion is perpetual, then time is also perpetual. We cannot conceive of a present that is not situated between past and future. Thus, the notion of "present" presupposes a past that preceded it, and this regress is infinite.
2. The fundamental given-ness of matter follows from causality: It is absurd to think that something should come to be from nothing. An existing substance can only result from a previous substance of the same kind. A material substance can only result from a material substance.
3. The circular motion of the heavenly spheres is unidirectional and continuous. We cannot conceive that the arrow of time may be reversed and that the heavenly sphere shall move in the opposite direction. Similarly, it is impossible to discover a cause that would interrupt the motion of the heavenly sphere or make it cease, because the eternal God is the cause of its motion.

Metaphysical Consideration

4. If we assume that God wins the existence of the world, it is inconceivable that this will should be awakened after a previous non-willing. God is eternal, and the eternal does not change.

Maimonides's Arguments against Aristotle

Maimonides faced the challenge of refuting these arguments without contradicting Aristotelian physics.

1. Maimonides argues first that Aristotle himself, as opposed to his commentators, did not think it was possible to prove the eternity of the world, or that these arguments proved it. On the basis of

his reading of the texts, Maimonides determines that Aristotle did not claim demonstrative proof. He merely argued that the likelihood of its eternity was greater than the likelihood of its creation, for considerations can be offered counter to the previous to support the opposite position.

2. Aristotle preferred the eternity hypothesis because of the tradition that was current among the preceding Greek thinkers. He rightly thought that an established tradition should carry weight in the absence of conclusive proof. In that case, there is no reason why we should not rely on our own tradition. There is additional importance that we can attribute to the argument from tradition: The tradition on which Aristotle relied, was pagan. It follows that the view of the world's eternity is idolatrous in its essence. It is noted in the beliefs of idolators that the heavenly bodies are divine. Clearly, if the beings that are part of the terrestrial world are divine, the world must be eternal. But the belief in God's uniqueness rests on God's absolute transcendence. We must conclude from this that God is eternal, but the world is temporally finite.
3. We can make no inference from present physical law to the case of transition from nonbeing to being. To make this argument more easily imaginable, Maimonides offers an analogy. A father lives with his son, who was orphaned of his mother in infancy, on an island. The boy ponders the mystery of his birth. The father explains to the boy, who has never seen a woman, that he was born from a woman's womb after nine months of pregnancy. The boy finds this explanation absurd. From his experience he knows that it is impossible to live more than a few minutes without breathing. How is it possible that he lived for nine months in his mother's belly without breathing? Clearly, then, it is impossible to make an inference from life after birth to the process that preceded it. Maimonides concludes that even if we are similarly unable to understand the process of creation, for we cannot have had any memory of it, still this is no evidence that it is impossible. Or in other words, creation is a pre-physical process, and we can make no inference from physical to pre-physical conditions.
4. To the argument that the creation of the world at a particular time implies a change in the divine will, but the eternal cannot change, Maimonides replies that the divine will to create the world is indeed eternal, and never changes. Time begins with creation, and it is in the nature of time, which is a function of material

substance, that it must start at some specified time in order to fulfill God's will. Why precisely X thousand years ago? You would ask this question no matter what the given facts turned out to be. The only answer is that in the manifestation of any free will there is necessarily an arbitrary component. (Maimonides uses the same argument later in Part III concerning the arbitrary details of certain halakhic laws, such as which sacrifices are offered on a given festival day.) With respect to the question of change in the divine will, it is important to note that there was no time prior to creation, for God transcends time, and therefore undergoes no change.

Which Argument is More Convincing?

Maimonides concludes that there are no compelling proofs, either for the world's eternity or for its creation. Logical objections may be raised against both positions. From a purely philosophical standpoint, we should try to determine in such a situation which alternative has the greater likelihood, or which position is more fraught with difficulties. Aristotle considered the creation of the world from the physical perspective, and he correctly determined that on the assumptions of physics the eternity of the world is more reasonable. It is harder to conceive of an absolute beginning for motion and time than to conceive of matter existing independently of God, being self-caused as it were. But if we pose the question from the cosmological perspective (why is there a world?), then the hypothesis of creation seems more reasonable.

Difficulties with Aristotelian Cosmology

Aristotle adopted the Ptolemaic cosmological theory which sought a unitary physical explanation for the movement of the heavenly bodies as determined by exact observation. The physical assumption was that the stars and planets were fixed in a series of concentric spheres, one within the next. The spheres rotated one around the other, and so the outer spheres brought about the motion of the inner ones in harmonic cyclical motion. The weakness of this theory is that it could not explain several irregular phenomena² that were confirmed by observation.

² Especially retrograde motion.

The explanation of these phenomena required all kinds of arbitrary assumptions, which seemed totally unreasonable if we assume a coherent system that operates by deterministic physical laws. These facts are more in accord with the assumption that we are looking at the result of an arbitrary determination by a creator who has some purpose in mind to create a system that is somewhat quirky.

Which Difficulties are Greater?

In Maimonides's view, the difficulties that arise from trying to make astronomical observations fit the eternity hypothesis are more serious than those caused by the human mind's inability to conceive of a beginning of time and motion. Why? First of all because the difficulties associated with Ptolemaic cosmology result not from any conceptual limitation but from empirical observations, and secondly because anomalies in the celestial spheres are considered more severe than anomalies in the temporal realm. "For whenever ignorance and infidelity bear upon a great thing, I mean to say upon someone whose rank in what exists is well established, they are of greater consequence than if they bear upon someone who was of a lower rank."³

The Deciding Factor: The Torahitic Consideration

Of course the deciding factor in Maimonides's eyes is the Torahitic consideration. If we had compelling proof that the world is eternal, the Torahitic interest would have to yield to it. In the absence of compelling proof, there will be no violation of our true and certain knowledge of physics if we accept the view that the world is created. But if we accept the eternity of the world, the legitimacy of the Torah will be disrupted. In support of this argument, we should recall that in Maimonides's view, Aristotle was led to prefer the eternity hypothesis by consideration of his pagan religious tradition. This means that upholding the legitimacy of the Torah is itself a philosophical interest, based on political considerations.

In the end, one must take into account the high credence of prophecy, especially that of Moses, on which we rely. To be sure, a prophet cannot prove, in his capacity of philosopher, what no other philosopher was

³ *Guide* 1, 36, Pines p. 83.

able to prove. But knowledge of God at the highest level of clarity and immediacy affords the prophet completely reliable understanding.

Should we see in these arguments of Maimonides a case that would convince the people of the truth of the accepted rabbinic view out of political considerations? Is it reasonable to suppose that behind the veil of these reasons he concealed his adherence to the Aristotelian view? It seems more probable to me that Maimonides stood behind his arguments in favor of the Torah's view with complete sincerity. However, just as Maimonides had no absolute proof that the world was created, his interpreters have no absolute proof that he thought so.

Miracles

Accepting the view that the world was created *ex nihilo* is the basis for legitimating certain articles of belief in the Torah world-view, first of all the belief in miracle as a supernatural event effected by the purposive voluntary intervention by God in the progress of humanity towards its goals. If the world is eternal, then the laws of nature are determinative and unchanging. If the world is created, then supernatural miracles by the sovereign divine will are possible.

This is the basic position that seems logical at first sight. However, it requires careful examination, because of the caution that Maimonides exhibits to avoid any clash with Aristotelian physics, based on causal determinism. As we have seen, a miracle is an event that does not occur according to natural law. It is an exceptional, unexpected event. Thus, every miracle is a onetime occurrence. The question that arises in this context is: Does the affirmation of the creation of the world, without contradicting the physical order, and without contradicting the principle that the will of God is eternal and unchanging, render miracles any more probable than Aristotle's view that the world is eternal? How is it likely that God, who set up the laws of nature with His eternal wisdom, would want to break them suddenly through an exceptional event? Is God's wisdom or will subject to change?

In order to answer this question, we must specify Maimonides's understanding of miracle more precisely, though his words on this matter are very carefully chosen because of its religious sensitivity. Maimonides, tries to salvage the notion that a miracle is an exceptional event that is not explicable by natural law. But whoever reads him closely will see that he is careful not to define it as an event that contradicts natural law. It would be more correct to say that the miracle points to the

intervention of another force, one that subordinates the regular order of nature to its purpose but does not cancel it. This interpretation is supported by Maimonides's extreme caution in classifying events as miracles. The most striking example is his attitude to the story of the stopping of the sun and the moon at Joshua's order. If this were an actual event, it would involve a crisis of the whole cosmic order. Maimonides was not afraid to interpret this story against its literal sense; it was just poetic hyperbole. The victory occurred so swiftly that the Israelite army was able to achieve in a single day what would ordinarily take two days...

The first qualification is that the miracle does not actually violate the laws of nature. The second qualification that follows from the first is that the true miracles (such as giving the Torah at Sinai to the entire nation) are integrated within the natural order as an additional possibility that obeys the purposive legality that God invested in nature from the beginning. To be sure, the miracle occurs—like creation—at a specific time. But it is God's eternal will that it should occur at that time, for the miracle will establish a reality that will endure afterwards, just as the natural order endures—to wit, an order of life that is constituted by the Torah in the Israelite nation. Thus, one should see the miracle as an expression of the law that requires that there be unusual events that set the pace of historical progress in accordance with God's will. This explains why all these miracles (such as those accompanying the Exodus) form a connected series in the history of Israel and its destiny among the nations.

Maimonides expresses his intention by citing a rabbinic dictum: God set a condition with the works of creation to implant in them the possibility of fulfilling His will in history. If the world was eternal, history would follow natural necessity. Since the world was created, it was possible to invest it with a developmental purpose; that is the rule that explains the connection of the events that are otherwise exceptional and unique.

These considerations explain the connection between Maimonides's view concerning miracles and his outlook on creation. We note that Maimonides argued the likelihood of creation based on the irregularities in the planetary motions that seemed inexplicable except as the expression of a purposive will.

This leads us to the third qualification. Maimonides opposes the view that the miracle is an irrational phenomenon in a rational order of nature. On the contrary, the miracle proves the rationality of

nature from the standpoint of the moral order—the orientation of reality toward fulfillment of the ideal of goodness that is imprinted in creation.

What defines this ideal? What brings about its fulfillment? The answer is clear. It is given in the Torah, which is the constitution that sets the ideal order for human society.

The Torah establishes the ideal human society, and all the miracles that Maimonides affirms in their plain sense are connected to this event: the miraculous rescue of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, the miraculous rescue of the patriarchs from their various imbroglios, the miraculous Exodus from Egypt and sustenance of the people in the wilderness, the exceptional status of Moses's prophecy, and the greatest miracle of all—hearing the voice of God speak to the whole people to command it, to instill in them reverence for the divine authority. And perhaps it is permitted to add to all these the miracles of the redemption still to come, when the exiles shall be gathered and the Davidic dynasty shall be re-established, and all nations shall accept the Torah that proceeds from Zion.

Maimonides's View of Providence

The Problem of Divine Providence

Miracles express God's guiding hand in history, and "guiding" is the same as "providence," i.e., a term denoting God's involvement in human affairs, to command humanity, to judge them and to give them their just recompense. This general description requires deep analysis, both as to its general and specific implications, for it raises many philosophical problems. Indeed, in Maimonides's remarks on this subject we notice tension and ambiguity, as was the case with the discussion of creation. Maimonides placed the belief in providence itself—as well as its most problematic instance, that of resurrection—in the category of "necessary beliefs," i.e. beliefs that are required for political reasons. Some interpreters have concluded that on this topic, too, one must distinguish between what is said, especially for political reasons, and Maimonides's actual belief as a philosopher.

The Philosophical Problem with Providence

The philosophical-political necessity to affirm the belief of ordinary, non-philosophical people in individual providence inclusive of reward and punishment is understandable. Most people do not abide by the injunction to do the good just because it is good, and to avoid evil just because it is evil. They need a government that will keep track of their deeds and respond in kind. The political government does this job, but anyone can see that it *Us* to do so effectively. Therefore one needs a backup, one that will exercise absolute providence, from which one cannot conceal any sin, small or great, and on which we can rely to give payback for every good deed in the fullness of time. But the question must be asked: Can a philosophical conception of the relation of God to the world and to man—even if it attributes the creation of the world to the divine will—can it corroborate this popular belief in general and specific providence? Furthermore, does the reality that we experience confirm that such providence is manifest in our lives?

Providence and the Problem of Evil

Maimonides answers the last question directly in Chapters 16 through 24 of Part III of the *Guide*, together with an interpretation of the book of Job that deals with the various aspects of the question of providence. Maimonides first rejects categorically the view of the “philosophers” who declared that God is not involved with what happens on earth. He condemns this view sharply as heretical. Then he enumerates five views on the issue of providence, which he identifies with the views of Job’s three friends, Job himself, and Elihu, who appears at the end of the book of Job. But if we want to plumb the full depths of Maimonides’s outlook on this complex issue, we must first look at the previous chapters of the *Guide* that are devoted to explaining the source of evil in the world, and then at the later chapters that deal with the reasons for the commandments. We should note that after explaining the reasons for the commandments, Maimonides returns to the question of providence, and on that note he concludes the book. This is an instructive parallel to the structure of the Thirteen Principles of Faith that were enumerated, as we said, in his Commentary to the Mishnah. There, too, the final section is devoted to the doctrine of divine providence.

The Source of Evil in Nature and Human Nature

We shall summarize here what we learned earlier about the source of evil in the world. Maimonides determines with certainty that the world was created for the benefit of its creatures, for existence in and of itself is good. As evidence, he notes that the elements necessary for the survival of all living beings—air, water, food—are naturally found in abundance, enough for all. The more superfluous substances are found in lesser quantity—there is more air than water, more water than food, more basic foodstuffs than delicacies. As a result, those creatures that are willing to make do with what is truly necessary for their survival, could live together in sufficiency and in peace.

In that case, why are most people not satisfied with their lives, and complain that the evil outweighs the good?

To this question Maimonides offers two complementary answers. First of all, most people do not know wherein their true appointed good consists, and they seek it where it is not. They think that good consists in perpetual bodily pleasure that comes from luxuries, and certainly in being spared any bodily suffering. Of course, this desire is not susceptible of fulfillment—quite the contrary! The more one seeks luxuries, the more suffering ensues. If they would only seek wisdom and knowledge as eagerly as they seek bodily pleasure, they would get pleasure in their lives, for one can pursue wisdom—which is human perfection—endlessly, and the more the better. Secondly, people are convinced that they are the highest purpose of creation. They are bitter that God has not afforded them the life of happiness that should be the birthright of creation's elite without having to labor for it, for labor is bound up with the cares of existence, and happiness is fraught with much suffering. They should know that their high opinion of themselves is wildly exaggerated. They are not the goal of creation! Indeed, man is the most respectable of earthly creatures because he is a creature of reason, but the "angels" (that is, the pure Intelligences and the heavenly bodies) are more exalted, and they, too, must do their duty to God, wherein lies their perfection and their happiness. But first and foremost, Maimonides argues that God's will is directed toward the whole of existence, and in that respect every one of the parts may see itself as included in the purpose of existence.

It follows that the evil of which people complain results principally from themselves, and its correction lies in their own hands. He lists here the three sources of evil:⁴

1. Evil befalls the human being because of his physical nature and mortality. One must make one's peace with this evil by knowing one's place in the hierarchy of creation so long as one has bodily life. If one dedicates the better part of one's energy to perfecting one's intellect, one will find true happiness; one will experience eternity even in this life and will not feel sorrow and care because of the bodily death that awaits us all.
2. Evil befalls people because of the injury that they cause each other in wars, in fighting, and in crimes that they commit against each other. These evils are rooted in people's sensual desires. Therefore it is impossible to prevent them entirely, but a wise government that restrains the people and punishes violent behavior will tend to reduce them to manageable proportions that will not disrupt the wise from their devotion to their true calling.
3. Evil results from irrationality and mistaken judgment. Maimonides tended to answer under this heading the majority of complaints of "undeserved suffering." People who are righteous in their own eyes—and perhaps in the eyes of others—because their intentions are good, suffer because they do not know how to actualize their good intentions. They cause pain instead of happiness, to others and to themselves.

If we pay attention to these causes, by which Maimonides explains human suffering and happiness, we discover his essential view concerning the nature of God's general providence regarding living beings in general and humankind in particular. Living beings are provided for by the organs of defense and pleasure that God has implanted in each of them according to their respective natures and perfections. Therefore one must add that if all other creatures are protected and ensnared by those characteristics that are proper to each species (the horns of the ox, the speed of the rabbit, etc.), then the human being is protected by his intellect, and so we can speak meaningfully here also of "individual

⁴ Schweid's characterization of the three sources of evil differ markedly in emphasis from the description given earlier, even though both are based on Maimonides's Guide Part 111, Chapter 12. The two descriptions are complementary. (LL)

providence”—the more intellectually developed a person is, the more providence he has. By using that intelligence, he can rid himself of the suffering caused by all the errors mentioned above.

Different Views on Providence

However, when Maimonides begins direct discussion of the questions of providence (in Chapters 16–17 of Part III), a different answer seems at first to be offered. First he condemns the view of the philosophers who denied God’s direct providence over the creatures of our earthly world, including human beings, and restricted God’s direct involvement to the course of the heavenly bodies. Maimonides then lists five positions on this topic:

1. Epicurus’s view. There is no God, so of course there is no divine punishment. Whatever happens in reality is by chance, lacking any rational pattern, let alone moral purpose.
2. Aristotle’s view. The heavenly bodies—each of which is a unique species—enjoy providence through the astronomical order. As for the creatures of this world, including humanity, they are accorded providence on the level of the species, but the fate of individuals is the result of chance.
3. The view of the Asharites. The Asharites were the more conservative of the two principal Muslim schools of the Kalam. According to them, everything in the world happens by arbitrary divine decree. There is no rational or natural-causal order, but each event is decreed individually by God. We can only comply, for that is His Will, and good from His perspective. What is good from the creature’s viewpoint is not relevant to God. If we ask why God punishes the sinner if He decreed that the creature should sin, the answer is simple: God willed it so.
4. The view of the Mutazilites. The Mutazilites were the more liberal of the two principal Muslim schools of the Kalam. According to them, everything that happens follows from the divine wisdom, which is beyond our understanding. Nothing can deviate from what the divine wisdom dictated, but we can trust that God’s actions are not capricious, and that everything is intended for the good of His creatures. We should emphasize that according to this view, God knows in advance what every person will do,

and what his fate will be.⁵ He knows who will sin and how they will be punished. This is the way of divine justice.

5. The view of the Mosaic Torah. Everything that happens in the world is by justice, especially in the human realm.

Maimonides's View: A Synthesis of the Mosaic and Aristotelian Views?

But now a surprise awaits the reader. In addition to the view of the Mosaic Torah, which one would expect was Maimonides's view, he presents a sixth view in his own name as a private view, in the following words:

In this belief that I shall set forth, I am not relying upon the conclusion to which demonstration has led me, but upon what has clearly appeared as the intention of the book of God and of the books of our prophets. This opinion, which I believe, is less disgraceful than the preceding opinions and nearer than they to intellectual reasoning.⁶

In other words, he presents his personal view as a proximate compromise between the view that follows from the principles of the Mosaic Torah and that which follows from rational considerations. We note that he does not mention Aristotle or "the philosophers" in this context—indeed, he has condemned their views at the outset. But whom else can he be thinking of when he speaks of "intellectual reasoning"?

Let us examine the substance of his position. Most creatures of this world experience providence only on the level of the species, and the fate of individuals is subject to chance. (The Kalam schools extended individual providence to the lower animals.) Only human beings experience individual providence. I cite his words:

According to me, as I consider the matter, divine providence is consequent upon the divine overflow; and the species with which this intellectual overflow is united, so that it became endowed with intellect and so that everything that is disclosed to a being endowed with the intellect was disclosed to it, is the one accompanied by divine providence, which appraises all its actions from the point of view of reward and punishment.⁷

⁵ The Mutazilites believed in the "acquisition" theory of human free will: whenever a person performs an action, God allows him to "acquire" temporarily the power of free will necessary to perform that action. (LL)

⁶ *Guide* III, 17, Pines 471.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 471–2.

And at the end of the chapter he repeats:

Grasp my opinion up to its last implications. I do not believe that anything is hidden from Him, may He be exalted, nor do I attribute to Him a lack of power. But I believe that providence is consequent upon the intellect and attached to it. For providence can only come from an intelligent being, from One who is an intellect perfect with a supreme perfection, than which there is no higher. Accordingly, everyone with whom something of this overflow is united, will be reached by providence to the extent to which he is reached by the intellect.⁸

All this seems compatible with the view that providence is immanent in the nature of the recipient, except for another passage that I have purposely omitted, declaring that individual providence on human beings is in the aspect of a divine judgment that brings reward and punishment in the judicial sense, to the extent that—

If ... the foundering of a ship and the drowning of those who were in it and the falling-down of a roof upon those who were in the house, are due to pure chance, the fact that the people in the ship went on board and that the people in the house were sitting in it is, according to our opinion, not due to chance, but to divine will in accordance with the deserts of those people as determined in His judgments, the rule of which cannot be attained by our intellects.⁹

This, to be sure, is the view of the Mosaic Torah as distinct from the philosophical view. To be sure, one can say that the evil result of an evil action or the good result of a good action is a kind of reward or punishment. But can we say that it is a judicial action in which God acts as a judge? We repeat Maimonides's words: "Accordingly, everyone with whom something of this overflow is united, will be reached by providence to the extent to which he is reached by the intellect."¹⁰ This indeed is the difference that was discovered in Maimonides's doctrine of attributes, and in his expression of the difference between philosopher and prophet. The divine intellectual flow that flows from God is an expression of the divine will, and in the relevant cases one can call the involvement of the divine will a judicial judgment.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 472.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 474, cited above.

The Medium of Providence

In Chapter 18 Maimonides explains further why individual providence attaches to intellectually developed individuals and not to animals without reason. The intellect with which man is blessed is not unique to each person. Reason as such is a general endowment in which individuals participate each according to his or her capacity, or in other words, to the extent that a person has succeeded in actualizing his or her intellectual potential. Therefore it is possible to say that the more one has received of the divine flow that flows upon him the more providence he has, for the destiny of the individual is more a matter of participation in the generality than an individual affair. This is the important point that Maimonides wishes to stress in the continuation of his remarks:

In accordance with this speculation it follows necessarily that His providence, may He be exalted, that watches over the prophets is very great and proportionate to their degree in prophecy and that His providence that watches over excellent and righteous men is proportionate to their excellence and righteousness. For it is this measure of the overflow of the divine intellect that makes the prophets speak, guides the actions of righteous men, and perfects the knowledge of excellent men with regard to what they know. As for the ignorant and disobedient, their state is despicable proportionately to their lack of this overflow, and they have been relegated to the rank of the individuals of all the other species of animals: He is like the beasts that speak not. For this reason it is a light thing to kill them, and has been even enjoined because of its utility. This matter is one of the fundamental principles of the Law, which is built upon it, I mean to say upon the principle that providence watches over each human individual in the manner proper to him.¹¹

This passage is especially interesting, for it repeats the idea that providence is immanent in human conduct, but in a different formulation. It refers now not only to prophets, but to those who heed whatever the prophets teach in the name of God because they understand the wisdom in their words. Even those who listen to the prophets receive providence to the extent that they are perfect in their understanding and in their conduct. Maimonides now returns to the topic of individual providence in the strict sense: "Consider in what way the texts [of Scripture] speak of providence watching over the details of the circumstances of the Patriarchs in their various activities and even in

¹¹ *Guide* III, 18, Pines 475.

their acquisition of property,”¹² and similarly with Moses and Joshua. Their providence extends to their individual destiny. That is because the details of their individual fates have direct implications for the general destiny.

Divine Knowledge and Its Connection with Providence

The next chapters, 19 to 21 of Part III, are devoted to an issue that is complementary to the notion of providence. We can only say that God provides for individuals if we can say that He has knowledge of them. Aristotle denied that God exercises providence over particular individuals, because in his view God is not involved with details: He knows reality generally as a unified idea whose source is in Himself not through empirical external experience. But it is only possible to know particular individuals through having experience of them.

By contrast, Maimonides argues that we should attribute to God the perfection of knowledge of particulars. Of course, this should be done through negative attribution: “God is not ignorant of particulars.” The knowledge of them is not lacking in Him, and this must be the case without causing multiplicity in God, and without God’s knowledge undergoing change when the existence of the corresponding particulars undergoes change. Rather, all these particulars are integrated with God in one all-embracing idea of the unity of existence.

What is the difference between Maimonides’s and Aristotle’s view, that enables him to make this far-reaching claim? The simple answer is: the view of the Mosaic Torah, that the world is created *ex nihilo*, i.e., that God is not only the source of forms that flow from Him and are particularized in matter, but He also creates matter *ex nihilo*. This assumption enables him to argue that God is the first cause of existence of every individual, in conformity to the general idea of the world in the divine mind. Therefore, to the extent that the individual is conscious of himself and conscious of being created by God, he brings himself under divine providence.

Indeed, a general and unified knowledge that is *a priori* and does not flow from empirical observation of reality external to God, but generates this reality in an all-embracing causality, is itself singular, unchanging and external. To be sure, human beings cannot understand such a

¹² *Ibid.*

knowledge, for their knowledge of particulars on the basis of empirical observation must be characterized by plurality and perpetual change.

When we speak of individual providence on either theory, we are talking about the consequential connection between a person's deeds and his fate, between what he does and what happens to him, and we affirm that the latter has the character of a judgment on the former. This notion is problematic either way we construe it. The view of the Mosaic Torah—in the form presented by Maimonides as distinct from his private view—allows the individual to think that God knows his destiny and relates to him directly. But from Maimonides's own view it follows that the relation is not direct, but passes through a long chain of causes through which particulars follow from general principles. From this discrepancy we must conclude that Maimonides's personal view was only a general approximation of the Torah's view, modifying it to conform to the requirements of reason. This is the philosophic option presented for the benefit of those individuals who, like Maimonides, require full agreement between the truth as they understand it theoretically, and the truth that comes from philosophizing from the Torahitic standpoint. But it seems from this formulation that simple believers who adhere to the plain sense of the Mosaic Torah take a wholly legitimate stance.

Hermeneutic Inquiry on Providence in Job

The difference between the Torah's view and Maimonides's on providence is liable to confuse the naïve reader. This led him to offer an interpretation to the book of Job in accordance with his outlook.

Before we approach this interpretation, let us explain that Maimonides made certain assumptions about the literary nature of the book of Job. They are very important, both for understanding Maimonides's method as a philosophical interpreter of the Biblical text, and for understanding the interpretation itself. Maimonides accepts the rabbis' view that the book of Job is a literary and speculative work, not a historical narrative. Job and all his friends never lived; it was all just a parable. The book's treatment of Satan is also part of the allegory. Satan represents matter, which is the source of evil and human suffering. That is why only Job's body was given up to Satan, while his soul was saved by the love of God. Finally, the views presented in this work are not the views of philosophers, but of simple believers, and the prophetic author seeks to respond to the perplexities of such simple folk on their

own level. It goes without saying that this assumption requires that the author addresses his subject philosophically but seeks at the same time to communicate to unphilosophical readers.

Maimonides then offers a detailed interpretation of the views presented by the respective characters of the book. According to this analysis, Eliphaz the Temanite represents the view of the Torah that everything happens according to justice. Bildad the Shuhite presents the Mutazilite view that everything reflects the divine wisdom. Zophar the Naamathite represents the Asharite view that everything happens by the inscrutable divine decree. The view of Epicurus that denies all providence is not represented in the book, for it is complete heresy and denial of what all men think who are blessed with common sense and reason. Job himself, at the start of the discussion, accepted the view of Aristotle that providence extends only to the sphere of the moon but not to the terrestrial world. Finally comes Elihu and reveals by the prophecy with which he was privileged that the full answer is given to the prophets, that God knows everything. Nothing is hidden from Him. But we cannot attain God's knowledge, and we cannot ask that His providence over the world meet our shortsighted expectations. We must recognize the limits of our understanding. "If man knows this, every misfortune will be borne lightly by him. And misfortunes will not add to his doubts regarding the deity and whether He does or does not know and whether He exercised providence or manifests neglect, but will, on the contrary, add to his love."¹³ Job abandons Aristotle's view and adopts Elihu's, which appears close to that of Maimonides's view based on the Torah and reason.

It is clear that the previous theoretical discussion and this hermeneutic presentation are complementary. Thus Maimonides's own views receive the stamp of authority of a canonical source, as well as his daring to draw a distinction between the views of simple believers and his own personal view. We are thus put on notice that his personal view has broader backing and is not a private idiosyncrasy. In other words, it addresses that small cadre of philosophers in the people—a minority, but in a leadership role—to teach them by example that they should present their philosophical position to the simple believers as their own personal position, one that is not incumbent on everyone.

¹³ *Guide* III, 24, Pines 497.

Still, there remains one aspect of the issue of providence that has not received sufficient exploration and confirmation in what we have said so far, an affirmation that Maimonides accepts even on the philosophical level, namely that God's providence over His creatures, by virtue of His being the cause of their existence, implies a judgment of reward and punishment over their individual actions.¹⁴ Is this a prophetic and metaphorical expression for the strengthening of the faith and devotion of the multitude who believe in the commandments, or does Maimonides mean these words in their plain sense?

Apparently it is the need to answer this question that provides the transition from the discussion of providence to the topic of the "reasons for the commandments." It is reasonable to suppose that the Torahitic view that providence is a divine judgment is connected to the Torahitic conception that it is God who gives the Torah. He is the legislator and commander, and it is He who gives reward and punishment in proportion to the fulfillment of the commandments.

The Commandments Express the Divine-Human Relation

Maimonides's decision to discuss the reasons for the commandments, and to present general principles for explaining the reasons that are the basis of every commandment of the Torah, takes a philosophical position in the raging controversy that had its beginnings with the rabbis and crystallized at the time of the Maimonides and in the following period. There were sages who sharply opposed such an explanation. Some did so out of the belief that even if the commandments have reasons it is not necessary to reveal them, and some out of the belief that the commandments need not have any reasons, for one reason alone is sufficient, and that is that one must obey God's will, for He is God and human beings are beholden to serve Him. This argument explains the opposition for revealing the reasons for the commandments, for knowing the reason may prove an excuse for not carrying out the

¹⁴ An example may help clarify this elusive notion. A parent gives his college-age child an allowance. He says, "It is up to you to manage your finances. If you overspend, you will be left with nothing before the end of the month and will have only yourself to blame. If you are thrifty, you will enjoy the surplus. I will not interfere with your management, but you should experience your distress or wellbeing in either case—the consequence of your own actions—as a sign of my disapproval or approval." (LL)

rule as given. Maimonides therefore began his discussion with three sweeping and categorical assertions:

1. First, we must assume that all the divine commandments have reasons, because it is improper to attribute to God any useless or vain action, i.e., actions that have no proper purpose or are arbitrary. Just as creation has a proper beneficent purpose, so legislation that is addressed to man as a created being has a beneficent purpose.
2. Secondly, inasmuch as the commandments are addressed to humankind, their reasons must be understandable by human beings. It is improper to argue that God issued commandments whose reasons are beyond human comprehension, for such commandments can have no useful function. This leads to his third assertion:
3. Understanding the reasons for the commandments is a precondition for their proper fulfillment in agreement with the purpose that is to be achieved through them. Mechanical fulfillment of the commandments from blind obedience is useless. On the contrary, it is liable to be harmful. Therefore it is recommended to reveal the reasons for the commandments to everyone.

In that case, what is God's general purpose in giving the commandments, on whose basis we can deduce the reasons for the various types of commandments? To this, Maimonides gives two complementary answers: To bring human beings first to material prosperity, and by means of that, to spiritual perfection.

This assertion is in keeping with Maimonides's political philosophy, which we have already discussed. These two purposes are essentially one, for material prosperity is a means to spiritual perfection. The social order is also a condition for bringing people close to God. There follows an extended and detailed discussion, during which the question of providence is forgotten. Maimonides shows how every commandment serves the stated purpose, whether by removing material obstacles, or banishing false and misleading opinions (such as the prohibition of all practices associated with idolatrous worship), or by inculcating virtue, social responsibility, neighborly love and recognition of the truth.

How do the commandments of the Torah lead to human perfection? First of all, by establishing moral relations between individuals. Next, through the ethical purification of the individual by disciplining his sensual inclinations to remove the barrier to intellectual enlight-

enment. After that, the rules of worship, which bring one closer to knowing God, distancing him from error, and symbolically alluding to the higher truth. After the reader completes this detailed discussion of the reasons for the commandments, the connection with the question of providence becomes clearer—it turns out that the divine Torah is the manifestation of God’s providence over humanity by the agency of the prophets! Whoever practices the commandments, is delivered from the random accidents that come from a material existence, and merits the true reward that consists in the love of God. Whoever is not scrupulous concerning the commandments is exposed to the randomness of material fate. Here we have the intrinsic reward that comes from observing the commandments, and the intrinsic punishment that comes from violating them. But inasmuch as we are speaking of the observance or violation of God’s commandments, it is possible to regard this reward and punishment as a judicial recompense and divine judgment. Here, then, is the key to understanding Maimonides’s remarks on the special providence that the prophets enjoyed, for it was they who embodied divine providence through their mission, with all their heart and soul.

Providence and the Prophetic Mission

Indeed, Maimonides’s next remarks tie in well with this idea. With the end of the discussion on the reasons for the commandments, he returns to the topic of providence by the agency of the prophets. He concludes his book in the manner of a book that is also conceived with the purpose of fulfilling a prophetic mission. Here is how he begins Chapter 5 1:

This chapter that we bring now does not include additional matter over and above what is comprised in the other chapters of this Treatise. It is only a kind of a conclusion, at the same time explaining the worship as practiced by one who has apprehended the true realities peculiar only to Him after he has obtained an apprehension of what He is; and it also guides him toward achieving this worship, which is the end of man, and makes known to him how providence watches over him in this habitation until he is brought over to the “bundle of life.”¹⁵

¹⁵ *Guide* III, 51, Pines 618.

There immediately follows the parable of those who come to the King's palace, and it turns out that the ladder of levels in individuals' comprehension and knowledge of God is also the ladder of the degrees of His providence over them. The prophet, who has conquered all material barriers, is at the highest level of providence. He is with God continually. It becomes clear from this explanation later in the chapter that this is his intention, and he repeats here what he said in Chapter 17. He teaches one to become accustomed to withdraw from material concerns by observance of the commandments and attachment to thought. In this state of attachment, he is saved from accidental events. This applies even to ordinary folk. But Moses and the patriarchs were privileged to arrive even to a higher level. They reached the point that even when they were attending to material and economic concerns, their attachment to God did not cease, for Providence attended them even at those moments, to save them from harm. We have here another mutation of the idea of providence, from the idea of being with God to the idea of immunity from the accidents of chance. But here Maimonides adds another reason:

It also seems to me that the fact that these four were in a permanent state of extreme perfection in the eyes of God, and that His providence watched over them continually even while they were engaged in increasing their fortune—I mean while they tended their cattle, did agricultural work, and governed their household—was necessarily brought about by the circumstance that in all these actions their end was to come near to Him, may He be exalted; and how near! For the end of their efforts during their life was to bring into being a religious community that would know and worship God. For I have known him, to the end that he may command, and so on.” Thus it has become clear to you that the end of all their efforts was to spread the doctrine of the unity of the Name in the world and to guide people to love Him, may He be exalted. Therefore this rank befitted them, for these actions were pure worship of great import.¹⁶

In the same context Maimonides later concludes that the prophets and saints suffered harm only when they fell from their high rank to be absorbed in egoistic, earthly interests, that is to say, when their attachment to God ceased. Only the Patriarchs and Moses did not suffer this fate, for they remained attached to God even when engaged in this-worldly tasks, for indeed everything that they did was part and

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 624.

parcel of their mission. Therefore their deaths were consistent with their mission; they died by the “divine kiss,” which is not death but transition to eternal life.

The Prophet and Torah as Vehicles of Providence

Thus we have here a systematic approach that identifies the Torah with divine providence. Whoever attaches himself to it enjoys providence, in the sense that he is saved from mishap to the extent that is possible in our world, for the Torah brings true happiness. Even natural mishaps that are inevitable (because we live in a material world) do not injure him except insofar as he sins, i.e., insofar as he is devoted to material interests for their own sake, insofar as he sees them as the goal. Only when he is involved with them in this fashion does material suffering cause him spiritual distress. If he shakes himself free of this error, then material suffering will not cause him spiritual pain, but he will see it as a spur to serve God the more, and that will be his reward. This view only¹⁷ comes to humanity through the agency of the prophets. Thus the prophets are a vehicle of providence, and therefore providence attached also to their worldly affairs. Within the station of his mission, the prophet relates to the world as the Active Intellect relates to him. Prophets exist in the world to guide it, but they are not bound by it and its principles. In this station their destiny is tied to that framework of divine volitional activity which we discussed in our remarks about the divine will, the creation of the world, miracles and the giving of the Torah. The miracle comes to establish a proper order of human life in the terrestrial world. It is directly connected to the giving of the Torah, and we should not be surprised that the prophet, who imitates God in his actions and becomes a living exemplar of fulfillment of the Torah’s commandments, becomes an embodiment of providence himself.

And here again are Maimonides’s own words at the close of his book:

In this verse he makes it clear to us that those actions that ought to be known and imitated are “loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness.” He adds another corroborative notion through saying, “in the earth”—this being a pivot of the Law. For matters are not as the overbold opine who

¹⁷ Well, maybe not exclusively—see the Stoics, and Boethius’s *Consolations of Philosophy*. (LL)

think that His providence, may He be exalted, terminates at the sphere of the moon and that the earth and that which is in it are neglected: “The Lord hath forsaken the earth.” Rather is it as has been made clear to us by the Master of those who know: “That the earth is the Lord’s.” He means to say that His providence also extends over the earth in the way that corresponds to what the latter is, just as His providence extends over the heavens in the way that corresponds to what they are. This is what he says: “That I am the Lord who exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth.” Then he completes the notion by saying: “For in these things I delight, saith the Lord.” He means that it is My purpose that there should come from you “loving-kindness, righteousness, and judgment in the earth” in the way we have explained with regard to the thirteen attributes: namely, that the purpose should be assimilation to them and that this should be our way of life. Thus the end that he sets forth in this verse may be stated as follows: It is clear that the perfection of man that may truly be gloried in is the one acquired by him who has achieved, in a measure corresponding to his capacity, apprehension of Him, may He be exalted, and who knows His providence extending over His creatures as manifested in the act of bringing them into being and in their governance as it is. The way of life of such an individual, after he has achieved this apprehension, will always have in view loving-kindness, righteousness, and judgment through assimilation to His actions, may He be exalted, just as we have explained several times in this Treatise.¹⁸

The meaning of this marvelous passage seems to be very clear in the context of the previous discussion: The prophet, when he knows God and imitates His actions through understanding His laws and understanding His ways as guide, becomes a vehicle of divine providence to humankind. The Torah that he gives is itself providence. Whoever conducts himself by it enjoys providence at his own level, and to the same extent becomes a vehicle of providence to others who learn from him.

By expressing these ideas at the end of the Guide, Maimonides sought to define the mission that he had in mind for his own book in the life of the Jewish people—indeed, not just for the Guide of the Perplexed alone, but for his entire philosophical and Jewish life-work.

¹⁸ *Guide* III, 54, Pines 637–8.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SUMMARY OF MAIMONIDEAN THOUGHT

According to the popular version of Maimonides, God exercises providence over people in the sense that they choose to observe His commandments or to disobey, and He rewards and punishes them accordingly. The philosophical understanding is that divine providence extends to the level of human intellectual understanding, and that this is the fulfillment of divine justice. But we should remember that God measures by His own measure and not by human measure. Therefore we should trust Him and love Him the more in realizing that whatever happens to us is from His hand and we are deserving of it. We saw that the philosophical understanding of this saying is that divine providence is effectuated through the Torah and the vehicle of prophecy. The more perfect is a person's conduct according to the Torah, *ipso facto* the more he enjoys providence. The notion of providence refers to being privileged with eternal life on the plane of pure spirituality. In this respect, such a person is to be classed on the same level as the heavenly bodies, whose movement is eternal. That is one way of understanding Maimonides's counterstatement to Aristotle, that providence does extend "under the lunar sphere." To be sure, one can say that providence is immanent in a person's actions and spiritual attainments. This is not "providence" in the same sense that ordinary people think of it, but rather the approach that "the reward for a good deed is the good deed itself," and the punishment for a sin is the sin and its consequences. But even so, one can see a true judgment at work here, first of all because sin in its primary meaning is submission to sensuality and materiality, and second because if someone gives in to sensuality he transgresses God's command. The immanent punishment in an action that is against the divine command, is that judgment, which is not the case if we assume that God is not involved in the world, in other words, if we deny the God of the Torah. This is the deeper difference between Maimonides and Aristotle, and this is the reason that Maimonides condemned at the start of the discussion on providence the view of the philosophers that God's providence does not extend to the terrestrial world.

Moreover, individual providence is expressed in perfected individuals through their prosperity and through their immunity to this-worldly mishaps. This notion is divested of its anthropomorphic character by the interpretation that the prophets are saved by virtue of their intellectual superiority, through which they can predict the future and avoid mishaps. Nevertheless, there remains here an element of the miraculous and supernatural, which is possible on Maimonides's assumption of creation *ex nihilo*.

Certainly there remains a tension between the popular and philosophical versions of Maimonides's doctrines. The philosophical version knows no true retributive reward and punishment, but only the good and bad that are immanent in the deeds themselves. Furthermore, Maimonides is not interested in broadcasting this philosophical view to the masses, for most ordinary people will regard it as a denial of individual providence altogether. Still, the Maimonidean view that he presents as an alternative to the popular view is not a purely Aristotelian view, but rather a version of the Torahitic-prophetic view that does not contradict the popular position but complements it.

The Coherence of the Guide

If we survey the entire system from our current vantage point, we will see before us a coherent thought structure. Maimonides proved God's existence on the basis of Aristotelian physics. He proceeded to construct a theory of prophetic knowledge of the divine, which outranks philosophical knowledge. The prophet knows God's will, and on that basis arrives at the certainty that the world is created. Miracle expresses the directionality of that will in human existence. It comes to establish an ideal ethical-political social order, and thus originated the Torah that was given in the miraculous Sinai event, which is absolute testimony of divine providence.

The Relation of Philosophy and Religion in Maimonidean Thought

Maimonides's system is the most comprehensive and complete attempt to infuse Aristotelian philosophy into the domain of Torah thought. Maimonides's physics and metaphysics are Aristotelian. His ethics is Aristotelian in its basic ideas, his psychology is Aristotelian, and his politics is Platonic. His theology is Aristotelian up to a certain point. His theory of prophecy is based first of all on Aristotelian epistemology.

But it seems that it is no less correct to say that *Maimonides's system is the most comprehensive attempt to infuse the Torah into the philosophical realm*. From our discussion of his ethics it became clear that despite its Aristotelian foundations, Maimonides deviated from Aristotle in defining the ethical goal. He set up intellectual perfection as an exclusive goal to which everything else is subordinated, and as a limitless objective that can never be completely attained in this world. Maimonides similarly overrode the Aristotelian doctrine of balanced happiness (*eudaemonia*) and exchanged it for a way of austerity that gives the body a minimum of satisfaction, not to attain pleasure or happiness but to be freed of the rack of its desires. Thus, too, intellectual perfection took on religious significance: the goal is attaining eternal truth, which is the true worship of God. The tendency of Maimonidean ethics, to become free of one's material nature and to devote oneself to the life of the spirit, is felt in the whole rest of the system. The Torah as the ideal political constitution seeks to remove the material obstacle (and everything that implies) from the path of attaining the truth, for each individual according to his ability. Its objective is to free the person from his material nature. The prophet is the person immersed in the love of God, and he has the advantage over the philosopher that he separates himself from all material interests, whether he is dealing with his worldly affairs (for the sake of his larger spiritual destiny) or in his spiritual efforts to arrive at absolute truth, beyond ordinary human comprehension. The doctrine of negative attributes is the method for guiding each person according to his ability, to understand what is beyond his ability to understand. And of course the concept of God, on which the Torah is based, is not the Aristotelian notion of the Form of the World, but rather a God who is totally other, transcendent, one and unique, without which the world cannot exist, but whose existence will not be affected by the nonexistence of the world. God's transcendence, in Maimonides's view, is what distinguishes the correct God-concept from the concepts of idolators who attribute divine influence and sovereignty to the forces of nature or to forces that mediate between God and nature. The Torah is intended first of all to distance us from any form of idolatry. And with this point we come to the second side of this line of thought. According to Aristotle's conception, God has no will, and the forces of nature have no will or intentionality. God is absorbed in Himself, and the creatures are drawn to Him by their desire and for the sake of their happiness, without any goal of reciprocity. This is the spiritual foundation of an outlook according to which causal necessity determines

all, “will” is an expression of need, a desire for dependency, and the world must be pre-existing, because if matter did not already exist, no purposive, altruistic will would be aroused to create it.

By contrast, according to the Torah’s outlook God is a personal Will who turns to the other to do him good. Indeed the wisdom in the universe is immanence of God’s wisdom in nature, but as a separate material being it was created by the will of the transcendent God. As we recall, this is the source of the ambiguity that we found in Maimonides’s theology. To the original Aristotelian concept of God as the self-knowing Intellect is added the dimension of a volitional God, who is beyond the comprehension of the created intellect. The transcendent God has intentionality toward the world. That intentionality is revealed in prophecy, and this completes the difference between prophet and philosopher. The prophet understands God’s intention in creation and transforms it to an ideal of leadership. He grasps God’s relationship of lovingkindness toward the other and becomes a vehicle of it himself. The prophet’s knowledge of God’s attributes are learned in his own capacity as emissary and leader (in which he must exercise them himself through imitation). God’s intentionality requires the assumption that the world is created *ex nihilo*. On this assumption, the miracle is recognized as an event that comes to establish a human order in parallel with the created order, but in keeping with God’s moral purpose in creation—to do good to the other. This intention is expressed by implanting providential miracles outside the cyclical course of nature; on their basis, humanity advances continually toward its spiritual perfection, a process that will continue until the time of the Messiah, and this is the secret of the mission of Israel as a chosen people.

Maimonides accepted Aristotle’s physics and metaphysics. But within the natural order he discovered another tendency, whose source is in the Torah. This implies that even though Maimonides was not ready to philosophize on the basis of the authority of the Torah in its literal sense, and unlike the Kalamic sages insisted that one can properly interpret the Torah only after knowing the philosophical description of reality, still he remained a Torahitic philosopher in the sense that he accepted the dictates of reason as the basis for articulating the fundamental outlooks of the Torah that were presumed as true on the basis of revelation. Thus on the one hand he interpreted the Torah’s texts in a way that was even arbitrary from a linguistic standpoint, but on the other hand he stood firmly on the fundamental ideas of the Torah: the rationality of God, the creation of the world, miracle, revealed Torah,

providential reward and punishment. Again, not because the literal sense of the texts required this. Maimonides assumed that the true philosophical tradition was an ancient Torah tradition, not the original creation of the Greeks. He had traditional proofs for this view, which we know today have no real foundation. But even if we discount Maimonides's argument that the rabbinic "Secret of Creation" is identical with Aristotle's *Physics* and the "Secret of the Chariot" with the *Metaphysics*, Maimonides's own system presents, on a foundation of Greek philosophy, an authentic tradition of Jewish thought.

This is undoubtedly a rare intellectual achievement, fraught with tension and ambiguity. It explains the enormous influence that the Maimonidean teaching exerted in the following generations down to our own day, and also the fierce controversy that it engendered. That is the justification for the fundamental and detailed consideration that we have accorded it in this review of the classic Jewish philosophers. Even among the Jewish philosophers who came after him, not least among the kabbalists who were opposed to philosophy, there was rare agreement that he was the greatest of them all. All of them learned from him, whether they accepted his views as he presented them, or disagreed with him. It is proper to emphasize that this statement also holds good with respect to the history of Jewish philosophy in the modern period.

PART THREE

THE LATER MASTERS:
CONTINUATION AND TRANSITION

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE MAIMONIDEAN CONTROVERSY

Maimonides strove to create a new intellectual superstructure for Judaism in order to insure its unity and integrity on a pure monotheistic basis. Indeed, such an effort demands continuity with respect to the relationship to the sources and tradition of thought, of law and interpretation, yet it necessarily contains revolutionary elements. His efforts had two immediate results:

1. The establishment of a solid school of faithful students who continued in his path, both by propagating his ideas among the elite leaders of the people, and by developing his ideas further and adapting them to the needs of this propagation. In this connection, it is possible to conclude that even though in Maimonides's life he faced opponents and critics in the legal area, he was able to secure broad acceptance of his legal achievements, and even his ideological opponents acknowledged his unique halakhic authority and expertise.
2. A fierce controversy that flared up concerning his philosophical method and even concerning his Thirteen Principles. This controversy, which broke out first in the Sephardic lands, and spread to the Ashkenazic and Italian communities after Maimonides's death, persisted for generations. It waxed and waned repeatedly, and more than once threatened to split the Jewish people apart.

From the point of view of the history of Jewish thought in its various currents, the inevitable result of this controversy was fierce antagonism between the school of Maimonides's students and the schools of religious thought that took a stand against it. The logic of controversy brings about polarizing of positions and an attempt to define the difference between the camps in all areas, whether in the doctrines of religious faith and their definition, or in theoretical disciplines, or in the methods of interpreting sacred texts to provide support for the warring views. We should not be surprised, therefore, that the form of thought that continued to present itself as "philosophy" was identified with Maimonides and his followers—his commentators and successors—whereas

those who disagreed with them did not define themselves as philosophers (who strove to innovate and stray from the accepted tradition) but as “kabbalists” (literally, traditionalists), the faithful representatives of the ancient tradition, or “Hasidim” (pietists), who had no interest in esoteric matters, whether philosophical or kabbalistic.

There is good reason to maintain that this distinction between the various streams of thought of this period is dogmatic and even arbitrary. A broad intrinsic definition of “philosophy” could well include the literature of “theoretical kabbalah” (as opposed to “practical kabbalah”) as one of the streams of Jewish philosophy, and several of the works of pietistic moral literature could find their place as popular presentations of philosophical or kabbalistic thought. In this context we should inform the reader first of all that the theoretical kabbalah was a direct continuation of the neo-Platonic tradition of medieval thought generally and Jewish thought specifically, though the mode of presentation changed from logical speculation to midrashic interpretation. Secondly, though the kabbalists generally took a stand against Maimonides’s successors, many (including the most important) of those who presented themselves as Maimonides’s disciples were influenced by the theoretical kabbalah, and at a certain stage they produced several theoretical works that aimed at a synthesis of the two positions. The most prominent examples of this genre were composed in the late Middle Ages in Spain on the eve of the expulsion and in Italy afterwards.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that in a book whose purpose is not to describe the history of all Jewish thought in the Middle Ages but to present “the classic Jewish Philosophers”—those who contributed to the legacy of “Jewish philosophy” that came to be regarded as such by the people—we may accept the traditional division of genres that was accepted by the thinkers themselves as well as by their disciples and successors, both in the world of philosophy and of scholarship.

Propagation of the Guide’s Influence

Maimonides wrote the *Guide of the Perplexed* in the Moslem country of Egypt in Arabic, but his entire output was the fruit of the philosophical and halakhic tradition of the Golden Age of the Jews of Moslem Spain. Indeed, this was a period of many upheavals with which Maimonides sought to grapple, and they had an effect on the fate of his writings. In the period of his productive work, most of the centers of Jewish culture in Iberia passed to Christian rule. This had far-reaching political

and cultural effects, which influenced the Jews' readiness to accept or reject Maimonides's revolution: the fierceness of the controversy was largely a consequence of this transformation, but there remained the basic fact that only in Sephardic lands was there a broad elite circle that was culturally enlightened and interested in his philosophical output. In Maimonides's own lifetime, R. Samuel Ibn Tibbon translated the *Guide* into Hebrew, and his original philosophical writings also contributed greatly to the spread of Maimonides's teachings.

The rapid spread of the *Guide's* influence in Hebrew translation in Christian Spain and in Provence heightened the sense of danger on the part of the official rabbinate, who based themselves on the accepted traditional positions as opposed to the "secrets of the *Guide*." It also explains the fact that Maimonides's students in the 13th century concentrated on propagation of his ideas, interpreting them and defending their legitimacy instead of developing original philosophical ideas of their own. One can find interesting and profound nuances in their interpretations, but none of them developed his own original philosophical system. They have interest for scholars, but this book of the "classical" Jewish philosophers is not the place to examine them in depth. Only toward the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century was a foundation developed that produced new thought-systems. This resulted from the combined effects of the clash of interpretations on the one hand, and the transformations in Arabic and Christian philosophy on the other hand.

We shall first present here a condensed survey of the substance of the theoretical controversy surrounding the *Guide*, followed by the substance of the transformations in the general philosophy of the times.

The Substance of the Controversy over Maimonides's Teaching

To understand the composite character of the controversy, we should first remark that the attitude to Maimonides himself, even among the fiercest critics of his philosophy, was ambivalent. Acceptance of him as a halakhic authority of unique stature inhibited expression of opposition to his philosophy, so that some who disagreed with him came to his defense. The most prominent example was the reaction of R. Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides), who was considered the greatest halakhic authority in Sephardic or Ashkenazic Jewry in the generation after Maimonides. In his view, Maimonides satisfied a major need that was felt among the Jews of Moslem Spain in his time: their immersion in the

general culture of their environment caused them religious perplexity, and Maimonides went out on a limb to respond to their doubts with arguments that would be acceptable to them. The threat implicit in the philosophical views that the *Guide* introduced to Christian Spain and Provence was the fault of sophomoric students who did not represent their master's views accurately; they gazed at the mystery and went off the deep end. Nahmanides wrote this explanation for the benefit of the Ashkenazic sages, who did not understand the background of Maimonides's project and judged him too harshly as a result. Clearly, in Nahmanides's view the Jews of Christian Spain of his time did not need the *Guide of the Perplexed* either, for it would only perplex them. But he was wary of undermining Maimonides's halakhic reputation, and so he emphasized that it was Maimonides's intention also in his philosophical work to defend the authority of the Torah against those who would question it. We can also say that Nahmanides exemplified the Sephardic tradition at its best by being at home in the scientific and philosophical realms as well as traditional Jewish learning. For him, and for other prominent anti-Maimonideans of the first generation (such as R. Joseph ben Todros Halevi and R. Judah Alfakar), ambivalence was a sign of appreciation for Maimonides's philosophical accomplishment. Even though they tended in the direction of theoretical kabbalah, they were influenced by him, and this was expressed in the content and form of the arguments they raised against Maimonides's views.

Essential Points of Critique of Maimonides's Views

We mention first two arguments with which the controversy started during Maimonides's lifetime:

1. On the basis of the Aristotelian physics that was the foundation of his method, it is improbable that he believed in the resurrection of the dead. His mention of this article of faith in the 13 Articles is only a perfunctory compliance with the halakhic requirement. This argument is based on the presumptive impossibility of bodily resurrection in Aristotelian physics and psychology. Furthermore, Maimonides does not mention this belief in either the "Laws of Fundamental Beliefs" in the *Mishneh Torah*, or the *Guide*. Even in his commentary to Mishnah Sanhedrin his words are brief and enigmatic. Maimonides was forced to respond to this argument in a separate letter called "Letter on the Resurrection." There he

characterized the resurrection as a miracle that can be affirmed on the assumption of creation *ex nihilo*—God can re-create those individuals who have died. But to those who took Aristotelian physics seriously, this explanation seemed dubious, perhaps with good reason. It strengthened the suspicion that this was a pious evasion of the intellectual issue for the sake of compliance with halakhic tradition.

2. A second criticism voiced during Maimonides's lifetime was directed against his halakhic contention that whoever believes in the corporeality of God, even on the basis of a literal understanding of Scripture, is a heretic. We should mention here especially the view of Rabad (R. Abraham ben David) of Posquières, the Provençal sage and major halakhic authority, who during Maimonides's lifetime wrote critical glosses on the *Mishneh Torah* which later became included in the standard printed editions of that work. In one of these glosses Rabad asserted that this legal opinion of Maimonides, which excludes from the fold many simple Jews who believe in God's corporeality because that is the plain sense of Biblical verses and rabbinic teachings, is itself in contradiction with the true law! To be sure, Rabad agreed with Maimonides in believing that God is incorporeal, but he attests that many perfectly good believing Jews, and even rabbis, believe in God's corporeality, and they are good Jews, observant of Torah and commandments and devoted to the service of God.

Rabad's criticism strikes at the heart of the purifying intellectual revolution that Maimonides sought to carry out in the religious consciousness of his generation, and that went against the spiritual tendency of the majority of the rabbinic leadership, particularly in Ashkenazic lands. To understand Rabad's intention, it is important to note that he himself was not included among those simple-minded people who believe in God's corporeality, but he sought to defend the right of ordinary Jews to conceive God and believe in Him however they could, in order to serve God wholeheartedly and observe His commandments. The essential point at issue is defined by this emphasis: What is true worship? What is true Torah-study? How does one define a good Jew?

Maimonides held that even ordinary believers who cannot conceive God abstractly should know that their pictorial conception is childish, vulgar and mistaken, in order to guide them toward a philosophical belief that in his view was the true belief. This stipulation derived from

his identifying the intellectual-philosophical ideal with the religious ideal of divine worship. All of the commandments should be observed for this purpose, and especially the commandment of Torah-study, for the essential part of Torah-study according to Maimonides is the study of philosophy, not the study of Jewish law, which is only a means to the goal. In his short comment, Rabad disagreed fundamentally with this conception. In his view, service of God is fulfillment of the mitzvot for their own sake, and Torah-study is learning the halakhah for its own sake, and therefore the question whether a Jew has the right intellectual conception of God did not seem at all fateful or decisive for him. The main point was whether he believed in the Torah as given, fulfilled its commandments, and engaged wholeheartedly in studying it.

To these two complaints were added criticisms of philosophical views that (according to their opponents) undermined fundamental beliefs that Maimonides admitted as legitimate and even necessary but then subverted through interpretation that amounted to their negation. A prominent example was the issue of miracles. On the one hand, Maimonides argued that miracles were possible. But on the other hand, he selected a few miracles from the Torah that he affirmed as true, while of the majority he argued that they are only prophetic dreams or poetic metaphors. In the eyes of ordinary believers this was a perplexing procedure that generated skepticism: if miracles are possible in principle, then one should accept all the miracles recounted in the Torah in their plain sense. If they are impossible, then not even one miracle-story is to be accepted as literally true. Therefore, one should draw the conclusion that Maimonides did not believe in miracles at all, and since he interpreted the revelation of the Torah as miraculous, we should suspect that he harbored the most dangerous philosophical heresy of all!

The same applied to Maimonides's words about creation *ex nihilo*. They were attacked from two sides. First, they are contradictory and obscure, raising the suspicion that his official embrace of the traditional doctrine is a cover for denial, or for an insecure belief riddled with doubts. Second, they contradicted mystical views concerning creation, that rested on the neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation that many Jewish thinkers accepted.

Yet another issue was the criticism of Maimonides's attitude toward Jewish scholars who did not engage in philosophy. First, they argued against him that if prophecy is the summit of philosophy, what is the difference between Moses and Aristotle? Second, they argued that his

attitude toward the majority of Jewish scholars whose entire preoccupation was in legal matters was arrogant and condescending. In this context they would often cite his parable of the people who seek to approach the king's palace at the end of the *Guide*, and they argued that according to this parable Aristotle is to be found inside the palace, while the Torah-scholars who have not studied philosophy are only in the courtyard.

Maimonides's explanation of the reasons for the commandments was attacked on the grounds that such logic could lead one to commit sins. According to a famous rabbinic passage, the Talmudic sages did not publicize their reasons for the mitzvot because they learned from King Solomon's sad experience. The Torah forbade the king of Israel from taking many wives or acquiring many horses, and gave reasons for these prohibitions. Solomon transgressed both these prohibitions because he thought that he would be immune to the bad effects against which the Torah warned, and therefore he deduced these reasons did not apply to him. Maimonides considered this argument in the *Guide* and belittled it. His opponents reported seeing enlightened Jews who came into contact with higher gentile society and were careless about their ritual observance for considerations similar to those that motivated Solomon.

A great deal of the actual conflict that flared up between the followers and opponents of Maimonides concerned the criticism of Maimonides's method of interpretation of Scripture, and especially far-reaching allegorical interpretation of the Torah narratives, such as saying that the relation of Abraham to Sarah represents the relation of form to matter in Aristotelian physics.¹ To be sure, Maimonides did not indulge in such midrashic interpretations, but he developed the methodology on which they were based. But his radical students in Spain were enraptured by this methodology and indulged excessively in far-fetched interpretations that were supposed to reveal mysteries of "Creation" and "the Chariot."

This phenomenon seemed especially grave to their conservative critics for two reasons. First, they could conclude that the narratives of the Torah were not historically true. More serious, if untrue the

¹ This allegorical interpretation actually was advanced by the radical Maimonideans. Its basis in Maimonides's *Guide* was more modest. In *Guide* III, 8 Maimonides suggests that the relation of form to matter is analogous to the relation of male to female generally.

stories in and of themselves seemed common and pointless, unworthy of inclusion in sacred scriptures. The Maimonideans held that these stories were justified only if they carried some exalted lesson on the same plane of truth as the mysteries of creation and the Chariot. In the final analysis, the result would be to have contempt for the Torah as a source of truth, because understanding the allegorical meaning of the stories would require prior knowledge of the philosophical truth that was learned from Aristotle's writings, not from the Torah.

From this followed the second more serious reason. The allegorical interpretation accords independent human intellectual inquiry a higher standing than the Torah's teachings. The inevitable result would be that the philosophically educated person would take on the prerogative to teach as true whatever appeared so by the light of his reason, without consulting the Torah at all!

We should emphasize in this connection that the kabbalists, who became the chief anti-Maimonidean spokesmen, interpreted the Torah themselves in all four methods (plain sense, midrashic, philosophical and mystical) and could arrive at their own far-fetched allegorical interpretations that were no less audacious than those of the philosophers. But they differed from the philosophers in two basic assumptions:

1. The plain-sense meaning always remained a basic minimum for them, and the other interpretations could add to it or go deeper than it, but could not efface it.
2. The extravagant interpretation was not based on human reason but on "kabbalah"—i.e., on authoritative tradition whose basis was in prophetic revelation.

When the controversy was at its most intense in the 13th century, the last-named issues became central to the agenda of discussion. A ban was proclaimed in Barcelona in 1303 against anyone studying the *Guide* prior to 30 years of age, and permitting it only after one had received a proper foundation in traditional Torah studies. In the official text of the ban, these issues of unrestrained allegorical interpretation were especially emphasized.

To summarize this episode, we cite one of the most prominent participants in the first round of the discussion in the first half of the 13th century: Rabbi Isaac Alfakar. At the center of his attack he discussed Maimonides's requirement to interpret the Torah in accordance with the conclusions of philosophical inquiry: in other words, to arrive at its understanding of the truth through an extraneous method. He returns

to a principle of the Kalam: it is permitted to interpret the Scriptures non-literally only if we find a contradiction in the plain sense of the Torah itself.² If the Torah contradicts the conclusions of philosophy, we must accept the views of the Torah without qualification. Why? Because we cannot rely on the demonstrations of reason. Our reason is limited, and we can place no certainty in it: "The demonstration of theoretical wisdom is not competent to uproot the whole structure of faith... much less the proof of the eternity of the world, which strikes at the very essence of the Sabbath." In other words, the Torah is on a higher plane than reason.

But was Alfakar unaware that Maimonides had tried to preserve the fundamental principles of the Torah and to base them on the intellectual limitations of human understanding?³ Indeed so, but here one could see an instructive difference in the point of emphasis. Maimonides sets the limit of inquiry in order to legitimize it and to reconcile it with the Torah as much as possible. Alfakar sets the limit in order to reject it altogether. This difference is expressed in his suspicion of Maimonides, and especially in the inconsistency that he finds in his words whenever Maimonides seeks to defend the basic doctrines of the Torah. Maimonides's words are not unequivocal, and they lend support to heretical views.⁴ This is the case on the issue of creation, as well as on the issue of miracles. In short, instead of certainty the book arouses great perplexity, and this is its principal danger. Maimonides's words "lend support to every rebel and scoffer that arises instantly from his teaching... when he holds up the Torah for derision in its main teachings because it hides its face, and he sows confusion among the people

² Actually, Saadia had permitted figurative interpretation of Scripture if the literal sense contradicted either obvious truths of physical science or involved anthropomorphic (especially corporeal) understanding of the Deity. (LL)

³ A lot of this argument hinges on the interpretation of Maimonides's position on issues such as the creation. Many Maimonideans of the Provençal school (including Ibn Tibbon, Joseph Kaspi, and Moses Narboni) held that despite Maimonides's official endorsement of creation *ex nihilo* (in *Guide* II, 13–25) he secretly agreed with Aristotle's theory of the eternity of the world (as they argued from hints offered in *Guide* II, 26–30 and their reliance on the "seventh contradiction" enunciated in the Introduction to the *Guide*). Thus Alfakar's complaint about the Maimonidean view on the "eternity" issue had a solid basis in the views of many of Maimonides's 13th-century interpreters, while the evidence of the *Guide* itself could be read either way. See the discussion of the different positions of Falaquera, Kaspi, and Albalag below. (LL)

⁴ This is of course the case, as a comparison of the moderate and radical interpretations on the *Guide* on the key issues such as creation, revelation, miracles and providence shows. (LL)

by setting them on the slippery rock of controversy. He is outside the pale in talking about the great miracles and wonders of the Torah, saying that they are riddles and parables.”⁵

Responses of Maimonides's Students

How did the enlightened party, the disciples of Maimonides, defend themselves against this criticism that was leveled against them? Of course there were different approaches, ranging from the moderate to the extreme. We shall cite here the philosophical responses of three prominent personalities: R. Shem Tov ben Joseph Ibn Falaquera, R. Joseph Kaspi, and R. Isaac Albalag. All three responded in theoretical treatises that have philosophical value and that had a certain influence at least within their circle.

R. Shem Tov ben Joseph Ibn Falaquera (1225–1295)

Among the principal Maimonideans in 13th-century Spain, R. Shem Tov ben Joseph Ibn Falaquera occupies a central place. He was a prolific author and poet, who dedicated his whole literary output to propagating and defending Maimonidean views. He was not an original philosopher, and although he registered a dissenting opinion on a number of issues, he did not develop an independent method. He excelled in clarity of style and in his ability to explain and simplify matters. He devoted his whole literary talent to one mission: propagating the views of the *Guide* in a moderate, even conservative approach that should dismiss all suspicion and opposition. In other words, he presented the doctrine of the *Guide* not in its revolutionary and innovative aspect, but in its conservative aspect of continuity that defends the traditional rabbinic position in its theoretical outlook no less than in its legal positions.

We start with Falaquera's apologetic refrain against the criticism based on the principal argument that there is a substantive difference between philosophy based on reason and the Torah that was given through revelation, and therefore the very attempt to identify philosophical truth with the truth of Torah is a kind of denial of the Torah. This topic

⁵ Cited in *Responsa of Maimonides*, Leipzig edition.

comes up repeatedly in all his writings, but especially in two of them: "The Letter of the Debate" and "The Letter of the Dream."

"The Letter of the Debate" is a dialogue between a traditional pietist and a scholar who is learned both in Torah and in philosophy. This is of course a deliberate literary setup. In contrast to the hopeless debate that took place in reality between the philosophical party on the one hand and on the other hand the traditionalists who threw heaps of ostracism and contempt on them and thus never arrived at a real exchange of ideas before turning to execrations and insults (as Falaquera described in his book *The Seeker*), Falaquera sought to set up his debate on the basis of common elements shared by the two sides, thus hinting at his readers that the suspicions harbored against the philosophers stemmed from prejudice rooted in ignorance. If they would acquire a basic knowledge of scientific education, it would become clear to them that there is no basis for suspicion, but there is room for rational discussion. The difference between the pietist and the philosopher is depicted as a difference between different rungs on the ladder of knowledge. The pietist whom Falaquera describes in his book is the pietist whom Maimonides describes in his *Eight Chapters*: a Torah-scholar of virtuous disposition who is ready to grow and learn more, and the philosopher is the ideal student whom Maimonides addresses in the *Guide*: one well-versed in the Torah who has also had a considerable philosophical education. The topic of discussion between them is how they can come to agreement—in other words, what is the proper relationship of philosophy and Torah.

In order to prove that reconciliation is possible and to remove the obstacle in the way of exchange of ideas, the philosopher argues two prior theses, which derive from Maimonides. First of all, he argues that the gentile philosophers believe in the existence of God on the basis of firm, well-established proofs, and on the basis of those proofs they renounce idolatry. It is thus clear that there is no reason to be suspicious of them or to fear that whoever attends to their words will be drawn into heresy, God forbid. Furthermore, if there are differences between the views of the pietist and the philosopher, there is more in common than what separates them.

Therefore the Jewish philosopher-scholar argues further that philosophical study is not only permitted according to the Torah, but it is obligatory. This argument could have been taken from Saadia and *Bahya*: the Torah and reason are two pillars, and only by relying on the two of them together can we be free of doubts.

Reconciling Philosophy and the Torah

After his demonstration that the Torah commands us to engage in rational inquiry, the Jewish philosopher enumerates those central issues on which (Maimonidean) philosophy corroborates the Torah's views:

1. Reason validates all the Ten Commandments, from affirming God's existence through "you shall not covet," including the Sabbath that commemorates the creation of the world. Falaquera does not deny that some of the philosophers of the Maimonidean party reject the creation doctrine, and that others understand the creation in a way that deviates from the accepted Torah view. Falaquera's "philosopher-scholar" roundly criticizes these thinkers, and agrees with the pietist in rejecting their position.
2. The philosophers endorse the fact of prophecy, and they help us to distinguish true from false prophets.
3. There is ample agreement between the Torah and philosophy in their ethical teachings (as demonstrated in Maimonides's *Eight Chapters*).
4. There is also basic agreement on ritual observance, but here too the philosopher does not sweep problematic issues under the carpet. He chooses his words carefully and argues that "one should only worship the Supreme God, and you know that most of the mitzvot have as their purpose to rid the world of idolatry." This alludes to Maimonides's view that the sacrifices are to be justified as a concession that Moses made to the Israelites who were accustomed to worship in this manner, that they might continue the sacrificial custom as long as they redirected their devotion from idols to the true God. This is an implicit swipe at the kabbalists who defended the sacrifices as intrinsically sacred and supra-rational.

Afterwards Falaquera concedes that there is a difference between the philosophical view and the Torah with respect to miracles. This is the issue on which one of the most serious splits developed in the Maimonidean position, but Falaquera attempts to minimize the differences by citing the rabbis to the effect that "the world operates according to its set custom," and that they only conceded those miracles that are essential to the Torah. Falaquera concludes with his first philosophical argument: the Torah requires that we study the sciences, and therefore we must seek an overall reconciliation between them and the Torah narratives.

As expected, the pietist is convinced by this speech. But it is clear that despite the basic agreement between philosophy and the Torah, there are also blatant disagreements, and they start us thinking about the source of the disagreement and its reason. The solution that Falaquera suggests in all his popular books is that *we should only accept those philosophical views that are in agreement with the Torah, and discard the rest*. This is a conservative position. But it creates a paradox that indicates an inner contradiction. On the one hand, the Torah's ideal and that of philosophy are the same. Rational verification of the Torah is a religious imperative, and one should not accept matters of faith in a spirit of blind obedience. On the other hand, the Torah sets limits to rational inquiry on those matters where its plain sense contradicts it. How can we resolve this paradox?

How can the Torah be Interpreted by Reason Yet Stand above It?

To this question we receive two answers that seem contradictory, but only together they complement the outlook of the moderate philosopher in this generation. In the preface of his commentary to the *Guide* Falaquera says: "It is necessary to preface [the study in philosophical wisdom with] the good virtues of Torah...for they are essential for a person in his existence, and they are not only essential to him as a sage. Therefore the philosophers said that a person must take on himself the first principles of religion, for denial of them or disputing them negates human existence itself. Therefore it is incumbent him to kill atheists and believe that the first principles of religion are true doctrine, divine words, above human reason. Therefore one should acknowledge them even though their reasons are hidden. Therefore you will not find one of the philosophers who disagreed with the miraculous deeds that are well-known in the world, for they are the premises that support religion, and religion is the basis of good virtues."

We should take these words with a certain suspicion. Their fundamental assumption is that *religion fulfills a necessary political role*. In order to carry out its political mission, it must base itself on miracle, that contradicts the conclusions of rational inquiry. But since the philosopher has a political motive to validate the Torah, he should not contradict the miracle but should represent it as something above reason. Thus he will not be in danger of undermining the political and ethical order, which is a condition of perfection, for thus he would contradict his own end-goal as a philosopher. Is this a ruse, that in order to establish

the Torah as a stage that leads to philosophy one depicts it as based on assumptions that transcend philosophy? This is a possibility. But it does not seem to be Falaquera's way.

Let us now fill in these matters from another source, "The Letter of the Dream," where he argues: "Truth can be attained in one way, which is the root of truth, its main principle and source, and there is a second way which is subordinate to the first. The first way, which is the root, main-principle and source of truth, is the knowledge of the Torah and what is contained in it consisting of true doctrines, such as the existence of the blessed God; His unity; His bringing other beings into existence from nothingness; His providence that extends over human beings individually and over other creatures collectively (by their respective species); reward and punishment; His changing the course of nature by whomsoever He chooses of His servants; and others similar to these explicit doctrines; and what the Sages of blessed memory expounded of these from what was alluded in the Torah; and the knowledge of the words of the prophets, of blessed memory, and of those who spoke inspired by the holy spirit. For when the true sage takes his stand on the truth of their words, there will be made clear to him from them divine secrets and true matters that are higher from those of philosophical thinkers... For truly the truth is known and emanated from the Torah which preceded the world, and whoever comprehends it and knows what it is... his soul will live forever, and its propositions are true and right altogether; there is no falsehood in them, and no change in them..."

"The second way is like a branch and subordinate to the first. These are the words of the true philosophical sages, some of which instruct us of the truth of first principles. Some say that the truth of these principles is known from the aspect of sense, and that the senses impart them. Other say that they derive from Him who gives reason to humankind... Therefore it is proper to accept from their words whatever those principles attest concerning Him, as long as it does not contradict anything of the Torah's words or the traditions of the Sages."

According to this excerpt, the way of philosophy is secondary to the theoretical way of Torah, for the attainment of truth (= human purpose) through the Torah is higher and more complete, therefore one should accept its words as decisive.

Of course, these words may also be suspected of insincerity. Do they not contradict Falaquera's preference for the philosopher over one who accepts the Torah without philosophical knowledge? But this is

not quite the case. By preferring Torah knowledge, Falaquera does not prefer one who accepts matters on authority, but rather the prophet. The prophet has a higher level of understanding than the philosopher. This view has a philosophical basis in Avicenna's theory of intuition. The prophet perceives truth directly, without inference. He can skip over discursive steps in logical reasoning. There are faint allusions to this view in Maimonides—Moses apprehends the world as created, surpassing the philosopher's intellectual ability. But whoever is not privileged to receive poetic intuition of the truth must resort to philosophical inquiry, and so Falaquera continues and says that the ancients who received directly from the prophets did not indeed need philosophy, but in exile we have need of them. "And so the pious of the Israelite people seized on this way after the composition of the Talmud, such as some of the Geonim, and many of the sages of Sepharad, and especially Maimonides, who spread the fountain of truth to the outside and refuted those words of the philosophers that contradicted our Torah."

The Torah is thus conceived in this way, as in one respect prior to philosophy and in another respect above it. It is a condition for the existence of an ordered society and for the cultivation of good virtues, and therefore for knowledge of the truth. It has its source in prophetic intuition, which is higher than rational inquiry. Reason is a means in order to advance from receiving truth on authority to understanding the higher truth.

In this way Falaquera presented the Maimonidean teaching in its conservative version—as rational inquiry within the limits of the Torah's outlook. Reason receives its purpose and direction from the Torah; it refutes whatever is in conflict with the Torah's doctrine, and it proves what the Torah affirms. It derives from the Torah and comes back to it. But it is clear in any case that the religious ideal is decidedly philosophical here: it consists primarily of understanding the truth, rather than fulfillment of the mitzvot for their sake. This fact perpetuates the inner tension even in this moderate version.

Propagation of Philosophy and the Educational Task

The second task that Ibn Falaquera took on himself was the propagation of philosophical knowledge and setting up an educational curriculum addressing this need. Here is a problem that was raised by the realities that prevailed in Christian Spain. Maimonides did not engage in spreading philosophical knowledge. He wrote for those individuals who

had acquired it on their own, and it was enough for him to indicate what was the recommended literature and the order in which one should study it. He relied on the availability of philosophical study in Arabic. In Christian Spain this was not the language of most Jewish students. Furthermore, the Maimonideans understood that they could not overcome the opposition to their ideas unless they succeeded in introducing the sciences and philosophy into the curriculum of studies of a broad sector of the people, so it would not be the exclusive possession of a select few. The consequence of these differences was to create a need to carve out a whole new educational direction and to implement it through appropriate tools. In other words, one needed to formulate an educational program and to create a popularizing literature of science and philosophy that could be made available to a broad educated public.

This general program is found in Falaquera's book *The Seeker*. In it, he describes the path of the seeker for truth in a popular way. The "seeker" is a man of excellent spiritual qualities. He strives to arrive at the true goal. The book describes his journey in the style of the Arabic *maqama* or the medieval romance. He turns first of all to a soldier, then to an artisan, then to a physician, a grammarian, a poet, and a moralist, and from each of these he asks what is the purpose of human life and receives the answer that his own profession is the true purpose. The journey proceeds by stages from the lower to the higher goals. First there are vocations and ways of life that are needed for physical survival in society (the soldier and artisan), then professions that embody some knowledge (the physician), and finally vocations that participate in higher wisdom (the grammarian and poet—Falaquera considers the poet as inspired), until one arrives at the moralist.

Ethics, in Falaquera's view, is a means for human perfection; it is a preparation for wisdom. But even ethics is not the final perfection for the human being insofar as he is human, and if we consider it the end-goal, we miss the end-goal to that extent. This has become clear with respect to all the prior stages. The seeker examines his teachers with a whole list of questions until he arrives at a question that they cannot answer, and thus it becomes clear to him that their vocation is not self-sufficient. This proves that the end-goal is not to be found in it, but on a higher level of knowledge. Thus he demonstrates to the moralist that he has no explanation from his profession on what is the criterion between good and evil. In other words, without another level beyond ethics, there is no ethics. The seeker does not disqualify his

teachers insofar as they have imparted knowledge to him, but he seeks their blessing and continues on his way.

From the moralist, the seeker goes on to the one who believes in the Torah without rational inquiry. He receives a lecture about the principles of religion and the dangers of inquiry. It becomes obvious that this believer is not ready to undergo questioning and inquiry. He is authoritarian and demands obedience as a precondition to instruction. When the seeker continues to pester him with questions, a quarrel breaks out, and the believer drives the seeker away as a heretic. The seeker does not want to learn any more from the believer, but he asks his blessing. This indicates that he understood nevertheless that wisdom does not contradict faith.

He turns finally to the sage who is versed in philosophy and Torah. This one explains that only through the rational sciences can we understand the Torah as we ought. But he refuses to reveal the truth immediately. He demands systematic study. First the student must learn the Bible and the oral traditions (though Alfasi's Digest of the Talmud and Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah* are sufficient for the latter purpose), then the various disciplines that prepare one for philosophy: arithmetic, geometry, optics, music, logic, physics and metaphysics. Whoever follows these studies in order will arrive at the true knowledge of God.

On the basis of his book *The Seeker* Falaquera developed the continuation of his literary enterprise, containing the whole philosophical curriculum: *The Beginning of Wisdom*, about ethical improvement and the usefulness of the sciences. *The Book of Virtues*—to prove the agreement of philosophy and the rabbis in the area of ethics. *The Views of the Philosophers*—a guide for learning philosophy.

His Interpretative Work: Avoiding Philosophical Perplexity

Falaquera's interpretative project is directly influenced by the foregoing purpose. At the same time as imparting philosophical knowledge, one should prevent the perplexity that is liable to be awakened from its acquisition. Indeed, in one respect he wishes to prevent it by insuring the undisturbed faith in the principles of Torah as based on supra-rational foundations. But in the process of study, questions necessarily come up, and so one must present the solutions that the *Guide of the Perplexed* offers in a way that is conducive to the understanding of every student. On the other hand, Falaquera is conscious of the danger of full public disclosure. It is forbidden to tear down the fence that

Maimonides erected around his teaching in the sight of the unworthy. It is forbidden to transgress Maimonides's injunction that one should not explain that part of his teaching that was not previously explained. Indeed, Falaquera tried to comply with the double injunction. He explained by emphasizing philosophical knowledge as background to the words of the *Guide*; by setting forth the views of the various philosophers next to excerpts from the *Guide*; and by emphasizing the points that required special attention from a particular aspect. In this way he showed the reader how and where he had to find the answer to the problems arising from his study of the *Guide*, without spelling out the answer as such.

This was a work that represents the conservative approach among Maimonidean interpreters. Other interpreters dwelt more stringently on the points of tension in Maimonides's teaching, and they thus prepared the background for the development of new philosophical approaches.

R. Joseph Ibn Kaspi

A characteristic example of the approach that emphasizes the inner tension in Maimonides's teaching is found in the commentary of R. Joseph Ibn Kaspi (1279–1340). *If we could characterize his approach in one sentence, it would be striving to break the tension that accumulated around Maimonides's teachings by spilling its secrets and revealing Maimonides's views on dangerous topics as he understood them, so that they would be obvious to any reader of the Guide.* There would be a heavy social price to pay for this, and Kaspi was ready to pay it. All his life he saw himself surrounded by the hatred of fools who regarded him as a heretic, but he was not dissuaded. In order to break the tension that was generated by the interpretation of Maimonides's writings, Kaspi decided to reverse course. He made a sharp distinction between literature of Torah-study and philosophical literature, and for each of them he composed topical interpretations in a manner proper to that discipline. Thus he wrote interpretations to the Pentateuch, to Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, adhering to the plain sense based on grammar and intra-textual inferences. In this manner he avoided allegorical interpretation and established the teaching of the Bible on the historical and ethical-political planes without looking for any metaphysical allusions. This was in his view the simple explication of the truth in those domains where most are capable of achieving it.

He did not seek the esoteric teaching of metaphysics in the Torah, but in that other area of literature where it properly belonged. In this he saw the tremendous importance of Maimonides's books, but not as a key to interpreting the Bible, but as a work that contained philosophical truth. Here too he exhibited his talent as interpreter. He took it on himself to explain the obscure, to release the tension, to point out all the secrets. He did it in full knowledge, against Maimonides's injunctions, knowing full well that he would be the target of much hostility as a result. But he saw it as his mission, because it had become clear to him that Maimonides's caution had achieved the opposite of its intention.

For this need, Kaspi wrote two complementary commentaries to the *Guide of the Perplexed: Silver Pillars*, and *Silver Ornaments*. In the first commentary he presented the elements of the Maimonidean method that Maimonides wished to communicate to all readers. In the second commentary he examined the esoteric level, sought out the intentional contradictions and deciphered the allusions. In this way he transformed the *Guide* from a work that sought to demonstrate the inner agreement between metaphysics and Torah, to a work that came to teach the metaphysical truth after one had completed one's knowledge of the Torah, out of the assumption that metaphysical truth does not indeed contradict the Torah because the Torah does not deal with it, but only offers ethical and political training and encourages those with the proper spiritual ability to proceed further on their way.

R. Isaac Albalag

Rabbi Isaac Albalag (who lived in the second half of the 13th century) proceeded from a similar viewpoint as Kaspi's but arrived at an opposite method. The great controversy that broke out because of Maimonides's attempt to prove compatibility of the Torah's truth and that of philosophy, raises the question if the effort was at all worthwhile. Is it not better, both from the simple believer's viewpoint and the philosopher's, to admit openly that they are incompatible? In other words, let us concede that the Torah has one truth and philosophy has another, and that each aims to satisfy a vital need of the life of the culture, but in different domains, the one in the social-ethical and political domain, the other in the scientific and metaphysical area?

Indeed, this was a sharp criticism of Maimonides's project, but not in the religious area as such or in the philosophical area as such, but

in the way that he correlated the two. Albalag's starting-point was his claim that Maimonides's attempt to make the Torah compatible with philosophy leads to complete inconsistency, both from the standpoint of the religious outlook and from the standpoint of philosophical theory. Maimonides did not satisfy the requirements of either of the two sources. But Albalag still saw himself as a disciple of Maimonides, and this was expressed in his agreement with the following ideas:

1. The revealed Torah is essential to preserving the political order, therefore any responsible philosopher will take care not to disturb the simple faith in the revelation of the Torah.
2. A perfect political order requires not only practical commandments but also articles of faith common to the public, and these articles of faith should be formulated in a language that will be understood by the common people.
3. There is an identity between some of the belief-articles of the Torah and philosophy, even though they formulate them differently. In Albalag's language:

From this there follow four true beliefs that all religious legislations include and on which they are based, and which philosophy also concedes and endeavors to establish. However, the Torah teaches them in a version addressed to the common people, i.e. in a narrative form, but philosophy does so in a demonstrative form addressed to individuals. These are the existence of reward and punishment, the survival of the souls after death to receive them, the existence of a master to administer the reward and punishment (namely God), and the existence of providence in human affairs to give every person guidance.

Albalag apparently tries to prove further on that one need not have any suspicion of the philosophers, because although they believe in the views of the Torah in a demonstrative manner that is foreign to the common people, the content of the beliefs is the same. Furthermore, in many places Albalag attempts to discover the details of Aristotelian doctrines in the Torah. But even from the excerpt just cited we can clearly see that Albalag was far from simple in this matter. All four articles of belief in which he claims compatibility between the Torah and philosophy are taken from the faith-articles that are necessary for the Torah to serve as the basic law of an ideal state. One must believe in reward and punishment to uphold the political authority of the Torah, and it turns out that *political* philosophy gives these assumptions validity out of political considerations. But it is on this point that we

find the difference between the philosophers and the masses. We cite Albalag's words in the continuation of this passage:

And he should know that the belief of the Torah and of the philosophers are one, and there is no difference except for one that cannot be avoided, and that is that the end-goal of the Torah is the prosperity of the masses and their avoidance of evil, and to teach them as much of the truth as they can tolerate, for due to their deficient knowledge and limited understanding they have not the power to contemplate the ideas of reason and represent them in their true nature, but only in corporeal images such as they are accustomed to grasping... Therefore the Torah addressed them cunningly to adapt to their ear and please their mind with what is possible for them to understand, and figuratively represented the punishment as fire and the pleasure of the soul as material pleasure.

It follows that the philosophers understand this matter very differently from the masses, and though one can interpret these words in the spirit of Maimonides's views, we will see very shortly that the difference between them is fundamental.

Albalag's Critique of Maimonides

Albalag's theoretical critique of Maimonides is rooted in two basic issues that are closely connected with each other: the creation of the world, and the divine will.

1. Albalag rejects Maimonides's whole argument—that the Aristotelian proofs for the eternity of the world are less than demonstrative, but only probable from a given standpoint—as flawed. Albalag disparages this approach as “pseudo-arguments.” In Albalag's view, there is no escaping the eternity of time and the eternity of matter if we accept Aristotelian physics as true. Since Maimonides accepted Aristotle's physics, he must make his peace with what follows necessarily from it. And yet it seems that Albalag does not accept an eternal, self-subsistent world either. What then is his position? He speaks of *eternal creation*. In other words, God creates the world continually from past eternity to future eternity. He considers this view more compatible with the Torah. God is good, and it is God's nature to be good always. It is inconceivable that God should change in this respect.
2. In Albalag's view, *it is impossible to say of God that He possesses will, or that He lacks will*. The manner in which God causes the world is above thought. It would seem at first blush that this is a tendency

to a consistent Torahitic view similar to that of Maimonides, but in effect Albalag expresses through the term “eternal creation” the Aristotelian view that the world is eternal. For what did Maimonides seek to affirm by the assumption of creation *ex nihilo*? We must say that creation for him was the expression of a free will, on whose basis miracles were possible, and on the basis of miracles, the revelation of the Torah on Sinai. When we speak of “eternal creation” and hedge on the issue of will, the whole theological structure that Maimonides erected on the notion of divine will collapses.

Why Should These Matters be Revealed?

R. Isaac Albalag understood well the meaning of this argument from the standpoint of the opponents of philosophy. Why did he reveal them with the argument that in effect this was the well-disguised opinion of Maimonides? Why did he think that it was better to uncover the self-contradictions of Maimonides’s own words in various places in the *Guide of the Perplexed*? He answered this question as follows:

But I have three reasons that Maimonides did not have. The first is that he wished to affirm the plain sense of the Torah and to refute the views of the philosophers from reason, which it is impossible to do. I, on the other hand, concede the plain sense of the Torah as a matter of simple of faith without proof, but I also concede to philosophy by way of nature and human reason.

The second reason is that this book is not Torahitic as his book was so that the masses would read it; so if one of them came to read this book and did not understand it from the beginning to this point, he would be disgusted and despise it and set it aside and not reach this point. And if he did understand everything that was mentioned previously, he would thus rise above the level of the masses to the level of those to whom it was worthy to speak of these things. He would then know that I only concede the view of the philosophers because theoretical inquiry does not afford me the means of refutation. Therefore I only concede on the level of human knowledge but not by way of faith.

The third reason is that in the time of Maimonides the view of the eternity of the world was very strange to the masses so that they imagined that whoever conceded the eternity of the world must therefore deny the whole Torah. But today this question has become so well-known to them that they do not instinctually shrink from accepting the doctrine of the world’s eternity.

It is hard to see these three arguments as mutually consistent, but Albalag’s position becomes clear enough by taking them in conjunction.

He accepts the view that the world is eternal, though he softens it by adopting a different terminology, which does not change the content: "absolute creation." Nevertheless, he is right when he says that in this language his contemporaries are able to accept the doctrine of the world's eternity without being perturbed. For this view is already found in theoretical kabbalah, which explained creation as eternal emanation from the divine "Nothingness" to material reality. In this way the notion of the world's eternity found traditional legitimization, if not in an Aristotelian way then in a neo-Platonic way, with which Albalag, the consistent Aristotelian, cannot concur. But Albalag knows, as we said, that in this formulation that he proposed the opposition between the Torah and philosophy remains at least on the question of the possibility of miracles. He concedes the difference and does not attempt to bridge it. His solution becomes apparent from the distinction that his words seek to establish: He believes in miracles as a supra-rational truth, and he knows that they are impossible from the standpoint of the true physics, and the two domains remain separate and independent.

In order to understand Albalag's views in greater depth, I cite another excerpt from his writing:

Popular opinion is not a reliable basis in knowledge of the truth, but one should learn the truth from demonstration and afterwards look in the Torah, and if its words are consistent with the demonstrated view, we should believe that view both from reason and from faith. If we cannot find for that view a scriptural text that agrees with it, we shall believe it from reason alone. If we find for that view a text that contradicts it, we shall believe the plain sense of the text by way of miracle, and we shall believe that the Torahitic view is not according to our [natural] understanding, but it is of the divine views that are special to the understanding of the prophets and to the activity of a power [of understanding] that is above nature.

In this way you will find that my reasoned view in many things is the opposite of my faith-view. For I know by rational demonstration that the one thing is true by way of nature, and I believe from the words of the prophets that the opposite is true by way of miracle. Furthermore, even the demonstrated view with which the text is consistent, I hold that it is the meaning of the text of a certainty and there is no other. Therefore it is not my purpose in what I explained to tell you that this is my belief which I believe and which I transmit to you as faith, but to tell you it is possible to apply the reasoned view to the text, even though the text may be consistent with this view as well as its opposite and yet even another view. Why all this? So that you should not be of those who hastily rush into erroneous demonstrations of reason, thinking at the start of the process that this is the view of the scriptural text, and therefore wish to bolster their view with theoretical arguments that they

imagine are stronger than those of the philosophers, until they convince themselves that the philosophers err in their arguments and think they are demonstrative, but it is not so.

There are many who follow this procedure among all peoples. Even Moses [Maimonides] was among them. They acted foolishly in two respects: (a) By denying the demonstrations of reason and saying they are not demonstrative. (b) By claiming rashly that their view is the true meaning of the prophet. I have already said in the start of this book that the purpose of the Torah is one that we cannot unequivocally determine from our reason, for just as only a philosopher can fully understand a philosopher's meaning, so only a prophet can fully understand a prophet's meaning. The reason is that their methods of understanding are not only different from each other, but opposite. The one grasps the intellectual notion intuitively, and the other grasps the intuitive notion intellectually. Without a doubt, as the methods of apprehension are different from each other, so are the contents of the apprehension, to the point that what the one has grasped from below is the opposite of what the other has grasped from above. Therefore one cannot challenge the one from the evidence of the other, but the wise person should believe the one on the basis of rational demonstration and accept the other by way of simple faith, and even if the one should contradict the other, neither is to be rejected on account of the other. For it is of the qualities of Torahitic faith that when rational demonstration denies it, the possibility of its truth is not to be rejected, for what is impossible in logical inquiry from the aspect of the conduct of nature may be required as true by prophetic understanding from the aspect of the power of the Conductor (i.e., God). Therefore, many things that are impossible according to theoretical reason are yet possible according to the Torahitic view. Similarly, there can be something that is grasped theoretically by the philosopher that is only grasped by the prophet through his theoretical faculty and not prophetically, not by any deficiency of prophecy, but because its mode of apprehension is higher.

Prophecy and Philosophy—Two Different Aspects of Understanding

It follows that prophecy is a higher mode of understanding than reason. Therefore one should not do philosophy from the Torah's outlook as Maimonides thought one should, but we should also not interpret the Torah according to philosophy. We accept the plain sense and concede its truth even if we do not understand it. But in the domain of philosophy we should follow the philosophers. There follows from this another assertion in which Albalag differs from Maimonides: the prophet is not a philosopher. Prophecy and philosophy are two entirely different modes of understanding, and even though Albalag attributes to the prophet a higher understanding than the philosopher, his understanding does not

encompass the domain of philosophy. It is therefore obvious that since the theory of prophecy is the middle link of Maimonides's religious philosophy and the belief in creation is the basis of the doctrines of the Torah, doing away with both will break apart the system into two separate halves that are independent of each other.

We may well ask: Was Albalag sincere? Did he truly believe in the truth of the doctrines of Torah, though they were not true from a scientific standpoint? We may argue this matter either way without arriving at an answer, and indeed there is no need. The overwhelming conclusion that emerges from Albalag's thesis is that the philosophical direction which Maimonides launched had reached the point where it required a new systematic examination of philosophical foundations.

The first who responded to this challenge was R. Levi ben Gerson (Gersonides).

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

TRANSFORMATIONS IN ARISTOTELIAN PHILOSOPHY

The developments that we have discussed above revolved around the issues of controversy between Maimonides and his opponents. However, during this controversy there occurred an important transition within the inner circle in the understanding of the Aristotelian philosophy itself, one that moved toward its resolution along the lines indicated by R. Joseph Ibn Kaspi on the one hand and R. Isaac Albalag on the other hand. The source of this transition has its roots in the general philosophical currents of the time. Maimonides's Aristotelianism was based on the works of the Arab commentators on Aristotle Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Avempace. These philosophers, like Maimonides, tended to make a systematic connection between philosophy and religion, and though Islam was the religion in question for these thinkers, they made Maimonides's project easier. Perhaps for that reason Maimonides did not comment directly on the major interpretative work of the greatest Arab commentator on Aristotle, Averroes, who was his younger contemporary. Averroes's radical philosophical stance deepened the gap between religion and philosophy, and in the remainder of the 13th and 14th centuries his influence increased and eclipsed that of his predecessors.

We should point out an instructive parallel between the developments that occurred in this respect in Moslem and Jewish philosophies of religion respectively. The philosophical positions of Alfarabi and Avicenna were attacked philosophically from a more orthodox religious standpoint by the philosopher-theologian Al-Ghazali, who had a formative influence on R. Judah Halevi's philosophical position. Averroes set out to defend the philosophical position that had been attacked by Al-Ghazali, and in the course of doing so he radicalized it. It was he who influenced the students of Maimonides, who were exposed to criticism that was based (among other things) on the increasing influence of Halevi's ideas, which were adopted eagerly by the kabbalists. This will help explain the double development that can be seen throughout the 13th century and reached its climax in the 14th century. We see on

the one hand the increasing influence of Halevi among conservative Jewish philosophers, and on the other hand the increasing influence of Averroes's philosophical views on Maimonides's followers. This is clearly discernible in the thought of Maimonides's interpreters in the 13th and early 14th centuries, and we may mention in this connection another Maimonidean commentator who was greatly influential, namely R. Moses Narboni (who died in 1362).

Averroes's Theory of Emanation

Averroes's primary innovation in Aristotelian philosophy of religion was a systematic pruning of the Neoplatonic assumptions that Avicenna had grafted onto the Aristotelian system, starting with discarding the concept of emanation or mediating flow that comes from God as a way of understanding the causal relation between God and the world. In Avicenna's view God is transcendent, necessarily existent, and independent of that reality of which He is the cause. How, then, does multiplicity emerge from unity? Avicenna borrowed the Neoplatonic theory of emanation to explain this, but he interpreted it in the spirit of Aristotelian epistemology: God thinks Himself, and His thought about Himself generates a duality. It is hypostatized as a separate intellect, and that is the first Intelligence. This Intelligence has two notions, one directed upward toward God, and the second about itself. This generates a second Intelligence, which is the common product of God and the first Intelligence, and from its own reflection on itself is generated the outermost heavenly sphere, which is moved by it. This process continues until one arrives at the ten separate Intelligences and the ten spheres of the heavens that bear the stars and planets.

Averroes's Criticism

Avicenna's critics pointed at the many difficulties with this theory of emanation. Maimonides drew on their criticism in order to argue, against the Aristotelian theory of a self-intellecting God absorbed in his own contemplation, the theory of volitional creation, which at a single stroke accounts for the entirety of existence, including matter and its complement of forms.

However, Maimonides considered Avicenna's theory to represent native Aristotelianism, whereas Averroes held that it was a capricious

and unacceptable amalgam of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian views. If one were to remove the foreign graft, this would restore the pure Aristotelian system which would then be logical and convincing.

God is the form of the world. In this sense, one can depict Him as the totality of all forms in their complete unity. They are actual in Him. By contrast, matter is all of the forms in potential. The various essences should not be described as emanating from the divine being. They are nothing else than the forms in the divine thought which are in a state of becoming in matter. In this way God is the spiritual being of the world in actuality, and the world is the spiritual being of God in the process of actualization in space and time.

However, in this conception there remains the primary difficulty of explaining the connection between the divine being, that is actual and absolute, and its reflection on the plane of becoming in matter. Clearly there emerges a dialectical interdependency between them, forcing us to posit God and matter as two separate principles, with the world produced through their interaction. The implication is the abolition of emanation and of God's absolute unknowability. Indeed, human reason can conceive God through positive attributes!

In this way Averroes was able to overcome Al-Ghazali's vehement critical arguments against Aristotelian philosophy, but he sharpened thereby the opposition between philosophical truth and religious truth based on divine revelation.

A. Immortality of the Soul

The first topic that was reopened by Averroes is the immortality of the soul. Maimonides solved it by the theory of the reification of the acquired intellect. Averroes's consistent interpretation of Aristotelian epistemology deprived this theory of its basis.

This comes to expression in Averroes's conception of the role of the Active Intellect. It is the agency from which the forms flow directly to matter and are imprinted in it. According to Avicenna it is a separate Intelligence that transmits the flow of Form that comes to it from God to our world, whereas in Averroes's view it is the unity of all the forms that have being in our world, in which it is actually realized. This means that it is not a source of flow, but it is none other than the self-consciousness of the material world, or more exactly the totality of ideations that human beings have of the world that they live in, the sum of their scientific knowledge...

According to the Aristotelian conception, the forms of existence and the manner of relations between them combine to a fixed sum that can have no addition, subtraction, or change. Individuals represent these forms alternating in matter, but everything that exists is known, and the known is an unchanging given—not to a particular individual, but to the total community of knowers. The individuals who bear this knowledge also come and go, but they pass their knowledge to their successors, and thus the knowledge is continuous, perpetual and unchanging. This explains nicely the influence of the active intellect on the material intellect: a person will not learn something that he did not previously know unless this knowledge exists actually in the thought of a thinker who preceded him. The learner learns from what was known in the human community, and the fixed store of human knowledge that is passed on from generation to generation enables him to actualize his intellectual potential to the point that he becomes a more or less complete representative of the total knowledge of his culture. This negates the value of individuality intellectually as well as physically. The individual is a passing temporal manifestation without any unique value.

It is easy to show that this conception empties the notion of immortality of the soul from any content. It was Maimonides's view that the individual's "acquired intellect" survives death as a separate intelligence independent of the body. But in Averroes's view, the acquired intellect of each individual, even one of accomplished wisdom, is only one aspect of the active intellect, and it has no independent separate existence. Individuals have no eternity; there is only eternal knowledge that is manifested each generation in different individuals, and beyond that it is possible to say that their soul's immortality is the memory of them that is left behind then, or their books that continue to be studied.

The spread of Averroes's system was the occasion of great controversy among Maimonides's disciples already in the 13th century. It is worth mentioning in this connection the book "Retribution of the Soul" by Hillel of Verona (died 1291), that attempted to deflect Averroes's criticism of the doctrine of individual acquired intellect and to salvage the theory of the immortality of the rational soul.

B. *The Problem of the World's Eternity*

The second central theological problem that was reopened to controversy by Averroes is the question of the creation of the world *ex nihilo* by the will of God. Averroes showed unequivocally that Aristotelian

physics demonstrates conclusively the necessity of the world's eternity. Maimonides was able to argue otherwise and to attribute to God a will that is an expression of divine activity, directed beyond itself, only on the basis of assuming the absolute transcendence of God from the world and the world from God. But if God is conceived as the form of the world, one cannot distinguish between them in this way. The interaction between God and matter is eternal, time is potentially infinite, and the world is eternal.

C. *Denying the Agreement of Philosophical Truth and Prophetic Truth*

Averroes's consistent Aristotelianism on the question of the eternity of the world influenced the interpreters of the *Guide of the Perplexed* in the 13th century. Influenced as they were by him, they could not accept Maimonides's views on the question of creation *ex nihilo*, miracles, and the Sinai revelation at face value. They were forced to assume that Maimonides concealed his true opinion intentionally in order to affirm outwardly what were considered "necessary truths" from the Torah's perspective. This had of course the additional consequence that Maimonides's most fundamental principle that there is necessary agreement between the Torah's prophetic truth and scientific truth is only lip service to preserve the faith of the masses who require external divine authority.

The question that could not be avoided was this: What is the philosophical justification for a position that seems at first sight deceptive? Averroes himself supplied the answer: Political philosophy provides that justification, for philosophy recognizes the necessity of religion for its proper role in the state. But here an ironic paradox was revealed: unequivocal clarification that there is no agreement between the Torah and scientific philosophical truth upsets the possibility of paying lip service to the political requirement to give political validation to the Torah's authority, and another kind of justification is required, such as that which we find in R. Isaac Albalag.

D. *The Doctrine of Negative Attributes*

Another point arises in a cardinal point of Maimonides's teaching. Conceiving God as the totality of forms in the world, and determining the necessary causal connection between God and the world, undermines the doctrine of negative attributes, which is strongly neo-Platonic. We have shown that Maimonides's doctrine of negative attributes gives way to a positive intuition, and this intuition is possible because although the

asserted similarity of God and the world reduces to verbal homonymy, nevertheless the divine essence is reflected in the totality of forms in our world. The critics of Maimonides in the 14th century ignored this fact, in order to simplify their criticism and to make their job easier. Still, it is clear that there is a fundamental difference between their conception and Maimonides's, and it is clear that this difference is rooted in the acceptance of Averroes's interpretation of Aristotle. According to this conception, God is indeed beyond our comprehension, because human reason cannot attain full knowledge of reality. Nevertheless, the difference between our knowledge and God's is not simply a matter of homonymy. The attributes that we comprehend are positive.

It follows from this that according to Averroes's conception, the concepts of unity and existence in God and man are identical. The same applies to God's wisdom; this is a complete knowledge of everything in our world. To be sure, such complete knowledge subsisting in perfect unity is beyond human ability, but even partial knowledge is a kind of positive knowledge of God's wisdom.¹

E. *Free Will*

With the abolition of the absolute distinction between human and divine knowledge, the question was reopened concerning the relation of human free will and eternal divine knowledge. If there is no change in God's knowledge and there is no difference between the operation of human and divine knowledge, then everyone must necessarily act in accord with what God knows in advance.

This conclusion confronts the philosopher of religion with a hard choice. If he wishes to affirm human free will and moral responsibility for his actions, he must forgo the assumption that God knows all our deeds and provides for us. If he wishes to affirm divine providence, he must forego free will.²

¹ To put it slightly differently: In Averroes, God's knowledge differs from human knowledge in that the one is a perfect and the other an imperfect manifestation of the same essence (namely, *knowledge*). In Maimonides's view, the same word "knowledge" means radically different things as applied to God and to humanity; there is no one essence that they have in common. (LL)

² As we shall see, Gersonides chose the first branch of this dilemma, Crescas the second branch. (LL)

The Influence of Christian Scholasticism of the 13th Century

Confronting the challenge of Averroes's philosophy opened the door to another transition. Jewish philosophy of the 13th century remained rooted in the cultural soil of Moslem philosophy, even though it developed under Christian political rule. The reason for this was apparently the fact that it was Jewish philosophers who transmitted the scientific and philosophical legacy from their Arabic sources and passed them on to Christian Iberian culture. They considered it as their own heritage and related to it as if to an authoritative source. But toward the end of the 13th century one notices a turning-point in their relation to Christian philosophers, especially Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas. It is recognizable already in the work of Hillel of Verona that we mentioned earlier, and also in the book *The Students' Goad* that was written by another disciple of Maimonides, Jacob Anatoli.

Later one can see the influence of Christian philosophers on R. Isaac Albalag (who adopted their view of the difference between scriptural and philosophical truth) and on Jedaiah Ha-Penini (in the solution to the question of survival of the soul after death). This tendency became much stronger in the 14th and 15th centuries, as we shall see later.

Christianity as a Theological Problem

The penetration of influence of Christian religious philosophy requires that we pay attention to the problem of the relations that developed between Judaism and Christianity in this period. From our discussion of Halevi's religious philosophy we learned that the confrontation with Aristotelian philosophy forced the rival faiths to take a common stance in defense of their revealed foundation. It is understood from this that the more radical the position taken by philosophy against religion, the more the religious traditions felt closer to each other, and the opposition to receiving mutual influence was weakened, especially in the area of philosophy of religion. Nevertheless, the relation of Jews to Christianity was always more problematic and complex than their relation to Islam, and in Christian Spain of the 13th and 14th centuries both of these relationships were burdened by exacerbating circumstances of suspicion and hostility. Driven by various political and cultural considerations, the Catholic Church in Spain increased the pressure on Jews to convert, and the monarchs, who had originally protected the Jewish community because of the material benefit they derived from them, gradually

succumbed to the increasing ecclesiastical pressure. To be sure, the Spanish Inquisition operated directly only against the *conversos*—Jewish converts to Christianity who preserved their Jewish connection in secret—but various methods of intimidation and enticement were deployed against the Jews to get them to convert. Forced participation in public disputations became a part of their daily life routine. This situation, into which Iberian Jews were impelled in a process that eventually led to their expulsion, presented a severe theological challenge. Jews were forced to pay a very high price for the decision to remain Jews, and the faith of many was tested to the breaking point. But the intimate familiarity with the sources of Christianity and its arguments, that was forced on the Jews, had its effect, and an increasing number of Jews converted out of conviction of the truth of the victorious Christian religion.

This, then, is the background for the increasing interest of Jewish thinkers in the Christian philosophy of religion, and in this context it is proper to emphasize that in the debate between Judaism and Christianity, philosophical rationalism offered Judaism a decided advantage over Christianity because of the anti-rational elements in Christian dogma. This was not the case with the neo-Platonic-based Kabbalah. Even avowed kabbalists preferred to debate with Christianity on the basis of Aristotelian rationalist principles. But for this purpose it was necessary to become expert in Christian philosophy of religion, and learning those ideas, even in order to refute them, could lead to absorbing them.

The Influence of Kabbalah

We must finally mention the influence of the Kabbalah. We have already dealt with the kabbalists' ambivalent relation to Maimonidean teachings in the 13th century. In the 14th century we witness an ambivalent relation of Jewish philosophers to the Kabbalah. They reveal the speculative depth of certain currents in it and are attracted by points of parallel between them and their accepted philosophical outlook. Philosophical interest in kabbalah increased along with the consolidation of the Kabbalah as an independent Jewish tradition. Furthermore, there is significance in the fact that Averroes's increasing influence on Jewish philosophy did not weaken Jewish philosophers' interest in kabbalah, but strengthened it. It appears that those who strove to defend Maimonides's original positions as to the agreement of philosophy and the Torah found considerable support in the neo-Platonic Kabbalah. But this was an alliance fraught with tension.

The theoretical Kabbalah that developed under the influence of Christian theology was laden with Messianic tendencies that made it very difficult to draw the line between Judaism and Christianity.

Summary

The varied influences of Averroes, Christianity and the Kabbalah shaped the complex, multivalent background for the appearance of new philosophical positions. The first Jewish philosopher who responded to this challenge was Gersonides (R. Levi ben Gerson), the author of *The Wars of the Lord*.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

GERSONIDES

R. Levi ben Gerson was born in 1288 and died in 1344 in Bagnols in southern France. He was a man of many talents, thoroughly versed in Jewish learning and general sciences. His contribution is prominent in several general and Jewish disciplines: medicine, mathematics, astronomy and Biblical commentary.

He wrote original works in all these areas, but his principal original contributions were in astronomy, a fact that had a noticeable influence on his philosophy of religion. In this area he invented two new observational instruments, and on the basis of his observations he proposed a new astronomical theory as an alternative to the Ptolemaic theory with respect to the conformity of astronomy to physics,¹ and thus earned general influence on the scholars of his day. This is highly significant also regarding his standing as a Jewish religious philosopher.

Gersonides indeed esteemed Maimonides and respected the authority of Aristotle, but he saw himself as an independent scientist and philosopher who was no mere disciple of others but an original thinker in his own right. He thus became the herald of a new period, the Renaissance, in the history of Jewish philosophy.

His principal philosophical work is *The Wars of the Lord*, comprised of six treatises, each of which deals with one topic whose traditional solutions had been rendered problematic:

1. Immortality of the soul.
2. Prediction of the future: dreams, divination and prophecy.
3. God's knowledge of particulars.
4. God's providence in the world.
5. The heavenly bodies.
6. Creation of the world.

In addition to his philosophical works Gersonides composed philosophical commentaries on all the books of the Torah and the prophets in a

¹ See Bernard Goldstein, *The Astronomy of Levi ben Gerson*, New York, Springer-Verlag, 1985.

unique format that emphasized the moral lessons that may be derived from these books. These commentaries were widely propagated in the Jewish world and had much influence.

Gersonides's Stance Toward Maimonides: Appreciation and Criticism

As we said, Gersonides held Maimonides in high esteem, but as an independent philosopher he criticized his views, often vehemently.

This was a criticism that can be seen as coming from an opposite direction from that of Albalag, who wanted to separate the realm of philosophical-scientific investigation from that of Torah study. Gersonides accepted without qualification the assumption that there is an identity between philosophy and Torah, and his criticism of Maimonides derived from those points which revealed the tension that raised the suspicion that there might be a contradiction between his true view and his declared view. From his point of view, this kind of tension attested to failure. Philosophy is in no need of riddles or esoteric secrets, and it is incumbent on it to demonstrate the agreement of philosophy and Torah with clear proofs. Understandably he did not ignore plain texts that contradict philosophical truth and must be interpreted figuratively: "For it is not the way of the Torah to force us to believe falsehoods." In that respect, he praised Maimonides's feats of creative interpretation. But he balanced this assertion immediately with the argument that not only does philosophy have the task to interpret the Torah, but *the Torah has the task to guide the philosopher to the truth in especially difficult matters*, for without the Torah we would be perplexed in trying to investigate them. "For we would not have inclined to this view to which speculation inclines, were it not that we see that it agrees with the view of the Torah. For it would not be permissible to be drawn to speculation if it were found to be at difference with faith. But when this appears to be the case, it is best that we attribute the lack of agreement to our own deficiency." Gersonides claims in several places that the Torah guided him to attaining the truth through rational methods.

Thus Gersonides's preferred method is to engage in free inquiry on the basis of observation and reasoning, but all the while keeping the Torah's directive as a guide to finding the truth, because he was confident from the outset that the critical scientific outlook would turn out to agree with the Torah.

It should be realized from what has been mentioned in the Torah concerning the creation of the world that the opposite has in fact happened to us; i.e., we need not force ourselves to explain the Torah with respect to this topic [i.e., creation], in such a way as to be in agreement with reason. Rather, what the Torah teaches us on this topic has in some sense been a cause of our having arrived at the truth on this issue by rational means.... And that is what we should expect of the Torah, since the Torah is a law by means of which man attains his ultimate perfection...²

If we compare these words to those of Maimonides, that it is not the plain sense of scripture that forces us to maintain the belief in creation but the need of establishing the basis of the Torah itself—the difference between the two thinkers becomes very clear. On this basis Gersonides directed his sharp criticism also against the notion of “necessary beliefs” in the teaching of the *Guide*, against the allegorical interpretation of scriptural texts, and against Maimonides’s writing in esoteric vein: “But the writers who do not write in this manner, but who put on a cloak of secrecy through their ordering of the material or the obscurity of their language...not only do they not serve the reader, but they add perplexity to perplexity. By God, if it is not the purpose of the author to conceal his words from the multitude of readers, so that only the few should understand them, for if the multitude should understand them they would be injurious.” In the last sentence there is an escape-clause to permit allusions. But it is characteristic that Gersonides deals openly with the topic where Maimonides was more secretive: “But our purpose is the opposite, and so we shall wish to respond by filling out his language and meaning, putting his ideas in correct order, so that the reader may have it fully explained in depth.”

Gersonides’s Scientific Achievements

It is easy to see in this criticism some influence of the controversy surrounding the *Guide*. But we shall not be able to understand Gersonides’s approach if we do not take into account the change of the philosophical climate and his own scientific achievements.

As to the change in the philosophical climate, as we recall, the transformation that Averroes’s radical interpretation had introduced complicated the task of reconciling philosophy with the Torah. On the other hand, it raised an intramural debate about the correct interpretation

² Gersonides, *Wars of the Lord*, Book VI, Part 2, Chapter 1, Feldman III, 429.

of Aristotle. This meant that the Aristotelian method could no longer be presented as a closed book.

To this were added developments in Christian thought of Gersonides's time. They also reopened several major issues in epistemology and metaphysics. If Maimonides received the Aristotelian philosophy as a complete system with consensual agreement, Gersonides received it as an open-ended system that had not solved all its problems and it was possible to criticize not only selected conclusions that had bearing on the Torah, but its very foundations.

As we said, Gersonides made innovations in astronomy on the basis of his observations. This had great importance for the topic of the creation of the world *ex nihilo*. We recall that Maimonides based his argument on the discrepancy between Ptolemaic astronomy and Aristotelian physics, to prove that the creation hypothesis was more likely than the eternity hypothesis. Gersonides resolved this discrepancy through his new astronomical theory, and thus demonstrated his independence both of Aristotle and of Maimonides.

This led to a philosophical turning-point not only in the Maimonidean tradition but in general philosophy. Maimonides had based his solution to the problem of the discrepancy between philosophy and the Torah on the assumption that the limits of philosophical method are fixed and firm, so that the topics on which Aristotle was not able to achieve demonstrative certainty are in principle beyond the power of human reason to attain, and we are therefore in a position to receive the view of the Torah on the basis of revelation. Gersonides, who knew that the Aristotelian method was not cast in stone, and what is not known today may be discovered tomorrow, refuses to recognize that science has any limits in principle. On the contrary, by assuming that scientific inquiry progresses and conquers new domains of truth, he could argue on the one hand that the Torah guides the researcher, and on the other hand, that every teaching of Torah is in principle capable of philosophical explanation.

The paradoxical consequence is that the demand for consistent rationalism is consistent with the demand for reconciliation between philosophy and the Torah. More emphatically, Gersonides arrives at the conclusion that through a philosophical deliberation more exacting than that of Maimonides and even Aristotle, it is possible to arrive at a more exacting agreement between philosophy and the Torah. Thus he proceeded to reexamine from a critical standpoint the basic concepts of Aristotelian physics, in order to arrive at a truer philosophical

standpoint that would at the same time be closer to the plain sense of the Bible. With this background, we should regard his basic assumption—that one should interpret the Torah in the light of philosophy, and philosophy in the light of the Torah—as the honest position of a Torahitic philosopher, who believes simply and honestly in the identity of the two realms.

Gersonides's Unique Theory of Creation

We will begin our examination of Gersonides's theology with the most sensitive point in Maimonides's dogmatic teaching—the creation of the world *ex nihilo*. This is, as we recall, the crucial deciding point in the question of the relation of philosophy to the Torah. If it is possible to maintain the theory of creation through rational investigation, then it is possible to maintain the revelation of the Torah from God to the entire people, in other words, as “Torah from heaven.” But if the world is eternal and a supernatural event is not possible, then the Torah is only a human creation.

Gersonides agrees with this assumption, but for that very reason he is not satisfied with the state of the discussion as Maimonides left it. First of all, it is doubtful whether he believed what he professed; and second, even if he believed what he professed, he did not prove the creation, but only assumed it as more likely, and tabled the issue as beyond reason's capacity. Third, the argument by which he sought to prove that the evidences for the world's eternity from Aristotelian physics are inconclusive, was revealed at his own hand as mistaken. As we recall, Maimonides argued that we cannot draw an analogy between something that already is in existence to something in the process of becoming. But according to Gersonides, the laws of reason are categorical and eternal. They always apply. If movement requires prior movement, and time requires prior time, and if existence requires something existing before it, these rules apply always, and it is impossible that God should entertain in His mind an idea that is absurd in a human mind. It follows that if the principles of Aristotle's physics themselves are fully certain, there is no escaping the conclusion that the world is eternal. Furthermore, Maimonides based himself on the incapability of Aristotle and his interpreters to give a continuous causal explanation of the motions of the heavenly bodies, and this was contingent on the claim that there could not be certain and precise knowledge in

the area of astronomy. On the basis of his own achievements in this area, Gersonides took issue with this assertion: it was indeed possible to arrive at certain conclusions on the basis of exact observation!

On the basis of all these considerations, Gersonides embarks on an open discussion, to prove demonstratively and not just as a matter of likelihood that the world is created. Three philosophical objectives are combined in this discussion to one purpose: his criticism of Aristotelian physics and Ptolemaic astronomy, his proof that the sciences are open to innovative research, and his prove that the Torah guides philosophy to the discovery of scientific truth.

Gersonides opens his discussion of creation from the standpoint of physics, and for this purpose he brings up for reexamination the distinction between necessarily existing entities, whose reason for existence is in themselves, and contingently existing entities, whose reason for existence is external to them, which must be created. How can we distinguish them? Gersonides's answer is that it is easy to arrive at a clear distinction with respect to the purpose of the entities in question. Entities whose purpose is in themselves, which they achieve by the inner law of their being, are necessarily existing and do not depend on any external cause. But entities whose purpose is in another external entity that does not follow from the law of their being, exist contingently and depend on an external cause that has determined their purpose and caused them to move towards it.

It follows that if we can prove that all entities in the observable world are oriented not only to their own purpose but primarily to a purpose external to them, we have in effect proved that the world is created.

We therefore should examine all known entities, and we will immediately be convinced that they have characteristics that are not required for their proper purpose. Inanimate objects have characteristics that are useful to plants; plants have characteristics that are useful to animals, and animals have characteristics that are useful to man. The reverse is true; things higher than humanity are of use to the beings under them—namely the stars, that perform actions on our world, without which we could not exist.³ In Gersonides's view, these facts attest that they were created by a being possessed of intentionality and will, and

³ Gersonides of course believed strongly in the astral influences on things on earth. Modern cosmology takes a more remote but no less striking view of how the universe in its totality is connected to the origin and fate of intelligent life. (See Barrow & Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*.)

do not exist necessarily themselves. This is a clear proof that they are created.

It is easy to show that this assumption deviates materially from the Aristotelian outlook on a point to which Maimonides himself adhered, namely that (according to Aristotle) every entity exists for its own sake and aspires to its own perfection, and unity is attained by inclusion of all these entities in the organic unity of the world, of which God is the form. On the contrary, argues Gersonides, the physical structure of the world attests that its various parts exist indeed for themselves but even more so for each other. But this substantive deviation from Aristotle enabled him to argue that the fact that the God who is transcendent to the universe desires the existence of the world is proved with absolute certainty from the physical structure of the world.

On the basis of this direct proof, Gersonides was able to take issue with Maimonides's argument that we cannot make inference regarding the rule of a being yet-to-be from the rule of that being when it fully exists. In place of this argument he proposes another argument: one should differentiate between the causes of existence of a part and the causes of existence of the whole. This argument gives him an opening to criticize Aristotle's concepts of time and motion, and to refute his arguments for the eternity of the world, based on the infinity of motion and time.

Gersonides's Concept of Time

Gersonides accepts Aristotle's definition of time as the measure of motion. Nevertheless, the concept of time that he developed differs materially from Aristotle's. He does not accept the assumption that time exists potentially in all its parts in the same sense, or in other words that the proposition that "the past is no longer," from the standpoint of the present, is tantamount to the proposition that "the future is not yet." The past—he argues—is closer to being actual than the future. In that case, the Aristotelian picture of time as cyclical is discredited, and in its place is a picture of time that one can draw as an extended line, not a circle—a line that progresses from the past to the future. What stands behind this conception? First of all the clear recognition of Gersonides that the sciences and cultural creativity in its totality are not finished and complete—but they are an open-ended, developing construct that is always moving toward greater completion. There is development in time, and time measures not a motion that turns back

on itself, but a creative process. Therefore the past is actual. It endures as the foundation of the present, while the future is truly only potential, and it is laden with novelty.

Moreover, it is clear that this conception is closer to the historical conception of time of the Bible, which is not cyclical but describes a process of progress and events of significance. We see here a true approach to the biblical conception, not only with respect to the notion of the creation of the world, but with respect to understanding the purpose toward which God guides all of humanity.

But if the past is actual relative to the future, this implies that it is not possible that an infinite time has elapsed prior to each present point in time. According to Aristotle, too, an actual infinity is an inconceivable absurdity,⁴ and the proof that Saadia offered for the creation of the world on the basis of this argument reappears here and shows its force. The same rule applies to time as to place. Time must be finite, at least with respect to its beginning.

Gersonides arrived at the same conclusion from considering the notion of time as the measure of motion. Measure by its nature implies limits, otherwise the task of measuring would be impossible. Just as space encompasses a particular volume, so time encompasses the motion that takes place within it, and in this passage Gersonides invokes the principle that the status of the part vis-à-vis the whole is not identical to the status of the whole. When we perceive each unit of time as a part of a more embracing continuum of time, it is correct that its beginning always appears to us as after a time that preceded it, and every present is perceived as the end of past-time and as the beginning of future-time, and it is possible to subdivide it infinitely, as Aristotle argues. But every unit of time, when it is considered by itself as a whole, it is finite and one, i.e. as the time-measure of a particular motion from the instant that we chose to start it until the instant that we chose to complete it—it is a finite and bounded unit, just like a unit of space. Since the concept of the whole, perceived by itself, is prior to the concept of the part, which is a fragment of its continuum, then just as space in general is one and bounded, we must then necessarily

⁴ The question is whether the impossibility of an “actual infinite” applies just to an infinite entity at one time, or also to an infinite series in time. Aristotle intended it just in the former sense. It was the innovation of John Philoponus (6th century Alexandrian Christian philosopher) to apply it in the latter sense. The Kalam and Saadia got this argument from him. (LL)

assume that time in general is one and bounded by an absolute origin-point with no time preceding it.

The criticism of Aristotle's concept of motion is similar to the criticism of his concept of time. Every unit of motion is bounded and finite, otherwise it could not be measured. Therefore motion in general must be finite, though afterwards it can be divided. At this point it is possible to point to many absurdities that follow from the assumption that motion is infinite. For example, observation shows that the motions of the stars are not of equal velocity. This implies that every sphere moves at its own velocity, and if their motion is infinite, we should have to maintain that the infinity of the motion of the faster sphere was greater than that of the slower sphere...

What can be said of the motion of bodies can also be said of the process of their becoming. It is correct that when we consider each body as a part of a whole, it is generated from a body that preceded it, and thus there is no person who was not born from parents who preceded him. But when we consider each body separately as an entity in its singularity and uniqueness, we see it "in itself" as a complete, finite individual. In that respect, it has no predecessor, but it has its own beginning and end, and it should be regarded as created. In the same respect, all of reality considered in its totality is a singular occurrence and created.

*The Difficulty with the Solution of the Problem of Creation:
The Eternity of Matter*

Gersonides criticized certain central assumptions of Aristotle's physics, but it is clear that his system was still Aristotelian in its fundamentals, both as to cosmology (the theory of the heavenly spheres) and as to the concepts of matter and form, potentiality and actuality, and the definitions of time and place in relation to what they contain or measure. Therefore it is no surprise that he encountered serious difficulties in the continuation of his argument. He succeeded in proving the creation of time, motion, and the process of becoming, but he did not succeed in proving that this was a creation "out of nothing."

The Aristotelian principle, that from nothing comes nothing, remained in full force even as applied to God. Since Gersonides also accepted the Aristotelian notion of God as a self-intellecting intellect, and rejected the Neo-Platonic notion of God, according to which the world is emanated from God, he was forced to assume a primal matter

from which the world was created, as a kind of initial state not dependent on God. Understandably, this assumption was likely to bring down the whole structure. In Aristotle's view, there is no matter without form. So if matter was eternal, the world was eternal. Furthermore, the eternity of matter is in opposition to the Torah's outlook that God's creative will is supreme and is not conditional on any external factor. In order to escape from these difficulties Gersonides invented the notion of "matter that does not preserve its form," in other words, matter that is totally passive, that has no motion and therefore is outside of time, and is not an active cause of the world but a kind of zero-level substrate for its existence. In other words, it is absolute potentiality that cannot achieve actuality on its own, but only by the divine will. This is a virtuoso intellectual attempt to reduce matter to the absolute minimum, so that it can be a substrate for reality but still not count as an active factor in the process of creation. But the effort itself attests to an irreconcilable contradiction, for matter without form stands on the threshold of being and nothingness. It is an absurd sophistry that can persuade only one who is desperately in need of it.

Theological Difficulties

As we said, Gersonides argues that the intentional design discernible in the characteristics that beings exhibit for the benefit of others proves that the world is created by an external agent. This conclusion requires a God possessed of will and intentionality who acts not for His own interest but altruistically. Here, too, Gersonides revives a Kalamic argument of Saadia's and thus returns to the Biblical conception.

Nevertheless, Gersonides was not ready to abandon the Aristotelian view that once the world is created, it is maintained by the law implanted in it. In the rabbinic proverb, "the world acts according to its custom." This implies that God is no longer required to direct it or exercise influence on it. God's will is manifested once and for all in the act of creation. From that point on, Gersonides views God as Aristotle does, as the self-intellecting intellect. The upshot is that just as we must assume a formless matter as a precondition of creation, so we must assume a once-and-done act of divine volition that is the exception to the rule of divine inactivity. God steps out of His customary role a single time in order to act beneficently to create the world. Afterwards, He resumes His intellectual self-absorption, and the created world maintains itself in obedience to the natural law implanted within it. In

that case, what caused God's will to change, and how can one explain this exceptional behavior on God's part? According to the Aristotelian conception, is not God's eternal unchanging nature an absolute rule with no exceptions?

Gersonides does not have an answer to these objections, and he has rejected Maimonides's answer that these matters are beyond human comprehension.

Gersonides's Theology

As we said, Gersonides's concept of God is basically Aristotelian: an absolute unity of "knowledge, knower and known." God intellects Himself, and His self-knowledge is on the ideal plane. Since Gersonides conceives the process of creation in Aristotelian fashion as the particularization of ideal formal knowledge through concrete expression in matter (that primal matter that left to its own devices is without form), one may infer that in God's self-knowledge He knows those forms which He causes to be concretized in matter, those forms that man learns through contemplation of concrete reality. Creation proves again that God does not only know, but also wills, and God's will is identical with His wisdom. But we recall again that Gersonides rejects neo-Platonic emanation theory in all its versions. He conceives God as an absolute transcendental being who creates through a single act of will that intentionally establishes nature as a reality that operates through its immanent laws. This is his one deviation from Aristotle's conception of God.

Clearly, this conception leads to radical consequences for the relationship of God to His world generally and to humankind specifically.

Rejecting Maimonides's Doctrine of Negative Attributes

The first consequence touches on Maimonides's doctrine of negative attributes. Gersonides rejects it utterly. Here are his reasons:

1. A negative attribute of God as Maimonides defines it is a "negation of privation," in other words, a negation of a negation. Every neophyte in the study of logic knows that a negation of negation implies an affirmation. If we say God is not ignorant, we have said in effect that God is wise. If we can understand what we

have just said about God, we must necessarily understand “wisdom” as applied to God in the same manner as we understand “wisdom” as applied to human beings. Gersonides thus argues forcibly that Maimonides’s whole theory of negative attributes is a word-game empty of real meaning. If it is anything more, it is a way of concealing an opposite view that Maimonides did not want to express openly.

2. The causal relationship between God and the world requires that we assume congruity between them. Aristotle correctly determined that the effect contains nothing not present in the cause. It is therefore impossible that the divine intellect could regard as possible what the human intellect proves is impossible. It is likewise impossible that there should not be agreement between what is conceived in our minds and in the divine mind. Therefore it is proper to describe God as existing, one, eternal, wise, etc. in a positive fashion. Gersonides agrees that man cannot comprehend God, because he cannot encompass all reality in a single cognitive act; if he were able to comprehend God, he would be God. But we can know that God is existing, one, wise, willing and eternal without encompassing His existence, unity, wisdom, will and eternity.
3. This lays the groundwork for the next argument. There is indeed a difference between each attribute as applied to God and the same attribute as applied to God’s creatures. God is the cause of all. He is the source of all attributes. Therefore God is prior in existence, unity, and all other attributes to all His creatures. Furthermore, the difference between the One who is first, eternal and absolute and those who are consequently caused by Him, is infinitely great. Yet despite this great difference, the use of the notion of “existence,” etc. with respect to God and humankind is not absolute homonymity as Maimonides maintained, but rather a distinction of the primary signification of the term and its secondary, derivative application. God’s existence is primary, and human beings have their existence derivatively from Him.

One must still address the question, whether the plurality of attributes does not create plurality in God. Gersonides replies that the plurality is generated in human thought concerning God, but not in its object, for the different attributes present the different aspects from which human beings regard God, but in God’s thought these are all unified.

But this is nothing special; in man's thought concerning himself he also distinguishes between his existence and his unity, between his wisdom and his will.

Gersonides's rejection of the doctrine of negative attributes enables him to maintain the Aristotelian and Torah outlooks in consistency with each other. Aristotle ascribed positive attributes to God, and so did the prophets. From this perspective, the difficulty with which Maimonides struggled in his theory of attributes appears manufactured and superfluous.

God's Knowledge of the World and His Creatures

However, the greatest problem of reconciling philosophy and the Torah revolves around the question of providence, and first of all with the question: Does God know the world and His creatures as they are in their individual existence? Aristotle argued with impressive consistency that God only knows the eternal forms that flow from Him and the lawful order that determines the relations between them. He does not know the fluctuating, changing particulars that come into being and pass away, for they are "beneath His dignity." The philosophical thrust of this expression is that the ignorance of these particulars, that pertain to creatures on a lower level than God, is no defect or stupidity on His part, but a virtue, for the force of truth applies only to the eternal and fixed, not to the realm of becoming and change. Even within the span of human knowledge, acquaintance with the particulars is only a means to the general truths to which they point.

Maimonides was able to refute the Aristotelian position only through the argument that God knows the particulars because He is their first cause, who arrives at them through the intermediary entities that mediate between God and the terrestrial world. This argument is based on the neo-Platonic conception of God, which Gersonides has rejected. Consistency impels him to accept the Aristotelian conception without qualification.

God does not know the particulars. This is no deficiency in God, for the knowledge of the particulars is beneath the divine dignity. But does this mean that God does not exercise providence in His world? A positive answer to this question would strike at the heart of the Torah's outlook, and so a philosopher true to the Torah could not accept it.

The Problem of Providence

How does Gersonides solve the problem of providence? As we recall, in his opinion, after the creation-event, “the world acts according to its custom.” This is a consistent Aristotelian outlook, opposed to the Maimonidean view that miracle plays a part in the historical process as an event that insures the progressive fulfillment of the divine purpose in history. Gersonides, who also believed in historical development, but did not ascribe it to continual divine intervention, sought an alternative in the inherent pattern that was established originally through creation, and found it in astrology, which he regarded as an empirical science. It is hard to avoid the notion that we have here a precedent of Marx’s materialistic schema, which sought to ground progress in the material order of nature.

In Aristotle’s view, the motion of the heavenly spheres causes primal matter to receive the form of the elements, and causes the elements to combine and establish the foundation to receive higher-level forms. The operation of the world according to its custom can only be understood in this way, given Aristotle’s concepts. Gersonides’s innovation, heralding the modern outlook, was that the lawful pattern inherent in nature lays the basis for progress that does not require supernatural intervention.

Gersonides held that the adherence to natural law involves the necessary determination of events that occur to individuals as individuals, which in Aristotle’s view was the domain of chance. Gersonides’s view was based on astrology, which he accepted as a verified science based on observation, and on his assumption that the heavenly spheres were created not only for their own sake, but included constituents that were created for the sake of their effect on other entities. Their influence on our world is not merely the effect of their own nature, but they operate in a designated fashion on others, and this higher design, that operates through the stars and planets, determines not only the general direction of evolving reality, but also its particulars. There is thus a pattern intrinsic to the world, that determines all historical events in our world in accordance with a predetermined plan.

This outlook influenced Gersonides’s conception of the role of the Active Intellect. According to the accepted medieval view, the Active Intellect is the unity of all intelligibles (ideas, knowledge, truths) regarding our world. According to Gersonides’s conception, it includes also the lawful pattern that unifies reality and guides its progress. This implies that the thinker who ascends the ladder of knowledge and becomes

attached to the Active Intellect will be able to prophesy the future. The implications of this view are rich. Gersonides attributed to the Active Intellect what he could not attribute to God. The Active Intellect is the “angel” appointed over the world, and may be said to exercise providence over it, but it has no authority to change the arrangement of active forces that was determined originally at creation.

To be sure, these assumptions do not solve all the problems of providence. They only determine that all the particular events of our world do not occur by chance, but are governed by a plan. But the idea of providence is based on the assumption that people have free choice, and that God intervenes to give reward and punishment. We recall that Maimonides defined providence as a “judgment.” Does Gersonides’s outlook permit us to uphold this Torahitic stipulation?

Gersonides attempted to respond positively to this as well. All the creatures of the world are subject in his view to the causal regimen that is determined by the movement of the heavenly bodies, but human beings are given the power to deliberate and choose. This is connected with the human ability to consider the future.

Clearly, human choice cannot change the causal efficacy of the heavenly bodies. But their net influence is dependent not only on the factors proceeding from them, but also on the characteristics of the entities that receive their influence. The attitude that they present at the moment of influence is also a factor in their fate, and that is the source of the difference between those creatures that do not govern their own nature, and human beings, who can change their nature through choice. The influence of the heavenly bodies does not vary, but its result can vary through the voluntary choices of human beings, and these results can be defined as providential reward and punishment. If a person acts out of correct understanding of the future, he will be rewarded, and if he acts foolishly, he will be punished appropriately.

It seems painfully clear that on this point Gersonides preserved the religiously nonessential aspect of the idea of providence (though to be sure it was the aspect stressed in popular thought), namely that there is no chance in human fate, it is determined from on high. But he paid for this by sacrificing the ethically-religiously important aspect that Maimonides appreciated: that providence expresses the reciprocity of the person and God.

Explanation of Miracle

The phenomenon of miracle was explained similarly by Gersonides as an interaction of human choice and predetermined fate. The question that this explanation raises is: Why do we not experience miracles continually? Why are they so rare?

To this, he answers: It all depends not only on the influence of the heavenly spheres, but also on human readiness. Miracles occur when there are individuals or communities that merit them through their deeds or their virtues. Here too Gersonides preserved the popular faith in miracles as events that are exceptions from the natural pattern, and expressions of "providence" inasmuch as they are part of the universal order and dependent on the readiness of the recipient; but he left out the essential part that Maimonides kept, namely that the miracle is an expression of the intentional intervention of God in the process of history for the sake of a higher purpose. It turns out that Gersonides drew closer in some respects to the historical outlook of the Bible, but neglected its moral aspect.

The Problem of Prophecy

From what we have said so far it is easy to guess how Gersonides solved the problem of prophecy. He agreed with Maimonides that a prophet must be perfect in his ethical virtues, intellect and imagination. But what distinguishes him as a prophet is not found in the intellectual-theoretical realm, but in the area of political leadership. This is because he is able to foresee the future with perfect accuracy, and he knows how to give the right advice in accord with what is forecast to happen. This is expressed in the formulation of his prophecies, which are always conditional: If the people behave in a particular way, there will be one result, and if they behave otherwise, there will be a different result. The people must choose, and that is the difference between a prophet and a diviner.

This conception of prophecy assumes that foreseeing the future on the basis of the astrological configuration is scientific, and furthermore, that the astral configuration operates on the imagination and the practical intellect of people through dreams and other visions. Gersonides bases these views on empirical investigation, especially the interpretation of prophetic dreams of individuals whose imaginative faculty is sensitive in that respect. Experience proves, in his view, that the correct inter-

pretation of such dreams yields positive results. He believes that this is a common phenomenon, not restricted to prophets.

What, then, distinguishes prophets from gifted dreamers and diviners? First of all, they differ in the clarity and precision of their imaginative depiction of the future (this will depend on whether they derive it from the heavenly bodies or directly from the Active Intellect). Second, it is not enough to have a dream, which is a representational activity of a sensitive imagination; it is also necessary to have the knowledge to “read” the dream, i.e., to interpret it—Pharaoh had such a dream, but he needed Joseph to interpret it. We should not be surprised that unintellectual people tend to have prophetic dreams—they are strong in imagination, unrestrained by intellect; but their dreams are imprecise, and they cannot interpret their own dreams.

The prophet, then, is one gifted with a pure imagination and clear intellect. He gets his input directly from the Active Intellect. His dreams are clear and resonant, and he knows how to interpret them. The proof is that the prophet is always right and never wrong. We must add that the prophet uses his knowledge for a correct and exalted purpose. He differs in all these respects from the philosopher, the diviner, and the soothsayer. It seems that here, too, Gersonides reflected the popular conception of the prophet as one who predicts the future, and in compensation he sacrificed the special spiritual and ethical stature of the prophet in Maimonides’s teaching.

Human Nature and Destiny

Human Purpose: Perfect Knowledge of Eternal Truth

We come finally to the question of Gersonides’s view of correct religious behavior. In at least one place in his work Gersonides said that the fact that the world was created as an act of beneficence obligates one to give thanks for it, so that religious ritual is interpreted as an expression of obedience and acknowledgement to the Creator-God for His kindness. But since creation is a one-time event for Gersonides, the authoritative reason for keeping the commandments remains peripheral. In his essential conception, Gersonides remains faithful to Aristotle. The purpose of human existence is perfect knowledge of the eternal truth. Immortality after death also depends on this. Indeed, with this

topic—in which Gersonides made a contribution to the progress of religious thought—we close our discussion of his teachings.

Immortality

The discussion of immortality was reopened by the spread of Averroes's outlook on the relation of the Active Intellect to the individual human intellect. Gersonides posed it all the more sharply (as was his wont) by focusing on the question of fidelity to the Torah's literal view, in which respect all the solutions based on Aristotelian psychology—including that of Maimonides—seemed unsatisfactory. If we attend to the rabbis' words themselves, they do not speak of survival of the intellect, but of the soul, and in Gersonides's view this conceptual distinction shows how the rabbis were concerned with the individual personality in its full particularity. Two points follow from this:

1. There is eternal worth in the individual existence of each person in his own right.
2. There is a difference in substance between the human soul and the angelic (the "separate intelligences"), one that is not effaced even after death. To be sure, the Torah teaches that the soul separates from the body and attains spiritual life, but it remains human and not angelic.

The Aristotelian solutions current prior to Gersonides do not meet these two criteria of the Torah-rabbinic doctrine of individual immortality.

Views on Immortality Analyzed

In the light of the Aristotelian views that Gersonides rejected, two questions come to the fore: (1) What is the relation of the human soul to the acquired intellect? (2) What is the relation of the acquired intellect to the Active Intellect? Does the thought of a person become his own, even though he received it from the Active Intellect? Or maybe (as Averroes's doctrine suggests) is it the Active Intellect that is thinking through the medium of various people's material intellects, so that their acquired intellect remains identified with the Active Intellect and is deprived of its particularity in each case?

Gersonides's detailed discussion of these questions examines all the interpretations of Aristotle that were current in his time. We shall limit ourselves to his preferred interpretation, that of Alexander of Aphrodisias, one of Aristotle's earlier and most reliable interpreters.

According to this interpretation, a person's material intellect is an acquisition that is borne by the faculties of the soul that serve the process of knowing: the imagination and the senses. These faculties operate through bodily organs by whose means the soul is connected to the body, and thus is formed a partition between the intellect and the body. It becomes the basis of individuality of a person's thought: each person thinks his own thought by means of his individual senses and imagination. Even though John Doe should agree with Richard Roe, each one is thinking his own thoughts, tied to his own intellectual faculties, so that the individuality becomes internalized by the thinking "I" and is no longer directly dependent on the body.

Aristotelian Critique of Individualism

It is easy to show that with respect to the problem of immortality, this is just the start of the way. The essential problem is: What maintains the individuality after the connection with the body is severed? Is this individuality preserved just as long as the intellect is a power borne by the soul's faculties, only to disappear when the connection with the body (including the mental faculties which have a physical basis) is gone? To be sure, the individual intellect gives the appearance of being wholly complete and independent, but Aristotelian psychology identifies the eternal intellect with knowledge in general, and knowledge in general has no separate individual existence: what Aristotle knows to be true and what Plato knows to be true, and what is known by the Active Intellect—it is all one and the same! The difficulty is rooted in Aristotle's conception of individuality as the characteristic of material bodies. Spiritual essence can only be one.⁵ Its individuality is all-inclusive. Therefore a person can preserve her individuality only by remaining attached to the body. Separation from the body annuls it. There is no way to correct this Aristotelian conception except from experience. Even though in this point Gersonides did not go far in his critique and remained Aristotelian in the last analysis, nevertheless he pinpointed the essential problem and made an original contribution toward its solution, which is his most important philosophical innovation in this area.

⁵ Maimonides invokes this principle to prove that philosophically God must be a simple unity. (LL)

How Can Individuality Exist Apart from the Body?

He raises the following question in this connection: Does the perfection of an individual's acquired intellect necessarily unite him with the Active Intellect that feeds him his concepts, as Averroes and the majority of Aristotelian commentators maintained? Gersonides argues against them that even though a person should attain intellectual perfection, he still does not attain the enlightenment of the Active Intellect and become united with it, because to achieve that degree it would be necessary to know everything as the content of a single intellectual act. A person who knows through his senses cannot intuit in the infinity of constitutive particulars the essences that correspond to an idea in the Active Intellect, and so his knowledge cannot be all-inclusive, but only partial. He cannot discern all the intermediate ranks in the hierarchy ranging from inanimate to vegetative, animal, and rational beings, but only the major lines of demarcation; but without the intermediate ranks we will not be able to grasp the multiple phenomena of our world as presenting a perfectly smooth continuous progression, and therefore we will not be able to understand them as the content of a single intellective act. In other words, the limitations that stem from the dependence of human reason on the senses requires that human knowledge, no matter how much it may progress and increase, will always remain incomplete and composite. Note that he speaks here of a limitation that will not be overcome even after separation from the body and the senses after death, because the limitation is not in the clarity, purity, or grossness of such knowledge, but in its scope and essential content.

But this still does not address the question, what can support the existence of the individual (albeit imperfect) intellect after it is severed from the body? Must it not perish with the body? On this point Gersonides made his original contribution. We recall first that in the discussion of the creation of the world Gersonides expressed his view that each person is created insofar as he is a particular individual. That person's individuality is not given him by his parents, but exists in itself. To this we add the insight that the past, unlike the future, is not pure potentiality—what has come to pass is less actual than the present, but more so than the future. This means that each individual who has lived represents a unique, irreplaceable value in his own right, and he exists in a certain respect even if he disappears bodily. We must add that in Gersonides's view the Active Intellect encompasses in its knowledge not only the universal categories and forms, but also the individuals and

their life-events, for the knowledge of the All implies knowledge of all the individuals that constitute it. This is the basis of his argument that each individual is the object of its own contemplation and knowledge. Its knowledge is not identical with the knowledge of other objects, even if they are of the same category and species. Therefore every act of intellection, in that respect, has an eternal status in its own right. If I look at John Doe and Sarah So, I will know the form of "humanity" through abstracting from them. If someone else looks at Richard Roe and Leah Lo, she will know from them the same general form. But the mental image of John and Sarah is not the mental image of Richard and Leah, and my mental image of "humanity" (even if identical in content) is not numerically identical with the person next to me. They are two separate intellectual acts, as well as having different material referents. The knowledge of them will therefore be separate and distinct in the minds of every observer, including the Active Intellect.

In Gersonides's language: "For instance, my knowledge must be different than the knowledge of my predecessor, for my knowledge is predicated on the individuals that exist now, whereas their knowledge is predicated on the individuals that existed in their time." Thus, every act of knowledge must be non-identical to someone else's similar act of knowledge. The very fact that it is I who am thinking and not someone else, is significant even if we are both thinking the same thought—"the fact that the cognitive acts are of a particular individual *qua* individual is indeed the case." We add: Since the uniqueness of a person's knowledge is not cancelled out in this fashion, the separate knowledge of different objects can conceivably survive without being swallowed up eternally in the Active Intellect.

Gersonides thus distanced himself considerably from the classic Aristotelian outlook, but still remained wedded to the Aristotelian assumption that the source of individuality is bodily matter. First of all, the individual body is not eternal, but only the knowledge that is generated from it in the intellect that considers it, and that knowledge is particular in respect of the individual bodily characteristics that it cognizes, not in respect of the form it knows (the form of "humanity" represented by John, Sarah, Richard and Leah is one)! Secondly, the individuality of the thinking human intellect is constituted by its dependence on the sensory faculties, and specifically on the unique sensory faculties of this particular body right here-and-now, not on the general nature of intellectual enlightenment as such (which does not differ among individuals). Thus, Gersonides's argument reduces

to the assertion that the bodily connection, which is the principle of individuation, is preserved historically in one's knowledge, since it is the knowledge of a particular individual, and in the knower, insofar as he is an individual knower.

But in the last analysis (one may argue), when the body disappears the individual knowledge remains only in the memory of those who remember him, and in the eternal memory of the Active Intellect. Does this solve the question of the immortality of the individual soul in the way that the Torah understands it?

It is possible to quibble, but we cannot deny that on this topic (as with the creation of the world) Gersonides succeeded in proving his case that radical analytical criticism of the Aristotelian outlook could lead one closer to the Torah. He accurately captured the "existential feel" that characterizes the classical Torah outlook, as opposed to the "existential feel" of Aristotelian philosophy, with respect to the importance of history and the significance of the individual and how the individual stands with respect to God. In each case, he suggested a solution that contributes positively to the development of Jewish philosophy of religion.

Summary

From Gersonides's fascinating attempt to solve the problem through internal criticism of the Aristotelian method, without abandoning its framework, one may conclude that the philosophical process that based itself on the Aristotelian school exhausted its possibilities without arriving at satisfactory solutions. In any case, this describes the limits of development of the Maimonidean school in its original systematic setting. Any additional development would require more radical criticism, that would exchange the Aristotelian method for a method based on new assumptions. This would be the daring step that would be taken by R. Ḥasdai Crescas.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

R. HASDAI CRESCAS

In originality and novelty of thought, Crescas's philosophical masterwork *Light of the Lord* is equal to Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*. Indeed, with respect to their contribution to general philosophy, Crescas's originality exceeds Maimonides's. Maimonides did not go much beyond the state of knowledge of the Aristotelian school in philosophical theory as such. His innovation was focused on reconciling tensions and contradictions between philosophy and the revealed truth of Torah. Crescas, on the other hand, attacked the foundations of Aristotelian philosophy, and thus broke through to a new path of philosophical thought. The fact that his work was scarcely accepted and did not enjoy the widespread influence in its time that the *Guide* received in an earlier generation, stemmed from its revolutionary character. The Aristotelian school still ruled supreme, even if a few cracks showed in it. This latter fact was well recognized by Gersonides, who was aroused, as we saw, to introduce corrections and to repair the Aristotelian philosophy, using its own tools and assumptions. Crescas's meager influence is testimony nevertheless to his great importance as a pioneer in the development of a new religious philosophy, which gained ground and opened new horizons in the succeeding generations. Therefore his teaching deserves sustained analysis.

Crescas as Conservative and Innovator

If Crescas's philosophy was innovative to the point of being revolutionary, we must stress the accompanying paradox that his innovation in philosophy stemmed from his conservatism in religious thought. He was thus the opposite of Maimonides, who was conservative in philosophy and revolutionary in religious thought. This may be indicative of a significant tendency in the development of religious thought, which we may discern also in Gersonides, who influenced Crescas, and whose example may have encouraged him to carry out his revolution in philosophy. Gersonides also tried to correct Aristotelian philosophy through more consistent application of its assumptions, for the purpose of reaffirming the biblical outlook more literally.

Religious conservatism can be a motivation for philosophical revisionism. During the Maimonidean controversy it became clear that the more radically the Aristotelian philosophy was interpreted, the more it threatened the foundations of simple faith in the Torah based on revelation. It was therefore natural that conservative thinkers who sought to defend the simple faith in revelation would exploit the weaknesses of philosophy in order to restore the previous status quo and return to the same certainty of faith and philosophy that was expressed in Saadia's *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*.

Such was Crescas's declared purpose. He heaped criticism on Aristotle in order to undermine the foundations of Maimonides's religious philosophy, but he did not develop an alternative method. Indeed he paved the way for new ideas of physics and metaphysics, but he did not develop a new physics or metaphysics of his own. It was his objective to rescue naïve, "simple" faith, to renew it and deepen it in its own fashion, and a conservative approach can lead to a profound renewal of understanding the seemingly simple words of Torah. Only if we contemplate both sides of this paradox will we understand the greatness of Crescas's contributions to the history of Jewish and general philosophy.

The Cultural-Historical Background to Crescas's Project

We recall that Maimonides's halakhic and philosophical achievement responded to a new historical reality of the Jewish people in diaspora. He was the great leader who united the people around his halakhic and theoretical works and raised them to the cultural level of that period. In that respect, he is beyond comparison with any successor. But Crescas faced a similar challenge in his era. It was a time of great changes in the external and internal conditions of Jewish existence. Like Maimonides, Crescas was called to respond to this double challenge. He had standing and influence in the royal court of Aragon, and he exercised his influence fully in order to secure the Jewish community in Spain against the persecutions and growing pressures toward conversion. His intellectual project was part of that response. His attack on Maimonides was the result of his desire to reverse the historical current of his time, and thus to achieve for his time what Maimonides achieved in the earlier period. In order to understand the full difference between the two figures in all these respects, we must take a look at the new historical situation and the challenges it presented.

The Change in Jewry's Status in Christian Spain

Until the late 1300s the Jewish community was materially well-established and enjoyed strong political protection. Many individuals, who constituted a thin but influential social elite, were accepted into the political, economic and cultural ruling class of Spain, and their status reflected on the community as a whole. It was clear that the kings of the Iberian kingdoms had an economic, political and cultural interest to afford protection to the Jewish communities and to reaffirm the privileges that permitted them judicial autonomy to conduct their religious lives according to their traditions. Nevertheless, the interest of the kings stood in contradiction to the interest of the Christian Church and its policies toward the Jews. Indeed, the Church represented the attitude of the Spanish people toward the Jews, and to a considerable extent also the personal attitude of the king and the nobility. The influence of the Church in Spain was quite strong in this period, for the reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from the Muslims was still in progress. Even in the period of relative security there were frequent outbreaks against the Jews, along with strong pressure to convert. This was one source of the strong opposition between the Maimonideans and their opponents. The rabbinic leadership, who wanted to strengthen the people against the temptation and pressure to convert, saw in philosophy a factor that weakened the people's faith and fortitude. Nevertheless, this period stood out generally as one of security.

However, from the late 1300s onward, the situation deteriorated rapidly. Individuals still enjoyed positions of influence in the economic, cultural and political spheres, but the general community saw no benefit from the fact. Persecutions and pressure from the Church increased. The community could no longer afford the exploitative taxes by whose virtue they had enjoyed political protection, and thus the state's motivation to defend them against the Church-incited mobs withered. In the moments of crisis that waxed and waned, the community was left defenseless to its fate.

There were still individuals who enjoyed positions of influence in the Spanish society, culture and political leadership. But now not only were they unable to rescue the community, but they were also pressured to convert to Christianity. As part of that pressure, the Church and monarchy initiated public disputations, in which the Jewish leadership were forced to participate, and they were conducted under the shadow of threat that greatly limited the ability of the Jewish spokesmen to

defend and respond to the successive attacks. To these were added laws whose purpose was to circumscribe their economic activity, to inhibit social interaction between Jews and Christians, to isolate the Jews and humiliate them. In the same vein the blood libel and other accusations were revived. All this was done to fragment the communities and bring them to conversion. As to the social and spiritual pressure on individuals to convert, it is worth pointing out that while in the 13th century it was still possible for a Jewish sage to stand up openly and forcefully for the truth of Judaism and not only defend his own faith but attack Christianity as well (as Nahmanides did in the public disputation before the king of Aragon against the convert Paolo Christiani, whereupon the king declared him the victor), in the 14th century the circumstances of the disputations became more severe and took on the character of an inquisition. The Jewish representatives were subjected to cross-examination by the Christians as if they were in the dock. Not only could they not mount a counter-offensive, but they had to be extremely cautious in their own defense in order not to embarrass their interlocutors or cast aspersions on Christianity, and thus they were at a continual disadvantage. A similar transformation can be seen in the character of the anti-Jewish riots and campaigns. If in the past the riots were incited by the lower clergy, now it was the systematic and intentional policy of the church. These signified a deliberate purpose of the Church to solve the problem of the all-too-strong and influential Jewish presence fundamentally and permanently.

This policy culminated in the riots of 1391, which dealt all the Jewish communities of Aragon a mortal blow. Crescas was then the leader of the largest Jewish community in Aragon, and it fell to him to lead the re-establishment of the communities in that country. The trauma of that experience had an impact on his religious thought.

Thus the riots of 1391 expressed the Church's purpose to uproot the Jewish presence from the Iberian peninsula (a goal that was later achieved in the expulsions of 1492 and 1496). The Church's realization of this goal was slowed by the material interest of the monarchs. They considered the Jewish community as an irreplaceable economic and cultural asset, as well as a source of income. This is why the king of Aragon was eager to reconstitute the shattered communities that had suffered the riots of 1391, and appointed Crescas to lead the effort. This is also why the riots were succeeded by a period of relative calm. In retrospect we can see that this was the calm before the storm. The Jewish leadership understood this and made preparations

through fortifying the spiritual endurance of the community. The significance of Crescas's intellectual project should be seen in the light of this background.

Spiritual Tensions in the Spanish-Jewish Community

The political and economic pressures led to social disintegration which had serious spiritual effects as well. The roots of the crisis went back to the relatively creative period of the 13th century. The Jewish intellectuals of that time—scholars, physicians, scientists and philosophers—filled a central role in the general Spanish culture and were socially accepted into the elite class. This resulted in a tension and division in the Jewish community between the assimilating elite, which became estranged from the rest of the Jewish people the more they redoubled their efforts to fit in with the ruling stratum and to prove their essential worth, and the Jewish masses. There thus developed an opposition—the like of which had not been seen in Spanish Jewry of the Moslem period—between two leadership cadres—a political and economic leadership of the wealthy, the well-connected, and the secularly-educated—and a rabbinic leadership which grew up from the stratum of traditionally religious scholars. In the 13th century there was already severe tension between these two groups, the one pursuing its own good and that of the government, and the other seeing itself responsible for the fate of the community and its Jewish identity. But the tension between the two quickly turned into status-based social tension between the classes of the community, the rich against the poor, frequently breaking out into sharp conflict over the structure of communal institutions and their governance. In the wake of the cataclysm, when Crescas was rebuilding the community, he had to contend with this factor as well, and to reestablish the communal institutions on a new basis.

The special tone of intellectual life of this period is noteworthy. We see this already in the agenda of scientific and philosophical activity of the 13th century. In Arab-ruled Spain, it took on the character of a cultural Jewish renaissance: they imitated the Arab elite in all areas of creativity to compete with them, to enrich and beautify their own culture. In Christian Spain, the primary goal of the intellectuals, scientists and philosophers was to pass on the Arab cultural legacy to the Christian-Spanish elite. This brought about a change in the areas of concentration—much less in religious and ethical thought, and more in general topics of science and philosophy. Scholarly pursuits could be

the vehicle of social aspirations; these set the philosopher in conflictual tension with a way of life based on Jewish religious tradition and with the spiritual assumptions on which that way of life was based. We can draw a line in the cultural realm corresponding to that in the social realm. The split in the leadership resulted in a cleavage in religious attitudes, so that engagement in philosophy and science defined a group of intellectuals tending toward assimilation, whose attitude to the traditional halakhic life-style veered from free-thinking critique to distancing and ridicule. In effect, they used Maimonides's rationalistic philosophy as a rationalization for freeing themselves of the burden of religious practice, even though Maimonides himself was strict in that regard. It is therefore no surprise that the rabbinic leadership distanced itself from philosophy and philosophical education, and embraced kabbalah and mysticism, which were more faithful to the religious sources and lifestyle.

This is all background for the profound and bitter controversy that was waged over the Maimonidean legacy in the 13th and 14th centuries in Spain. We saw that Maimonides himself was sensitive to the dangerous aspect of the issues dealt with in the *Guide*, but we should recall that he wrote against the backdrop of the Golden Age of the Jews in Moslem Spain, and his influence was absorbed by a different cultural sphere, where the latent dangers were more readily activated. The intellectual tensions in his work were compounded by social tensions. This helps explain the character of the controversy, which took on social and popular coloration. The philosopher was accused of theological heresy and religious negligence, while the kabbalist united the rabbinic leadership with the religiously-practicing community.

Of course this internal conflict grew worse as a result of the increasing pressure and threat from the Christian environment. Still, we must emphasize that the philosophically-minded Jewish intellectual who was distanced from traditional Jewish belief because of his intellectual sophistication, was even more distanced from Christianity. The intellectualism characterizing the Aristotelian school, on which Jewish philosophers were brought up, was very anti-Christian in its implications. In this respect, at least, Jewish religious teaching was more rational in its proclivity than Christianity, but the social enticement was powerful, and when one added the threat, very few Jewish intellectuals passed the test. This is another facet of the external and internal catastrophe which Crescas and his followers had to face. All this helps to explain the palpable force that we sense behind the fierce attack that Crescas

mounted against the doctrines of Maimonides, and thereby against the whole Aristotelian system. Even so, in arguing against Christianity, he could not refrain from using the standard Aristotelian arguments that lay at hand.

Yet another change should be noted in describing the transition from the 13th to the 14th century. The kabbalah, that was previously described as a pillar of the rabbinic position, was fraught with its own dangers, given the spiritual realities of Spanish Jewry. If Aristotelianism could be described as utterly contradicting Christian dogma, the neo-Platonic-based kabbalah shared common assumptions with Christian theology (for instance, the theory of the Sefirot resembled that of the Trinity), and the common ground expanded when the kabbalah took on Messianic overtones. Furthermore, while Messianism gave hope, it also expressed impatience, weariness from suffering, rebellion against the Jewish people's fate and yearning for release from its troubles. This also gave rise to criticism of a compulsory religious lifestyle and desire for freedom. The Christian polemic against Judaism exhibited an antinomian critique of the compulsory Law, and now the kabbalah manifested antinomian tendencies, especially in a late addition to the Zohar (the *Ra'aya Mehemna*) which would later be a source of the antinomian strains in Sabbateanism. In any case, it was clear that kabbalistic literature had also absorbed some Christian influence, and in not a few cases it led to conversion—not from external compulsion, but from the internal conviction that Christianity is the true Judaism.

A Conservative Synthesis

We can finally describe Crescas's project as a response to the double challenge, external and internal. We can provisionally describe it as an attempt to find a new synthesis of philosophy and kabbalah to neutralize the dangerous elements in both, and to provide through careful analysis a foundation for a conservative position of strong halakhic religiosity that could stand up to all these threats. But it will be understood now why the search for a way to establish a Torahitically conservative position will appear revolutionary, both from a philosophical and from a kabbalistic standpoint.

Not uncommonly in such situations, the attempt to stake out a new position in a polemical context will reveal (though indirectly and unintentionally) deep affinities with the views against which one is fighting. Intellectual creativity, even in a mode of revolt, cannot shake itself free

of the context from which it is born. This is very much the case with Crescas, as regarding both his Jewish roots and his Christian environment. Internally, Crescas never totally shook loose of the Aristotelian influence against which he fought. First of all, he used it in his debate with Christianity. Second, he built his own philosophical method out of dialogue with it, and thus his own method is still partially based on the method that he refutes. Third, he accepts many elements from it, in psychology, epistemology and metaphysics. Crescas also did not free himself completely of kabbalistic influence, for though he rejected the doctrine of emanation, he accepted its God-concept, and thus he truly established a synthesis out of his criticism. The same is true of his relation to Christianity. In his internal conflict Crescas stood in a similar situation as many Christian theologians of his own time, and even though he understandably did not mention them or acknowledge their influence, it is possible to find ideas whose source is found in their writings. This is a fertile field for future research.

His Teacher, His Colleague, and His Disciple

Crescas's system was not the product of a lone effort, but emerged from contact and interaction with a group of scholars. He testifies to this in his introduction to his book *Light of the Lord*, but he does not supply information about them, and we do not know who were the members of the group or how they cooperated. On the other hand, we know something of several individuals with whom Crescas was connected, and their thought is important background for understanding his. I shall deal briefly with three of them: his teacher R. Nissim Gerondi, his colleague R. Isaac ben Sheshet (RIBaSH), and his younger contemporary R. Simeon ben Zemah Duran.

R. Nissim Gerondi

The primary fame of R. Nissim Gerondi (1315–1375) was in the field of halakhah. He was the leading authority of his generation in Aragon and the teacher of many important scholars, including Crescas and Ribash. He was not an independent philosophical thinker or the founder of an original system, but he felt the obligation of a leader to take a stand against views and tendencies that were dangerous in

his view, especially from the Jewish philosophers on the one hand and the attacks by Christianity on the other. We see this in his published book *Twelve Sermons*.

The Polemic against Christianity

In his polemic against Christianity, R. Nissim Gerondi embraces several views whose source is in Maimonides's *Guide*. In this respect he simply reflects the common wisdom without adding anything. This is further testimony that Jews were more comfortable arguing against Christianity on a consistent rationalist basis. The one novel feature—which points to the new direction that the Jewish-Christian dispute was taking in that period—is found in his defense of Jewish law. Christian disputants argued frequently against the “Pharisaic” character of Judaism, citing ethical deficiencies and perversions that they claimed to find in Talmudic law. Jewish respondents would counter by emphasizing the superiority of the Mosaic law, that guides a person to those actions that lead to prosperity in this world and salvation in the next. But the Christians counter-argued that Talmudic law is defective precisely in the area of social and political governance, as opposed to the Christian states which can boast of well-developed and efficacious laws. To this R. Nissim responds by drawing a distinction between “the law of justice”—referring to the absolute, eternal system of laws that determine the right relations between individuals—and “the law of the state,” which changes in accordance with the circumstances of time and place, for it is its nature to be sensitive to the needs of these circumstances. The Torah lays the basis for both of these, but it spells out the particulars only of the eternal law of justice, while it leaves the law of the state to the institution of the monarchy, which must legislate within the parameters of justice. This explains the apparent advantage of Christianity. Since the Israelite monarchy ceased to function, while Christian states thrive and develop, it is clear why Jewish law has not kept pace, while the civil law of Christian states continues to develop. But this advantage is only imaginary, because it does not prove the advantage of Christian religion over Jewish religion. On the contrary, the civil law of the Christian states is not specifically Christian or religious in character, whereas the law of a Jewish state, subject to the requirements of the divine law of justice and based on the foundations of the Torah, would surely be superior to the laws of the Christian states. In other words, the Christian states have a contingent historical and political superiority, whereas the Mosaic

Torah has an essential superiority in principle. These reflections signify an interesting turn towards historical and political thinking that would develop more prominently in the 15th and 16th centuries.

R. Nissim's Critique of the Philosophers

From the intimate character of the Jewish-Christian debate in this period we can infer an opposite lesson: In the process of disputing with Christianity, R. Nissim is noticeably influenced by it. The terms "law of justice" and "law of the state" are an echo of Thomas Aquinas's "natural law" and "positive law." And when R. Nissim turns to confront the Aristotelian philosophers, this influence is more prominent. Throughout all the sermons one senses his effort to limit the authority of the philosophers. He accepts Maimonides's view of the uniqueness of Moses's prophecy, but he bases that authority on the miracles. Maimonides had called Moses "Prince of the Sages" implying that he was the greatest philosopher of all time. R. Nissim infers: "This was said in order that his prophecy should stand in force for us, and so that we should not believe any philosopher who contradicts his words. Therefore if any philosopher should say the opposite of Moses's revelation, we should know that he teaches falsehood."¹ Thus R. Nissim construes Maimonides's own words, based on the law of the prophet in Deuteronomy, in order to limit the authority of the philosophers and to assign them a place subordinate to the prophets and sages. Maimonides insisted that the prophet, speaking in his prophetic capacity, had no authority in halakhic matters, except for a temporary enactment. Halakhic authority was vested in the sages rather than in the prophets. R. Nissim defined the philosopher as an instructor in social conduct with lower rank than the prophet and certainly lower than the sages, "for no philosopher is permitted to add any new thing. Therefore he has no credibility in legal innovation or interpretation, unless he restricts it to one instance or occasion."

This exploitation of Maimonides's words to limit the dangers of the philosophical movement that emanated from his teachings can be found also in the theoretical basis of R. Nissim's limitation of the philosopher's authority as a communal leader. In R. Nissim's view, prophetic revelation is the ultimate test of all the commandments and articles of faith,

¹ *Sermons of R. Nissim Gerondi*, Sermon 1.

because it is above reason, and reason cannot attain it on its own. Our senses apprehend objects only on the material level. Apprehending the form depends on another endowment that is supernatural, which R. Nissim identifies with a “divine prophetic flow.” In other words, apprehension of essences comes about as an enlightenment from a higher intelligence. The same is true of our understanding the rules of true conduct, which we cannot attain “unless there comes to us a divine prophetic flow which is above reason, by which is made known to us those things desired by God, and which make an impression on the soul, which are the commands and prohibitions of the Torah.”² The reliance on Maimonides and the departure from him are subtle here, but highly significant. Maimonides also thought that in each correct intuition there was an enlightenment from the Active Intellect (and not just from the senses), and he also believed that the knowledge of true conduct is a higher enlightenment of the intellect that apprehends the divine “attributes of action.” But let us note that R. Nissim identifies the action of enlightenment in intellectual intuition with a prophetic flow, and considers the norms of conduct as coming from a supra-rational revelation. This change is only possible if one regards the divine-intellectual flow in the world not as constant and ubiquitous, but as a manifestation of grace. The significance of this turn will be made clear shortly. R. Nissim Gerondi touches on the topic of human sin and argues, just like Maimonides,³ that man was placed in the Garden of Eden to engage in intellectual truths and not to turn aside to “opinions” (the judgments of the practical intellect), but man sinned by increasing his material nature at the expense of his spiritual (by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge) and became immersed in matters of opinion (knowledge of good and evil). His punishment reflected his crime—it was decreed on him—“to think thoughts without end”—in other words, without the ability to attain the truth, which is his end-goal. Doesn’t this sound very Maimonidean? Yet there is a subtle difference. Maimonides thought that even in his current condition the human being arrives at a certain perfection of knowing the truth through his intellect, and moreover he thinks that the story of the Garden of Eden describes the timeless human condition. R. Nissim believes that the story describes a substantive change that occurred in the human

² *Ibid.*, Sermon 5.

³ See *Guide* I, 2.

condition. In the Garden of Eden man lived on a higher-than-natural level, in other words, he enjoyed divine grace in the form of prophecy, whereas after sinning he lived “in accordance with his humor and nature, not otherwise”—in other words, grace forsook him. Only in this way can one construe prophecy as a grace that surpasses natural human understanding, and in this respect R. Nissim deviates from the Maimonidean view in order to set a limit to the philosopher’s superior pretensions. But it is clear that this view shows a strong influence from Christian theology as formulated by Thomas Aquinas.

The Commandments as a Demonstration of Obedience

These views have implications for understanding the nature of the Torah and the commandments. R. Nissim differs with Maimonides’s understanding of the first two commandments (“I am the Lord” and “You shall have no other gods”). In Maimonides’s view, all Israel heard these two commandments together with Moses, because these two commandments are rational and universal, while the other commandments are in the class of “opinion.” R. Nissim does not deny that we can deduce rationally that God exists and that we must worship only Him. However, precisely for this reason it was not necessary to command these two principles. Indeed, we must know that there is such a thing as “commandment” before we can be commanded. Indeed, these first two utterances are not commandments, but rather the proclamations of a king who announces, “I am He who loves you, who exists necessarily, who is your Ruler.” Since nothing is said of recognizing God’s existence but rather of the sovereignty of the God who cannot be conceived in thought, we must deny Maimonides’s argument that the purpose of God’s rule is to bring people to know Him intellectually. The true purpose is not philosophical and intellectual, but to serve God by keeping His practical commandments as a gesture of obedience. The proper purpose in fulfilling the commandments is nothing other than complete submission to God’s will. I cite his words because of their importance to understanding Crescas:

But the perfect intention in one’s actions is the following: the purpose of good deeds is not that the deeds be done, but rather the intention of the heart in them. What is this matter of intention? Whoever has the intention of attachment to God, even when he is engaged in common matters, in matters of business and acquisitions, he serves God with perfect service. Whoever does not have the intention of attachment to

God, even when he thinks he is worshipping God he is rebelling against him.... The words of the sages are fences and hedges and protective enactments for the essential portion of the commandments, and whoever does the peripheral and additional extensions acknowledges that he is not doing them as rote human enactments but with perfectly pious intention, and this is their true purpose.⁴

In other words: The emphasis is on the intention that accompanies the deed, but only careful and punctilious attention to the detailed performance of the deed is evidence of that intention and indeed an expression of it. Thus R. Nissim does not understand the matter of intention in either Maimonides's or the kabbalists' sense, but rather as the inner feeling of devotion and submission that accompanies the detailed performance of the commandments according to halakhah.

To this matter belongs also the classification that R. Nissim suggests for the commandments of the Torah, which also influenced Crescas considerably:

1. Commandments whose transgression harms only the soul (these are commandments that pertain to thought, such as commandments of belief).
2. Commandments whose transgression harms both body and soul (such as ethical commandments, and certain ceremonies such as the Sukkah).
3. Laws that have no specified reason, and whose performance is therefore purely an expression of obedience and submission, which is "the root of worship."

Maimonides sets the commands of belief in first place; all the others are only a preparation and discipline for true belief. But R. Nissim Gerondi reverses the order, and thus demonstrates how things have changed on account of the rejection of the intellectualist ideal of the philosophers. The commands pertaining to various articles of belief are not so important, for R. Nissim does not identify belief with knowledge. Indeed, Abraham married into the family of Haran even though they were idolators. Thus the intellectual defect in this family was amenable to correction, and this was a relatively minor issue for Abraham in comparison with the commandments pertaining to those commandments involving both inner intention and outward performance.

⁴ *Sermons*, Sermon 8.

In the commandments of this second class, correct thought is accompanied by appropriate bodily action to carry them out—these are the “rational commandments” of Saadia. These show a manifestation of will accompanying knowledge. Higher than all of these are the *hukkim* (Saadia’s “arbitrary commands”), which R. Nissim associates with the paeon in Deuteronomy, “these are a sign of your wisdom in the eyes of the gentiles”—the gentiles will see in these the superiority of the Torah because they are above reason. Even though reason does not command these laws, all can see the reward that Israel receives on their account. These are the commands that express obedience and the pure intention of the heart, and therefore they are in the top rank. It stands to reason that R. Nissim regards this inner activity of the will as the correct expression of faith. This means that faith is not cognition of the truth, but willing what God commands should be done.

We should finally emphasize that despite the conclusion that prophecy ranks above philosophy, R. Nissim does not deny the value of philosophy. Our knowledge of God’s existence before God reveals Himself to us has its source in philosophy, and we cannot receive revelation without knowing first of God’s existence. In that case, philosophy may be seen as a preparatory step for prophecy, and if we observe strictly the limits of human knowledge, engaging in philosophy can have a positive religious value.

R. Isaac ben Sheshet (Ribash)

R. Isaac ben Sheshet (1326–1408) was not a philosopher but a halakhist who was very influential in his time and afterwards. His contribution in the theoretical sphere was very slight, and was expressed not in theoretical treatises but in legal responsa, in which he commented on certain topics relating to the controversy that continued between the disciples of Maimonides and his opponents. Thus there is no theoretical doctrine here to speak of, but his few pronouncements, expressed in admirable clarity, are significant for understanding the background for understanding Crescas’s independent philosophical method.

Ribash’s Approach to Kabbalah

I will first cite Ribash’s words concerning the kabbalah of his time:

My teacher Peretz ha-Kohen of blessed memory did not speak of the sefirot or attach any importance to them. I also heard him say that R. Simeon of Kinon, who was the leading rabbi of his generation, would say, "I am praying according to the understanding of this infant," in order to discourage the kabbalists of the habit of praying to one sefirah now and another then depending on the topic of the prayer... This was all very strange to anyone who was not himself a kabbalist and might regard it as a kind of dualism. I once heard one of the followers of philosophy speak in disparagement of the kabbalists, saying that the Christians believed in the trinity while the kabbalists believed in the divine decade!

Later on Ribash cites the criticism of R. Nissim Gerondi, who criticized Nachmanides because he "immersed himself" too much in kabbalah, and his words "reveal one handbreadth and conceal two, so that one can easily err on account of them, and therefore I chose not to have any business with esoteric matters." To be sure, Ribash did not forbid kabbalah, but he was very cautious with respect to it. "Therefore I say that when it comes to these matters one should rely only on a certified kabbalist—and even then, only maybe."⁵

Ribash's Approach to Philosophy and Science

Ribash exhibits the same degree of caution with respect to books of science and philosophy:

Indeed, concerning the famous books of Physics, it is not a divine injunction [to forbid them—ES], but one should refrain from them if they tend to uproot the principles of our holy Torah, and especially the two central pillars on which it is based, namely the creation of the world and the blessed Lord's providence over the human race. They bring evidences and demonstrations according to their view to establish the eternity of the world, or that it proceeds necessarily from God just as light proceeds necessarily from the sun and shade from the tree. As for providence, they claim that it does not extend below the lunar sphere. They wrote in their books that conclusive knowledge comes only from philosophical inquiry, not from tradition. But we who are in possession of the truth are of the view that the Torah that comes to us from Sinai, revealed by God through the agency of the Prince of the Prophets, is perfect, and thus superior to any other source. All their reasonings are null and void in comparison with it.⁶

⁵ Responsa of Ribash, #157.

⁶ Responsa of Ribash, #48.

Thus Ribash reverts in effect to R. Nissim's formula. Philosophical and kabbalistic inquiry is dangerous, though it is permitted within certain limits. One should set above it obedience to Torah whose source is in revelation, and one should serve God according to the Torah without any sophistry. But Ribash does not make any attempt to give any rational basis for his conclusions. (One exception: he is forced to deal with the question of the relation of free will to special providence,⁷ but he only affirms what follows strictly from the Torah.) He remains within the practical considerations of a halakhist, for whom halakhic authority is the final word. For that very reason, one detects in his words a definite tendency that grows stronger in this generation and will influence Crescas considerably: *one must base Judaism on binding principles*, whose force is based not on reason but on revelation, which are therefore superior to reason and constrain it. These principles are the ones named in the previous citation:

- 1) The world is created *ex nihilo*.
- 2) God exercises particular providence over human beings.

Why precisely these principles? Because precisely on these issues philosophy threatens to disturb the views of the Torah. But if one stipulates these principles in advance, it will tend to neutralize the danger.

R. Simeon ben Zemah Duran

In R. Isaac ben Sheshet's words one detects the tendency to fortify the Jewish religion by means of a dogmatic framework. But the first new systematic confrontation with the problem of the principles of Judaism is found in the thought of our third background thinker in connection with Crescas: R. Simeon ben Zemah Duran (the Rashbatz, 1361–1441).

Duran's Method of Jewish Dogmatics

In his book *Lover of Justice* Duran formulated his basic premise as follows:

One of our people's sages wrote, citing a gentile sage, that philosophers must submit to religious premises, for just as every craft has prior premises

⁷ Responsa of Ribash, #118.

that need to be assumed as prerequisites for engaging in that craft, so is it proper to accept the assertions of the Torah as prior premises. We must not question them or demand proofs for them, for we know that prophecy arrives at truths that philosophers cannot achieve with their reasoning.⁸

Here is a repeat of the attempt to restrain the danger of philosophical inquiry without forbidding it as such. This effort is close to the method of the Christian theologians, whose influence Duran explicitly acknowledges. Duran goes on to say he is not opposed to philosophical inquiry:

Since God has created man with intellect, it is proper for him to investigate everything rationally. He should not be like a person who has eyes but closes them and relies on a seeing person to lead him.⁹

Duran even requires that on the basis of the basic premises of religion, the study of dogmatics should be pursued logically and scientifically. It should operate in a similar way as other disciplines, by establishing unquestionable axioms based in this case on prophetic experience. What are these axioms? In the course of the discussion he tells us there are three kinds of truths in the Torah:

1. Assertions that are verified by rational proof (the existence of God, and all that follows from it).
2. Assertions that reason neither proves nor disproves (creation and its corollaries; the Sinai revelation).
3. Assertions that reason requires but experience contradicts. The outstanding example of this is providence. Reason requires that God, who is the cause of all, has knowledge of all (including future events). But sense attests to human freedom of choice. We cannot arrive at a satisfactory resolution of this paradox.

It is clear in any case that we must posit dogmatically the belief in creation of the world and providence, alongside the philosophically provable belief in God's existence, and on this foundation the science of religion can be based. It is worth mentioning that this enumeration of religious truths still bears the impress of Maimonides's 13 principles, despite the effort to reduce the danger ensuing from free philosophical inquiry.

⁸ Duran, *Ohev Mishpat*, Introduction, Chapter 17, Venice edition p. 349.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 6.

The Teaching of R. Hasdai Crescas

R. Hasdai Crescas's date of birth is not known. It is known that he died in Saragossa in 1412. He was the scion of a noted family of learning, the student of R. Nissim Gerondi, and a familiar of the Aragon royal court. After the riots of 1391 he was appointed supreme judge of Aragonian Jewry, and the king appointed him to rebuild the Jewish communities and organize them anew. In this way he came to lead Aragonian Jewry in one of its most difficult times. As we said, his theoretical project fit in with his efforts to unite Aragonian Jewry and strengthen its Jewish identity against the pressures and temptations of conversion.

Crescas's principal work is *The Light of the Lord*, written in Hebrew. According to the book's introduction, one should regard it as the first part of a systematic work that would parallel Maimonides's halakhic work *Mishneh Torah*. This implies that *The Light of the Lord* was meant to correspond to the first portion of the *Mishneh Torah*, namely the *Book of Knowledge*, which established in a legal manner the foundations of the Jewish religious world-view. But it is clear that Crescas did not finish this project. Except for *The Light of the Lord*, there remains only a small book called *The Refutation of the Christian Principles*. It was written in Spanish and translated into Hebrew by R. Joseph Ibn Shem Tov. Finally, a manuscript was discovered of a philosophic-halakhic work that preceded *The Light of the Lord*, and this was published by Aviezer Ravitzky under the title *Sermon on the Passover*.

Crescas's Doctrine of Principles of Faith

Maimonides was the first philosopher who formulated the principles of Judaism as obligatory tenets of faith contained in a legal code. However, his purpose was pedagogic, and he did not make these principles central to his system of thought. We note the changed historical circumstances that formed the background of Crescas's project. The worsening inner fragmentation and the confrontation with Christianity generated an urgent need to formulate principles that would define Judaism's essential identity and its differences with Christianity. This was no longer merely a pedagogic aid, but the foundation on which the entire world-view would be articulated. Therefore a different method was required, and a different approach to determining the principles and justifying them intellectually.

Crescas's system of principles differs from Maimonides's in that it is the starting-point of his philosophical system as well as his halakhic system. It differs also in the deductive process by which the principles are determined, as well as in their logical formulation.

Belief in God's Existence

The differences with Maimonides begin with Crescas's Preface. Both in Maimonides's commentary to the Mishnah and in his *Book of Knowledge*, he started with the principle of God's existence, which he defined as the first of the 613 commandments and the first of the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your God..." Crescas counter-argues that precisely because the belief in God's existence is the premise of all the commandments, it cannot itself be a commandment. After all, we are speaking of the commandments of God, and no one can believe that God commands anything until the person first knows with certainty that there is a God who is in a position to command him. Thus the knowledge of God's existence is the premise of all the commandments, but it is not itself a commandment.

To this, Crescas added a philosophical argument. It is impossible in principle to command someone to believe, for belief is not a matter of free choice. If one knows a truth, one is not free to deny it, and if one does not know it, one is not free to believe it. This argument applies especially to the belief in God's existence, because on the basis of knowing that God exists and commands, a person is required to accept as true whatever God, who revealed Himself to him with absolute certainty, commands him, including truths that one cannot arrive at through reason. When God commands us to believe such truths, it is the task of reason not to verify what was declared through revelation, but to interpret it to the best of our ability so that it will be consistent with our general knowledge.

Indeed, distinguishing the belief in God's existence from the other commandments of the Torah affects Crescas's relationship to philosophical speculation. If knowledge of God's existence is a prior assumption and not a commandment, it is not only permitted to analyze this proposition in order to verify it, but it is proper and necessary to do so. But after we prove God's existence, we must then accept His commandments, and they will limit our theoretical purview from that point onward. It will then be reason's task to explain what we have received as divine revelation, but the obligation is based on God's absolute

authority, and human reason is required by its own logic to submit and obey. We note that this is presented as a rational consideration, and it is perfectly legitimate for us to ask why God commands various beliefs and deeds and does not leave them to the free rational judgment of man who was created in the divine image. Any rational answer to this question must reckon with the limits of understanding and the critique of human reason. Crescas responds to this challenge as well within the framework of his proofs of God's existence. All this will be better explained farther on. At the outset of our discussion it is important to emphasize in what respects Crescas differs from the assumptions of Maimonides's doctrine of basic principles. Maimonides's pedagogical approach presents the doctrine of basic principles as a simple authoritative formula that everyone can understand, even though the common man's understanding will differ qualitatively and substantively from the philosopher's. We recall in this connection that even the simple proposition that God exists is understood differently by the philosopher than by the layperson. But Crescas assumes that every person can arrive at a correct intellectual understanding of the principle of God's existence, unity and incorporeality, and all that is entailed by this. We will show further on that in this positive conception of God's attributes he does not assume any special intellectual effort, nor does he see it as the purpose of divine worship. Thus he comes to offer the doctrine of principles as derived entirely from the teaching of the Torah based on revelation. Instead of giving a popular formulation of the conclusions of philosophy, he assigns to philosophy the secondary task of giving an explanation of the Torah's teaching.

Order of Importance of the Principles

Thus it is not by reason (which has completed its independent task by proving God's existence and determining its own limitations) that we determine what we should believe, or which articles of faith are more or less important, but by the Torah. The status of the Torah itself follows logically, in the following dogmatic outline: After we know God's existence, He reveals Himself to us in prophecy, and the Torah with all its commandments is identical with His revelation. Of course we must believe it, for it is of divine origin. But this too is not a commandment, but knowledge, for once we have understood this as factual, we cannot deny it, and it obligates us, as any fact obligates us, and we cannot ignore it without paying a severe price. But we accept this knowledge

not from rational deduction, but from direct experience that forces itself on our awareness. We note that Crescas does not deny reason's task of interpreting what the Torah commands us to believe. Thus we must determine the system of belief-principles based on the fact that the Torah that we received from Sinai is divinely commanded: we must accept as true all principles that this fact entails, and to reject as false those principles that contradict it.

Crescas's intention is clarified by the enumeration that follows. First come those principles whose denial involves denial of the Torah's status as divine revelation:

1. God's knowledge of created beings.
2. God's providence over them.
3. God's omnipotence.
4. Prophecy.
5. Human free will.
6. The purpose of the world.

The reason for these is clear. If God does not know the particulars of created beings or exercise providence over them, it is impossible that He should give them the Torah. If He is not omnipotent, it is again impossible that He exercise providence over created beings. Without prophecy, the Torah cannot be given to humankind, and if people do not have free will there is no reason to give them the Torah. The determination that there is a purpose for the world and for humanity is also a necessary assumption for the Torah's existence, for if it were not God's will to be beneficent to His creatures, He would not give them the Torah. Note, though, that the same principles that appear in Maimonides as pedagogic means to advance human beings to the end-goal of knowing God, and are therefore of secondary importance, are accorded primary significance by Crescas.

On the next rank come those principles that the Torah requires one to believe, but whose denial does not contradict the principle of a revealed Torah:

1. Creation of the world *ex nihilo*.
2. Immortality of the soul.
3. Reward and punishment.
4. Resurrection of the dead.
5. The eternality of the Torah.
6. The prophecy of Moses.

7. The priestly divination through the Urim and Thummim.
8. The Messiah.

Note that while for Maimonides the creation of the world is a foundational principle whose denial undermines the whole Torah-outlook even though it cannot be inferred infallibly from the Torah text, according to Crescas the Torah is simply a tenet that the Torah requires us to believe, for in his view the eternity of the world does not undermine the fact of revelation. The same applies to the belief in the uniqueness of Moses's prophecy, which according to Maimonides is the condition of the unique and absolute authority of the Torah. According to Crescas, it is only through the Torah that we know that Moses's prophecy was unique and that there will never be another like him. The same applies to the belief in the Messiah and the resurrection. The Torah requires them, but they are not prior conditions for the validity of the Torah.

In the end, Crescas also recognizes beliefs that have a source in the Torah, but which the Torah does not require one to believe. It seems he means to refer to beliefs that are accepted by the Jewish people, that it is possible to infer from various verses that could also be interpreted differently, so that one who denies them is not denying an unequivocal declaration of the Torah:

1. The future eternity of the world.
2. The existence of an infinity of other worlds.
3. That the heavenly bodies are living beings.
4. That the heavenly bodies influence human affairs.
5. The efficacy of amulets.
6. Demons.
7. Reincarnation.
8. The immortality of a child who dies before achieving majority.
9. Paradise and hell.

The difference between Crescas and Maimonides is all too obvious here. Along with beliefs that Maimonides adheres to, Crescas also lists some beliefs that Maimonides dismisses contemptuously, and Maimonides would certainly reject a permissive attitude toward such beliefs.

In summary, Crescas seeks to develop a theory of basic tenets of Jewish belief whose systematic validity could be determined with certainty as a necessary condition for the validity of the Torah. In addition, it would include all the beliefs that were accepted by the major sages of the people, including some contradicting opinions on matters

of legitimate controversy (of which the rabbis said, "These and those are the words of the living God"). This was an attempt to maintain a conservative religious world-view that would tolerate within its bounds disagreements that did not undermine the basis of the unity of the Jewish religion and did not transgress its proper limits.

The Doctrine of Principles as Framework of Crescas's Thought

This summary enables us to determine more exactly to what extent Crescas's doctrine of basic principles determines his religious thought. On the one hand, he accepts unequivocally the supra-rational authority of the Torah in all its tenets, and subordinates his philosophical thought to whatever is under the rubric of "Torah commandments," whether in thought or in deed. On the other hand, he lays out within the framework of obligatory commandments a broad area that includes various philosophical interpretations as well as debates between contradictory assertions in which philosophy is free to take various positions. We shall demonstrate that Crescas exercised the freedom of thought that he allowed within his dogmatic framework with a scientific and philosophical consistency that does not fall short of that of Maimonides in depth and originality.

This assertion will guide us through the rest of the discussion. First we will follow the reasoning that lays the foundation for Crescas's whole system of dogmatics: the proofs for the existence of God and setting the limits of human reason. Then we will depart from the dogmatic order that Crescas imposed on his exposition and we will deal with his religious philosophy systematically.

Crescas's Theology

Just as Crescas's doctrine of principles is conceived in opposition to Maimonides, so too his discussion of God's existence is based on opposition to Maimonides's discussion of the same issue. At the start of Part II of the *Guide*, Maimonides presents 25 premises in which he summarizes the basic principles of Aristotelian physics (adding a 26th principle of the eternity of the world, that he assumed hypothetically for the purpose of the immediate argument). On the basis of these premises he presents four proofs for the existence, unity, and eternity of God, as well as several secondary proofs for God's unity and eternity. This

presentation assumes more than meets the eye. For Maimonides, knowledge of objective truth is understood as proving the existence of the object that is defined in the concept. If the proof for the existence of God is based on Aristotelian physics, this means that the knowledge of God is a particular way of looking at physics, namely from the aspect of the transcendent cause that endows it with existence and movement. Furthermore, the entire primary discussion of God's existence, unity and eternity is based in Maimonides on his theory of divine attributes. Thus, Crescas's critique of Aristotelian physics is the opening wedge for a critique of the entire Aristotelian system as the foundation of theology. In other words, Crescas's critique of the Aristotelian physics on which Maimonides has based his thought seeks to undermine the foundation-stone of Maimonidean theology.

Crescas's Critical Method

Crescas's procedure in his critique is fundamental and exacting. First he criticizes most of the 25 premises that summarize Aristotelian physics.¹⁰ In other words, he undermines the foundations of the whole Aristotelian system of physics, which Maimonides had thought to be established as absolutely certain, both physically and logically. Afterwards he directs his criticism at the proofs for God's existence that were developed on their basis, and finally at the doctrine of negative attributes that was based on those proofs. The results that he sought to achieve were the following: to undermine the scientific authority of Aristotle; to sever the connection that Maimonides had established between Aristotelian philosophy and the Torah; to define the limits of independent human reason in the domain of theology; and to establish the distinctness and superiority of the Torah's concept of God as compared with the Aristotelian conception. The last of these will be the basis of Crescas's own independent outlook.

Crescas has received special attention from recent historians of philosophy based on his criticism of Aristotelian philosophy, because in this respect it is possible to present him as one of the harbingers of the new physics developed by Galileo. This is an exaggeration, as

¹⁰ This portion of Crescas's work is available in English with commentary. See Harry A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, Harvard, 1957. A detailed study of the implications of this critique for the progress of Renaissance science and cosmology is found—together with additional translated excerpts—in Warren Zev Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*, J. C. Gieben, 1998.

we said earlier. Crescas had no intention of developing a new physical theory, and he did not base himself on observation. The brunt of his criticism was directed at the logical weak points of Aristotelian physics in order to develop a new theology, not a new physics. Therefore I will not detail his physical arguments, but I shall select the main arguments on whose basis he developed his new theology.

Crescas criticized sixteen of Maimonides's 25 premises, but there is special importance in six of these, that group around two basic ideas:

1. The question of the finitude of the universe, and the notion of infinity in general.
2. The notion of time, conceived by Aristotle as the measure of motion.

There is also significance in his comments on Aristotle's notion of matter, but his position here is ambiguous.

The Existence of an Infinite Magnitude

Against Aristotle, Crescas maintains that an infinite magnitude and an infinite number are possible, as well as an infinite material extension. It is obvious that this argument destroys the entire Aristotelian cosmology. If an infinite magnitude and the possibility of infinite bodily movement exist, then we must assume, against Aristotle, also the existence of an infinite spatial vacuum, and this destroys the Aristotelian conception of space. Instead of defining space as "the boundary of the body that encloses the enclosed body," Crescas proposes to define space as a three-dimensional continuum that precedes the bodies that exist within it. Furthermore, rejecting Aristotle's concept of space undermines the concomitant concepts of absolute "up" and "down," and with them falls the theory that each element (earth, water, air, and fire) has a natural place to which it tends to move. One must then find another explanation for the movement of bodies in space. Crescas assumes that each element has a "specific gravity" that explains their relative disposition in order from heavy to light. Such a concept permits movement of bodies in a vacuum. This assumption destroys the Aristotelian theory, and according to it, the duration of movement of bodies in space is determined by the degree of opposition of the body in which it moves. In order to avoid the absurd result that bodies might move in a vacuum in no time at all, he similarly assumes a "specific time" for each movement parallel to "specific gravity" for bodies.

A New Concept of Time and Space

With this argument we move to the second central idea of his criticism. Crescas refutes Aristotle's assumption that time is merely the measure of motion, and that where there is complete rest, there is no time. In Crescas's view, rest also takes place in time. But if rest has temporal duration, then the referent of time is not simply motion or rest, but both motion and rest are measured by time which is independent of both of them. What, then, does time depend on? Crescas's pre-Kantian answer was that the soul is the subject of time, and the meaning that he attributes to this will be explained later.

Crescas's presentation does not emphasize the connection between these two parts of his criticism of Aristotle's physics. But it is easy to show that there is a parallel between the new concept of space and the new concept of time. Just as space is the infinite extension in which bodies stand or move, so time is the infinite duration in which bodies are at rest or in motion. The bodies do not demarcate space, nor does their motion demarcate time, but space and time demarcate and encompass them. Space and time are the eternal conditions without which material existence cannot exist, and they are not dependent on it.

We said earlier that Crescas was not interested in developing a new physics in place of Aristotle's. The purpose of his new definitions of place and time was theological. We find a hint of this in the fact that just on these two points Crescas points to a connection between his views and certain rabbinic-midrashic ideas that pertain to theology. In connection with the notion of place as an infinite three-dimensional extension he writes:

Accordingly, since the Blessed One is the form of the entire universe, having created, individuated it, and determined it, He is figuratively called Place, as in their oft-repeated expressions, "Blessed be the Place"; "We cause thee to swear not in thy sense, but in our sense and in the sense of the Place"; "He is the Place of the world." This last metaphor is remarkably apt, for as the dimensions of the void permeate through those of the body and its fullness, so His glory, blessed be He, is present in all the parts of the world and the fullness thereof ...¹¹

In other words, there is a parallel between the relation of God to the world and the relation of space to the objects in it. And as to time,

¹¹ *Light of the Lord*, I.2.1, Second Speculation (Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, p. 201).

he says that the separate Intelligences and God Himself have relation to time, and that is how one should apparently understand his argument that the soul is the subject of time. It is doubtful whether one can deduce from this that in Crescas's view God exists in time, just as we cannot deduce from his words about space that God exists in space. But we can deduce from here that in his view, just as God is the *substratum* of time,¹² He is, apparently, the substratum of space. He has a relation both to place and to time, which are the general conditions that demarcate all of existence, and this means that all the conditions of material reality—including its spatiality and its temporality—are in God and only in God, so as He is eternal they are also eternal.¹³ The meaning of this will become clearer when we come to deal with the topic of the creation of the world.

Removing Physics from the Realm of Religious Thought

The first gain from the critique of Aristotle's physics was to undermine Aristotle's prodigious authority in medieval philosophy. All saw him as "the Philosopher" par excellence, and treated him as if he were infallible. For a Torah-true thinker interested in the exclusive authority of the Torah, this was a not negligible achievement. But after all, this was only a psychological gain. We must examine further what substantive, systematic gains came with it.

In this respect it appears at first sight that Crescas reaped a poor harvest from his physical critique. To be sure, Maimonides's proofs for God's existence were proved to be flawed. Still, it was possible to prove

¹² "God is the substratum of time" *ha-el nosei ha-zeman*. Alternatively, that "God is the *subject* of time" or that "God supports time" (just as a certain computer model supports color graphics and data communication). See next footnote for the subtlety and indeterminacy of Crescas's conception of the relation of God to space and time in contrast to Maimonides on the one hand and Spinoza on the other. (LL)

¹³ The exact relation of God to the world is not to be taken for granted, especially by those of us raised on the standard medieval wholly-transcendent Thomistic-Maimonidean concept. Charles Hartshorne pointedly argued that a taxonomy of God-concepts may be constructed by posing to each theological position the five questions: "Is God eternal? Is he temporal? Is he conscious? Does he know the world? Does he include the world?" Aristotle, Plotinus, Maimonides, the Zohar, Spinoza and Whitehead obviously had different answers to these questions (and where the Bible stands is a battleground for different interpretations). Crescas clearly stands historically between Maimonides and Spinoza—and (arguably) conceptually as well, as Schweid cogently points out here. (See Hartshorne & Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God*, Introduction (Humanity Books, 2000, p. 16) (LL)

God's existence from reason. It was still necessary to assume a first cause, even if the chain of causes was infinite. Furthermore, we saw that Crescas agreed with Maimonides that rational knowledge of God's existence was prerequisite to accepting revelation. What advantage, then, had this critique brought? Apparently none at all. True, Crescas argued further that there is no rational proof for God's uniqueness, for there may be two Gods, one active and one passive. But despite the sharpness displayed in this argument, it is pointless, especially from Crescas's standpoint. What is divine about a passive God? Nevertheless, we should moderate our complaint. Severing the Aristotelian linkage between physics and proving God's existence takes physics out of the realm of religious thought. It is important to whoever has an interest in cosmology, but it is no longer relevant to our thinking about God. For the purpose of belief in God's existence, it is sufficient for us to point to one empirical fact that nobody will contest: the physical world exists, it evolves, it changes, and it thus depends on an outside cause. Everyone can understand this with his common sense, and you need not be a scientist or a metaphysician in order to know with certainty that there is a God. In this respect, there is no difference between the philosopher and the common man on the street! Indeed, the full ramification of this conclusion will dawn on us if we remember that in Maimonides's view physics was important not only to prove God's existence, but also to approach the understanding of God's essence through human reason. A mistaken physics will certainly not bring us closer to understanding the true God!

Still, this gain is not decisive. The question is what can we know about God as philosophers, what can we know about God as recipients of a revealed tradition, and what is the relation of these two knowledges. For this problem, the critique of physics has only indirect significance, insofar as the concepts of "infinity," "space" and "time" have an influence on Crescas's notion of God. But to draw the conclusions pertaining to knowledge of God, we must reexamine Maimonides's doctrine of divine attributes on the basis of the critique of physics.

Critique of Maimonides's Doctrine of Negative Attributes

According to Maimonides, we first prove that God exists and is one, eternal and incorporeal. Crescas agrees, as we saw, that it is possible to prove that God exists and is incorporeal. Nevertheless, he disagrees with the assumption that it is possible to prove God's unity. In his view

there is nothing absurd in the possibility that there is one God who creates and is active, and a second God who does not create and is inactive. Thus the belief in divine unity rests only on the word of the prophets. But this argument is only a mental game. Can a passive God be considered truly a God after we have just defined God as that whose existence is necessary as the cause of the existence of the world? The important question is rather: What do we know about God after we have proved His existence? We recall that Maimonides thought that we cannot ascribe any positive attributes to God—whether definitions, parts of definitions, qualities or relations. We can only ascribe to Him attributes of action, but these are not attributes of His essence. Even the attributes “existing,” “one,” and “eternal” are not to be attributed to Him by us in a positive sense, because God’s existence, unity, and eternity do not add anything to His essence, but are identical with it. Since existence, unity, and eternity that are identical with an essence are beyond human comprehension, we may express this only in the form of “negation of privations.”

I will stipulate in advance that Crescas’s critique of Maimonides’s theory is based on a mistaken interpretation of the doctrine of negative attributes. But this is a typical characteristic of revolutionary thinkers. They criticize their predecessors on the basis of new assumptions, and these are so certain in their opinion that they do not feel the need to define them in connection with each topic in their system. À propos of the attributes, we should repeat that for Crescas, the proof of God’s existence is trivial. It points to the fact that the physical world has an efficient cause. This cause is present in creation and in revelation, and we have the same direct sense of God’s presence as we have of the presence of flesh-and-blood people, even if God’s essence is not revealed by His presence. From our perspective, then, He exists as any being exists, and like any other being, the fact of His existence does not tell us anything about His essence. We may nevertheless ask whether we can learn from God’s existence as cause of the world something about God Himself.

Crescas approaches this through logic. He analyzes the meaning of the sentences, “God exists,” “God is one,” “God is eternal,” in terms of grammar and syntax. Let us assume that the word “God” hints at a being to which we assign a name because we have no appropriate concept for it. Let us assume that the intention is to say that the existence of the known world has a cause which is unknown to us. Nevertheless, the relation of the words “God” and “exists” is affirmative, and there

is no difference in this respect between the sentence “God exists” and the sentence “Reuben exists.” We understand the word “exists” with respect to God and to Reuben in the same sense. We know of Reuben that he is a particular man of certain characteristics, while of God we know nothing except that He is the cause of all that exists. Is it our intention to say of God that “he is not nonexistent,” as Maimonides argues? But this is apparently a word-game. Every negation of a negation is an affirmation, and when we say “he is not nonexistent,” it is the same as saying “he exists.” Perhaps the intention is to say, “he exists, but in a different sense that is beyond our comprehension”? But what sense can the word “exists” have, other than the familiar meaning in relation to any physical or spiritual entity? Certainly every entity exists in accordance with its own proper essence, but the distinction between “exists” and “is nonexistent” is one and the same for all essences!

Crescas concludes that no philosopher can avoid ascribing positive attributes to God, even if one apparently argues the opposite. Furthermore, if we can indeed ascribe only negative attributes to God, what will be the difference of theological understanding between the greatest prophet and the most humble believer? Does the great prophet understand more negations? But more negations do not possess any more content! Is he better at proving the negations? But the proof is simple and trivial, and repeats itself in the same form for all the attributes. Even if we repeat it a hundred times, we will not add any more to our knowledge.

How can We Describe God without Ascribing Plurality to Him?

Nevertheless, Crescas also does not deny that God is one and simple. How shall we describe Him, then, in a positive way without introducing plurality into our notion? On this point Crescas encountered the same logical difficulty with which Maimonides struggled, and attempted to carve out a new path. He suggests a distinction between attributes that are “accidental” to the essence and those that are “intrinsic,”¹⁴ that even though not identical to the essence, do not add to it. “Accidental” attri-

¹⁴ The difference between “intrinsic” (*atzmi*) and “essential” (*mahuti*) is admittedly hair-splitting—some will say, a distinction without a difference. Crescas seems similarly to be splitting hairs when he says they are a part of the essence, but not identical to it, and do not add to it (are not accidental). The reader should try to bear with these confusions until the resolution in the next 10 pages. (LL)

butes are not part of the definition, for instance, the determination that the table is green. The color of the table is not part of the definition, and even if the color would change, the definition would not change, whereas “essential” attributes are included in the definition.¹⁵

What are Essential Attributes?

Crescas’s discussion of essential attributes is divided into two parts. In the first part he discusses *primary attributes*, those that follow necessarily from the proof that God exists, for instance, existence, unity, and eternity. In the second, he discusses *attributes that follow necessarily from conceiving God as the cause of existence*. We will look at each one separately.

Primary Attributes

Crescas distinguishes in strict formal-logical fashion between two formulations of the problem of God’s existence and unity. According to Avicenna’s view (which is shared by Maimonides), existence is generally an “accident” added to the essence, for the concept can be grasped in thought without the object of the definition existing externally. This implies that existence is something added to the essence. Not so God, who exists necessarily, and this is a kind of existence beyond human comprehension. By contrast, in Averroes’s view the attribute of existence is identical with the essence, for when the concept is present in our thought, it exists *there* at any rate. Averroes sees no difference between something existing as an idea in thought to its existing as an external object outside of thought, at least for purposes of establishing that it

¹⁵ To do adequate justice to this framework, one should be permissively broad enough to include not only attributes that are logically part of the definition, but also those that necessarily follow from it. For instance, a minimal definition of “automobile” might include only the fact that it is a motor-powered vehicle, but any common-sense use of the term would include a fairly complete basic description, including a standard list of parts such as doors, gas tank, pistons, brakes, etc.—all of which would be included as “essential” attributes. (These will be analogous to Crescas’s “intrinsic attributes” of God in the further discussion.) “Accidental” attributes would be optional features such as bucket seats, vinyl/leather/cloth upholstery, standard or automatic transmission, etc. Another analogy might be borrowed from cosmological theory: the various components of the theory (the gravitational constant, etc.) are intrinsic to the theory but not identical to the whole of it, yet the theory stands as an integrated unity of inextricably related facets. (See the medieval theory of the divine knowledge as predecessor to this!) (LL)

exists on some level. But Averroes also deduces from this assumption that we should not say that God exists in the same way as objects of which He is their cause, because they all exist originally in God's mind. Hence, God's own existence in His own mind and not in an external mind has a different sense which is not understood by us. We shall show later that Crescas is closer to the view of Averroes, but at the first stage he points to the fact that the correct arguments of the two sides contradict each other, and we must conclude that existence is not identical with essence (it is not part of the definition) but also is not something added to the essence (it adds no content to the definition). The same is true of unity. Crescas defines this intermediate condition as "intrinsic attributes" of an essence. But what does this mean? It is easy to point to the meaning at this stage of the argument, for at this point Crescas returns in effect to the original Aristotelian outlook. The existence of a thing and its unity as a defined concept are identical whenever a "form" (or essence) is actualized in a material or mental representation that exhibits it. Whatever is realized from a potential state by being expressed in matter or thought thereby becomes "actual," and actuality is existence. When we contemplate a given object and ignore its specific definition in order to determine first that it is an object among objects, we nevertheless ascribe existence and formal unity to it. In other words, existence and unity are two parts of the definition of any essence in this respect. Every object, insofar as it is an essence, exists and is one. It is clear why affirming existence and unity add nothing to the definition of this particular object. Nevertheless, it is clear why we should not say that the existence and the essence of a thing are identical. It is thus correct to say that it is of the essence of each thing in this respect that it should have such-and-such an essence and that it should exist, or in other words, the definition of a thing is: an essence that exists. The logical conclusion that follows from this is simple: God *qua* entity is no different in this respect than all other entities. He also exists and is one, without our being able to infer from this anything about His essence.

The saving conclusion that follows from all this is that even if we know nothing about God Himself, about what defines Him and distinguishes Him from all other beings, we know that He exists and is one in a positive sense, and our knowledge of this is not different in its sense than our knowledge of every other entity that it exists and is one. It is obvious that we must add immediately that God is different in the

very fact that His existence is the cause of all existing things, and His unity is the cause of all things that exist as “one.” In this sense God is “prior” to His creatures, and for this reason we add the third attribute to “existing” and “one”: He is primordial (= eternal).¹⁶ This difference does not permit us to say of God’s existence, unity, and eternity that they relate to God and human beings “homonymically” as Maimonides argues, but that they apply to them in the same sense, with the difference of “*per prius et posterius*” (that God is the prime paradigm of existence, unity, etc. and all others exhibit them secondarily and derivatively). But we recall immediately: God’s “priority” is the priority of the infinite over the finite. This will have a special meaning later.

We summarize this portion of the discussion by emphasizing the double gain for Crescas’s theology. On the one hand, everyone can understand simply the assertion that God exists and is one. On the other hand, the assertion that God exists and is one is weak. We cannot learn from it anything about God’s essence. He exists and is one, as we are. But in His essence, He is absolutely other.

Attributes that Follow Necessarily from the Concept of God as Cause of Existence

But is it impossible that we may know anything positive of God’s essence? Maimonides answered with an absolute negative. Crescas disagrees on this point also. We know of God not only that He is one, existing, and eternal. We also know something about Him as the cause of existence. We pass here to the second stage of the discussion.

As we recall, Maimonides also denied relational attributes of God, because they assume equality between the members of the relation. But (Crescas argues) when we proved that God exists, we established only that He exists as the cause of all other entities. The world, we said, does not exist on its own. It has a cause. The notions “cause” and “effect” characterize two entities in their relation to each other. If we proved that God exists, we proved that He relates to the world as

¹⁶ Hebrew *qadmon* (as applied to God or the world) is often translated “eternal” for convenience (generally in the sense of “eternally pre-existing”), but the Hebrew reader will generally catch the dual significance of the word as (1) eternal and (2) primordial. See Maimonides’s 4th principle. (LL)

its cause. It is impossible to say that this is a negative assertion. Every negation of a privation has a positive sense.

This is a key sentence, for it soon becomes clear that by breaking through this dam we will be able to attribute to God an infinity of positive attributes. How so? Crescas demands a strict understanding of the causal relation. Aristotle determined that there is nothing in the effect that was not first in the cause, and this applies to every effect. This means that not only the world in its generality testifies to God as its cause, but also every individual being in it. Whatever we grasp in the world had its source in God, again with the qualification that in the world everything exists in finite mode, whereas in God it exists infinitely. Everything in God precedes in infinite mode the reality of our world, for God is its cause. At any rate, we are now permitted to ascribe positively to God every perfection that we find in our world: knowledge, wisdom, power, life, will, love, mercy, judgment, etc. They are all positive attributes.

The Problem of Relation between Divine Unity and Multiple Attributes

Here too Crescas repeats his assertion that these attributes are “intrinsic” to God—i.e., they are not identical with the divine essence (in knowing them, though we know something positive about God, we do not know the divine essence as a single essence), but they also are not accidental to the divine essence (for they do not cause plurality in it). But it is clear that at this stage of the discussion it is more difficult to explain how multiple intrinsic attributes, that are not components of the definition, do not ascribe plurality to God. Crescas’s answer is complicated and laden with qualifications. As he wrote in a laconic style, his short sentences are often hard to understand, obscure and amenable to diverse interpretations. What I will say here is only a likely interpretation, the most likely in my view. In any case we stand here at a delicate boundary point, which Crescas’s original theology grasps in an opposite manner than Maimonides’s.

We approach it through his words regarding Moses’s vision in the cleft of the rock. This is also a focal point for Maimonides’s doctrine of negative attributes, which has its own interpretation of this event. Crescas criticizes Maimonides’s interpretation and suggests another.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Light of the Lord*, I.3.1–3.

We recall Maimonides's words: Moses requested at that point two things: knowing God's "glory" which is to know Him directly, and knowing "all his good," which in Maimonides's view is to be identified with all that God has created for His goodness. God responded that his second request could be fulfilled, but to the first request God replied, "Man cannot see Me and live." Nevertheless, he was told that his answer to the second request would be an answer of sorts also, and this was the apprehension of God's "aftermath" that Moses merited. In Maimonides's view, this meant that Moses apprehended God through the "attributes of divine action" that are revealed through creation. Crescas differs with Maimonides first of all in his interpretation of the verse, "Man cannot see Me and live." He also believed that the understanding of God is beyond human reason. Nevertheless, Moses was not requesting anything that every child knows is impossible. In his comment, Crescas focuses his entire criticism on Maimonides's negative doctrine of attributes. A person may know something positive about God, and Moses requested this knowledge, and also was granted satisfaction on the high level proper to a prophet such as himself.

But we should emphasize that in Crescas's view these things are said only of a prophet, not of a philosopher. Why? This will be answered in due course. What did Moses "see"? He "saw" essential attributes of God in the sense of the second part of the discussion, the attributes of God who is conceived as the cause of all reality. And now Crescas develops his ideas in the form of a parable. Just as one must distinguish between the essence of a material being and its sensible appearance (in Crescas's words: "the visible surface"), so one must distinguish between the essence of God and His intrinsic attributes. We return to the material example: What we see in the object—the color, the image, the hardness or softness, etc. is not identical with its essence. The essence, by definition, is the judgment of the intellect with respect to the visible object. But nevertheless, one should not say of the "surface" that is perceived by the senses that it is divorced from the essence. On the contrary, the sensory "appearance" is the only way that the essence of the object can be manifested to us. In this sense we can only relate to the essence according to its external manifestation, and this manifestation is neither separate from the given essence nor identical to it. It is its appearance as our senses and intellect can grasp it. Let us note that this conclusion, which is similar in some respects to Kant's epistemology, blurs the Aristotelian distinction between "accident" and "essence." An object appears to us as a bundle of qualities, and even

if the qualities are many, the object that is manifested through them is one. All its qualities present it as this particular individual body, and in that sense it is one. How do we come nevertheless to define it and to distinguish between its essence and its accidents? When we turn our attention away from that object, compare it to others, and define it by those qualities that it has in common with its genus and its species. Then all the qualities that distinguish the individuality of this individual are left over as “accidents.” (Thus the man with brown hair, medium height and blue eyes appears to us in the totality of his characteristics as one. By comparing him with his genus and species, we classify him as a “rational animal.” Then the brown hair, the medium height, and the blue eyes, etc. are left over as “accidents” of this particular being. But taking him as this particular individual, they are necessary and combine to become a part of his individual essence.) As a secondary distinction, this step is legitimate. But what will happen when we look at an undefined entity, infinite in every respect? He will appear to us in all the manifold aspects of his appearance as one without definition, because he is inexhaustible. His attributes reveal his essence. They are intrinsic to him. But he is not defined by them, because he is infinite. It is impossible to encompass him, and therefore it is impossible to define him. Here too Crescas arrived at a saving interpretation: We can think about God with many positive attributes without ascribing multiplicity to Him, because these attributes are intrinsic to Him without our being able to define Him through them. In this way it is possible to explain simply also the differences between the prophets who were privileged to know God. Whoever was the greater prophet apprehended more of His infinite essential attributes that were revealed to him, without any one of them knowing the infinite God in the way that only He knows Himself in His unity.

Philosophic Knowledge and Prophetic Knowledge

We emphasize now that according to Crescas God reveals Himself in His actions. He reveals Himself in his creation although He remains an infinite being transcending it. These assertions point to the kinship of Crescas to kabbalistic thought. It is recognizable in many respects, but is expressed primarily in Crescas's presentation of the infinitely many essential attributes as symbols through which is manifested an essence that nevertheless remains hidden, for this is the difference between the manifestation of God in human consciousness and that of finite entities.

The attributes of a finite entity define it, because it can be fully known through them, but the attributes of the infinite God can only signify Him without encompassing Him. We can consider the profundity of this difference if we distinguish between non-intellectual sensory perception and intellectual perception. A sensitive animal without intellect encounters bodies through sensations, but it responds to each sensation directly without forming a concept of the object. A person with reason grasps the sensations as forms of appearance of an object, and when he considers that God is the cause of these objects, he infers that the characteristics that reveal him the objects directly signify the essence of their cause. But in order for him to do this, it is not enough that he know that God is the hidden source of the objects that he recognizes, because he will then have no direct connection to the source, and he really knows only the things that God has created. This is the substantive difference between philosophical knowledge and prophetic knowledge. The scientist and philosopher know the intelligible truths of the world and infer that God is their cause, but the prophet is privileged that God appears to him willingly by using the intelligibles of the world created by Him as symbols. This is a communication of divine presence beyond physics and metaphysics. The difference between the prophet and the philosopher is that the philosopher discovers that God exists because the world exists, whereas the prophet is privileged that God reveals Himself to him voluntarily and confers on him the direct experience of His presence through the symbolism of the created world.

This reading, it seems to me, preserves the central thread of Crescas's thought: We apprehend essential divine attributes in addition to the attributes of existence and unity. But their content when perceived just intellectually is poor. It is identical to what we grasp in thought of other beings. Their inexhaustible presence is missing. This is grasped only through direct manifestation. Indeed, in the remainder of our consideration of Crescas, his intention in this matter of prophetic experience will be revealed more clearly.

Divine Incorporeality

After clarifying the issue of the essential attributes in its two subheadings, Crescas moves on to the issue of divine incorporeality. And here a surprise awaits us, whose seed was planted in the discussion of the attributes, which is why the discussion in this topic is fraught with great importance and a certain danger. This has an external danger:

Indeed on this topic there was a sharp dispute with Maimonides. Was Maimonides right to regard those who attribute corporeality to God as heretics? In Rabad's opinion, expressed in his critical notes to the *Mishneh Torah*, people who think that God is corporeal because they understand the text of the Torah literally are indeed in error, but they are not heretics. But Crescas's reason is more profound. It seems him that precisely on this point there is a pronounced difference between the prophetic conception of God and the intellectual-scientific conception. Crescas accepts, of course, Maimonides's view that God is not corporeal. That much is clear, but despite this, he appreciates the need to invest the notion of God with positive content much more than Maimonides did.

The Source of the Difficulty: God's Joy in Creation

In Maimonides's view, one should interpret all concrete expressions about God in the Torah allegorically. Clearly, then, if it says that God "rejoices" in His creations, this must be meant allegorically. What is joy? In the intellectual sense, joy is nothing other than the knowledge that we have arrived at true, perfect knowledge. Consciousness of the perfection we have attained is true joy. Crescas differs with this understanding, and argues: Joy is not an intellectual affair. Even when we speak of joy in knowledge, it is not part of the knowledge itself, but a feeling, a movement of the soul that accompanies knowledge. Furthermore, joy accompanies acquisition of new knowledge. Knowing what we already knew does not arouse joy in us. But God already knows everything. What, then, does God have to rejoice over? The philosophers do not have a convincing answer to this question. But the prophet intuitively grasps this divine joy, and it is the joy of God in His deeds, not in His knowledge. God loves to do good, and rejoices in the good that He does. This is God's joy. Crescas knows, to be sure, that this concept of joy as an excitation of the soul stands in contradiction to the divine incorporeality. But he has no inhibition. On the contrary. This is exactly the point at which he bursts the bounds of the philosophical conception. The fact that the philosophers cannot grasp the essence of divine joy because it is beyond reason does not bother him, but rejoices him. *This is the most important truth that prophecy grasps, and the philosopher cannot give a satisfactory account of it.* The philosophers' inability to explain it is proof of prophecy's superiority. Philosophy cannot plumb the depths of meaning of the prophetic concept of God.

We have considered the notion that the intrinsic attributes of God that we learn from the fullness of creation are the “visible surface” or symbolic expression through which the infinite divine essence is manifested.

We have also considered the notion that the philosopher, who is not privileged with revelation, grasps these attributes in their ordinary significance, but he does not grasp the divine presence through them. This confirms the guiding assumption that we have maintained throughout this discussion, that through intellectual analysis it is possible to apprehend something, but this apprehension is poor in content. In effect, the apprehension of this intrinsic attribute is but a preparatory stage, i.e. a basic orientation to the existence of the cause of created things, to which they allude. The content is the subject-matter of prophetic revelation, and what is revealed is expressed in the notion of God as rejoicing in the good, as a presence that has a supra-rational aspect, which can therefore not be plumbed by the intellect, but to which one can only turn. God is present to the prophet through the attributes, with all the infinite power of the creation, even though concentrated in a limited area, for every divine work, despite its limited scope, reveals the infinite power of the Creator. (Incidentally, one can support this understanding of Crescas’s words by comparing them with the words of his teacher, R. Nissim Gerondi, to the effect that the natural understanding of man is material, whereas the spiritual apprehension of essences is a matter of the “divine prophetic flow,” and an effect of grace that is beyond natural human comprehension.) We shall now consider the full context of Crescas’s remarks on the issue of the divine attributes, and thus we shall complete our discussion of his theology.

Immediately after his explanation of divine joy Crescas cites a familiar midrash that the rabbis told about the beginning of Abraham’s career. According to the midrashic story Abraham saw an illuminated castle and wondered, must this castle not have a governor? In other words, is it likely that such a splendid, elaborate structure filled with light should happen to be here on its own, without someone in charge who designed it, built it, and arranged its lights? This philosophical puzzlement is apparently what brought Abraham to recognize by his reason that “the castle has a governor.” But the midrash goes on: “The owner of the castle looked at him and said, ‘Leave your divinations’ behind. I am the governor of this castle.’” The expression, “leave your divinations behind” is rich in meaning. “Divinations” in the plain

sense refers to astrology, and the idolators were astrologers who saw in the stars that illuminate the world (the “castle”) expressions of divine powers. The midrash implies that only when God reveals Himself to Abraham does he arrive at the awareness that the governor of the castle expresses Himself by building the castle and illuminating it. Abstract knowledge is an achievement in its own right. Before knowing that the castle has a governor, man cannot receive revelation, but this knowledge is only preparatory, and true enlightenment comes only from direct revelation.

If we return now to Crescas’s discussion of “intrinsic attributes,” we can say that reason grasps God merely as existing, eternal, and the cause of all beings. But the prophet grasps God as a source of lovingkindness, as a loving presence, as benevolent. Kindness, love, benevolence—these bespeak a personal relation, a relation of direct involvement. Crescas’s conception of God is based on this, and this is the key to the fundamental difference between his doctrine of attributes and that of Maimonides. In Crescas’s thought, God is not the self-intellecting intellect, nor is He the unchanging eternal will that is expressed once and for all time in the moment of creation. Rather, God is the *Fountain of Life*, the infinite effluence of love that is embodied in the never-ending, daily-renewed process of creation.

We will now summarize the conclusions of the discussion on God’s existence. Crescas took the issue of God’s existence out of a legal-obligatory framework, in order to clarify that through our intellect we achieve mere knowledge, poor in content. It is necessary as preparation and transition to revelation, but by exhausting what we can know of God through intellect, we perceive its limit. The fullness of content, knowing “all the goodness” of God in the sense of revealing the inner dynamic of the divine life, is something that philosophy cannot deliver, but only prophecy. Indeed it appears that the fundamental difference between Crescas and Maimonides is revealed in the way that they understand the meaning of “all God’s goodness.” According to Maimonides, this refers to the created world, which is good, but even this plenitude of good is not itself a revelation of the divine essence. Only a supreme intellectual effort affords the prophet the possibility to infer the Supreme Cause from creation. But in Crescas’s view, “all God’s goodness” that was revealed to Moses is the inner dynamic of the divine life itself, of which the created world is only a symbolic expression—its visible surface—and this was not an intellectual effort of the prophet, but an opening which God opened to the prophet, after the prophet turned to Him in expectation.

Creation of the World

We will discuss the issue of creation immediately after the discussion of the attributes for systematic reasons, although this departs from the dogmatic order of Crescas's presentation in *The Light of the World*. Crescas's remarks on divine joy, kindness and love are based on the idea of creation. This is a return to the Biblical point of origin that we recognized in Saadia's philosophy, though Crescas preferred to develop his theological position by dealing critically with Maimonides and Gersonides. We will therefore begin with a review of these two positions.

Review of Maimonides's Doctrine of Creation

As we recall, in Maimonides's view it is impossible to prove the creation of the world philosophically. Therefore he bases the proofs for God's existence on the hypothesis of the world's eternity. To be sure, he establishes afterwards that the belief in the creation of the world *ex nihilo* is a necessary premise from the Torah's viewpoint: only on that basis are miracles possible, and only on the basis of the possibility of miracles is the Sinai revelation possible. In order to reconcile this conclusion with his reliance on Aristotelian physics, Maimonides shows that although the premise of the world's eternity is more in consonance with Aristotelian physics, it is not required, and even if we hold that the world is created, Aristotelian physics is still wholly valid. Nevertheless, as far as philosophy is concerned, we cannot prove the creation of the world, but only weigh the relative likelihood of the alternative possibilities. The eternity hypothesis is more reasonable from a physical viewpoint, and creation is more reasonable from cosmological considerations. Since the Sinai revelation is confirmed from historical testimony—the prophets, who are more authoritative than the prophets, testify to the giving of the Torah as a miraculous divine revelation with absolute certainty—it is proper to accept the notion of the creation of the world as established. But in order to eliminate all the difficulties that have been exposed from a physical standpoint, one should stipulate that the creation is a one-time phenomenon, in which hylic matter is created, and in that act space and time are created as well. This is the manifestation of an absolute will, and one should not say that it involves any change on God's part, for change occurs in time, and “prior” to creation there was no time. Nevertheless, the fact that this determinate event occurred *x* years ago, neither more nor less, follows from the arbitrary element in

every voluntary choice. We cannot understand more than this, for the transition from eternity to time cannot be grasped by the finite mind. But since such an event occurred, transcending reason and nature, we may infer that other such events are possible that have the capacity to establish a new order, such as the Sinaitic revelation, which is a kind of creation, and possibly the perfected order of Messianic times and the resurrection as well.

Review of Gersonides's Doctrine of Creation

As we recall, Gersonides accepted Maimonides's premise that the creation of the world is a necessary condition of the Torah. However, he was not convinced by the argument that the plain sense of the Biblical text does not require creation, nor by the argument that creation cannot be proved scientifically. The fact is that Maimonides based the creation of the world on a confusion-laden argument in a matter where certainty was called for, both with respect to the idea itself and his manner of advocacy of it. In order to dispel the confusion, Gersonides tries to show that it is indeed possible to prove the creation of the world in an unequivocal scientific manner, and that in this respect the plain sense of the scriptures leads us to the scientific truth of the matter. Scientific knowledge in this view is not a finished closed book (as Maimonides thought), but it accumulates and develops over time. Indeed, for this purpose Gersonides had to criticize several Aristotelian physical premises, and in this respect he opened a pathway on which Crescas would enlarge considerably. In any case, on the basis of his critique of Aristotle's concept of time Gersonides determined that just as space is finite, so time must be finite, and in that case it follows necessarily that we should posit a beginning to time and a beginning to motion, in other words, creation. But on this point Gersonides encountered a grave difficulty. According to the Aristotelian conception it was not possible to posit a generation of something from nothing, but only a transition from a deficient (potential) state to a plenary (actual) state. The very concept of creation *ex nihilo* thus rests on an absurdity. Gersonides could not move beyond this negative judgment, because he accepted the premises of Aristotelian philosophy and strove to repair that method in a manner consistent and faithful to its basic premises. Therefore he argues: Creation is not *ex nihilo* (something from nothing) but rather the emergence of a fuller reality from a formless matter that is not (in its primordial state) capable of sustaining a form, matter that is pure

potential, incapable of actualization on its own. The act of creation is preparing that matter with the ability to receive form, and endowing it with the form itself. Only then do motion and time begin. But it is clear that Gersonides did not succeed in overcoming the Aristotelian duality of matter and form. There is something in earthly existence that is "self-caused" but is not God, even though he tried to reduce its independence of existence practically to nullity.

The Kabbalistic Doctrine of Creation

We have presented the two outlooks with which Crescas contended directly. But to understand his own teaching, we must present a third view, which he also accepts in part and rejects in part, though without mentioning it explicitly. This is the kabbalistic view, which is based on the Neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation. The kabbalists turned the notion of "creation of something from nothing" on its head. For them, the "something" was the existence of this world, which is a finite, contained reality, constrained by lacks and deficiencies, which for that very reason can present a "something" to thought. The "nothing" is the infinite plenitude of God's perfect and absolute existence, which is "nothing" in two senses. The Hebrew *ayin* ("nothingness") is cognate with the interrogative *me-ayin* ("from whence?" but also "from nothing"), as in "From whence (= from nothing) comes the world?" It is also "nothingness" for human thought (which is incapable of grasping it). "Something from nothing" therefore refers to the emanation of the world from the infinite divine life itself, the finite and delimited manifestation of the infinite flow coming from the unfathomable divine source.

Crescas's Doctrine of Creation

We shall now consider how Crescas has constructed his own doctrine in the light of these three views. He agrees with several of Gersonides's critical arguments against Maimonides. He is not satisfied with the notion that the adjudication between the views of creation and eternity of the world must be based merely on probability. He certainly does not agree that the literal sense of the Torah in this matter is given to diverse interpretations. Belief in creation of the world is one of those articles of faith that the Torah commands directly and explicitly. Crescas bases this belief on the Torah, as opposed to Maimonides who bases the Torah on the belief in creation. Nevertheless, in the debate between

Maimonides and Gersonides, Crescas is clearly closer to Maimonides in his overall position. He finds the notion that the world was created from formless primordial matter strange. He leans emphatically toward Maimonides's position that creation must be understood in the sense of *ex nihilo*. Since he does not accept the premise of the finitude of the universe, which was accepted by both Maimonides and Gersonides, he is not persuaded by Gersonides's argument that time, like space, must have a boundary. On the contrary, he deduces that *space must be without a boundary*, the same as time. The decisive element in the Torah's teaching, in Crescas's view, is one that Gersonides downplayed, namely the creation *from nothing*, while the notion of creation as a beginning in time had little importance for him, and on examination turned out to be misleading. For Crescas, the central idea expressed in creation *ex nihilo* was God's absolute supremacy, expressed in the core assertion that God is the sole cause for the world's existence. The assumption that there is primordial matter which is a necessary condition of creation, even if it is "matter that does not sustain its form," contradicts God's absolute supremacy over the world, and to what purpose is it then for us to conclude that the world began to exist actually exactly x years ago and not before? In this respect, it is clear then that Maimonides's solution appears preferable to Crescas than Gersonides's. His critique is directed at Maimonides's insistence that creation *ex nihilo* is conditional on the premise that time and space began at a particular origin-point prior to which there was no time or space. This Maimonidean thesis is based on Aristotelian physics, though it conflicts with Aristotle's conclusions, and this fact was the source of his credibility gap, for it appeared to the majority of Maimonides's students and critics that Maimonides's profession was insincere. Crescas's critique of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics is relevant precisely with respect to this issue.

We saw that in Crescas's view space and time are infinite, and both are supported by God. It follows from this that all of the preparation for the existence of the material world—space and time—are in God Himself and in God alone. How, then, is it possible that God's eternal will to create a world will not be fulfilled in and of itself in the infinite duration of time and the infinite extension of space? How is it possible that the infinitely great power of God will not come to fruition in the plenary possibility of space and time? It is clear from this that Maimonides's arguments concerning the arbitrary character of the volitional decision to create the world will not appear persuasive to Crescas. On the contrary: space and time are only the initial manifesta-

tion of God's inner necessity to create, for God is infinite loving power, and beneficence is His immanent teleology. It follows that what appears to Gersonides as the essential teaching of the Torah really stands in opposition to the Torah's essential teaching. Even Maimonides erred in this respect, because he was drawn to follow Aristotle's theological outlook, though inconsistently. Indeed, the world is created *ex nihilo*, but it is eternal, and its eternity consists in the fact that divine will that creates the world is eternal and manifests itself continually, creating at every instant past and present. This is the meaning of the passage in the Jewish liturgy, "Who in His goodness renews every day continually the work of creation."

How can the Continual be Renewed?

Seeing creation as a manifestation of the plenary power of the deity's inner life brings Crescas close to the kabbalistic outlook. The fullness of the divine "nothingness" is manifested in finite creation. Despite this, Crescas does not accept the kabbalistic doctrine of emanation, and he does not conceive creation as a continuation of the divinity's inner life, which would then be constricted and materialized by degrees in order to bring the world into being. This is because like Maimonides, Crescas insists on absolute distinction between God and the world, and on the absolute distinction between God and humanity. On this issue Crescas also agrees with Maimonides that God created the world by an act of will that calls it into being outside himself, in the manner that an artisan creates his art-work outside himself, with the difference that the artisan is dependent on external matter to implement his conception, whereas God creates matter and form together from nothing. But can nothingness (the absolute vacuum of infinite space) be the source of substance? Can nothingness be the substrate of reality? Certainly not. Therefore one must understand the expression "something from nothing" in the sense of "something after nothing." But one ought not understand the term "after" in the sense of temporal succession, because creation proceeds continually. "After" must then refer to the order of causal-ontological priority: empty space and time supported by God are causally prior to their being filled by material reality that God renews by the infinite will that renews it. How? This is indeed the divine omnipotence that human intellect does not comprehend. But it is nevertheless possible to represent it by a parable: Human speech expresses an idea that is manifested in a communicative medium outside

the person, by strength of his power of voluntary communication: the person who is communicating creates through his speech a reality that did not exist before he spoke.

The World as Symbol of God's Internal Life

The parable of speech (God creating the world through a commanding utterance) shows us how Crescas sees the world as a symbolic expression of God's internal life. It is a symbol not in the kabbalistic sense of an expression that reveals God Himself, but a symbol in the ordinary sense, as an expression of something by means of an external medium, just as a person concretizes his thought in a vocal utterance, which captures the essence of the thought in an external medium. In this way it is possible to say that a person encounters the world as if it were a divine utterance. The world expresses God, and it expresses Him by virtue of its being God's handiwork. The existence of the world, when it is conceived as an absolute possibility in itself but has no power of survival on its own, reveals the divine power. The teleological connection between the parts of creation—their congruence and mutually beneficial synergy—reveal or express the divine wisdom and loving-kindness. In this sense, it would seem, the perfection of the world is the "visible surface" of the divine essence, just as the visible surface of a physical entity expresses its essence. Here, then, is the verge of the distinction between prophet and philosopher—the philosopher grasps the world as existing on its own power and in its own right, not as the expression of a will and life transcending it. The philosopher does not stand in the presence of the mystery in the very fact of existence, because he does not grasp its creation from nothing. For him, existence in its perpetual continuity is not something to marvel at, but a matter of rational necessity. But for the prophet the world is a perpetual marvel, because he grasps it as the revelation of divine power and loving-kindness, which renew it continually from nothingness. In that respect, the very presence of the world for the human being is a divine revelation. The world is given to man and reveals itself to him as an eternal creation and as a divine utterance. It seems that if we seek to find the origin of this conception we must go back and look in the creation chapters of Genesis, and in the chapters of Psalms, Job, and the prophets that speak of the divine power that is manifest in creation, not as a continuation of divine life, but as a medium through which God manifests His infinite wisdom and power that transcend human understanding. The appearance of

the world as a perpetual marvel, infinitely inexplicable and an infinite kindness, are to be found in this source. God is revealed in absolute act. Certainly what distinguishes this vision from the philosopher's vision is not a new intellectual insight. The prophet does not know more than the philosopher. The prophet only directs this knowledge to its divine source through creation. This is an intuition given to a person by grace. It does not come about automatically. I hope I will not exaggerate if I say that according to Crescas the prophet, and every true believer on his own level, conceives the world's existence as a miracle that reveals the absolute power of the God who creates it, and this sets him apart from the philosopher.

Miracle

The notion that there is a direct connection between belief in the creation of the world and belief in occurrence of a miracle, which is a direct manifestation of God's will transcending the laws of nature is not, of course, an innovation on Crescas's part. This notion has its source in the Bible, it is common in the midrashic literature, and it makes its impress on medieval philosophical literature as well. Maimonides also argues that the creation of the world as a one-time event that establishes the natural order is the foundation of the belief in the miracle, which is a one-time occurrence that reveals the divine will. However in Crescas's thought this idea received a new original meaning on the basis of his special theory of theology and creation. One may say that if creation is brought about from nothingness, and nature perpetuates it, then its perpetuation is an ever-renewing miracle.

However, the difference between Crescas and Maimonides persists in this connection as well. In Maimonides's view the miracle is an event that establishes once and for all a particular necessary order of the divine wisdom, and the emphasis is placed particularly on the perpetuation of this order, so that in Maimonides's view the miracle is conceived as an event that stands as a one-time exception from the natural order and does not abolish that order but opens up another domain of developmental regularity that God provided for in the original act of creation: there is a cyclical order set in nature, and there is also an order of miracles that establish new stages in the history of creation. It thus appears that in Maimonides's view the miracle reveals the law of historical development that goes beyond the cyclical repetition of

nature. By contrast, Crescas follows Nahmanides's kabbalistic view and turns Maimonides's view on its head: *the miraculous is not subsumed under nature, but nature is subsumed under the miraculous.*

Creation is miraculous, and inasmuch as God renews in His goodness every day continually the work of creation, so is the miracle renewed continually, and it is revealed to our eyes continually in the full force of its marvelous character.

The first meaning of miracle is thus the ever-renewing aspect of creation. It is the natural order itself, when it is grasped not from the aspect of the causal connection of the events that are generated from one another, but from the aspect of creation that renews nature "after nothingness." But to understand this matter we should emphasize that Crescas is not returning to the view of the Kalam school of Al-Ashari, according to which in each and every instant the world is renewed in accordance with the capricious will of God. On the contrary, Crescas insists emphatically—even more than Maimonides—on the continuity of the natural order and on the causal continuity within the world. It expresses the teleological intentionality of God, which guarantees the continuity and identity of nature that is renewed by Him at every moment. For the divine will is not capricious. We shall see later that according to Crescas this causal-necessary continuity applies not just to nature, but also to history. History also displays a perpetual renewal that strives towards messianic fulfillment.

Miracle as Exceptional Event

It would apparently be possible to rest satisfied with this understanding of the essence of the miracle, for on this conception every historical event is in the category of miracle. But Crescas does not omit the special meaning of miracle as an event that is an exception in some sense from the natural order, and that reveals the divine will in an unusually characteristic and direct way. In addition to the miracle of creation, Crescas distinguishes (following Nahmanides) two other types of miraculous occurrence in the domain of history, the manifest miracle and the hidden miracle.

The hidden miracle is an event that does not deviate from the natural order, but that nevertheless reveals God's direct intentionality with respect to a particular nation or individual, in other words, an event whose occasion, though not contrary to nature, is not accidental, but

which attests to a teleological purpose. All the developments of Jewish history follow this rule, for such events cannot be explained by natural law without reference to a special purpose, even though none of the events contained in it occur in violation of natural law.

A manifest miracle, on the other hand, deviates from the course of natural law or overrides it. No witness to such an event can deny the direct divine intervention and the special intention that it embodies.

But what is the philosophical foundation for distinguishing between a miracle that is not perceived as a miracle, and a miracle that is clearly so perceived? The answer to this question is conditional on our ability to distinguish an objective progression in history. But first we require a philosophical answer to the following question:

How can one miracle appear "more" miraculous than another? The answer is rooted in comparing the common and divergent elements in the hidden miracles of creation and history, on the one hand, and the "manifest" miracle on the other hand. Not accidentally, Crescas asserts that only rare individuals grasp the miraculous nature of the natural process itself, and that few believe in the hidden miracle when it occurs. Only the manifest miracle forces its witnesses to believe in it. Why? Because nature reveals all of the divine power when it subordinates itself to the law that God Himself imposes on it. For this reason it is concealed behind the cyclical continuity of the occurrences of nature and history. The hidden miracle that occurs in history but not in nature is rarer. It occurs once in a while, and therefore it is relatively more apparent. But it is still so rare that few discern it. Only in the manifest miracle does the divine omnipotence break through in full power. From this conclusion we can judge the exact meaning of "miracle" in Crescas's thought. Violation of natural law is wholly inessential to it; this is a side issue, so that from the aspect of a person's limited ability of discernment the main point is the nature of the event itself: it is a definitive event, an event that occurs with absolute uniqueness beyond time as a revelation of the infinite intensity of divine power, and it is a matter that forces the witness to such an event to confess its miraculous nature. In the true analysis, the miracle proves nothing except its own occurrence. But it provides—for after all, the event itself is revelatory—an experience of divine presence in the event, of Him whose power is infinite. Whoever grasps the miracle in this way will be persuaded afterwards that even in its reduced form of "hidden" or "natural" miracle, the meaning is the same: the definitive revelation of divine power. In this aspect, the

aspect of “miracle” in nature itself is a divine revelation, and whoever knows how to intuit this will experience the fully miraculous in every moment.

Providence

What we have said so far about miracle includes in effect the main points of Crescas’s outlook on providence. We must however preface the presentation of these points with a clarification with respect to divine knowledge. Out of fidelity to the Torah’s view that God watches over His creatures, Crescas agrees with Maimonides on the following three propositions:

1. God knows the infinitely numerous particulars in His infinite knowledge.
2. God knows what has not yet occurred or come into being, but is destined to come into being.
3. God knows the possible without that knowledge making it necessary.

Despite the third point, this outlook seems to tend toward absolute determinism. Indeed, Crescas’s concept of God as an infinite will Who expresses His inner teleology through His creation, requires this. The divine will is the cause of all being, including its particulars. Crescas encounters the difficulty, how to prevent the multiplicity of divine knowledge from engendering multiplicity in the divine unity, and he attempts to solve this problem through his critique of Maimonides’s and Gersonides’s positions.

Critique of Gersonides and Maimonides

According to Gersonides, who in this respect is a consistent Aristotelian, God knows the particulars only with respect to the general rule or principle under which they fall, but He does not know them as such. In Crescas’s view, this is a denial of the notion of particular providence, with respect to both the individual and history, for God knows only in a general way what *would* happen if people would act in various ways. Therefore he rejects this view as false, both from the Torah’s standpoint and on theoretical grounds. (He enumerates many “absurdities,” of which I will spare the reader the details.)

Crescas is more in agreement with Maimonides, according to whom God “is not ignorant” of individual facts; however, the manner in which God knows them without generating plurality in Him is beyond human comprehension, for in Maimonides’s view our knowledge and God’s knowledge are only “homonymous.” But Crescas does not accept this negative formulation of the theory of divine attributes! As with all other relational attributes, we must speak of God’s knowledge and our knowledge as possessing a common sense (though with the difference referred to as “primary” and “derivative”). So what is the solution?

According to Crescas’s presentation, we can say that the signification of the term “knowledge” is common to us and to God, and in both cases refers to not being ignorant of something. But the objects of our knowledge are completely different, and here apparently is how this should be understood: *man knows the finite and definite, whereas God knows the infinite*. But knowledge of the definite draws distinctions, and in so doing grasps what is plural, whereas infinite knowledge grasps the totality of infinite reality in its unity. This understanding becomes clearer if we review Crescas’s explanation of the divine attributes: human thought grasps that which is an infinite unity in God as a finite plurality of attributes, and indeed the notions of all existing things are the relational attributes of God. It follows that what we know in the mode of plurality is encompassed in God’s knowledge as absolute unity.

Degrees of Providence

However in speaking of providence we refer not only to knowledge, but to intentional influence in order to direct human behavior through reward and punishment. This is of course the connection between providence and miracle, and just as Crescas distinguished degrees of miracle, so he distinguished different degrees of providence.

The most inclusive providence is that of nature, and it includes those creatures that live simply by their nature without knowledge or will. Human life also has its natural, involuntary aspect, which it has in common with other creatures. Whatever occurs on this level of a person’s existence is controlled by natural law the same as with other animals.

We may speak more specifically of providence extending *to the human species by virtue of its intellect*. Here there is a measure of individuality and independence of nature, though it is not in contradiction to nature: to the extent that human intellect exercises voluntary control over one’s instinctual impulses, to that extent the person experiences providence

through his intellect. Thus, insofar as Jews are rational human beings, they experience the providence of intellectual endowment, which is part of their human nature. The more a person partakes of reason, the more he enjoys this form of providence.

Beyond this level of providence, there is the providence of a particular human group, namely *the providence of the chosen people*, which according to Crescas is yet more particular than that of human nature. Every individual Jew, insofar as he has a connection to the history of his people who are governed by the Torah, enjoys providence as part of his people through the hidden miracles that they collectively experience, miracles of deliverance and retribution that are directed at the entire nation. Here the yardstick is the fidelity of the people to the injunctions of the Torah. There is surely no natural connection between the observance of divine commands such as the Sabbath and festivals, the laws of hybrids and mixed species, etc. and economic and political prosperity or suffering. Nevertheless, the fate of the Jewish people is determined by its fidelity to keeping these injunctions, which set it apart. This is the “hidden miracle” that is manifest in Jewish history. We note that *this providence is also law-governed*, but not by natural law, rather by a divine judgment in the judicial sense, that can override natural and rational law. In this respect, Crescas argues, all Jews (even exceptional individuals) are subject to providence in accordance with the deserts of the Jewish nation as a whole. Even perfect saints suffer when the community sins, and even scoundrels are saved when the community is righteous. However, beyond this level is manifest providence for individuals who have arrived at the rank of prophecy. These individuals are judged according to their individual deeds—and again, the determining rule is the rule of divine intentionality toward each individual according to his degree of closeness to God. In this fashion it is possible to say that all of reality follows a hierarchy of laws operating at different levels of reality, each of which manifests the governance conforming to the knowledge and intention of God with respect to every individual.

We should note in all this that in one respect Crescas’s conception is quite similar to that of Maimonides. *Providence is not conceived as an arbitrary intervention, but as a legal-judicial determination that follows necessarily from the divine wisdom*, and from the flow of divine beneficence that strives for the good of all. What, then, is the meaning of the distinction by which God bestows His grace differentially to one nation from among all humanity, and to certain individuals within that nation? The answer to this question is found in a second assumption that is at the basis for

ranking the levels of divine providence: Whoever is worthy of greater providence is closer to God, but not because it strives for its own distinction, but because it strives to bestow influence on all the entities that are on a lower level. Thus whoever is the recipient of greater providence is an intermediary of providence and a conduit of divine goodness to others. In the natural realm there is no progress or development, and so natural creatures without reason receive providence through the general law of nature that God established by His will, but God does not intervene in their particular destinies. Only human beings show progress and development through the process of history, and therefore providence is manifested through history in an intentional, directional, and teleological way. It shows first individuals who were effective through their families, then through a people, and finally through humanity collectively. Thus divine providence strives toward the manifestation of the all-embracing perfection of divine loving-kindness toward all human beings. Since we saw that the issue of providence is identical with that of miracle, Crescas argues that manifest miracles, which establish a higher order of existence, become more prominent, powerful and generalized the more that providential history progresses towards the fulfillment of divine grace. The miracles that were performed for the Israelite people during the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah were greater than those that were performed for the patriarchs, because providence was manifested then not just to individuals but to an entire people. In the end of days, when there comes the time for the propagation of the truth to all humanity, there will occur a miracle that will compel all humanity to acknowledge the sovereignty of God in the world. The reference here is to the supreme miracle of all—the resurrection of the dead will surpass the miracles of the Exodus. In this way the one-time event will follow the pattern of the general law that directs the historical progress of all humanity. This gives us a glimpse of the fundamental difference between Crescas and Maimonides. In Maimonides's view, history reverts to its natural course, and the Sinai revelation is a kind of climax that stands out for the generations from the natural, regular course of history. But for Crescas, all human history is destined to ascend to a supernatural level.

Judaism and Christianity

This conception of divine providence in history necessarily raises the question of the relationship between Judaism and competing religions.

For Crescas, the most present and pressing problem was the problem of the relationship to Christianity. He conducted a spirited attack against it in his work, *Refutation of Christian Principles*, but in his remarks on the miracle of the resurrection there is a rapprochement of ideas born of intimate rivalry with Christianity. It is difficult not to be reminded that according to the Christian gospel the resurrection of Jesus after his crucifixion signifies the redemption of humanity from sin and fulfillment of the promise of eternal spiritual life in the hereafter. This is a similarity that carries with it a sharp dissent. Crescas displays an ambivalent relationship with Christianity. Indeed, even while rejecting it, he nevertheless saw in it, like Judah Halevi, the beginning of the propagation of the true faith to all humanity. In this respect Crescas expresses a universality of outlook, even though he insists on the uniquely chosen status of the Jewish people.

Human Free Will and Its Limits

In Crescas's doctrine of providence, his outlook appears as one of causal determinism, as we said. However, among the principles that the Torah explicitly teaches we find human free choice. Crescas upholds this principle, and those interpreters err who see Crescas as holding to a determinism that does not acknowledge the freedom of choice, although he is forced to compromise and explain it in a forced way. Against this interpretation one should emphasize that Crescas affirms free choice as a necessary principle of the Torah, no less necessary than the principle of providence. We point out that it was on the basis of his affirmation of free choice that Crescas developed his teaching of worshipping God with complete devotion. Worship without true devotion is meaningless, and the difference between devotion and its absence is a matter of free choice. Thus we have the same dilemma of reconciling free choice with divine providence, which Maimonides reconciled by determining that God's wisdom and knowledge are beyond human conception. Crescas, on the other hand, inasmuch as he affirmed a positive doctrine of divine attributes, could not resort to the same solution, and was thus caught on the horns of a serious paradox.

The question as Crescas raises it depends entirely on a prior philosophical question: "Does the nature of the possible (or contingent) exist?" In other words, are there entities whose existence is possible but not necessary, so that one may choose them to exist or not to exist? Crescas presents two extreme positions on this issue, and as is his habit

throughout his presentation, he shows that these two positions contradict one another. We shall not enter into the details, but we shall construe the resolution by analogy with his view of creation. Crescas considers the world as created “from nothingness” by the absolute will of God and out of the necessity of God’s essence. Thus the world does not flow “from itself” nor does it flow “from God,” i.e., it is not a continuation of the divine life via emanation. It follows that the world and everything in it exists necessarily from God’s standpoint, but from its own standpoint it is in a status of absolute possibility—absolute, because one should not understand it as “potential” based in matter, which exists “of itself,” but as lacking all basis and lacking all determination except through the divine will. It follows that the answer to the first question is positive: “the nature of the possible exists” from the standpoint of created entities. But it does not exist from the standpoint of the Creator, who operates out of the infinite necessity of His essence. It is easy to see that in this construction of the matter we have affirmed absolutely the notion of providence from the standpoint of the necessity of the divine cause, but we have also affirmed the notion of choice from the standpoint of the possibility in the things themselves. Whatever occurs in our world must occur in accordance with God’s will (this is providence), but nevertheless the individual in and of himself is free. As such, he can assent or dissent to what is happening in him and around him, to obey or disobey the commanding God. He determines within his soul among the various alternatives, affirming and negating, even though this does not mean that his will determines the external facts. He can control only his inner relation to the facts that are determined by the providential will.¹⁸

How shall we understand these assertions? The conventional understanding—found among most of the scholars of Crescas’s thought—is that this amounts to a forced verbal affirmation of free choice but its denial in effect. It appears as if a person can assent or dissent only

¹⁸ The determination of psychological events by material causality is detailed in *Light of the Lord* II, 5 (especially Chapter 3). The freedom of the soul to assent or dissent from this causality is expressed in II, 6 (of which only partial excerpts have been translated in Harvey, *op. cit.*). It seems from the presentation in Crescas that the soul’s assent or dissent has no material effect on external events such as the empirical choice of the person in the material world. This is what has led the majority of interpreters of Crescas to interpret his whole position deterministically. Schweid questions this prevailing interpretation. More thorough research and open discussion of the problem is necessary for a definitive resolution, if such is possible. (LL)

on the level of his internal preference regarding those events that are forced on him from outside. In other words, he can agree to them or disagree with them, but his choice has no influence on their actual occurrence. Therefore a person is punished or rewarded according to his intention, i.e. based on whether he assented or dissented to what happened to him.

This understanding has in it a bit of Sartre's outlook. A person can choose himself within the situation in which he is placed, but he cannot choose his situation. But this Sartreanism, that has an element of secular despair, should put us on guard against the strangeness of attributing such an outlook to a thinker of consistently conservative inclinations, who strove to be true to the outlook of the Torah, according to which one certainly ought not to understand the matter of free choice in this strange fashion. Indeed it is easy to prove that this is not the understanding that Crescas intends, and that whoever interprets his words about the relation of freedom and necessity in this way is not paying regard to the fuller context of his teaching. First of all he does not understand Crescas's remarks on providence fully and precisely. For when Crescas speaks of providence, he does not picture a chain of causes and effects whose source is in a fixed law by the will of God rooted in creation. He speaks of an ever-renewed creation, whose continuity is not "of itself" but "of God." This means that the infinite unfolding of events in the created world expresses in all the levels of being and in all its particulars the direct will and intentionality of God, whether we are speaking of the regular recurrent, cyclical process of nature, or of the singular events that depart from the natural order. Providence means that all events, great or small, happen by the immediate and direct intention of God. Nevertheless, this interpretation does not come to grips with Crescas's assertion that the "nature of the possible" is found not only in the person who chooses, but also in the things that he chooses.

All creation is the domain of absolute, infinite potentiality, and that is how it presents itself to God on the one hand and (though in a limited way) to the created human being on the other hand. If so, it follows that the manner in which the person chooses to obey or disobey the divine will, will determine the way in which God determines at the same instant what will happen in accord with the objective of His providence.

By this approach, the resolution of the contradiction between free choice and providence is stunning in its simplicity and its complete consistency. To be sure, it is God who determines, out of the infinite

necessity of His essence, what happens and what is going to happen. But this is an infinite necessity that faces an infinity of possibilities and addresses them directly with a beneficent intention. This is “providence,” not “predestination.” This means that God aligns His infinite will with the person’s choice, and God’s infinite knowledge encompasses in absolute unity the totality of alternatives that present themselves to the person as open options. The person chooses within a given framework of possibilities, and God chooses what will occur and come into being according to the person’s choice. God places the person in a certain reality. God situates the person as a chooser, as open to possibilities within himself, and afterwards, when the person chooses, God determines the reality in response to his choice. “Whoever comes in order to purify, the door is opened for him,” and “make your will as God’s will, so God will make His will as your will.” In other words: things will surely happen as God wills, but God wills in response to the human will, and in this sense the human will is propagated to his surroundings. He does not choose himself alone in a given situation, but his choice influences the situation in which he was placed from the outset. In this way, our choice applies not only to the possibility within us, but also to the possibility of the things around us, inasmuch as in their occurrence they manifest the necessity in the divine will that decided to preserve them. We must emphasize: this necessity that is in the divine will is teleological. This is the beneficent divine intention in its essence, and the beneficence is according to the virtue of the recipient, that is in the nature of things in accord with the will of the giver. In this sense the recipient can determine what will be “necessary” from the standpoint of God, who intends his good, whether by way of reward or punishment.

We can easily see that only thus can we reconcile Crescas’s words on all the issues that bear directly or indirectly on this topic. We return to the distinction that we started with: Recognizing God’s existence is not within the rubric of commanded articles of faith. It depends on a prior determination on man’s part. Abraham first comes to recognition of God’s existence. He turns his heart to God, and then God responds and reveals Himself to him. Moses asks about God’s existence. The question comes from him, and God responds to him—as a matter of grace. Every event is dependent on God’s will. But God’s determination is appropriate to the preparation that the individual has undergone on his moral level to receive God’s response.

Crescas’s conception of miracle is built on the same model: the miracle occurs in accordance with each creature’s openness to the divine light, according to his capacity for absorbing it. In the case of

human beings, this depends on intention and will, and so providence is in accordance with a person's responsiveness to the divine will. This is not the forced utterance of "Amen" to human free will. This is consistent affirmation of the premise of freedom, corresponding to consistent affirmation of the premise of providence.

Service of God

The discussion of free will and divine providence brings us directly from the topic of theology and creation to the topic of man's obligation to God and the substance of true worship of God. On this issue, too, Crescas stands in opposition to the outlook of Maimonides, who identified worship of God with apprehending Him in thought, and conceived the commandments all as means to intellectual love of God.

In similar fashion to the approach that we found with his teacher, R. Nissim of Gerona, we find that Crescas construes true worship in terms of the obligation to act in accord with the divine will, or more precisely in terms of the devotion of the heart that is continuous with the deed and fulfilled in it. This conception follows consistently from the discussion of theology, providence and human free will. We saw that in Crescas's teaching, God is not conceived as a pure intellect whose joy consists in perfect knowledge. God radiates generosity and love. God is beneficent by nature and rejoices in His actions—in creation. The human being, who is God's work, the product of His kindness and recipient of His goodness, owes Him absolute thanks, and the thanksgiving expressed in deeds, i.e. in the same purposive volition, in the same inclination of the soul—heartfelt and willing—that comes to expression and fulfillment in deeds. Just as creation expresses God's intention and in that respect is God's declaration of love, so does the deed express the human being's intention, and if he responds to God out of recognition of obligation, this is his declaration of love. To what does this apply? To a deed that is no rote performance, but a true embodiment of the soul's will through deeds. In other words, the deed is service to God insofar as it expresses the person's intention to be obedient to God's will.

It is clear that this conception is very different, both from Maimonides's outlook and that of the kabbalists, in the matter of the intention of serving God. But what we have said so far is too general. It does not address the substance of what the soul undergoes, or the specific Jewish-Torahitic content of divine service in Crescas's thought.

One might suppose that any deed performed with a good will, expressing a feeling of love of God, counts as service to God. But when Crescas speaks of service of God through fulfillment of the commands of the Torah, then the notion of the heart's devotion takes on the sense of fulfilling the Torah's commands in thought that ensues in action. He is not speaking of feeling in general, or of inchoate yearning, but of mobilizing the soul's entire activity in the endeavor of fulfilling the Torah's commands. The explication of this matter clarifies the substantive difference that obtains between Crescas and Maimonides on the one hand, or the kabbalists on the other hand.

We said before that God arranges reality before a person so that he may choose, and arranges it again in accordance with his choice, and that this is the meaning of the providence that directs man's free choice. But this formulation is missing an essential link by which alone it is rendered complete and coherent. God does not only arrange reality before a person, but commands him regarding that action which is proper for him in that situation and in every situation of the infinity of situations in which he is liable to be thrust. The person knows what he is summoned to do by providence, whether that knowledge comes by way of nature, of intellect, or of revelation. He knows, then, which choice will elicit a response, and his response to the reality that is arranged for him receives in this manner a direct meaning of a choice between the willingness to respond to the divine command and the refusal to do so. In this way it is also clear that the decision for the one option or the other is truly not just an inclination of the inner soul, but a relationship that is formed between the person and the environment to which the particular command applies. The divine command on all the levels of its manifestation is thus the medium in which providence and choice meet and determine one another. It follows that we should depict the relationship of the person to the God whom he serves as a dialogue of commandment and response: of the bestowal of grace and its acknowledgement.

Parallel between Torah and Creation

We must now consider the manner in which Crescas conceives the application of the Torah to the infinity of situations in the actual world. Indeed, at the foundation of his teaching one finds the very similar conception of the kabbalists, though transferred from the theological plane to the halakhic plane of the Torah. *Just as creation expresses the*

dynamic of the divine life, so does the Torah. There is parallel and agreement between the situations of creation and the Torah's teaching, and just as the infinity of creation unfolds from the infinite divine Oneness, so does the Torah. There is no situation in creation that does not have a specific instruction concerning it in the Torah. This idea is prominent in the critical discussion that Crescas directs against Maimonides's view about the relation of the written and the oral Torah, from which we receive clarification also regarding Crescas's understanding of intentionality in fulfilling the commandments.

According to Maimonides's view, the written Torah and the oral Torah are two parts of one Torah that was given at Sinai.

However, their purpose and manner of transmission are different. The written Torah was given in public through an open manifestation of God's authority to the entire people, and its giving was an event constitutive of that authority, but it is not amenable to fulfillment and realization in the particulars of the actual world. It seems that according to his basic conception, the written Torah is an absolute ideal constitution, and for that very reason it is not amenable to direct implementation in actual historical life. The oral Torah was given by God to an individual, to Moses, and was transmitted by him to other individuals. Insofar as it reaches the people, it does so by way of one individual to another, and so its method of transmission is essentially oral. What is its content? Explication of the written Torah and its implementation in practical living. But it is basic to this distinction that the oral Torah is not conceived as flowing from the written Torah, but as flowing directly from the divine authority in a way that one cannot arrive at the oral Torah from the written Torah, but only the reverse—it is possible to arrive *from* what is said in the oral Torah to the written Torah. (There is a parallel between this premise to another Maimonidean premise: one cannot arrive at the understanding of eternal truth from the allegorical images in the Torah and prophetic writings, but just the reverse—from the esoteric tradition of "Torahitic wisdom according to the truth" it is possible to understand what is really said in the written Torah.) Furthermore, inasmuch as the oral Torah explains and implements, it develops according to its own internal logic, and therefore one should not think that whatever was said by the later sages was delivered to Moses at Sinai, but the later teachings are inferred from the words of Moses and of the sages who learned from him, and in that sense they refer back to him. They continue in the path that he laid out and they bear the stamp of his authority.

That being the case, we can better understand another argument of Maimonides. In commenting on the rabbinic maxim, "You may not present matters of oral Torah in the manner of written Torah," he said that this did not imply that all the words of the sages that accumulated over the generations were preserved orally, for in his view this was impracticable. It meant rather that these traditions were learned orally, and starting from the time of the elders and the prophets, each of the students would write down his own "scroll of secrets"; he would prepare his lessons from it, come to the academy, and impart his own teachings orally. R. Judah the Patriarch's great achievement was thus no more than collating these scrolls of notes. Why did he do it? Because of the dispersion of the community, for in the absence of a single center, each scholar would teach according to his own tradition, and thus the tradition of learning would be split into many competing Torahs. It was therefore necessary to put down in writing one authoritative text of which one could say: *This* is the Oral Torah.

In keeping with this line of thought, Maimonides wrote his major halakhic work *Mishneh Torah* as a summary of the existing tradition. However, at the same time he introduced a revolutionary innovation, as we know. He composed a book of legal conclusions without citing differing views, without mentioning his sources, without explaining the deliberative process and the principles on the basis of which he made his decisions. He produced a *Mishneh Torah*—offered as a proposed authoritative summary of the Oral Torah. What did he intend by it? Already in his lifetime his first critics felt that this was an attempt at a radical revision of the traditional ideal of Torah study, adapting it to his philosophical outlook. We recall that Maimonides distinguished between ordinary "Torah wisdom" (halakhic deliberation) and "Torah wisdom according to the truth" (physics and metaphysics), and he saw in the latter the purpose of human existence and the truly perfect worship of God. He therefore sought to direct those scholars who were duly qualified to pursue the ultimate, higher wisdom, instead of investing all their time in ordinary Torah studies. He surely did not intend that thanks to his book there would no longer be a need for anyone to study Mishnah, Talmud, and other rabbinic works, as his critics accused him. He intended that these studies should continue, as he himself emphasized. But it seems that he wanted to carve out an orderly progression for educating Jewish scholars. They should study Mishnah and Talmud with their commentaries, until they reached a certain age, and it was even incumbent on them to devote a portion of

their time to these studies afterwards. But from a certain age onwards, they should devote themselves primarily to “true Torah wisdom” if they were worthy of it. For this purpose his summary code was required, for without it, it was impossible to know the law unless one devoted oneself exclusively to halakhic studies. Even on this understanding, the Mishneh Torah was revolutionary enough, representing Maimonides’s consistent intellectual approach and his special conception of the notion of serving God through thought.

*But according to Crescas, the Oral Torah emanated from the Written Torah.*¹⁹

We have expounded Maimonides’s outlook at length in order to lay the basis for understanding Crescas’s disagreements with him. First of all, Crescas differs with Maimonides on the relation of the written Torah and the oral Torah. In his view, the oral Torah is a continuation of the written Torah—one may say it emanates from it. More radically: The process of Commandment started with Abraham, who was possessed of such virtue that he could worship God with a single commandment—the covenant of circumcision—that implicitly contained all the commandments. Next came the Sinaitic Torah, which specified the one commandment in terms of many commandments, for people in a less advanced state of perfection than Abraham. Just as the written Torah is a further emanation and development from Abraham’s commandment, so the oral Torah became further developed, emanated and specified than the written Torah, and so it continues to develop without end, in parallel and in keeping with the never-ending unfolding of reality that is ever renewed in time.

Just as Crescas disagrees with the relationship that Maimonides described between the written Torah and the oral Torah, so he disagrees with the manner in which it is studied and taught orally. The halakhah was intended originally to be oral not only in the manner of its transmission but also in the manner of its knowledge. The Torah must be available to one continually, preserved in memory, providing quickly and easily the guidance that one needs in facing the many situations into which one is thrust. Writing the commandments in a book changes their nature in the student’s thought, for when he relies on the written form, the Torah is not an integral part of him. He then tends to conceive it as a set pattern, the same for all occasions. Most of all, he does not experience it as within him, as a part of himself.

¹⁹ This is based on Crescas’s presentation in *Light of the Lord*, Introduction. (LL)

But in truth it is necessary that the Torah should be in a person's soul at all times, that it should accompany him in every situation, and that he should live it. In other words, learning the Torah in written form delimits it and sets it in stone, so that one cannot live it from within. Therefore Crescas reads the history of the law differently: the oral Torah remained oral throughout the generations of the elders, prophets and sages. Only around the time of R. Judah the Patriarch did they start to write "scrolls of secrets," in case the persecutions that the people suffered might cause an interruption in the chain of traditional learning, and the commandments might be forgotten (God forbid!). From that time on, the sages permitted writing down the matters of oral Torah in various forms. But Crescas is careful to point out that they were all careful to insure that the Torah should not lose its dynamic character in the written medium. The sages transmitted different views, they cited the halakhic deliberations, and they continued them. In short, they treated the halakhic process very differently than Maimonides.

Crescas now spells out his major complaint against the *Mishneh Torah*. On the one hand, Maimonides does not conceive the oral Torah as flowing from the written Torah. On the other hand, he presents a cut-and-dried law without references, without deliberation, without mentioning differing opinions. He wrote a book summarizing the oral law to his time as a bounded, finite given, transformed into a "written" law in the full sense of the word, and thus deprived it of that dynamic vitality which it can only have as an entity that dwells and comes into being in the thinking process of the student out of reciprocal contact between his thoughts and the events of his life. On the one hand, one cannot learn from the *Mishneh Torah* what law should govern unprecedented situations. On the other hand, when one fulfills a command according to the *Mishneh Torah*, the deed is not done out of organic, flowing connection to the primal source—the written Torah—but only on account of its being decided thus by the most recent authority. For all these reasons, Crescas decides to write another work, parallel to the *Mishneh Torah* but different from it, that will help the scholar in time of need to observe and remember the law, not as a once-and-done finite matter, but as the flow of the particular instances from the encompassing whole.

Worship and Love of God in Exacting Halakhic Study

The book that Crescas promised to write has not come down to us. As we said, the book *Light of the Lord* is only the first portion standing in place of Maimonides's *Book of Knowledge*. But from the structure and contents of the projected work we can form a judgment of the ideal of Torah study as Crescas understood it. The primary purpose is what Maimonides called ordinary wisdom of the Torah. That much is obvious. A person ought to devote himself to the study of Torah in the spirit of the injunction, "meditate on it day and night." It is clear that he sees ultimate value in the very process of halakhic deliberation, and is not satisfied with the bare legal conclusion.

A person should reach a state where the oral Torah is preserved within him, present to him, living continually in his thought process. Why so much? It seems that on this point we are considering the true intention of the fulfillment of the commandments according to Crescas: "Study is valued when it leads to deeds"—he quotes the rabbis, and he says we should take this saying at face value—meaning what? Not that halakhic deliberation is valued because it leads to a legal decision; that is too trivial. Rather, that the process of study by its nature leads to expression in action. In this respect there is a far-reaching difference between one who performs a commandment "by the book" and one who performs it as a result of a deliberative process, a difference in which is latent the whole understanding of the intentionality of religious observance. The former fulfills a discrete obligation, isolated from the living stream that bears it, while the latter carries forward this particular command from its very source, and what he fulfills is a direct result of the whole Torah, its plenitude and infinity manifest in each and every deed. Thus, when Crescas speaks of the intentionality of religious observance, he is very far from Maimonides, who understands by this an action that is a direct or indirect means for intellectual apprehension of God. He is also very far from the kabbalists, whose intention in performing a command is bound up with its symbolic significance in relation to the "sefirot." But he is also very far from the manner of religious observance of the simple unlettered Jew, who fulfills the command out of a simple feeling of obedience or love. Crescas's intentionality is expressed in intellectual-scholarly activity, in deriving the commandment from its source and from the plenitude of knowledge of the particulars of the oral Torah, which point to a particular outcome in deed in every "here" and "now." Thus a person performs the divine will in his relation

to every situation in life. His love for God is expressed in this exacting erudite activism, and precisely from this derives the joy of proper fulfillment of the commandment.

Summary

Our presentation of Crescas's thought began with the generalization that it marked a revolutionary turning-point deriving from conservative intentions. We conclude by observing that even in its conservatism it arrived at an anticipation of tendencies that have developed in Jewish thought of recent times. Its significance as an expression of transition from old to new lies in this fact, more than in Crescas's critique of Aristotelian physics.

Crescas's conservatism is expressed in his declared intention to return to the traditional approach first of all in his exegetical method. In his theoretical discussion of the various principles of belief he constructs a quasi-legal deliberation by considering all the views of the Jewish thinkers and by arriving at a conclusion only after giving each argument its proper due. But his conservatism is expressed above all in his rehabilitating various views whose source is in the Bible and rabbinic thought, while expressing them with the conceptual clarity of philosophical articulation. But a movement of "return to the sources" often holds latent within itself the ideological background from which it springs, even when it criticizes its predecessors. We saw that Crescas's thought developed by way of critical integration of Jewish Aristotelianism (as formulated in Maimonides's *Guide* and Gersonides's *Wars of the Lord*) and Jewish Neo-Platonism (as formulated in the kabbalah and especially by Nahmanides).

Finally, in its unification of these two streams, *The Light of the Lord* approaches Halevi's *Kuzari* in many respects.

We thus have here a definitive summation of the medieval Jewish philosophical heritage. But what is the kernel that Crescas sought to emphasize in that heritage by critical recombination of the streams of Jewish thought in his day? It seems that we can express his central idea in this sentence: *Crescas sought to reconstruct an outlook based on a primal, pre-philosophical religious experience, an outlook rooted in the immediate clarity of a unique event perpetuated through a way of life.* The original testimony for this experiential event is contained in the Bible, and the way of life elaborated in the halakhah (especially in the liturgy) perpetuates

it by extrapolating the Biblical theophany onto the ever-changing and self-renewing reality by means of the oral Torah. This is the common denominator between Crescas and Halevi, and this is also what makes Crescas a precursor of certain developments in Jewish thought of the twentieth century, particularly the thought of Franz Rosenzweig.

The similarity of these two thinkers in respect of their understanding of creation, revelation and providence is astonishing, even though Rosenzweig was not acquainted with Crescas directly, while recognizing his own spiritual kinship with the author of the *Kuzari*.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

R. JOSEPH ALBO

Crescas's teaching did not enjoy the influence that it deserved in its time, despite his status as the leader of the Jews of his land, and although he grappled originally and convincingly with the problems of religious belief that were pressing issues of the time.

Only part of the fault of this meager influence may be blamed on the manner in which the *Light of the Lord* was written. It was written laconically in a difficult technical language, devoid of literary grace. Even though the book is permeated with profound religious feeling and a spectacular flight of original thinking, it cannot be compared with the popular style of Halevi's *Kuzari*, which enjoyed increasing influence in the same period, whether among scholars who were searching for a middle path between Aristotelianism and kabbalah, or among ordinary Jews. It certainly cannot be compared with Maimonides's works, whether in terms of their literary-pedagogical structure or their clarity of style. But it seems that if we are speaking of the influence on philosophers of the established school of his time, the main reason is rooted precisely in Crescas's advantage as we perceive it today: his critical audacity and the originality of his thought. The Aristotelian philosophy was still the dominant school, and ordinary philosophers who were not innovators themselves hesitated to uproot Aristotelian physics without replacing it with another physical system. Philosophers considered Maimonides's position preferable despite the problems it raised. In any case, it is a fact that in the generations immediately after Crescas they followed his lead only in rare instances.

The only philosopher of whom we can say of a certainty that he was Crescas's student, namely R. Joseph Albo, the author of the *Book of Principles* (*Ikkarim*),¹ is no exception to this rule. To be sure, he did keep faith with his teacher in some matters, but overall his theoretical presentation departs from Crescas's in favor of more conservative

¹ Albo, Joseph, *Sefer Ha-Ikkarim: Book of Principles*, translated by Isaac Husik, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia 1929–30, 5 volumes. The modern Hebrew edition in the *Mahbarot la-Safrut* series was based on Husik's edition.

philosophical outlooks that he found for the most part in Maimonides or Halevi, and occasionally among the kabbalists. Thus instead of the unified, original system of Light of the Lord that astonishes us by its rigorous consistency, Albo offers an eclectic teaching, which borrows its conservative elements from different streams and binds them together into a doctrine of principles. It is clear that this kind of writing was more acceptable to the generations following Crescas. In any case, R. Joseph Albo is not a particularly original thinker, but clearly eclectic. Nevertheless, the *Book of Principles* found great acceptance in the Jewish community as a popular presentation with a decidedly conservative orientation. If some of Crescas's ideas—uprooted from their context and stripped of their original profundity—were nevertheless exposed to a wide audience of readers, this was thanks to Albo's help.

The Book of Principles as a Reflection of Its Age

The historical importance of Albo's *Book of Principles* requires us to devote attention to it in this survey. The *Book of Principles* was characteristic of its period and answered to its needs. Despite its mediocrity of thought, it made a certain innovative contribution on two topics that pertained directly to the problems of the philosophically-educated Jewish community during the time of transition: its development of the approach to dogma, and its summary of the Jewish-Christian debate that received a new twist in that period. In these two respects Albo's book characterizes the developments in thought that were influenced by the cultural-historical background that was described above.

Albo's Life and Writings

Joseph Albo was born around 1380 and died in 1444. He served as rabbi in the communities of Daroca and Soria in Christian Spain, and he was Crescas's student. Also important background for understanding his work is the fact that he was appointed as one of the representatives of the Jewish community in the great disputation that took place in Tortosa, with the Jewish apostate Joshua Lorki on the Christian side, before Pope Benedict III in 1413–14. Incidentally, in this disputation Albo showed himself to be of a fiery and stormy temperament. He did not mince words, and he launched fierce verbal attacks at the Christian interlocutor, which frightened and angered his Jewish comrades. The

Book of Principles was written after this disputation, and it is clear in it that the problem of the position of Judaism vis-à-vis Christianity pre-occupied him greatly, and it became a formative factor in his thought, as we shall see. Nevertheless, he was not less troubled by the danger of Aristotelianism as disturbing the faith of enlightened Jews.

The *Book of Principles* is Albo's only published work, as far as we know. It was written originally in Hebrew. It was among the first Hebrew books to be printed (by Soncino in 1485), and was published in over seventeen editions. Isaac Husik published a critical edition of it, together with an English translation and notes (Jewish Publication Society, 1929–30). Two commentaries were written on it: *The Tent of Jacob* (by R. Jacob Koppelman in the 16th century) and *A Planted Tree* by R. Gedaliah ben Solomon Lipschitz (17th century).

Albo's Dogmatics: The Principles

We can see in Albo's *Book of Principles* the summation of an extensive development of thought that started with Maimonides, and that developed and became central in the late 14th and early 15th centuries. It seems that in the wake of the Tortosa disputation, from which the Jewish representatives left with a sense of failure in considerable measure because of the differences of opinion that it had exposed among them, Albo felt the need to examine all the partial approaches that had been offered in the formulation of Jewish belief, and to present an organized, comprehensive statement that could win general approval and consensus of the rabbis and Jewish scholars of Iberia. This is probably why even though he was a student of Crescas Albo did not adopt his approach, but preferred an eclectic approach and based it on that of R. Simeon ben Zemah Duran. The advantage of an eclectic approach in dogmatics is clear: in formulating the principles of a religion, it is not important to have one logically consistent system, but rather to express a general consensus. The price for this is that one sacrifices consistency and originality, and makes one's peace with vacillation and unclarity in the general structure. It appears that Albo made his peace with these limitations, and as a result he succeeded in his objective and his work was accepted by scholars and lay Jews, by philosophers and by kabbalists of a conservative bent. But we would do him an injustice if we did not emphasize that despite his eclecticism, he attempted—and in some

measure succeeded—to give his doctrine of principles the appearance of systematic unity. The cracks and blemishes are only visible on close examination.

The “Axioms” of the Science of Religion

Albo’s fundamental assumption is the same as Duran’s: Just as each branch of science has fundamental premises, some in the nature of axioms and others derived from prior sciences and demonstrated elsewhere, so too in the science of religion. We must first determine what are the necessary premises for that discipline, and then we can deduce what follows necessarily from them in strict scientific fashion. The result to be achieved by this method (if indeed it were capable of realization) would be that on the one hand it preserves the independence of religion from philosophy and provides a useful line of defense against radical Aristotelianism. On the other hand it allows the possibility of rational criticism of conclusions derived from first principles, by which we can discriminate between religious truth and false religious claims. Thus it also provides a useful line of defense against Christianity. Furthermore, this outlook establishes a place for religion in the general universal scheme of the sciences. In other words, it establishes a common denominator on a universal basis for all religions, without singling out in advance (at least apparently) any specific religion as true. At the outset, it is necessary to examine all the religions that claim that exclusive religious truth is in their possession. Afterwards one must establish a universal criterion by which one can decide what is evidence of a religion’s validity, and which of the religions claiming exclusive truth has proved its case.

The fact that Albo discerned a need to present this kind of scientific approach attests that a new situation had arisen in the interfaith debate, and this had further implications for Albo’s doctrine of principles that we shall discuss later.

In any case, the fundamental assumption is that religion is a science. We immediately ask: What kind of science? What kind of questions does it answer? Albo’s answer: Religion is a science of human governance and conduct in society and in nature. It is based on understanding the original meaning of *dat* (“religion”): law, a rule that provides motivation and guidance for action. Religion in this capacity is an institutionalized basic law.

The Types of Religion: Natural, Conventional, and Divine

If so, the next question arises: What kinds of laws are known to us? Albo's scientific-empirical answer is that there are three kinds of laws (or religions): (1) natural law; (2) conventional law; (3) divine law. We note that these are general categories, irrespective of particular existing laws.

Natural law includes the primary necessary conditions of human association as such. It is called "natural" on the Aristotelian assumption that the human being is a social animal by nature, i.e. his humanity is not actualized without society. The basic condition for social existence is that people should be prevented from injuring one another. It follows that the laws of natural religion are those of the Ten Commandments regulating interpersonal behavior. Their natural character can be recognized by their universality: there is no society (not even a society of thieves) that does not observe these rules.

Conventional law builds on natural law. It becomes clear once a society is formed that natural law is insufficient. We must add positive injunctions that seek to organize the relations between individuals in all areas of their contact with each other, otherwise it would be impossible to prevent quarrels and fights. Conventional law is universal in the sense that there is no society that does not have this kind of legislation, but each society sets up these laws on its own in the light of its unique experience, and therefore they should be defined as compacts, not as the laws of social nature. Incidentally, we can well point out that we have here a synthesis between the Kalamic view of "rational law" (which corresponds to "natural law/religion") and the Aristotelian outlook that sees social law as a matter of "conventional opinion" whose source is in practical reason (which corresponds to "conventional law/religion), and the source of this synthesis is the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.

Divine law or religion includes, of course, the law that was given in the name of God by prophets, not by statesmen who give natural and conventional law. But what is the need that leads to giving such a law? Albo again provides a synthesis of views taken from Saadia and Maimonides. First of all, divine law is superior to conventional law in the advantage that it provides for the social order, for conventional law has deficiencies because of the limitations of human reason. People often err. When a person is called on to establish normative law, he makes capricious decisions because he has only guesses and estimates to go on, and in the end, there is only the limited authority of a human

legislator, and his power to influence his fellow-humans to carry out his legislation is also poor. Divine law is superior in all these respects. Its judgment of good and evil is absolute, the norms that it establishes are based on the best possible considerations, and its authority and providence are absolute. Thus far, Albo follows Saadia. From this point on he accepts Maimonides's distinction between the state that is established by a statesman for the sake of material prosperity, and a state that is founded by a prophet for the sake of spiritual perfection, which includes immortality after death. This is the special, supreme mission of divine religion. But the views that Albo took from Maimonides were interpreted differently by him on account of the intervening Maimonidean controversy, and here he shows Crescas's influence.

In Albo's view, immortality of the soul is not immortality of the acquired intellect as Maimonides maintained. It is immortality of the entire individual soul, and it therefore follows—again, in departure from Maimonides—that we are not speaking here of natural human perfection. Natural perfection is actualization of the intellect, but *immortality of the individual soul transcends nature; it occurs through grace*. How do we merit this grace? In Maimonides's view, spiritual perfection is achieved by learning the truth, and all the mitzvot are directed to assisting this outcome. In Albo's view, spiritual perfection is the soul's achievement of *faith* that is beyond intellectual understanding (we will discuss this shortly), and it is expressed through proper acts that are performed with the right intention in compliance with the divine command. In other words, a person merits paradise through his faith and through fulfilling the commandments of the Torah.

We have three kinds of law that apply to three domains of conduct within the general science of religion. Each kind of law or religion has premises specific to it, and they are its primary principles. Natural law is based on the prohibition of injury to another person. Conventional religion is based on a person's freedom of choice and his having an end-goal or perfection toward which he strives. We note that Crescas included these last notions among the principles of the divine Torah (Book 2, Principles 5 and 6). But Albo argues that it is not specific to the Torah, but is an element of every religion, for every basic law has meaning only if we assume that a person is free to obey or disobey it, and only if the legislation serves a moral purpose (perfection). This is an attempt to bring the framework that he presents as close as possible to a model of economy and refinement, while also paying his respects to the other thinkers who have engaged in the enterprise of formulat-

ing Jewish dogma. We shall see later that this issue preoccupied him more than any other, and even more than was necessary to give his presentation a scientific impression. Despite his outward debate with Maimonides and Crescas on the correct formulation of Jewish dogma, he wanted to show that all of their views were included in his views, only in a more precise and ordered fashion. In other words, his systematic statement of Jewish principles excluded no established Jewish thinker from agreeing with them, and he made no exceptions to this rule.

Premises of Divine Law (= Religion)

Albo lists three premises of divine law (religion):

1. The existence of God.
2. Revealed Torah.
3. Reward and punishment.

This is a decidedly traditional formulation. It is based on Mishnah Sanhedrin Chapter 10, and it is developed according to the outline of Maimonides's 13 principles in his commentary to that mishnah (see my earlier discussion, Chapter 8). But Maimonides does not present his principles as part of a scientific method. In his version they were a didactic presentation of the elements of theoretical philosophy, incorporated into the basic law of the Torah. Albo presents them as an independent scientific method, and this is at the basis of his disagreement with Maimonides's dogmatic approach, though he adapted Maimonides's content with modifications.

But how does Albo "discover" his principles, and how does he validate them? We saw that he seeks from the outset to offer a strict scientific method. How does a scientist or philosopher proceed? He first offers premises that have been validated by a prior science or that are self-evident, and he inquires what follows necessarily from them. Whatever follows from such an inquiry is his science. But when Albo seeks to carry out his project, he proceeds very differently. The "principle" is defined by him as an assumption whose negation would imply negation of the whole Torah. Thus he asks: what are the assumptions whose denial would cause the Torah to fall? He answers with the three principles that we listed above. In other words, he assumes the truth of the Torah before he formulates its principles. But this does not quite do justice to his thought, for after declaring his principles he then examines their validity. The existence of God is proved in physics, and as the student

of religion as such is not required to study physics, this is for him a premise that he takes from a previous branch of science. Furthermore, for most believers God's existence is a belief based on revelation, i.e. on historical experience which we do not doubt because of the reliability of the tradition that attests to it. In this respect, it is a premise in the primary sense. Revelation is also a belief based on the clear evidence of a historical event. As for reward and punishment that is a recurring experience in Jewish history.

We can easily recognize that in the process of "discovering" and validating the principles, Albo covers some of the same intellectual ground as Crescas. Crescas had removed belief in God's existence from the status of revealed belief and made it a prior assumption proved by reason and confirmed by revelation. The revelation of Torah was also assumed prior to commandment, for the Torah itself provides the commandments. The remaining principles were derived from the Torah's existence as assumptions without which the Torah would be absurd. But Albo's context is different. He combined Maimonides's method with Crescas's, creating a hybrid that is not wholly one or the other. From the one he took the demand for scientific rigor, and from the other the assumption that the Torah is an entirely independent source. The result could not be fully convincing from a purely theoretical standpoint, as we shall discuss later. But we should again appreciate Albo's teaching with respect to its social-religious purpose—to find a common denominator between the extremes in the Jewish thought of his generation.

Secondary Roots (Shorashim)

After assuming the primary roots or principles, Albo deduces from each of them a series of consequences which he designates *shorashim* or secondary roots.²

- From the first primary root follow the secondary principles of God's unity, incorporeality, non-temporality, and freedom from imperfections.
- From the second primary root follow the secondary principles of divine knowledge, prophecy, and genuineness of the divine messenger.

² The title of Albo's work, *Ikkarim*, means literally "roots," and so does *shorashim*. Albo implies by his usage that the former are the major, central roots and the others auxiliary, secondary roots. (LL)

- From the third principle follows the secondary principle of divine providence.

Thus there are eleven primary and secondary principles in all.

It seems to me that the weakness of the logical structure, which is presented as scientifically consistent, is most obvious here. Only the secondary derivatives of the first principle follow logically and deductively from it. This is no surprise, for here Albo follows Maimonides's rigorous path. In Maimonides's view the proof of God's existence proves His unity as well as His incorporeality and eternity (which Albo calls "non-temporality," but the intention is the same), so that whoever says "God exists" implies also that the Being he affirms is one, incorporeal, and eternal. The same does not apply for the derivatives of the second principle. They are not included in the assertion of the primary principle, but they are conditions for it. In other words, if we did not know that God knows individuals and sends prophets, we could not believe that the Torah was given by Him. But it does not follow that the concept of "revealed Torah" includes within it the notions of divine knowledge and prophecy. As for the third principle and its derivative, why do we not say that both follow from the second principle? Or why is not "providence" the primary principle, and "reward and punishment" its derivative? If truth be told, Albo was somewhat aware of these difficulties and struggled with them.

Why, then did he prefer the scientific format that embraces the secondary under the primary principles in the form of deductive derivation? Again, for vital religious reasons:

First, because of the exigencies of the debate with Christianity. For that reason he exploits the feature that whoever denies the secondary principle denies in effect the primary principle as well even if he claims otherwise. (For instance, Christianity affirms God's existence, but by requiring belief in the Trinity it denies the Jewish view of divine unity, and when it requires belief in the Incarnation of God in Jesus, it denies God's incorporeality).

Second, to prevent a split in the Jewish camp. How? When Maimonides argues that belief in God's incorporeality is an independent requirement, it follows that whoever believes in God's corporeality from taking the Scriptural text literally is branded a heretic. We saw that this caused a storm, and that Crescas responded to it as well. Albo argues that this belief, though true, is not a primary principle but secondary, so a Jew who conceives of God corporeally because of Scripture is in error but not a heretic. One might ask, how is it possible to include

errant Jews but exclude Christianity by the same logic? The answer is that in the one case we are speaking of individuals who embrace the true religion but err in their understanding of it, while in the second case we are speaking of people who have a correct understanding of an erroneous religion. In any case, this is the main interest that Albo has in giving his dogmatic structure a scientific shape.

“Beliefs Connected with the Principle”

So far we have a general discussion of the concept of “divine religion,” its primary and secondary principles, but no specific religions have been discussed. We have good reason to suppose that Albo has Judaism in mind from the start, but the scientific method forced him to distinguish between the general definition and examination of a specific religion that claims to fit it, because the specific contents of the divine religion are not determined deductively, neither from its general definition nor from its primary principles, but they are the instantiations of these principles by power of the divine command, and such instantiations can be many and variable.

In this way Albo arrived at the third and last category of the elements of faith: “beliefs connected with the principle.” This is a belief that does not follow deductively from the primary or secondary principle, but it is associated with one of these as an instantiation of it, whether in all divine religions or in one divine religion only.

Albo enumerates six such beliefs in Judaism:

1. Belief in creation of the world *ex nihilo*. This is connected with the first primary principle, and to the derivative principle that God is lacking in all imperfection, i.e. that He is omnipotent.
2. Belief in Moses’s unique prophetic rank.
3. Belief that the Torah will never be altered or replaced by another Torah. This belief and the preceding are connected to the second primary principle of revelation, of which they are an instance but do not follow deductively.
4. Belief that human perfection is attained through each of the Torah’s commandments.
5. Belief in resurrection of the dead.
6. Belief in the coming of the Messiah. This belief and the preceding are connected to the third principle of reward and punishment, of which they are instances but do not follow deductively, because it can be fulfilled in other ways as well.

Again, we must ask what Albo seeks to achieve through these distinctions. The answer again is twofold. On the intramural side, he includes in the third category those beliefs that some Jewish teachers included as dogmas and others left out, and whose interpretation generated much controversy. Maimonides, for example, did not include the creation in his list of principles, while Duran included it. If Duran was right, then Maimonides may have been a heretic, and his more radical students who believed in the world's eternity certainly were. On the other hand, if Maimonides was right in listing the coming of the Messiah as a necessary principle, then Crescas, who did not include it in his list, might be considered a heretic. The same may be said of all the other principles in this category, concerning each of which there was controversy. Albo solves the problem in a simple way when he suggests a framework that can encompass the widest range of views current among the people, including those that were subject to debate, without turning the dissenters into heretics.

Thus far the internal Jewish problem. But turning to the outside, Albo suggests a clear criterion for distinguishing the religions claiming to be divine, based on the broadest basis of principles of divine religion, with scientific objectivity, without disqualifying any of them on account of their accidental differences of implementation. We shall see how far the matter extends from the fact that Albo dissents from Maimonides's view that the belief in Moses's prophecy, and even the belief in the immutability of the Torah, were principles specific to Judaism. In Albo's view they are not principles, because they do not follow necessarily from the notion of a divine religion. Thus Albo concedes that it is theoretically possible for a later prophet equal or greater than Moses to come and give another Torah. We might argue that this is not possible only if we can prove it by substantive examination of Moses's prophecy, and by substantive comparison of it and other religions that claim to be divine. The question may be raised here why Albo, who was engaged in an intensifying debate with Christianity, passes up so easily an argument that would seem so helpful? The answer is that Albo showed here what he had learned from the disputation in Tortosa. Maimonides's argument collapsed before the Christian argument that the Torah itself testifies to a series of prior religions that were superseded in turn: the religion of Adam, the religion of Noah, the religion of the patriarchs. Moses abolished them all. Why was it not possible, then, for another Torah to be given that would displace his? Furthermore, according to the Mosaic Torah, the religion of the Noahides still obligates the gentiles (so that the "righteous gentiles" who observe the Seven Commandments of the

Noahides have a place in the World to Come). Why, then, should it be impossible for several divine religions to coexist at the same time for different peoples? Faced with these arguments, Albo had to assume a common religious basis (and not merely a common philosophic basis) between him and his opponents, so that he could prove on that common basis the prior antiquity and perpetual validity of the Mosaic Torah. It follows that Albo had the same intention as Maimonides, but times had changed. What had been an external challenge became for Albo an internal challenge, for the unrelenting pressure that Christianity exercised on Jews and on their religion turned the very existence of Christianity into an internal theological problem that must be addressed not only for the benefit of Christian disputants, but for the benefit of the Jewish defenders of the faith.

Summary of the Dogmatic Discussion

We have now completed Albo's curtain-raising—his theory of dogmatics treated scientifically. The *Book of Principles* is constructed on this model. In Book One he presents the method; in Book Two he deals with the first primary principle and its derivatives; in Book Three, with the second principle; in Book Four, with the third. But with the detailed development, the arbitrary character of this model becomes more and more apparent, for in effect Albo deals with each derivative not as it follows logically from the primary principle, but in accord with assumptions that he borrows from the literature with which he was familiar, and in an obviously eclectic way. He draws liberally from Maimonides, from Aristotle directly, from Saadia, from Abraham Ibn Ezra, from Halevi, from Nahmanides, from the kabbalists and from Crescas. There thus develops an awkward structure, encumbered all the more by his presentation laden with sermons and labored subtleties, especially in the later sections of the book. There is no need to display for the reader the detail of Albo's suggestions and interpretations. We will continue with a discussion of how his systematic philosophy is addressed to the debate with Christianity on the one hand and with the Aristotelian philosophers on the other hand. The question is which of the religions that claim to be divine is the truly divine religion. For this purpose he must first address the question: How is a divine religion given? How does it validate its claim? And how does it bring its followers to spiritual perfection?

Albo's Argument against the Philosophers and Christianity

We have already received a certain answer to the question of the validation of divine religion in the previous discussion. A divine religion is true only if it includes all the primary principles and their secondary derivatives. If it affirms a principle but denies the derivative, it has effectively renounced the principle itself. Therefore a divine religion can never change on the level of its principles. But this finding, though very useful in the debate against Christianity (though not against Islam), has no value in verifying the true religion. Why not? Because we are speaking of accepting truths that are themselves based on the clarity of immediate experience. From here on the determining question for us, as members of a religion, is not if we hold to the right formal principles, but if our faith in them is established in the correct way. With respect to God's existence, the question is whether we have proved God's existence in the right way and come to true knowledge or been privileged with true revelation. In other words, the question is whether our belief in God's existence is genuine, and not only if the assumption of God's existence is true. With respect to the principle of revelation, the question is not only if there is revelation, but whether this particular Torah, with all of its commandments, is revealed. With respect to reward and punishment, the question is whether a particular event came intentionally as a reward for our action or not. Thus we are in need of internal validation of the faith itself. The faith itself must be true, and the Torah including its commands must be true. With this we arrive at the essential theological innovation of Albo's teaching, which he arrived at by pitting Maimonides against Crescas: What is faith? How can faith be verified? For it is clear that on the one hand he distinguishes between faith and intellectual knowledge, and thus he raises religion above the level of nature and intellect; on the other hand, he requires that faith be judged by rational criteria, otherwise we could not prove the truth of Judaism and the falsehood of Christianity.

Maimonides and the Aristotelian Concept of Belief

Maimonides defines faith as a representation or conception represented in the soul (in the senses, imagination, and reason) that relates to objects external to it. A person believes that the representation faithfully represents its object. Therefore if the representation or concept indeed

agrees with the object, then the belief is true, and if they do not agree, then the belief is false. But it occasionally happens that a person uses the right words while depicting the object incorrectly in his mind, for instance, if his mental representation or concept do not agree with what the words describe. His belief is then false even if he is not lying—he is in error or confused. In Maimonides's view, this is the situation of most believers: they proclaim and confess that God exists, is one, and incorporeal, but since they cannot free themselves of their imagination, they do not understand their own words correctly. Their belief is then false, unless they know that they are still far from apprehending the truth that they confess, and strive with all their power to attain it. It is obvious that according to this conception the notion of faith has a meaning of complete certainty in the thing wherein our concept agrees with its object, but we should note that Maimonides does not distinguish between knowledge and its certainty, because certainty arises from the very basis of knowledge, in each act of knowledge in accord with its proper basis. If it is sensory knowledge, the test is the exactness and clarity of the experience. If it is conceptual knowledge, the test is the exactness of the logical demonstration. Therefore, if I do not know how to prove that God exists, is one, and is incorporeal, then I do not truly believe it, even if I repeatedly say with feeling and enthusiasm "God exists, is one, and is incorporeal!" In other words, the perfection of knowledge is certainty. Therefore, it is clear that Maimonides does not attribute religious value to faith expressed in verbal confession even if accompanied by genuine heartfelt conviction. Religious value is bound up with authenticated knowledge.

Crescas and the Kabbalistic Concept of Faith

When we pass from the Aristotelian movement (that Maimonides represents) to the kabbalah, from which Crescas was influenced in the matter of faith, we find a totally different model. We already saw that Crescas does not deny the need to arrive at intellectually certain knowledge in the matter of God's existence, unity and incorporeality. But this knowledge is only a prerequisite for faith in a sense separate from knowledge, and that is the main thing for him: the strength of inner conviction that comes to expression in the service of God. In other words, faith for Crescas is the singlemindedness of intention and desire to serve God as an expression of human inwardness; it is the gesture of obedience born of love and devotion (*devekut*). By this conception,

there is of course a religious value in faith. But again, the meaning is not intellectual certainty but the intensity in which the will is devoted to act in accord with true knowledge and thus to fulfill God's will.

"Compromise" between Maimonides and Crescas

Albo's outlook in the matter of faith is a middle way between the outlooks of Maimonides and Crescas. It appears that he carved out this path because both Maimonides's and Crescas's outlook are adapted to exceptional individuals with special spiritual gifts, but Albo addresses his words to the majority of his people who are neither philosophers nor kabbalists.

How, then, does he define faith? He holds onto the aspect of certainty that a certain assertion is true, and invests it with absolute value, as if this certainty were divorced from knowledge itself. Thus he deviates from Maimonides without arriving at Crescas. We will try first to understand this definition in depth by means of an example that Albo cites to make his argument concrete: when I taste hot pepper and it burns my tongue, then I come to know that pepper burns, and scientific analysis brings me to the certain conclusion that the cause of the burning is the excess of the element of fire in the pepper. Thus I know intellectually what I feel, and my faith is not separate from my knowledge. In other words, I know that pepper, because of its preponderance of fire, burns. But when I see a magnet attracting iron, the phenomenon is present to me with certainty, yet the sensory experience of seeing the iron move toward the magnet does not bring me in direct contact with the cause of the phenomenon, for the cause is hidden from me. I may assume with certainty that there is a cause, because the fact is certain. In this case faith is separate from knowledge, and I am certain of a reality of something that I do not know. In other words, with respect to the magnet I can say that I believe in its power to attract iron. From this we deduce that "to believe" means to be sure of the truth of something, even though its cause is unknown to us. Now the existence of God can be proved, but His revelation as creator and benefactor, His presence to the prophets, the miracles, the Torah, and providence are certain phenomena whose cause is hidden from us, so that we do not know their causes but we only believe in them. We "believe" in the sense that we rely on that experience that reveals them in full certainty, and from that point on religious value attaches to the strength of faith. The believer is one who relies on it with certitude, who harbors no

doubt. The reward that a person receives as an adherent of a divine religion is first of all in accord with the degree of his faith in itself, in the power with which he upholds the truth that was revealed to him. The prophet is first of all a perfect believer in this sense. We learn how much importance Albo attached to the independent value of faith from the fact that he made personal immortality dependent on it. Whoever's soul was fully devoted to the eternal truth of God's existence, his soul would enjoy eternal union with God. Albo explains the miracles of the prophets in the same way. They activate supernatural forces unknowingly through their faith.

The interesting fact that emerges from this understanding of the concept of faith is its astonishing similarity to the concept of faith as an independent redeeming value in Christianity. In this manner Albo's doctrine of principles of faith approaches the conception of the nature of articles of faith in Christianity. This is another paradoxical effect of rapprochement that develops from confrontation. But we may still ask why Albo took this step that was laden with danger. The answer is apparently rooted in what we said earlier: the need to strengthen the faith of the Jewish masses against the doubts and confusions whose source was in Aristotelian philosophy. The kind of faith that Albo holds up is equal for everyone. It frees simple believers from having to make intellectual efforts, and it offers in their place formulations of faith that one need not understand in depth, but only believe. The question that Albo raises in this connection is characteristic: Is a person permitted to inquire about the truth of his belief? This question could not have been raised in Maimonides's world of thought. In his view, a person was not only permitted but obligated to inquire about the truth of his belief, otherwise he would not truly be believing. But in Albo's generation this question is raised by Jews who stand on the threshold of apostasy. They ask: Does the very fact of apostasy, which involves undermining of faith, disqualify one from believing any religion at all? For changing one's faith involves one in doubting the previous faith, and once a person's doubts are raised, his faith is impugned, and even if he goes on to another faith that appears more certain to him, he will soon experience misgivings about his new faith! The Christians raised this argument to Jews who had been baptized. They did not trust them, and the fact that such a question was raised in the hearts of Jews facing the pressure to convert explains the need that Albo sought to answer by drawing closer to Christianity: A Jew must hold on to his faith at any

price, because it is his passport to eternal life. It is forbidden to raise doubtful thoughts even when facing the severest temptations.

How does One Distinguish True and False Belief?

Defining faith as a value makes Albo's task easier in the internal struggle, but it complicates it in the intimate struggle with Christianity, for after affirming faith as a value in itself, he must nevertheless find a way to examine it and to distinguish true faith, that is valuable, from false faith, that is without value. This is the next step. Of course, what was said previously about the inner connection of secondary principles to primary principles has validity in verifying faith. Faith in a religion whose secondary principles contradict the primary principles is self-defeating, for we will not be able to hold it in good faith, in a way that we do not contemplate its contradiction, for it is self-contradictory. Therefore, even if faith can apply to things that are beyond our power to comprehend fully, it cannot apply to things that reason contradicts. This is the first way of validating the divine religion, but it is not a sufficient validation. There must be verification of faith in truths that are beyond reason but which reason does not contradict, in order for us to distinguish between a Torah that was truly revealed by God and a Torah that only pretends to this status. Is there a way of distinguishing such truths? Albo's positive answer returns us to philosophy: even faith in what is beyond knowledge must result from a necessary cause of which it is possible to give an intellectual account. We return to the example of the magnet which attracts a piece of iron: we do not know what force works in it, and we only believe in its existence, but there is an intellectual cause of our belief—namely the experience to which we can return and be persuaded of the absolute factuality of the unusual phenomenon. Whoever believes in the story of the magnet without being persuaded of its factuality or at least without examining the reliability of the reporter, is a fool who will believe anything, and the faith of the fool is worthless. It is self-defeating because it is suffused with obscurity and has no substance. Albo's conclusion is that faith in what is beyond knowledge must be based in factual experience that has no misgivings, and this applies also to the principles of divine religion. To believe, one must be persuaded by an event that attests to them, or one must accept reliable, certified testimony of such an event.

What Experience Verifies Religious Belief?

Albo distinguishes two kinds of such experience, the first one primary and the second less convincing and dependent on the first.

1. *The primary experience is prophecy.* In prophecy, God is present to the prophet through visions that can only have come from a supernatural source, or through an utterance. In other words, we are speaking of revelation in its various aspects. When a person receives prophecy, his belief in what is given him is certain, and he has no doubt about it whatsoever.
2. *The second kind of experience is miracle.* In other words, the prophet gives us the divine word, and to prove that he truly speaks in God's name, he works a miracle. To be sure, Albo does not reject this kind of validation, but he does not put it on the same level as the prophetic experience, for a miracle does not contain in itself the propositional truth that it seeks to demonstrate. Therefore faith based on miracles is not as perfect as faith that follows from prophetic revelation. Of course for people who have not directly experienced either prophecy or a miraculous event that supported a prophetic claim, the most reliable validation is one that is based on a public experience at which many people were present, where their testimonies agreed without contradiction, assuming they were themselves reliable people in their intellectual and critical ability as well as their ethical character.

Basing the Mosaic Torah on Experience

The rest of the argument is quite familiar from Halevi's argument in the *Kuzari*. At Sinai the Israelite people enjoyed a public experience of the first kind. Moses himself enjoyed the highest degree of prophecy (and the rest of the Israelites who prophesied with him were witnesses to that). Together with him or with his aid, the 600,000 Israelites who had experienced the Exodus were privileged to prophesy, and they were able to attain on their own and verify directly everything that they received from Moses. From their testimony derives the most reliable tradition. No other religion can boast of such verification, and so the belief in the Mosaic Torah is absolutely certain, whereas the belief in other religious traditions that sought to displace it must be riddled with doubts and inherently unreliable.

The Uniqueness of the Mosaic Torah

On the basis of this conception Albo was able to reexamine the question of whether the Mosaic Torah was susceptible of change. First of all he repeats that a divine religion can change in principle. This is not on account of God, who cannot change, but on account of its recipients, who understand the truth that is revealed in the Torah on different levels, from different points of view, in different situations. Such an admission must put the question in another, more profound form: there is no question that the Mosaic Torah is susceptible of change, but in what sense can it change? For in the Oral Torah, which derives from the written Torah, there are changes, yet it retains its identity as the same Torah. More precisely: can a change come about that will be in essence the abrogation of the original Torah in favor of another Torah?

To answer this question, Albo distinguishes three types of divine utterance in the Mosaic Torah:

There are things that Moses and the people heard directly from the divine glory, especially the first two of the Ten Commandments, "I am the Lord your God" and "You shall have no other gods before Me." These are certainly not subject to change, for they are God's own words, and changes in them would be changes in God who gave them.

There are things which the people received directly with Moses's help in a way that they heard them together with him—namely, the Ten Commandments. These words are nearly as if spoken by God in their original form.

Finally, there are words that Moses received from God and transmitted to the people as spokesman, though the people did not prophesy with him. In the words that were transmitted in this way, the human factor of the receivers plays a larger part, and therefore it is possible to suppose that some change may occur in the details of these commands, but only if the innovator be a prophet of Moses's stature. Albo says that this cannot be ruled out as impossible. But it is clear that if another prophet like Moses should arise and give a second Torah, it would be different from the first only in peripheral details. Clearly Christianity and Islam cannot claim this, for Christianity explicitly negates what was communicated to all the people directly from God (since the belief in the Trinity contradicts the Second Commandment). Both Christianity change what God commanded through Moses with the people as witness (referring to the Sabbath, which is included in the Ten

Commandments). Similarly, both of these religions abrogate most of what was transmitted through Moses to the people, and they do so through prophets who were not of Moses's stature, for they had no validation through direct mass experience or tradition with the degree of validation of the Mosaic Torah. In other words, even after Albo seems to soften Maimonides's strong insistence on the uniqueness of the Mosaic Torah, he returns to it on a different basis that is not subject to the counter-arguments from the existence of other valid religions prior to Moses, and from the mutability of the Oral Law.

Thus Albo discharged the double task that he had taken on himself: to use philosophy to fortify the position of Judaism in the debate with Christianity and Islam, and at the same time to present Judaism as a unified doctrine agreed on by all its adherents, despite their differences, and absolutely certain despite the philosophical challenges that disturb faith on the basis of intellectual knowledge.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE TURN TO CULTURAL THOUGHT

Our analysis of Albo's *Book of Principles* is evidence of the direction of a process whose influence is noticeable in the philosophical literature of Christian Spain in the generations prior to the expulsion. It is a process of declining interest in philosophy in favor of other varieties of religious thought that had the potential to strengthen the people's faith against outside threats. Crescas's ideas may have held the promise of a new beginning, but we saw that they had no follow-up. His critique of Aristotelian physics found little reception. The continuers of the philosophical tradition made their peace with Maimonides's *Guide* as the best way to reconcile the contradictions between philosophy and the Torah. Indeed, many of the Jewish scholars who were inclined to philosophy in these generations—such as R. Abraham Shalom, R. Shem Tov ben Joseph, and R. Isaac Abravanel, defended Maimonides against Crescas and his other critics, for compared with the developments that one could see in the thought of Gersonides and Crescas that arose from their striving for philosophical consistency, Maimonides appeared as a conservative and champion of the golden mean. Nevertheless, it was not possible to ignore the dangers of engaging in philosophy. In the generation of the expulsion many Jewish thinkers maintained that the expulsion was a punishment that was visited on the Jews for the heresy of philosophy. In the view of thinkers like R. Isaac Arama and R. Joseph Jabetz, that is what had caused many educated Jews to give up their religion in the face of threat or for careerist motives, because in either case they ended up disparaging their religion and abandoning Jewish observance.

Such diatribes and accusations swayed most Jewish thinkers toward a conservative outlook with respect both to Judaism and philosophy. The old was preferable to the new, even if the latter had the purpose of solidifying the Torah's status.

These winds of change are the likely reason for the increasing influence of Halevi's *Kuzari* in this period. The advantage of his viewpoint was that he set the Torah on a higher level than philosophy without denying the latter's attainments in the domain of empirical science.

Furthermore, his views were comprehensible to ordinary Jews without philosophical education. But since Halevi's views were not accepted unconditionally but as a kind of charm to quiet the evil spirits that scientific research had roused up, the tendency to dogmatic solutions increased, i.e. determining the fundamentals that should remain unquestioned and within whose limits inquiry would be permitted. But it is easily understood that such an approach, far from encouraging philosophical inquiry, tends to suffocate it. In effect, we may say in summary that the philosophical movement that began in the tenth century exhausted its momentum in this period and tied itself to the theory of dogmatics as protection against breaking out into the new fields of inquiry that were already visible in the vistas of Renaissance Italian culture. But the spirit cannot be contained. Alongside the conservative and dogmatic intellectual barricades, there appeared a few blossoms of thought that demonstrated the advantages of the new field of culture.

History as an Object of Philosophical Discussion

The most prominent sign of new interest was the discovery of history as an independent domain of inquiry that could possibly explain the situation of the Jewish people not in terms of divine providence, but in terms of political, religious, and socio-cultural factors deriving from this-worldly reality. This line of inquiry seemed at first not to be systematically philosophical but merely scientific. But it laid a foundation for a new way of philosophical speculation regarding history and the question of providence. We shall show later that Jewish thought in the modern period responded to the revolutionary change that occurred in the historical circumstances of Jewish existence, and therefore it displayed sensitivity to the problems that arose from the historiography that investigated those circumstances and the causes of the transformation that occurred through them. We already find something of this modern sensitivity to historiography as the basis of history in the generation of the Spanish expulsion. The questions concerning the causes of the expulsion were very troubling, and the standard theological answers were insufficient especially for the philosophically educated, who were not inclined to accept the argument that it was their love of science and philosophy that had caused the catastrophe. What could be more natural for these people, from their experience, than to use scientific tools and the scientific way of thinking in order to show that

the catastrophe occurred from political, religious and cultural factors, not because of the people's sins?

In this connection there naturally arose the attempt to understand the motivation of the Christians not only from the ecclesiastical-dogmatic perspective which had been prominent in the interfaith disputations, but also from the political perspective of the educated classes. The most probing question was: What was the image of the Jew in Christian eyes? What were its sources? Why was the Jew so hated even after baptism? Was there perhaps some justification for this negative image on the basis of Jewish behavior? Was it perhaps conceivable that Jews should correct their behavior in order to improve their image? This was a new viewpoint, and it uncovers a new field of inquiry that was not previously discussed.

In order to highlight the importance of this change, it is proper to emphasize that interest in history, grappling with the question of Jewish fate, and grappling with Christianity are not in and of themselves innovations of the generation of the Spanish expulsion. Even Maimonides, the Aristotelian for whom history was a domain of accidental events of no philosophical importance, had recourse to it when he sought to give an explanation for the reasons of some of the commandments and for the situation and peculiar destiny of the Jewish people. What was peripheral for Maimonides was central for Halevi. We saw that the *Kuzari* responded to a historical challenge and dealt with it by providing a comprehensive historical outlook from a religious viewpoint. We saw that the majority of Jewish philosophers, including Crescas, proceeded similarly. But among all these philosophers there held sway the theological assumption that the events of Jewish history do not follow nature but are to be understood by way of the hidden miracle of divine providence. Therefore they made little effort to understand history in its own terms.

The same applied to the confrontation with Christianity. The question of the source of anti-Jewish Christian hatred always occupied the Jewish apologetes, as also the question of how to act so as not to arouse that hatred. But the theological reason for Christian hatred appeared sufficient, and the question how to act so as not arouse hatred had no interest beyond the practical objective, because the thought never occurred to Jews that they themselves had something in them that justified the hatred. On the contrary, they believed that the fault lay with their enemies. In other words, Jews measured the Christians by their yardstick but were not interested in viewing themselves through

Christian eyes. In the period we are discussing there occurred a major transformation in this matter that is already noticeable in Albo's *Book of Principles*. Jews were forced to confront Christian thought and culture intimately to the point of internalizing its values. This is the beginning of a phenomenon that later characterized the Jews of the emancipation era: seeing and judging themselves by the yardstick of the Christian observer.

R. Solomon Ibn Verga

R. Solomon Ibn Verga lived in the second half of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century and was numbered among the exiles of Spain and Portugal who arrived in Italy. His book *The Rod of Judah*¹ was first published in 1554. It is clear from his book that he was well-versed in philosophical learning, and philosophical ideas are scattered throughout his work. However, this is not a philosophical work, but rather a narrative work that combines historical documentation and literary testimony interwoven with reflections whose principal purpose is to derive lessons from the traumatic event of the expulsion from Spain and Portugal. His interpretation of the expulsion comes in the context of a broad review of the series of tribulations that the Jewish people experienced in their history. At the same time, this was the first theoretical attempt to understand these calamities through examining the human motives without the theology of sin and punishment. Therein lies its philosophical interest.

As regards its literary structure, here is a narrative of a series of destructive events, great and small, that happened to the Jewish people from the destruction of the Second Temple through the Spanish expulsion. This is not historiography but a sequence of episodes quintessentially depicted and artfully presented. The objective is to create a basis and framework for instructive dialogues concerning the factors and causes that led the Jewish people to make their way from one destruction to another. Indeed the dialogues are the heart of the book,

¹ The book's title *Shevet Yehudah* is ambiguous. The word *Shevet* originally meant "rod, staff" and came eventually to mean "tribe." Ordinarily *Shevet Yehudah* would mean "the tribe of Judah." But Ibn Verga evidently meant *Shevet* in the sense of "rod" connoting punishment and affliction, as his book is a chronicle of the tribulations of the Jewish people.

and in their literary aspect they fall into two categories: (1) Dialogues between a Christian king and a Christian sage concerning the Jews; (2) dialogues between a Christian king or sage and a Jewish sage. This literary setup is especially interesting, because Ibn Verga was able to convey his message through the artistic depiction of active characters no less than through the content of the dialogues. Especially instructive is the parallel between the character and behavior of the Christian sage and the character and behavior of the Jewish sage, for it reflects the image of the Jew in the non-Jew's eyes and vice versa. The image of the Jew displays cleverness, ambiguity and unusual agility in avoiding responding to questions that are hard to answer, whether so as not to attack the Christian disputant or in order to conceal the weakness of the Jewish argument in the face of attacks that he perceives as justified. At the same time the Jewish sage displays obstinacy in his faith, that he covers over with fearfulness and fawning reverence. By contrast, the Christian sage is characterized by intellectual honesty coupled with inflexibility, slow-wittedness, a considerable pride that is haughty and condescending, and an irascible temper characteristic of monarchs. Clearly this depiction is implicitly critical of the Christian side; there is no doubt that some of the Jew's negative characteristics are the result of his degraded status and his anxieties. But this criticism is balanced by the advantage that Ibn Verga gives to the Christian sage by virtue of his intellectual honesty. It is surprising that he has no prejudices based on religion, and so there is a certain justification for his haughty bearing and his outbursts of anger, and it thus seems clear that in this respect Ibn Verga sees the Jewish sage through the Christian sage's eyes just as he sees the Christian sage through the Jew's eyes.

The Causes of Blood-Libels and Judeo-Phobia

What, then, are the cause of Jew-hatred, of Jewish defeats and of blood libels? In the central dialogue in Chapter 7 between King Alfonso the Great and Pious of Spain and Thomas the Sharp-witted, the two Christian discussants discuss the blood-libel as a malicious fabrication, perverted and baseless. What, then, causes these libels that are so widespread? The answer is social. First the two determine by personal observation that Jew-hatred is not common among the nobility or the educated class but only among the illiterate masses.

Next, they seek out the reasons. First, the relative economic prosperity of the Jews, who were able to get rich quickly by lending at interest,

while the Christians were impoverished and some lost their money and their lands to the Jews. Second, the social conduct of the Jews. When a Jew has grown somewhat richer, he displays the fact immediately through his dress, his appearance, and his conduct, whereas rich Christians do not. It is interesting that in another dialogue the Jewish sage explains that because Jews are generally downtrodden, they compensate by showing off their wealth when they have it. Another reason that Thomas mentions is the Jews' self-separation by religious law. Eating together draws people closer, while intentional refusal to do so is perceived as insulting, even when one understands that this has a religious basis and expresses no pejorative intent. Nevertheless the haughty pride of the Jews in claiming to be a chosen people infuriates Thomas the Sharp-witted, and when he discusses this he changes from defender of the Jews to their accuser.

Reasons for the Jews' Military Defeats

Similarly the Christians discuss the reasons for the Jews' military defeats, even though in their heyday the Jews were more numerous than their enemies, richer, stronger and well-versed in strategy. The main reason is that they discover (based on knowledge of Jews in their own day and research of historical records) is the excessive Jewish tendency to internecine disputes, which dissipate their energies in never-ending internal strife. The sage advises the king that if he wishes to destroy the Jews, he should leave them alone to do the job themselves. Another reason is that the Jews did not recognize the ammunition in their enemies' hands. Only after all these is the theological reason mentioned: they angered their God, and He delivered them into the hands of their enemies. This clearly explains why God did not rescue His people but delivered them over to the natural factors that caused their defeat, which are the primary causes.

Reasons for Persecution of the Jews

In the continuation of the book (Chapter 63) R. Solomon Ibn Verga straightforwardly summarizes his own view of the causes for the persecution of Jews in diaspora:

1. God's anger at His chosen people, from whom He expects more (in accordance with Amos 3:2: "You alone have I singled out of

all the families of the earth—that is why I will call you to account for all your iniquities.”

2. The natural consequence of the ruling power to impose its religion on the ruled, and the natural phenomenon of religious hatred.
3. The consequence of the Jews' having killed Jesus.
4. The temptations of many rich Jews in Spain that led them to marry Christian women and whose wealth blinded them to the realities of their own position. These phenomena led to justified jealousy and hatred.
5. The Jews' habit of swearing falsely to gentiles in monetary matters.
6. The Jews' haughty attitude toward their Christian neighbors.

Of course these considerations fall far short of scientific social-cultural and political research. Nevertheless the innovation in discovering these planes of thought is highly significant.

A Tolerant Outlook toward Christianity

It is finally worthwhile to mention the balanced, fundamentally positive evaluation that this book gives of the Christian world, when the framework of observation is not merely religious but also cultural. In all the dialogues between the Jewish sage and the Christian sage, Ibn Verga emphasizes repeatedly that the Christians are not regarded under Jewish law as idolators, and that whatever Jewish law says negatively about idolators applies to the pagans of antiquity but not to Christians. It follows that Jewish law regards the Christian religion as legitimate for gentiles, though not for Jews. This view is not new in itself. Jewish authorities who lived in Christian lands had previously proclaimed this to be the case, for obvious reasons.

The new factor is found in several expressions that give the impression of a tolerant outlook that conceives religious identity as a subjective allegiance that does not imply one's claiming absolute superiority to a rival religion. Thus the Jewish sage argues that he is required to uphold his faith because of the Sinaitic revelation, but the Christian, whose ancestors were not present there, is not similarly obligated, and is not religiously deficient on that account. The Jew's self-separation from the Christian through his way of eating is because of his dietary regulations to which the gentile is not subject. Here too there is no disparagement of the gentile and his religion, for though the laws of kashrut create a sense of identity and distinctness, they do not imply

religious superiority. One of the dialogues even raises the idea that Judaism is better for the Jew on account of his nature, and Christianity is better for the Christian because of his nature, but which of them is really true? To this the Jew responds with the famous parable of two jewels that appear identical, which only the jeweler can distinguish. Lessing would later use this parable in his play *Nathan the Wise*.

Indeed, in all these respects the *Rod of Judah* is reminiscent of the intellectual ambience of the early Enlightenment.

Don Isaac Abravanel

Don Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508) was the greatest political and spiritual leader of Iberian Jewry in the period of the Spanish expulsion. His station, his personality and his fate embodied the tragic paradox of the history of this Jewish center. From the beginning of its history, first under Moslem rule and later under Christian rule, it produced prominent personalities who carried out central governmental tasks in royal courts. By virtue of their political influence they gave protection to Jewish communities, taking responsibility for their status and prosperity, while contributing to the cultural flourishing that was nourished by intimate contact and reciprocal (though guarded) openness with the surrounding culture. Don Isaac Abravanel, the last in this succession, was unsurpassed in all these respects. As the powerful Minister of the Treasury—first in Portugal, later in Spain and finally in one of the Italian principalities—he was communal leader of all Jews in the Iberian peninsula and made every effort to secure and buttress their threatened status. But precisely in his tenure, under his leadership, and despite all his efforts, the Church succeeded in attaining its objective, and with the completion of the Christian reconquest of the Iberian peninsula, all its Jewish inhabitants who did not convert to Christianity were expelled. Don Isaac Abravanel himself went with them into exile.

What we say Abravanel's public achievement applies to his spiritual attainments also. He was many-sided in his achievements, an outstanding example of the "Renaissance man" (and a reminder that the cultural revival of the Italian Renaissance was felt in Spain as well). His Jewish and general education were both broad and deep, encompassing all areas of the culture of his time, and he sought to integrate them in his activity as a spiritual leader whose mission was to strengthen his people as it struggled to deal with both external calamity and internal

spiritual crisis. The beginning of medieval Jewish philosophy was indeed rooted in the centers of Babylonia, Egypt and Northern Africa, but it had the climax of its development in Spain, and its history reflects the long and crisis-ridden history of Spanish Jewry. Not accidentally, those individuals who lived and created on the fault-line between the cultures, like Abravanel, included the greatest and most innovative thinkers in Jewish philosophy. Abravanel was the last in this distinguished line of cross-cultural creators, and in many respects we may see him as summing up their legacy, especially that of Maimonides on the one side and Halevi on the other, but he did so on the basis of broad immersion in the thought of the Italian Renaissance.

Abravanel's Literary Oeuvre

Abravanel was not an original philosopher but a summarizer and critical interpreter of the legacy that embodied the tensions and profound spiritual crisis with which he sought to grapple in order to give spiritual strength to his people. He did this intentionally with the tools of that same legacy, which he used for the purpose of restoring it to the original conservative point of origin, from which it was possible to continue the Torah's legacy that defined and unified the people. He sought to revive the glories of the past, and in that enterprise he encountered the influence of the Italian Renaissance. If Abravanel's philosophical project had any originality, it was not expressed in a new philosophical method such as Crescas's, but in his combination and critical reinterpretation of traditional ideas. His literary output started with his commentary on the Bible, and his innovation in this area is expressed first of all in the books that he preferred to comment on, namely the historical books in the Prophetic part of the canon: Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. The Spanish commentators were not terribly interested in these books. But Abravanel's focus on the interpretation of these books did not simply derive from the desire to save them from neglect or to map out new territory that would be his. These books document the struggle of the tribes of Israel, recently settled in their land, with the problems of political unification and establishment of the monarchy, namely the problem of the relationship between the prophetic-Torahitic legacy and the institution of the monarchy, that strove for an independent role vis-à-vis the Torah. Look closely and you will see that this was the problem that stood at the focus of Abravanel's immediate practical interest, both as a Spanish politician and as a Jewish leader acting

against the background of the power-struggle between the Church and the Spanish monarchy, which would determine the fate of the Jewish people in Spain. This was the immediately pressing problem that needed to be dealt with philosophically. It was natural, therefore, that on this topic he brought to expression the best of the insights which had their source in his personal experience as a political leader who was also an intellectual (caught between these contradictory personal aspirations), as well as in the general thought of his time with which he was profoundly familiar. It is also natural that this topic became a central axis of his output as a philosophical commentator. His principal contribution in the latter area was his extensive commentary on Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, in which he combined defense of Maimonides's positions as seen from a conservative religious standpoint, together with criticism that aimed to strengthen that conservative foundation, with the aid of insights that he found in Halevi's *Kuzari* as well as in the general thought of his time.

In addition to these central works, Abravanel composed commentaries to the Pentateuch, the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, the Mishnaic tractate *Avot*, and the Haggadah of Passover. He also composed a series of short philosophical works in which he dealt critically with certain Maimonidean views: *New Heavens*, *Principles of Faith*, *Divine Creation* and three works, very influential in their time, that he wrote on topics of redemption: *Springs of Salvation*, *Salvation of the Messiah*, and *Herald of Redemption*. In these he sought to give encouragement to his people who were in despair from the horrible and woeful calamity of the Spanish expulsion.

Abravanel's Historical Outlook

As one who continued the Jewish philosophical tradition in Spain and who served as a political and spiritual leader in a period of traumatic historical crisis, Abravanel set the question of the history of the Jewish people among the nations at the center of his thought. This fact was especially prominent in those works that he devoted to the topic of redemption: understanding the causes and meaning of the calamity with respect to Israel's mission in the world became focused in his attempt to calculate the date of the Messianic redemption in order to ascertain its approach and announce it to his fellow-Jews. However, his interest in investigating the Messianic end of days proceeded not

only from the need for consolation without which it would not be possible to withstand the temptations and pressures of apostasy, but also the need to solve the secret of the paradoxical fate of the people that experiences repeatedly the highs and lows of brilliant prosperity (even in diaspora) followed right away by abysmal decline. Already in his youthful work *Crown of Elders*, Abravanel was preoccupied by the riddle of how divine providence is revealed in Jewish history. The thesis that he sought to prove in his work was a kind of conflation of the views of Halevi and the kabbalists: while all other nations are directed by intermediary angelic forces that mediate between God and all humanity, the Jewish people are directed by God Himself, and this is the secret of their unusual destiny. To be sure, in diaspora there is no obvious manifestation of the divine presence among the people as there was in the Temple, nevertheless direct providence continues in non-obvious ways, through the "First Angel" who mediates between God and the other angels. How did Israel merit this special eminence? Abravanel's answer is similar to Halevi's: the Jewish people is a unique anomaly among humanity, just as Moses was a unique anomaly among his people. This is a higher level of existence, which involves a special closeness to God. But Abravanel added explicitly what Halevi only hinted, that closeness to God is in and of itself the source of divine providence for the levels of existence that are below it. In this way Moses embodies in his Torah the divine providence that will stand in perpetuity for his people, and the Jewish people embody in their fate the divine providence that extends to the nations. In this respect Israel is analogous to the outermost heavenly sphere which according to the astronomers was the prime source of motion that devolved from there downward, ultimately causing the cyclical events in terrestrial nature. By analogy, the life-cycle and destiny of the Jewish people among the nations is what determines the cycles of the destinies of the nations that derive from the former. The Christian and Moslem peoples believe that they govern themselves through their own kings and determine the fate of the Jews accordingly, but this is utter idolatry. The Jewish people should know that their destiny, which is set by God's direct providence over them, is what determines the fate of the nations, for the purpose of drawing them gradually toward realizing the vision of the kingdom of God over all humanity.

This outlook explains the cycles of high-points and low-points in Jewish history, which do not repeat exactly as the seasons in nature,

but proceed in increasing intensity, both in ascendancy and in decline, until the final ascent will bring full redemption. This gives reason and consoling meaning to the tribulations of the people: such suffering does not result from the sins of the people as the Christians contend, but rather from the sins of the peoples among whom Israel rises and falls in order to fulfill her mission in their midst. It is no wonder that Israel suffers more than they do in this process. But in time to come, Israel's glory will be revealed to all.

The parallel between Israel and the "heavenly sphere" is verified by a study of the details of the status of Israel between God and the peoples among whom the Jews live:

1. The Jews move continually out of their devotion to God. All their movement is directed at fulfilling the commandments of the Torah, and through this they move the other peoples in whose midst they live.
2. As the sphere has an axis, so Israel has an axis, around which it revolves even when it is in diaspora: the land of Israel, toward which it moves in order to fulfill the commandments that are dependent on the land.
3. Just as the essential part of the sphere is the star that shines in it, the essential part of Israel is its prophet Moses, and his light is the Torah.
4. Just as the sphere is in continual motion but does not go through a birth-life-death cycle, so the people of Israel move while in diaspora, going through cycles of ascendancy and decline, but do not pass through a cycle of life and death. They exist eternally, and after each cycle of decline they ascend again, and will do so until they return to the promised land, become purified, and renew the light of their star at the approach of the Messianic era.

This cosmic conception of the rhythm of Jewish history is similar to the outlook of R. Nahman Krochmal, the great historical philosopher of the 19th-century Jewish Enlightenment in Galicia. It is very likely a source that inspired Krochmal's outlook. It derives from previous sources, as we said, but it directly reflects the tragic experience of Abravanel's generation, as well as his personal experience as a powerful statesman who contributed to the prosperity of the people that determined his own people's fate.

Abravanel's Relation to Maimonides's Theory of Prophecy

This conception of history, influenced by Halevi and the kabbalah, serves as background for understanding Abravanel's relationship to Maimonides's *Guide*. In his extensive and detailed commentary that seeks to elucidate Maimonides's views and to present them to educated readers who are not philosophers, he seeks to defend Maimonides's basic view regarding the complete agreement of philosophy with the Torah in whatever pertains to science, physics and metaphysics. Thus Abravanel adopted the conservative understanding of Maimonides. He rejected vehemently those interpretations that pointed to contradictions in the *Guide*, declared them intentional, and argued from this that Maimonides did not believe in those Torah doctrines declared to be politically "necessary truths," such as creation *ex nihilo*, individual providence, supernatural miracles, the resurrection of the dead, etc. It was Abravanel's view that Maimonides had proved to the best of his ability his claims that reconcile revealed truth with the truth attained by reason. As a "renaissance man" well-versed in the sciences and philosophy of his own time, Abravanel sought to prove the same synthesis of universal and Torahitic truth for which Maimonides strived. Only through such a synthesis could the Jewish people carry out the leading role that Abravanel attributed to them in the historical and cultural destiny of the nations of the world. By this conception it is clear that the Torah must be conceived as a source from which all knowledge of the truth flows to gentile culture. This determines Abravanel's preference for Maimonides's view over Halevi's regarding the relationship between philosophy and the Torah. But on the topics of the relationship between God and His people and the understanding of the Messianic history of the Jewish people, Abravanel broke with Maimonides and sided with Halevi.

First of all, Abravanel disagreed with Maimonides's theory of prophecy, according to which a prophet is required to have philosophical understanding in order to comprehend God's truth. Like Halevi, he thought that God chose prophets to communicate His message to Israel, and that the required preparation consisted in fulfillment of the Torah's commandments, as the prophetic faculty in itself is not an intellectual ability but a supra-rational faculty peculiar to the people of Israel, which in turn determines Israel's supernatural rank by which it is distinguished from other nations. This rank allows not only for God's direct guidance of the people of Israel, but also providence towards individuals. It also

allows supernatural miracles as the direct intervention of God, when the time requires it, in order to rescue the people and bring them to redemption. Indeed, this leads Abravanel to disagree with Maimonides also concerning the nature of the future redemption. He was certain that the prophets alluded to miraculous divine intervention that would transform the natural order and that would raise the Jewish people together with all humanity under their leadership to a supernatural level of spiritual existence and to eternal life.

Abravanel's View of Maimonides's Dogmatic Theory

Having adopted Halevi's theory of prophecy as a supernatural rank achieved by fulfillment of the commandments, Abravanel was led inevitably to criticize Maimonides's theory of principles of faith, as well as the other attempts to formulate principles of faith of the Torah that were made in imitation of his approach. Since the service of God cannot be identified with attaining intellectual truth, there is no value to a dogmatic system. From the Jewish perspective, the one essential principle is the Torah in its entirety. Thus whatever the Torah teaches and commands is a primary principle that every Jew is commanded to understand, to expound, and to fulfill to the best of his understanding and ability.

Abravanel's Relation to Civilization and State

Finally, we should mention Abravanel's original and interesting contribution to political theory and to the issue of the relationship between religion and the state. It reveals his personal experience as a political leader knowledgeable in matters of exercising the power of the state, and his participation in the political-religious conflicts that characterized the period of the Renaissance in Italy. Indeed, we find prominent in this connection the personal aspect of Abravanel's status as a leader of the generation living out the destiny of his people and his culture. All his life Abravanel was caught between the contradictory pulls of earthly political vocation and otherworldly spiritual vocation, between being called to the royal courts to fulfill a decidedly political task and his consciousness of a spiritual calling, as a scholar who strove for spiritual fulfillment expressed in intellectual creativity. The greater part of his intellectual output was managed in longer or shorter pauses between one administrative task and the next. One might say that the low-points

of his political career—when he was sometimes on the run from his political enemies—were the high points of his intellectual output, and vice versa. From this developed his ambivalent attitude to his political career and the means by which he pursued it. He had an insider's knowledge of the Machiavellian villainy of the exercise of power and the sin that is necessarily bound up with civilized existence based on the idolatry of worldly power, that sees power and its exercise as an end in itself. We should not be surprised, therefore, that he was alternately attracted and repelled by it, and struggled with it his whole life long.

In his commentary to Genesis, Abravanel suggested a theory by which the development of human civilization is the result of Adam's sin, on whose account he was cast out from the paradise of his original existence according to his first nature as created in the divine image. What was Adam's sin? It was the sin of dissatisfaction with what Nature, created by God for man's good, gave man without having to toil and labor, but only in the measure of necessity, so that he could devote himself to his spiritual destiny, to fulfilling his Creator's commandments and serving Him. The first human being despised spiritual happiness and attached himself to material happiness, not as a means but as an end in itself, and thus he became enslaved to luxury. The punishment carried with it the necessity to be enslaved more and more to his material wants, which the harder their attainment, the more they increase, and the more they increase, the harder still it becomes to attain them. To this end man created civilization and erected his state, which clearly embody sin and its punishment, and which avenge themselves finally on their creators.

Abravanel's vision of human redemption was drawn, then, against this backdrop: it would be the return to the Edenic condition, the original natural state preceding civilization. Nature would satisfy all human needs without effort, without suffering, without sickness, and human beings would devote themselves to the spiritual vocation of serving their Creator. Against this backdrop, too, he depicted the Torahitic task of the Jewish people: Moses, who brought his people out from slavery to freedom, strove to restore them to the original condition: sovereignty of God over His people. Israel's sin was a repetition of Adam's sin, but within the new course leading to redemption. Thus Abravanel interpreted especially the episode of the formation of the Israelite monarchy as it is narrated in the book of Samuel—that the people rejected the kingdom of God because they were not satisfied with the small sufficiency that the earth produced, and they sought a kingdom

and a civilization of wealth like all the other nations. Samuel warned the people of the consequences of their sin, that it will involve them in the history and destiny of the nations of the world. The vision of future redemption is also interpreted as a restoration of the original natural condition: the people will return purified to live a life of simplicity and self-sufficiency in its land.

CHAPTER TWENTY

FROM SPAIN TO ITALY

In the life-narratives of R. Solomon Ibn Verga and Don Isaac Abravanel and in their works we find concrete expression of the transition from the Spanish center that was destroyed to the Jewish center in Italy that achieved its flourishing at the same time.

We have here a fascinating process of transfer of a legacy from one locale to another and its adaptation to a new cultural reality and to new sources of influence. In the previous chapters we followed two such processes: the transfer of the Babylonian legacy of Geonic times to the center that developed in Moslem Spain, and later the transfer of the legacy of Moslem Spain to the center that developed in Christian Spain.

We should emphasize that the process of transition was not always expressed in the continuation of philosophical thought. Thus the influence of Saadia Gaon's writings (including the *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*) in the Ashkenazic Jewish center of northern Europe did not generate philosophical thought but mystical thought. By the same token, the transfer of the philosophical legacy of Saadia, Maimonides and the Jewish philosophers of Moslem Spain took place in Christian Spain in two parallel streams that confronted and complemented each other: philosophy and kabbalah.

The same is the case with the transfer of the Jewish philosophical legacy that was created in Spain in both periods to all the lands to which the Spanish exiles migrated. In most of these lands it generated no new philosophical creativity, but mostly kabbalistic, though one can discern in this creation a philosophical aura that is an important key to understanding it.

Only in those centers where there was direct confrontation with a culture that had its own philosophical tradition, the Spanish-Jewish philosophical legacy was absorbed into original philosophical creations in which the signature of the new cultural environment is visible. This happened in two centers that developed one after the other—first in Italy, under the influence of the Catholic culture of the Renaissance,

and later in Holland and Germany under the influence of the Protestant Renaissance.

The Beginnings of Italian Jewish Thought

R. Jacob Anatoli and R. Hillel of Verona

The influence of the *Guide of the Perplexed* that brought about the organized movement of Jewish philosophy in Spain and Provence in the 13th century, awakened a creative response in Italy also. It is represented by two Jewish philosophers who saw it as their mission to spread Maimonides's ideas: R. Jacob Anatoli (who was born around 1200), the author of *The Student's Goad*, and R. Hillel of Verona (born between 1220–1235), author of *Rewards of the Soul*. R. Jacob Anatoli dealt mainly with the translation of scientific and general philosophical literature into Hebrew. Through the philosophical allegories that he put in his book *The Student's Goad* he sought to popularize Maimonides's views and to defend them against critics. R. Hillel ben Samuel (called "of Verona") worked for the same purpose, and his *Rewards of the Soul* sought to expand on one of the topics where Maimonides had been extremely laconic and had been attacked for insincerity as a result: individual immortality. R. Hillel showed that Avicenna and Averroes differed on this issue, and he showed that Maimonides followed Avicenna's approach, which argues that individual immortality makes perfect sense. The new phenomenon that can be seen in both books is the reception of the influence of contemporary Italian Christian philosophers. R. Jacob Anatoli was influenced by the Christian philosopher Michael Scotus and cited his words, while R. Hillel of Verona offered long extracts from the writings of Thomas Aquinas side by side with long citations from Averroes and from the Spanish-Christian thinker and translator Dominicus Gundissalinus of the 12th century. In his book we can see the influence of contemporary Christian thinkers alongside the classical tradition influenced by the Arab-Muslim school, which is an important innovation that has the potential of generating new creative philosophical ideas. But as we said, in the works of the pioneers of Italian Jewish philosophy in the 13th century we do not yet see an original contribution.

R. Judah Messer Leon

In the 15th century the literary, scientific and philosophical work of R. Judah ben Jehiel Messer Leon stands out prominently. But it too was not the product of original creativity but was directed at propagating humanistic education among Jews. His many writings—only some of which were published and survived—dealt with rhetoric and grammar, with logic, and with interpretation of the works of Aristotle, Averroes, and Maimonides. These works show the influence of Italian humanism but we still do not see in them an original Jewish contribution.

*Influence of the Renaissance in Italy**Elijah Del Medigo*

If we are looking to discern an obvious and open influence of Christian scholasticism in these thinkers, it is toward the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century, at the height of the Italian Renaissance, that we see the stimulation of Jews by the intellectual life of Italy has led to a level of active participation, in which they are contributing and not just receiving. This resulted from the character of Renaissance culture, from the striving for universal all-inclusive knowledge and for an all-encompassing synthesis of philosophical and religious ideas. Coming out of this tendency, Christian thinkers in Italy showed considerable interest in the traditions special to other religions, including Judaism, and they turned to Jewish scholars to learn directly from them. The most famous and productive example of this was that of Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) who took an interest in Jewish philosophical commentary and in kabbalah. His colleague was R. Elijah del Medigo (1460–1497), the author of *Examination of the Faith*. To be sure, this work is not original in its philosophical thought, but it is distinguished by the systematic approach of an expert synthesizer. His wide-ranging overview of the problem of the relation of philosophy and the Torah is characteristic of a man of the Renaissance. From this overview he seems to have come to a moderate version of the doctrine of the “double truth,” according to which one should distinguish philosophical truth from religious truth and accept each in its proper domain according to its own discipline’s norms even if the two contradict each other.

This view had currency among the party of Averroists in Spain and Italy. But according to del Medigo one may follow this method only on issues that are not central principles of faith, for in those central matters every believer must accept the view of the Torah in its simple sense even if he cannot reconcile it with philosophy.

R. Judah Abravanel

The greatest of the Jewish philosophers in Renaissance Italy was R. Judah Abravanel (1460–1521+), the eldest son of R. Isaac Abravanel. He was educated by his father, and already in Portugal he was recognized as a physician and scholar in his own right. He came with his father to Italy and was associated with the circles of the Platonic academy in Florence. He formed close personal connections with its best thinkers, and it is likely that he wrote a book that has not come down to us on “The Harmony of the Heavens” at the request of Pico della Mirandola. With the publication of his original philosophical work *Dialogues of Love* in Italian after his death, Judah Abravanel (or Leone Hebreo as he was known) became one of the most original and influential Platonic thinkers in Italian Renaissance philosophy of his time.

The Literary Character of the Dialogues of Love

The influence of the currents of Italian Renaissance thought on Judah Abravanel is expressed first of all in the formal esthetics of his book: a symbolic reworking of the form of the Platonic dialogue. The topic of love is developed in a dialogue between a male philosopher named “Philo” and a young woman—also educated and seeking knowledge—named “Sophia.” (The meaning of the names—“lover” and “wisdom”—and their conjunction in the term “philosophy”—is central to his conception.) The two are romantically attracted to each other but they are not yet worthy of each other, and their dialogue is a search for true love. The male character plays the teacher role and the female that of the pupil, and it is clear that the stages of instruction are also the stages of the young man’s pursuit of the lovely and intelligent young woman. In the early stages this pursuit has a very earthly aspect, not at all “Platonic.” Perhaps because his love is not yet properly directed at true “sophia (wisdom),” it is unsuccessful. It is worth emphasizing the allegorical significance of this fact, which will be clarified later. As

the book as we have it is incomplete, it is reasonable to suppose that in the final section this love achieved its harmonious fulfillment.

The narrative structure of the dialogue requires that we pay attention to two very significant innovative characteristics. First of all, the classic structure of the medieval dialogue—that of a conversation between a student thirsty for knowledge asking questions and a thoroughly knowledgeable teacher lecturing *ex cathedra*—is preserved in this dialogue, but it is quite toned down and approaches closer to the original Platonic model, in which the partners of the dialogue each have something significant to say reflecting their personal characteristics and level of knowledge. Furthermore, the story and the characters, including their relationship, play a role in the unfolding of the theoretical discussion, because the plot on all its levels is an allegorical narrative: the young woman represents the feminine principle of matter, while the young philosopher represents the male principle of form. Matter yearns for form, but it cannot remain faithful to it. Form yearns for matter, but it cannot possess it absolutely. The two persons of flesh and blood represent in their love the cosmic drama in the totality of their relations and their thoughts. The atmosphere of the Renaissance is reflected here in the attention paid to the formal aspect—the beauty of the philosophical dialogue, for beauty is itself one of the important topics that the dialogue discusses, for all love is a love of beauty—and in its turning to a conception of existence in which the allegory reflects the structure of reality.

The second fact to which I wish to pay attention is the emphatic change in the relation to earthly love, and to earthly life generally. Spanish Jewish literature was not exactly monkish in its attitude to earthly existence. But the fact is that even the philosophical literature of Moslem Spain never offers an example like this, in which earthly love reflects heavenly love not merely allegorically but in the very flesh, with all the panoply and choreography of romantic love. Such an attitude was appropriate to poetry but not to speculative literature, where one treated the material in a spirit of austerity and purity. In Judah Abravanel's *Dialogues of Love* the change in the direction of the legitimization of the sensual is striking: he reveals the spiritual beauty of earthly love, and permits himself daring expression in the depiction and praise of earthly love.

The Philosophical Content of the Dialogue

The relation to the Platonic dialogue represents the transition that occurred in the Italian Renaissance from the dominance of the Aristotelian philosophy that characterized the legacy of Arabic philosophy, to the dominance of the Platonic philosophy. The Platonic idea that constitutes the axis of the method is classic, and its impress is very recognizable also in the Aristotelian tradition that absorbed some Platonic elements. The innovation is in the development and systematic specification of the idea that reciprocal love between the spiritual and the physical in the world is the force that moves all creative processes in nature, in culture and in the supra-terrestrial sphere of reality, and the emphasis is that this is a reciprocal love: the spiritual is drawn to the physical no less than the physical is drawn to the spiritual. Judah Abravanel interpreted in this manner Aristotle's doctrine of the relation between matter and form in the basic principles of reality: love in its highest form, which in Abravanel's view is its masculine, active form. God seeks to unite with matter in order to form with it the physical-spiritual whole that is the realization of the ideal of the beautiful.

God thus expresses the ideal of beauty that is within Him. Clearly in His aspiration to blend with the created world to enliven it, God is not expressing a need to perfect Himself, for God is absolutely perfect and self-sufficient. This is a pure love that flows from infinite perfection, like the light that radiates from the sun because enlightenment (love, beauty) is its nature. God's love radiates level by level from God to the terrestrial world, and when it hits the ground, it turns backward on itself and becomes the second kind of love, the lower, the "feminine," that longs for the way back in order to be filled with the flow of the masculine love, to blend with it and become perfected by it, level by level until it becomes love of the separate Intelligences that long to blend into the divine ideal of beauty.

The masculine love is the desire to give, while the feminine love is the desire to receive. Together they form a complete circle which originates in God and ends up in God. As for God Himself—the source of all—this is the inner motion of the love that flows forth from Him and returns to Him, God's love for His perfection, by which everything emanates from Him and is drawn back towards Him.

This image of the unity of existence, whose source and end are in God, remind us of the image of reality in R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol's *Fountain of Life*. But it seems to me that it is no accident that Gabirol does

not speak of the power of love that is revealed in the connection of the parts of existence on their various levels, but rather of the will whose motion embraces all of existence. Will represents *ethos*, i.e., a love in the sense of reciprocal ethical connection, whereas Abravanel's concept of love represents *eros*, i.e. a reciprocal connection of a decidedly esthetic character. This comparison sheds light on the highly significant innovation in R. Judah Abravanel's Renaissance conception of the world. Gabirol's outlook with respect to this world was an austere spirituality bordering on asceticism; the unity that he strove for was spiritual and transcendental, to the point of sublimating the sensual in the spiritual. Abravanel's conception can be defined as earthly-secular. There is no yearning here to blend with the heavenly, but just the opposite—to blend the spiritual into the earthly.

The Pagan Sources of R. Judah Abravanel's Thought

Indeed, this is not the only point in which there is both similarity and difference between Gabirol and Abravanel. Another aspect of the comparison between them will deal with their relation to Jewish sources and to the Jewish-religious problematic specifically. We can say of both of them that they produced their work in a period of open contact between a gentile elite and a Jewish elite; both remained faithful to Judaism—no one questions their orthodoxy; but they both produced works that have no defining Jewish characteristics, and whose influence was propagated in the Christian environment.

But even in this respect there is a substantive difference between them. When we discussed Ibn Gabirol's thought, we pointed out that his poetic works demonstrate his deep immersion in the Jewish literary tradition—the Bible, the Midrash, the prayer-book. He did not mention these sources in his philosophical work and he did not attempt to prove agreement between the truth that he expounded as a philosopher and the truth of the scriptures. But there is no doubt that he assumed such agreement as obvious. Not so Abravanel. Compared to Ibn Gabirol he was conservative in his philosophy, and he made repeated efforts to prove that the Platonic and Aristotelian ideas that he used were to be found in scripture. When he discusses the differences between scripture and the philosophers, for instance on the issue of the creation of the world, it is clear that he accepts the biblical outlook, and he remarks that it is easier to reconcile the Torah's view with Plato's philosophy than with Aristotle's, therefore Plato's should be preferred. Nevertheless,

one may determine that the influence of non-Jewish—and specifically of pagan-idolatrous sources on Abravanel is blatant and clear.

The *Dialogues of Love* makes abundant and open use of pagan literary sources, and it does not shrink from drawing liberally on stories from Greek mythology, which to be sure he interprets allegorically. Jewish Aristotelian philosophers regarded these sources as out of bounds because of their grossly idolatrous content, but Abravanel shows no hesitation and offers no apology. On the contrary, he interprets stories of the Greek gods as if they were stories from the Torah, and occasionally he even draws parallels between his Greek mythological sources and the Torah narratives. Such a think would never have been conceivable in any prior period. It became possible only because of the background of Christian Renaissance culture. But we must still remark that the manner in which Christian art and literature draws on pagan mythology seems more organically natural than the mythological borrowing in Jewish thought. The dissonance is quite sharp here. In any event, Judah Abravanel is not sensitive to this. He appears altogether enthused by this discovery, as he was enthused by the discovery of the philosophical legitimacy of earthly love. Moreover, he interprets the biblical stories in a way similar to his mythic interpretations, and he searches them for obscure foundations of myth. Indeed the pagan influence does not stop with his use of mythological motifs. It makes its way into the method itself, and here we can expand more on the general impression that we pointed out earlier of the difference between Gabirol's world and Abravanel's secular world. Indeed, Judah Abravanel's God strives to perfect creation, but the love that derives from Him is His love of self, of the beauty whose source is in Himself. This is an inner movement in God that gives birth to the world, and from that point on the relation of the world to God is the relation of teleological attraction toward perfection. God Himself remains impersonal in relation to the world. In other words, there is an impersonal divine immanence in the world, an erotic emanated force that moves the whole world. This conception is pagan in its substance, despite the similarity that one may find between Abravanel and Crescas. For Crescas also conceived God as a flow of love and beneficent will, yet for Crescas this is a personal love of the transcendental God for His world and for all individuals in His world, a love that embraces each person as an individual before his God in a bond of commandedness. But for Judah Abravanel this is a generalized impersonal flow that turns on itself and reveals itself as the yearning of the lower existence to perfect the spirituality that

is immanent in it. It seems that there is a close connection between Abravanel's use of Greek mythology, his affirmation of earthly love, and this conception of impersonal divinity. All of them display a tendency toward the general secular culture, though the formal connection to Judaism remains firm.

Summary

The characteristic that distinguished the philosophical creativity of the Jewish center in Italy is the encounter of the Jewish-Arabic tradition of Spain with the tradition of Christian scholasticism and the Renaissance. We pointed out three stages in it:

1. Reception of the direct influence of Christian scholastics, especially Scotus and Thomas Aquinas.
2. Transmitting the Jewish-Arabic tradition to Renaissance thinkers, especially Pico della Mirandola.
3. Finally, attempts at synthesis between Renaissance and Jewish-Arabic influences in original innovative philosophical works.

In all these stages we see clearly that the divisions between the Jewish and Christian intellectual elites was weakening, and this facilitated free contact with the culture of the environment to the point that Jewish philosophers allowed themselves to participate in the general philosophical-religious movement and to discuss the relationship between philosophy and religion in a general perspective, Jewish and Christian in common, without worrying overmuch about their unique Jewish identity, which they considered clear and obvious. In this respect one may see the Jewish philosophy that was embedded in the Italian Renaissance, and especially the philosophy of R. Judah Abravanel, as a harbinger of the philosophical tendencies that characterized Jewish philosophy from the Enlightenment onward, both with respect to the direct participation in general philosophy and with respect to the relationship to the totality of secular culture, including its obviously pagan sources. But the social-political framework that separated the Jewish community from the Christian environment remained fully in effect and prevented assimilation, and the consciousness of Jewish identity was strong. In this respect there is a sharply noticeable difference between the output of the Jewish-Italian center in the period of the Renaissance and the philosophical creativity that started to develop in Protestant lands in a later period, a difference that came to expression in the basic manner

of Jewish self-definition. It is clear that the modern period in the history of Jewish philosophy began at the point that Jews broke loose from the traditional social frameworks that preserved the authority of the Jewish community and its lifestyle conforming to Jewish law. This process was reflected most prominently in the life and thought of Baruch Spinoza. It was his philosophy that summarized in a critical manner the legacy of the philosophy of the schools of the Middle Ages and presented to the Jewish philosophers who followed him the great and difficult challenges of the modern period, to which his thought belongs.

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INDEX OF NAMES

- Abraham bar Hiyya 46, **87–94**, 96, 124, 145; Aristotelian influences 89; astrology 87, 93; chosenness of Israel 91; gentile wisdom and religions inferior 89–90; Halevi and 89–94; historical outlook 91–94; Neo-Platonism and 89; prophecy 89; Science 87–89; Sinaitic revelation 91; Torah superior to reason 90; translation work 88; works 87
- Abraham ben David *see* Rabad
- Abraham son of Maimonides 182
- Abravanel, Isaac 443, **450–58**; Bible commentaries 451; dogmatics questioned 456; historical outlook 452–54; Messiah 452–53; political theory 456–58; prophecy 455–56
- Abravanel, Judah **462–67**; *Dialogues of Love* 462–66; God's immanence and perfection 466; Ibn Gabirol and 464–65; literary form 462–63; love of God 464, 466; pagan sources 466; Plato and 462–64
- Al-Baghdadai, Abu al-Barakat xiii
- Albalag, Isaac 309 n. 3, 310, **319–25**, 326, 330, 332, 336; double truth 319, 322–25, 332; eternal creation 321–323; God lacking will 321–322; miracle 323; political uses of religion 320–21, 330; prophet and philosopher compared 324–25; Torah as ideal legislation 320
- Albo, Joseph **423–42**, 443, 446; and Crescas 423–24, 429–30, 433–34; and Maimonides 428, 429, 433–34; and Saadia 428, 434; *Book of Principles* 423 (n.), 424–25, 434, 443; Christianity and Judaism 424–25, 431–35, 438, 446; commandments means to human perfection 432; creation *ex nihilo* 432–43; dogmatics 424–42; dogmatics scientifically treated 426, 429–34; eclecticism 424, 429, 434; faith as warranted certainty 437–40; free will 428; God: eternal, existent, incorporeal, perfect 429–31; God's unity 430–31, 436; grace 428; harmonization of previous thinkers 429–30, 433; immortality of entire soul through faith and mitzvot 428; Islam and Judaism 435; kabbalah 434; Kalam 427; life 424–25; Messiah 432–33; Moses' supremacy 432–33; natural law (= Ten Commandments) and conventional law 427–28; prophecy 430–31; prophet as perfect believer 438; religion: criteria for validation 435, 440; religion: general principles 425–29, 433–35; religion and philosophy independent methods 426; resurrection 432; revelation 429–30, 435, 440; reward and punishment 429; Torah immutable 432–33, 441; Torah revealed 429, 439–42
- Alfakar, Isaac 308–10
- Alfakar, Judah 304
- Alfarabi xii, 152, 159, 179, 256 (n. 30), 326
- Al-Ghazali 134, 143, 326, 328
- Al-Kindi 18 (n.)
- Anatoli, Jacob 332, 460
- Aquinas, Thomas xii, 69, 332, 366, 368, 427, 460, 467
- Arama, Isaac 443
- Aristotle 17–21, 40, 71, 73–77, 92–93, 131, 136, 141, 144, 152–53, 159, 176, 178–79, 181–82, 184–85, 187–88, 193–94, 201–04, 207, 215–16, 219–22, 224, 226 (n. 3), 228–29, 241 (n. 9), 247 (n. 12), 249, 253–54, 259, 261–64, 266–74, 280–81, 284, 286, 293–97, 306–08, 309 (n. 3), 321, 326, 331, 335, 338–48, 351–53, 358, 380–83, 390, 398, 400–01, 434, 461, 464–65; Aristotle's epistemology 169, 188, 224, 248, 294, 327; Aristotle's metaphysics 98, 141, 163, 338, 356; Aristotle's physics 18, 219–21, 261, 266–70, 274, 294–97, 304–07, 321,

- 338–39, 343, 379–83, 397, 400, 421–23, 443; (*Nicomachean*) *Ethics* 181, 201; *Metaphysics* 297; *Physics* 297; *see also* Aristotelianism
- Averpace (= Ibn Bajja) xii, 159, 326
- Averroes (= Ibn Rushd) xii, **326–31**, 332–34, 337, 352, 354, 387–88, 460–61; Active Intellect 328–29; eternal creation 329–30; God actual, absolute, form of world 328; God's attributes (positive, knowable) 328, 330–31; immortality: intellectual, questioned 328–29; matter as forms in potential 328; Neoplatonism rejected 327–28; philosophy and religion at odds 328; political uses of religion 330; radical stance 326
- Avicbron *see* Ibn Gabirol, Solomon
- Avicenna (= Ibn Kina) xii, 152, 159, 222, 262, 315, 326–28, 387, 460
- Bahya Ibn Pakudah **46–67**; abstinence 65–66; asceticism 61, 65–66; commandments, relative religious value of 49–50, 54–55; creation 48; dialectical thought 53–54; duties of heart and limbs 54–55; *Duties of the Heart* 46–57, 135; free will 59–60; God's attributes 48, 51–54; historical and universal arguments 54; humility 62–63; knowledge of God from nature and scripture 53–54; love of God 66; neo-Platonism 56–58; otherworldliness 48, 56–58; philosophy and religion agree 48; philosophy and religion complementary 49–50; political uses of religion 51; rational and positive law 48; reason as highest faculty of soul 57; reason superior to Torah 90; repentance 63–64; roots of knowledge 48; service to God 56, 58–59; soul-body dualism 57–58; theodicy 59–60; unification of deeds 61–62
- Crescas, Hasdai 18 (n. 5), 239, 249, 331 (n. 2), 356–73, **374–422**, 423–25, 428–37, 443, 445, 451, 466; Aristotle (Crescas' critique) 357–58, 379–84; as communal leader 360–61; Christianity and Judaism 409–410; creation (eternal and *ex nihilo*) 399–401; dialectically influenced by his opponents 363–64; dogmatics 374–79; faith as inner conviction 436–37; free will and necessity 410–14; God as place of the world 382; God's attributes 384–392 (– intrinsic 386–89, – multiple and infinite 390–93, – negative 384–86, – positive and knowable 389–90, – prior and posterior 389); God's existence not a commandment 375–76; God's incorporeality 393–94; God's joy in creation 394–97; God: proofs 384; God's relation to space and time 383 n. 12–13; Halevi and 421–22; historical outlook 445; infinity affirmed 381; infinity in creation and Torah 415–19; kabbalah and 401; knowledge of truth each according to his ability 384; life and works 374; *Light of the Lord* 357, 364, 374, 382, 390, 411, 418, 422–23, 425–26; love of God 414–15; Maimonides and 357, 374–78, *passim*; miracle 403–06 (– and creation 403, – and human action 413–14, 443, – manifest and hidden 404–06); Moses vision in cleft of rock 390–91, 396; necessity and possibility 411–13; philosophy preparatory to revelation 395–96; prophet and philosopher compared 391, 393–96, 402–03; providence 406–09 (– and free will 413, – and human intellect 407–08, – in history 408–09); religious conservatism and philosophical radicalism 357–58, 363–64; Rosenzweig and 422; Service to God 414–15, 420–21; space, conception of 381–82; time conception of 382; Torah written and oral 415–19
- Delmedigo, Elijah 461–62
- Duns Scotus 69, 332
- Duran, Zimeon ben Zemah 364, **372–73**, 425–26, 433; and Albo 425–26; creation 373; providence 373; scientific approach to dogmatics 373
- Empedocles (pseudo-) 70
- Epicurus 280, 286; *see* Epicurean

- Falaquera, Shem Tov Ibn 69, 309
 n. 3, **310–18**; authored Hebrew epitome of Gabirol's *Fountain of Life* 68–83, 86, 101, 464; compatibilism of religious and Aristotelian outlooks 311–12; conservative Maimonideanism 313, 315, 318; educational program for science and philosophy 315–17; ethics 316; knowledge of God 317–18; political uses of religion 313; prophet and philosopher compared 315; Torah source of truth 314–15
- Gersonides, Levi 325, 331 n. 2, 334, **335–356**, 357, 397–401, 406, 421, 443; Active Intellect and individual knowledge 354–55; Active Intellect and providence 348–49; ompatibilism of Torahitic and Aristotelian outlooks 338–39; creation from primal matter 338–45, 398–99; free will 331 n. 2, 349; God's attributes positive and knowable 345–47; God's knowledge (general) 345, 347; God's transcendence 345; historical view of time 341–43; immortality individualized 352–56; Kalam and 344; life and works 335–36; miracle 350; prophecy 350–51; providence through Active Intellect 348–49; scientific achievements 335, 337–39; time (– finite) 398, (– historical) 341–43; *Wars of the Lord* 334–35, 337
- Gundissalinus, Dominicus 460
- Guttmann, Julius 69, 89
- Halevi, Judah xii, 14–15, 46, 86, 89, 91–94, **95–146**, 160, 216, 304, 326–27, 332, 410, 421–24, 434, 440, 443–45, 451–53, 455–56; Aristotelianism and 97–98, 128–29, 130–32, 140–44; asceticism, views on 101–02, 135; Biblical views on history 122–23, on prophecy 129; chosenness of Israel 123; Christianity and Judaism 97, 112–16, 410; Christianity, his presentation of 110–16, 120; commandments 137–39; creation denied by philosopher 107; dialogue form 99–103, 143; divine principle (*inyan elohi*) 124, 125 n. 10, 128–130 (– and prophecy 128–130, – and religious practice 136–39; epistemology of prophecy 132–34); ethics 102, (– and Golden Mean 136); exile 126–27; experience-based knowledge 106, 117–18, 121–22, 131–35; free will 124; Genesis as primal narrative of world history 123–24; God (– anthropomorphism 04, – attributes 104, 133, – knowledge, denied by philosopher 107, – names 104, 133, revealed in history 123, – will, denied by philosopher 108); Hebrew language as original language of mankind 123; hierarchy of being 130–31; historical outlook 122–28, 445, (– Judeo-centric 123, 126, 130, – providential 126, – redemption completes creation 124); historical testimony (– as rabbi's opening move 117, criteria for validation 119–22, versus universal argument 118–19); immortality 108, 144; Islam, his presentation of 110–16, 120; Israel (– heart of the nations 126, – superior by virtue of prophetic capacity 130–31); Kalam and 98, 135, 140–41; Karaites, his critique of 97–98, 100, 117, 139; *Kuzari* 86, 96–99, 107, 117–21, 136 (n.), 144, 421–23, 440–43; language 123; life 95; neo-Platonism and 98; philosophy (– as alternative to revealed religion 98, 107, 131, – as opposed to religion 109, 332, – as positive source of knowledge 98, 129, 131, 140–41, 144, – limitations of 108–09, 140–44); poetic works 95; prayer 138–39; prophecy 103, 128–34, 141–42 (– and dream 106, 125, – and religious experience 133–34, – intellectual perfection in philosopher's view 108, 129); prophet and philosopher compared 129, 131–34, 141–42; providence in history 126; religion (– correct religious action 106, 134, – personal experience 133–39, political according to philosopher 108); revelation 104 (– addressed to all humanity 124, – educational process 124, – self-validating 109–10, 117, – Sinaitic 103, 117,

- 121–22, 124, – validated by consensus of believers 110–11; Sabbath 124, 138–39; Torah 124; Zionism (Halevi precursor of) 127–28
- Ha-Penini, Jedaiah 332
- Hillel of Verona 329, 332, 460
- Ḥiwi al-Balkhi 4
- Husik, Isaac 89, 423 n. 1, 425
- Ibn Ezra, Abraham 46, 434
- Ibn Ezra, Moses 39, 46, 47
- Ibn Gabirol, Solomon xiii, 39, 42, 45, 47, **68–86**, 98, 101, 145, 224, 464–66; Biblical references (– absent in *Fountain of Life* 70, – pervasive in “The Royal Crown” 83); cultural encounter, Jewish and non-Jewish 68; dialogue form 70; emanation 77, 79, 82 (– and the divine will 79); ethics 80–81; First Substance 73; form and matter 73–79 (– applicable to intelligible beings 76, – duality reflected in God-and-will 80, – each a cause of plurality 75, – hierarchy ascending to universal form and universal matter 77–78); *Fountain of Life* xiii, 69; four elements in ethics 81; God 73, 82, 84–85 (– as First Substance 73, –inexpressibility 84, – oneness prior to existence 82, – personal connection with 84–85); hierarchy of being 76–78; *Improvement of the Virtues of the Soul* 69, 80–81; influence on Christian philosophy 69, 80; Intellects (the Ten Intellects) 77–78; introspective approach 71–72; Jewish and general themes 86; kabbalah and 69, 78, 80; light imagery 78, 82; microcosm, human as 71, 81; neo-Platonism and 68, 70–71, 76, 80, 82, 84–85; Nothingness (divine) 80; poetic side 70, 81–86; potentiality higher than actuality 76; repentance 85; “Royal Crown” 69, 81–83; service to God 85; threefold division of reality 73–74; will 73, 79–80 (– as aspect of God’s essence 79, – as personal side of God 80, – divine and human 79); works 68–69; World to Come 85
- Ibn Pakudah, Bahya *see* Bahya Ibn Pakudah
- Ibn Tibbon, Judah 47
- Ibn Tibbon, Samuel 162, 303, 309 n. 3
- Ibn Tzaddik, Joseph 39, 46
- Ibn Verga, Solomon **446–50**, 459; historical outlook 446–450; Jew-hatred and its causes 447–449; parable of identical jewels 450; *Rod of Judah* 446–450
- Isaac ben Sheshet (Ribash) 364, **370–72**; creation 372; critical of kabbalah 371; critical of philosophy 371–72; dogmatics 372; providence 372
- Israeli, Isaac **39–45**, 82, 224; creation and emanation 42–43; emanation 4–43; hierarchy of being 40–42; imaginative faculty in prophecy 44; influence 39; Intellects 42; kabbalah and 39, 42; neo-Platonism and 39; philosophy as spiritual vocation 45; prophecy and philosophy 43–44; soul, universal (rational, animal, vital) 41; *tzimtzum* 41–42; works 40
- Jabetz, Joseph 443
- Judah ben Joseph xiii
- Kant, Immanuel 21, 32, 382, 391
- Kaspi, Joseph 309 n. 3, 310, **318–319**, 326; *see* double truth
- Kaufmann, David 69
- Kimhi, Joseph 47
- Kirkisani, Jacob 5
- Koppelman, Jacob 425
- Krochmal, Nachman 454
- Lessing, Gotthold 450 (parable of identical jewels)
- Lipschitz, Gedaliah ben Solomon 425
- Lorki, Joshua 424
- Maimonides, Moses xii, 9, 11, 17–20, 23–25, 30, 39, 44, 53, 106, 129, 146, **149–297**, **301–25** (Maimonidean controversy) 326–33, 335–39, 341, 345–47, 349–53, 357–58, 362–63, 365–70, 373–81, 383–87, 389–91, 393–94, 396–401, 403–04, 406–10, 414–21, 423–25, 427–31, 433–38, 442–43, 445, 451–52, 455–56, 459–61
- Sub-topics under Maimonides:
- Active Intellect 188, 248–49, 257
- Alfarabi 159, 179

- Appetitive faculty *see* Emotional faculty
 Aristotle and Maimonides 152–53, 159, 176, 178–79, 181–82, 184–85, 187–88, 193–94, 201–04, 206, 215–16, 219–22, 224, 226 (n. 3), 228–29, 241 (n. 9), 247 (n. 12), 249, 253–54, 259, 261–64, 266–74, 280–81, 284, 286, 293–97
 Asceticism 202–03, 213
 Astrology 195–96
 Attributes of God 224–251; of action 229–30, 233–35; of existence 236–37, 249–51; of mercy 229–30, 233–35 (– as model for human behavior 255–57); negative 237–41, 295 (– criticized from Averroist assumptions 330–31)
 Avempace 159
 Avicenna 159
 Bible, allegorical interpretation of 307–08
 Commandments 210, 287–289, 307; dual goal: intellectual and physical perfection 210, 288–289; reasons for 287–289, 307
Commentary on Mishnah 152; Eight Chapters (Introduction to *Avot*) 176–209; general introduction 164–65; introduction to *Helek* 165–75
 Compatibilism: divine knowledge and free will 199–200, 284–85 (– untenable on Averroist assumptions 331); miracle and natural law 274–76, 403–04; Torah and Aristotelian outlooks 293–97; viewed as lip service by Maimonides' esoteric interpreters 330
 Creation: alleged agreement with Aristotle 266–67, 273–74, 306; arguments for 262–74, 397–98; Aristotelian and neo-Platonic elements in doctrine 265–66; Aristotle's arguments against 27–72; based on Torah's philosophical perspective 267–68; purpose of 278; three principal views on 269; volitional preferable to emanation 327
 Dialectical thought of 166, 227–30, 241–44, 248, 251
 Divine glory 163
 Divine will 197, 215, 259, 262–66, 274–75, 296; and Aristotle's view 215; as active interest in the world 259; and creation 262–66, 296; as lack 259; and natural law 197, 274–75
 Dogmatics 169–75
 Double truth, did not espouse 174
 Emotional faculty in ethics 190–91
 Epistemology 186–88, 220
 Esoteric doctrines: creation 266–67, 273–74, 306, 322, 330 (– according to Albalag 322; and Averroes' influence on Maimonidean interpreters 330); equated with Work of Creation & Chariot 161, 219, 303; providence 276–77, 293–94
 Ethics 189–209, 287–89; Aristotle, differences with 204, 20–6–07, 295; Golden Mean 200–02, 204; rabbis, differences with 204–06; virtues in 189–91
 Evil causes of 192–94, 279; arises from human ignorance 278
 Form and matter originating from God in creation 264–65
 Free will 194–200; and divine foreknowledge 199–200; deprivation as sickness 198
 God alone to be worshipped 170; anthropomorphism 225–26, 232; attributes *see* Attributes of God, this entry, above; definition impossible 228–30; emotions (anthropopathism) 228–30, 39–43; in 13 principles 170–73; incommensurability 228–29, 236–38, 243; incomprehensibility 237–41; incorporeality 170–71, 223–28, 239, 305; knowledge 172, 199–200, 260, 407 (– in 13 principles 172, unity of intellect, knower and known 260); perfection(s) 235–36, 239; proofs for 219–24, 261–62, 379–80; transcendence 222–23, 295; unity 170, 226–29; will *see* Divine Will
Guide of the Perplexed 18 (n.), 106 (n.), 153–58, 161–62, 174, 176, 192, 208, 214–15, 219, 224, 232 (n.), 234 (n.), 242, 246 (n.), 249 (n.),

- 252, 255, 256 (n.), 261–64, 273 (n.), 277, 279 (n.), 281 (n.), 283 (n.), 286 (n.), 289 (n.), 292, 294, (translation and propagation) 302–04, 307, (controversy and later influence) 309–13, 317–19, 322, 330, 337, 365, 367 (n.), 379, 421, 443, 452, 455, 460
- Heir of Spanish Golden Age 302
- Historical outlook 160–61, 445
- Idolatry as antipode to Judaism 60–61
- Imaginative faculty 181–82, 210; and political talents 210; and prophecy 210–12; *see* Soul
- Imitation of God 255–57
- Immortality, intellectual 185–86
- Intellect: acquired 187–88; hylic 186–87; intellectual perfection as supreme goal 176, 192, 203, 206, 295, 305–07; separate Intellects (Intelligences) 208, 228, 278; *see also* Active Intellect
- Israel: merits World to Come 170; superiority contingent 160–61
- Job: interpretation of 277, 285–86
- Kalam and 159, 162, 219, 225–27, 231–32, 240–42, 246–47, 260–61, 309
- Knowledge of God/truth: popular, each according to his ability 169–70, 244–46, 293–95, 305–06
- Life 149–50
- Love of God: through knowledge of God 217
- Materiality obstacle to enlightenment 207–08, 213, 247, 251, 258, 295
- Messiah 172
- Miracle 274–76, 306, 403–04
- Mishneh Torah* 151, 153–58, 180 (n. 4), 304–05, 317, 374, 394, 417–19
- Moses: in Thirteen Principles 171; supremacy of 212–13, 254–55, 258; vision in cleft of rock 233–36, 247–49, 255
- Neoplatonic elements 224 n. 2
- Philosophy: alleged ancient Israelite origins 159, 161, 261, 297; harmonization with religion 152–53, 293–97; tensions with religion 153, 159, 165–68, 306–07
- Plato and Maimonides 158, 167, 176, 178–79, 269
- Political theory 176–78; authority crucial 177
- Political uses of religion 167–70, 174, 276, 330
- Prophecy **210–18, 247–58**; differences with Bible 213–15; ethical perfection prerequisite 206–08; grades of prophecy 211–12; imaginative faculty 210–12; in 13 principles 171, 173; intellectual perfection 188, 210–11, 247–48, 252; prophet and philosopher compared 211, 215–18, 253–57, 306; prophet and statesman (politician) compared 177, 209–11, 255–57
- Providence 258, **276–294**, 407; and human intellect 279–83, 293–94, 407; as politically necessary belief 276–77, 293–94; general and individual 279–80; in commandments, prophecy and Torah 289–92
- Psychology **178–88**
- Reason: divine and human 248–49, 251–52; practical 184; theoretical 185. *See also* Intellect.
- Resurrection 172–73, 304–05
- Revelation 171–73 (in 13 principles). *See also* Prophecy.
- Reward and punishment 165–67, 172–74
- Saadia and 225, 231–32
- Service to God 188, 203, 305–06
- Soul **178–88**; Aristotelian theory of soul's faculties 177–85; as form of body 186; emotional faculty (= appetitive faculty) 183–84 (Pseudo-Aristotle 70 (*Theology of Aristotle*, based on Plotinus) in ethics 190–91); imaginative faculty 181–82, 210–12; nutritive faculty 180; rational faculty 184–88; sensory faculty 180–81
- Thirteen Principles **169–75**
- Time 397–98
- Torah 27, 171–74, 177–78, 210, 217, 295, 416–18; as legislation of God-oriented society 217; as legislation of ideal state 177–78, 210, 276, 295; in 13 principles 171–74; written and oral 416–18
- True belief defined 225

- Works 151–57
 World to Come 165–70, 173, 188
 Messer Leon, Judah 461
 Munk, Solomon 69
- Nahmanides, Moses 303–04, 360, 404, 421, 434; ambivalence to Maimonides 303–04; disputation with Paolo Christiani 360; influence on Albo 434; influence on Crescas 421; miracle manifest and hidden 404
- Narboni, Moses 309 n. 3, 327
- Nathan ben Hayyim xiii
- Nissim Gerondi **364–70**, 371–72, 374, 395, 414; Aquinas and 366, 368; commandments, reasons for 369; intellectual perfection deemphasized 369; law of justice and law of state 366–67; Maimonidean influence 365–68; Moses' uniqueness 366; philosophy as positive source of knowledge 370; prophecy as episodic supra-rational enlightenment 367–68; prophet and philosopher compared 366–67; rational and positive law 370; service to God: obedience and correct intention 368
- Paolo Christiani 360
- Philo of Alexandria ix–x, xiii, 15; influence on Christian philosophy ix–x; influence on Jewish philosophy x
- Philoponus, John 18 (n.), 342 (n.)
- Pico della Mirandola 461–62, 467
- Plato 30, 73, 100–03, 136, 154–55, 158, 167, 176–79, 256 (n.), 269, 294, 353, 462–65; *see also* Platonism, Neo-Platonism
- Plotinus 40, 70, 241 n. 9, 247 n. 12, 383 n. 13; founder of neo-Platonic philosophy 40; influenced Maimonides' negative theology 241 n. 9; *Theology of Aristotle* based on Plotinus' *Enneads* 70, 240–41 (n.)
- Pseudo-Aristotle 70, 240–41 (n.) (*Theology of Aristotle*, based on Plotinus)
- Pseudo-Bahya 47 (*Theory of the Soul*)
- Pseudo-Empedocles 70 (influence on Solomon Ibn Gabirol)
- Rabad of Posquières 305–06
- Saadia Gaon ix, xii, **3–38**, 39, 43–44, 46–57, 63–64, 67–68, 72, 86, 89–92, 98, 135, 138, 140–41, 145, 162, 205–206, 219, 225, 231, 267, 309 n. 2, 311, 342, 344, 358, 370, 397, 427–28, 434, 459; Aristotelian influences 16, 18; *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* 6–7, 11–14, 24 (n.), 26 (n.), 36–37, 46, 231, 358, 459; commandments 13–14, 138; commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* 14; creation, proofs for 16–21; divine glory 15; epistemology 7–9, 22; ethics 30–38, 205 (– degrees of merit 34–35, – Golden Mean 36–38, – rational and positive commands 13, 33, – Torah in ethics 38, – utilitarian aspect 31–32); evil 27–28, 32; first of medieval Jewish philosophers ix; founder of continuous Jewish philosophical tradition 3; free will 28–29; general works 3–5; God: anthropomorphism 23–24; God's attributes 24–26, 225, 231–32; God's incomprehensibility 22–23; God: proofs for 21; human nature 26–30; immortality 3, 32; influence in Renaissance 459; Kalam and 16–21; knowledge, degrees of 22; knowledge, roots of 7–9; life 3; Maimonides' critique of 17–19, 30; miracle in prophecy 15; natural law 16; philosophy and religion agree 10–11; prophecy 14–16 (– Mosaic 16); rational and positive law 13–14; rationalism 8–12, 22–23, 30, 68; reason's supremacy in ethics 37–38; repentance 35; resurrection 30; roots of knowledge 7–9; service to God 35–36; soul 28–30 (– Platonic view 28–30, – Stoic view 29–30); theodicy 27–28; time 21; tradition 9–10; World to Come 32–33; worldliness 32–33
- Said ben Ali xiii
- Shalom, Abraham 443
- Spinoza, Baruch 180 (n.), 383 (n.), 468; *Ethics* 180 (n.)
- Shem Tov ben Joseph 443
- Wahb ben Yaish 69
- William of Auvergne 69

INDEX OF TOPICS

- Active Intellect (in Maimonides) 187, 188, 214, 228, 248–49, 257, 263, 291, 367; (in Averroes) 328–29; (in Gersonides) and providence 348–49, and unique individual knowledge 351–56
- Actual [-ity, -ization] (in Saadia) 19, 21, 32, (in Ibn Gabirol) 74–76, 79, (in Bar Ḥiyya) 92–93, (in Halevi) 139, (in Maimonides) 166, 185–86, 203, 221–22, 257, 260, 262–63, 269, 279, 283, (in Averroes) 328–29, (in Gersonides) 341–44, 354, (in Crescas) 388, 398–99, (in Albo) 427–28,
- Alexandrine Judaism ix–x
- Anthropocentrism 31, 278
- Antinomies 21, 200, 237, 363
- Aristotelianism xii, 16, 18, 20 (n.), 97–99, 140, 204, 265–66, **326–34**, 363, 421, 423, 425–26; *see also* Aristotle
- Asceticism (and austerity) 36, 51, 61–62, 102, 139, 152, 179, 202–05, 213, 295, 463, 465
- Belief (in Saadia) 6–7, 11–14, 17, 20, 37, (in Halevi) 98, 107, 110–14, (in Maimonides) 152, **165–75**, 195, 199, 206, **225**, 231, 245, 271, 274, 276–77, 281, 287, (and Rabad) 304–06, (and Albalag) 320–25, (in Gersonides) 337, (in Crescas) 358, 362, 369, 373–78, 384–85, 397, 399, 403, 421, (in Albo) 423, 425, **430–41**; *see also* Faith
- Bible ix–x, 4–5, 11, 17, 23–24, 26, 29–30, 43, 45, 56, 69, 92, 102, 129, 139–40, 204–05, 213–14, 254 (n.), 317–19, 339, 342, 350, 383, 403, 421, 451, 465
- Categorical imperative 32
- Chosenness of Israel (in bar Ḥiyya) 90–92, (in Halevi) 123, (in Maimonides) 160
- Christianity x–xiii, (in Saadia) 15–16, (in Bar Ḥiyya) 86–87, (in Halevi) 90, 92–93, 96–97, 106, 111–117, 127–28, 135, (in Maimonides) 150, 160, 202, 211, (influence on post-Maimonideans) 332–34, (in Crescas) 359–66, 374, 409–10, (in Albo) 425–26, 431–35, 438–42, (in Renaissance) 445, 449–50
- Commandments 5, 8, 13–17, 25, 27, 31, 33–35, 44, 48–54, 59, 85, 89, 98, 102, 116, 124–25, 128, 134, 138, 164, 172, 174, 205, 245, 277, 287–293, 305–07, 312, 320, 351, 366–70, 375–76, 379, 414, 416, 418–20, 427–28, 430, 432–33, 435, 441–42, 445, 454–57; reasons for the commandments 138, 287–89, 307, 369
- Compatibilism: of divine foreknowledge and free will 199–200, 84–85, 331; of miracle and natural law 274–76, 403–04; of Torah and philosophy 293–97, 311–12, 324, 330, 338–39
- Creation 14, (in Saadia) 16–25, (in Israeli) 40–43, (in Bahya) 48, 54, 60, (in Ibn Gabirol) 82–84, (in Bar Ḥiyya) 92, (in Halevi) 107, 113, 118, 124, 144, (in Maimonides) 162, 194, 219, 232, 247, 254, **262–74**, 275, 288, 294, (in post-Maimonideans) 306, 309, (in Falaquera) 312, (in Albalag) 321–25, (in Averroes) 327, 329–30, (in Gersonides) 335, 337–38, **339–45**, 348–49, 351, 354, (in Isaac ben Sheshet) 371, (in Duran) 373, (in Crescas) 377–78, 385, 394–96, **397–403**, 404–06, 411–12, 414–16, 422, (in Albo) 432–33, (in Isaac Abravanel) 452, 455, (in Judah Abravanel) 465–66;
- Creation, topics: and emanation 42–43; eternal 321–23, 329–30; in kabbalah 323, 399, 401; *see also* Maimonides, Creation
- Culture (Jewish and general) ix–xiii, 12, 67, 86, 88, 93, 122–23, 146, 150,

- 164, 253–54, 302, 304, 319, 329,
332, 359, 361, 444, 446, 450–51,
455–56, 459, 461, 464, 466–67;
theory of human culture in Halevi
122–23
- Dialectical thought 31, 53, 64, 166,
168, 227–33, 237, 243–49, 251, 260,
328
- Dialogue form (in Ibn Gabirol) 70,
(in Halevi) 99–103, (in Falaquera)
311, (in Ibn Verga) 447–48, (in
Judah Abravanel) 462–64
- Disputation (in Bar Hiyya) 90, (in
Halevi) 110–12, (public in Spain)
333, 359–60, (Tortosa) 424–25,
433, (general) 445
- Divine glory 30, 137, 163, 441
- Divine principle 80, (in Halevi: *inyan
elohi*) 124–30, 137–38
- Dogmatics (in Maimonides) 169–75,
225, (in Duran) 372–73, (in
Crescas) 374–79, (in Albo) 424–42,
(in Renaissance) 444
- Double truth (in Maimonides
– rejected) 174, (in Kaspi) 318–19,
(in Albalag) 319, 322–25, 332, (in
Elijah Delmedigo) 461–62
- Eclecticism (in Bar Hiyya) 89,
(in Albo) 424–25, 434
- Educational emphasis (in Bahya)
50–51, 57, (in Halevi) 124,
(in Falaquera) 315–16
- Emanation (in Israeli) 40–43, (in Ibn
Gabirol) 79, 82, (in Maimonides,
especially in prophecy) 188, 207,
214, 223, 247–48, 251, 254, 262,
265, (in post-Maimonideans) 306,
(in kabbalah) 323, 399, (rejected in
Averroes and Gersonides) 327–28,
345, (rejected by Crescas) 364, 401,
411
- Emotions (in Maimonides) 180–84,
186, 190–91, 204, (well-tempered)
206, (denied of God) 228, 230, 232,
239
- Epicurean (in Maimonides) 165, 173;
see also Epicurus
- Epistemology ix, (in Saadia) 7–9,
22, (in Halevi) 132–34, 142,
(Aristotelian in Maimonides)
169–70, 186–88, 220, 224–25, 248,
263–64, 294, (in Avicenna) 327,
(in Averroes) 328, (in Gersonides)
338, (in Crescas) 364, 391
- Esoteric views 161–62, 165, 176, 219,
266–67, 273–77, 302–03, 306, 319,
322, 330, 336–37, 371, 416
- Eternal reward 32, 166, 185, 187, 279,
329; *see* Immortality
- Eternity of God 52–53, 113, 139, 223,
236, 246, 249, 266, 346, 379–80,
387, 389, 431
- Eternity of the world 219, 221–23,
265–66, 268, 270–73, 309 (n.),
321–23, 329–30, 338–39, 341,
343–44, 371, 378–79, 397–99, 401,
433
- Ethics (in Saadia) 30–38, (in Bahya)
54–58, (in Ibn Gabirol) 80–81,
(in Halevi) 101–03, 134–39, (in
Maimonides) 189–209, 294–95,
(in Falaquera) 316–17, (in Crescas)
414–421; *see also* Golden Mean,
Perfection (human), Utility, Virtues
- Evil (in Saadia) 7, 9, 25, 28, 31–34,
(in Bahya) 49, 56–57, (in Ibn
Gabirol) 85, (in Halevi) 127, (in
Maimonides) 183–84, 190, 192–94,
200–01, 204, 265, 277–79, 282, 285,
(in Falaquera) 316, (in Albalag)
321, (in Crescas) 367, (in Albo)
428
- Faith (in Saadia) 6–7, 12, (in Bahya)
49–50, 60, (in Ibn Gabirol) 68,
(in Bar Hiyya) 87–88, (in Halevi)
97–98, 106, 113, 133, 137,
(in Maimonides) 154, 165, 169,
225, 236, 242, 287, (in post-
Maimonideans) 301, (in Alfakar)
309, (in Falaquera) 313, 317, (in
Albalag) 320, 322–24, 330,
(in Gersonides) 336, 350, (in
R. Nissim) 366, 370, (in Crescas)
358, 376, 399, 413, (in Albo) 425,
428, 432, **435–40**, 442, (in Ibn
Verga) 447, 449, (in Isaac Abravanel)
456, (in Elijah Del Medigo) 462;
see also Belief
- Form (in Saadia) 7, 20, 40, (in Israeli)
40, (in Ibn Gabirol) **73–80**, (in Bar
Hiyya) 89, 92, (in Halevi) 141, (in
Maimonides) 179, 181, 185–86,
193, 262–64, 267, 269, 295, (in post-
Maimonideans) 307, (in Averroes)
328, 330, (in Gersonides) 344,

- 348, 355, (in R. Nissim) 367, (in Crescas) 382, 399, 401, (in Judah Abravanel) 463–64
- Free Will (in Saadia) 26, **28–29**, 31, 36, (in Halevi) 124, (in Maimonides) 189, 192, **194–200**, (divine) 215, 265, 272, (in post-Maimonideans) 331, (in Ribash) 372, (in Crescas) 377, **410–414**
- God
- Anthropomorphism (in Saadia) 15, 23–24, 309 (n.), (in Bahya) 54, (in Halevi) 104, (in Maimonides) 163, 224–26, 232, 241, 294
- Attributes (in Saadia) 16, 21, **24–26**, 36, 225, 231–32, (in Bahya) 48–49, **51–54**, (in Halevi) 104, 133, (in Maimonides) 24–26, **224–251**, 255–56, 259–60, 264–65, 82, 292, 295–96, (in Averroes) 328, 330–31, (in Gersonides) 345–47, (in R. Nissim) 367, (in Crescas) 376, 380, **384–96**, 397, 407, 410
- Eternity *see* Eternity of God (main entry)
- Existence (in Saadia) 16–18, 21–24, (in Bahya) 48, 66–67, (in Ibn Gabirol) 82, (in Halevi) 131, (in Maimonides) 162, 169, 173, 219–224, 236–38, 242, 244, 246–251, 260–61, 264, 266, 294–95, (in Falaquera) 311–12, 314, (in Albalag) 320, (in Averroes) 331, (in Gersonides) 346–47, (in Crescas) 3–89, 396–97, 413, (in Albo) 429–31, 435–38
- Immanence (in Maimonides) 296, (in Judah Abravanel) 466
- Incommensurability (in Maimonides) 228–29, 236–38, 243, 250
- Incomprehensibility (in Saadia) 22–23, (in Maimonides) 218, 225, 237–41
- Incorporeality (in Saadia) 15, 22, (in Ibn Gabirol) 75, (in Halevi) 113, 118, (in Maimonides) 170–71, 220–28, 230, 240, 244, 246, (in Rabad) 305, (in Crescas) 376, 384, 393–94, (in Albo) 430–31, 436
- Inexpressibility (in Ibn Gabirol) 84
- Infinity (in Israeli) 41, (in Bahya) 64, 66, (in Ibn Gabirol) 73, 76, 79–80, 82, (in Maimonides) 228, 235, (in Gersonides) 346, (in Crescas) 389–96, 399–407, 411–16, (in Judah Abravanel) 464
- Intellect (in Ibn Gabirol) 84, (in Maimonides) 251, 228, 249, 260–63, 282–83, 296, (in Gersonides) 343–46, (in Crescas) 96, 414
- Knowledge (divine) (in Saadia) 29, (in Halevi) 107, (in Maimonides) 199–200, (in Gersonides) 347, (in Crescas) 410–13, (in Albo) 430–31; unity of the Intellect, Knower, and Known 260–63, 347
- Names (in Halevi) 104, 133, (in Maimonides) 260, 266
- Perfection(s) (in Halevi) 133, (in Maimonides) 185, 212, 232, 235–41, 244, 259, 265, 282, 284, (in Crescas) 390, 402, 409, (in Albo) 430, 432, (in Judah Abravanel) 464
- Proofs for (in Saadia) 21, (in Halevi) 133, 144, (in Maimonides) 219–24, 61–62, 379–80, (in Falaquera) 311, (in Crescas) 376, 379–80, 384, 387, (in Albo) 429–31
- Transcendence (in Maimonides) 170, 222–23, 240, 271, 295, 330; (in Gersonides) 345
- Unity (in Saadia) 23, 25, 35, (in Bahya) **52–53**, 56, 58, 62, (in Ibn Gabirol) 82, (in Halevi) 113, 118, (in Maimonides) 223, 226, 231, 236–37, 242, 246–50, 261–63, 265–66, 290, (in Falaquera) 314, (in Averroes) 331, (in Gersonides) 345–48, 353 (n.), (in Crescas) 376, 379–80, **384–93**, 396–97, (in Albo) 430–31, 436; *see also* Unity of All Being
- Will (in Saadia) 13–15, (in Ibn Gabirol) 73, 79–80, 82, (in Halevi) 108, 124, 144, (in Maimonides) 162, 197, 199, 214–15, 233, 238, 259–60, 262–68, 271–72, 274, 277, 282, 291, (in Albalag) 321–22, (in Gersonides) 344, (in Crescas) 401, 403–04, 406, 411–14, 420

- Golden Mean (in Saadia) 36–37,
(in Ibn Gabirol) 81, (in Halevi)
102, 136, (in Maimonides) 200–02,
204, 443
- Hebrew language (in Halevi) 123
- Hierarchy (in Israeli) 43, (in Ibn
Gabirol) 76–77, (in Bar Ḥiyya)
89, (in Halevi) 125, 130–31, 133,
(in Aristotle) 204, 220, (in Maimonides)
253, 279, (in Gersonides) 354,
(in Crescas) 408
- Historical outlook (in Bar Ḥiyya)
91–94, (in Halevi) 122–28, 445,
(in Maimonides) 16–61, (in
Crescas) 445, (in Ibn Verga)
446–50, (in Isaac Abravanel)
452–54, (in Nachman Krochmal)
454; in Renaissance **443–58**
- Historical testimony (in Bahya) 54,
(in Halevi) 117–123
- Idolatry (in Halevi) 127, 144, (in
Maimonides) 160–61, 171, 178,
209, 295, (in Falaquera) 311–12,
(in Isaac Abravanel) 453, 457
- Imagination (in Saadia) 15, (in Ibn
Gabirol) 78, (in Halevi) 137, 142,
(in Maimonides) 180 (n.), **181–87**,
190–91, 193, 208, 210, 213–14, 227,
232, 435–36, (in Gersonides)
350–51, 353,
- Imitation of God (in Maimonides)
212, 217, 235 (n.), 255–57, 291–92,
296
- Immortality (in Saadia) 30, (in Halevi)
108, 115 (n.), 144, (in Maimonides)
185–86, 188, (in Averroes and
Hillel of Verona) 328–29,
(in Gersonides) 335, 351–56,
(in Crescas) 377–78, (in Albo) 428
- Imperfection (in Maimonides) 193
- Infinity (in Saadia and John
Philoponus) 18 (n.), 19, 20 (n.), 21,
(in Israeli) 41, (in Bahya) 52–53,
64, 66, (in Ibn Gabirol) 73, 75–76,
79–80, 82, (in Maimonides) 219–20,
228, 233, 235, 270, (in Averroes)
330, (in Gersonides) 341–43, 346,
354, (in Crescas) 378, **381–82**, 384,
389–96, 399–407, 411–16, 420, (in
Judah Abravanel) 464
- Intellect (= reason) (in Saadia) 7–8,
10–12, 30, (in Israeli) 44, (in
Bahya) 46, 50–52, (in Ibn Gabirol)
75–76, 81, 84, (in Halevi) 108, 125,
128–31, 136–37, 141–42, 144, 329,
(in Maimonides) 160, 171, 181,
184–88, 192, 207–08, 213–14,
232–33, 247–49, 251–58, 260,
281–83, 293–94, (in Averroes)
328–29, (in Gersonides) 350–55,
(in R. Nissim) 367–69, (in Duran)
373, (in Crescas) 376, 391, 393,
396, 401, 415, (in Albo) 439–40;
and providence 281–83, 407–08;
acquired intellect 108, 187–88,
210–11, 249, 328–29, 352, 354, 428;
hylic intellect 186–87; potential
intellect 185; *see also* Active Intellect
- Intellect(s) (= [the Ten] Separate
Intelligences, Universal Intellect,
Intellectual Soul) (in Israeli)
41–42, (in Ibn Gabirol) 77–78,
(in Halevi) 130, (in Maimonides)
08, 212, 228, 263, 278, (in Avicenna)
327–28, (in Gersonides) 352, in
R. Nissim 367, (in Crescas) 383,
(in Judah Abravanel) 464; *see also*
Active Intellect
- Intellectual perfection (in Bahya:
“awakening”) 50–52, 57, 59,
(in Halevi) 108, 128–30, 133–34,
136–37, (in Maimonides) 164, 166,
176–78, 187–88, 192, 202–18, 235,
288–89, 295, (in R. Nissim) 367–69;
and prophecy 202–18
- Islam (and Moslems) xi, xiii, (in
Saadia) 3–4, 16, 18 (n.), (and Ibn
Gabirol) 69, (in Bar Ḥiyya) 87–90,
93, (in Halevi) 96–98, 100–01,
105–07, 110–20, 127–28, 134–35,
(in Maimonides) 141, 143,
145, 149–50, 160, 211, (in post-
Maimonideans) 326, 332, (in
Albo) 435, 441–2, (general) 450,
453, 459, 463
- Kabbalah, kabbalists (and *Sefer
Yetzirah*) 14, (and Israeli) 39,
42, (and Ibn Gabirol) 68–69, 78,
80, (and Bar Ḥiyya) 91 (n.), (and
Maimonides) 247 (n.), 297, (and
post-Maimonideans) 302, 304,
308, 312, 323, 326, 333–34, (in the
14th century) 362–63, (and R.
Nissim) 369, (and Ribash) 370–72,
(and Crescas) 364, 392, 399,

- 401–02, 404, 414–15, 420–21, (and Albo) 423–25, 434, 436–37, (and Isaac Abravanel) 453, 455, (and the Spanish-Jewish émigrés) 459, (and Pico della Mirandola) 461
- Kalam xii, (and Saadia) 16, 18, 20, 342 (n.), (and Halevi) 98–99, 135, 140–41, (and Maimonides) 159, 162, 219, 225–27, 230–34, 236, 240–42, 246–47, 250, 260–64, 266–67, 280–81, 296, (and post-Maimonideans) 309, (and Gersonides) 344, (and Crescas) 404, (and Albo) 427
- Karaite xiii, (and Saadia) 3–5, 12, (in Halevi) 96–98, 100–01, 103, 117, 139–41
- Law
- Divine (in Halevi) 129, (in Maimonides) 212, 283, 292, (in Crescas) 403, 405, 407–09, 412, (in Albo) 426–29
 - Historical (in Bar Ḥiyya) 92–93, (in Halevi) 124, 126, (in Maimonides) 403
 - Natural (in Saadia) 13, 16, (in Bahya) 60, (in Halevi) 124, 126, (in Maimonides) 196–97, 199–200, 263–65, 268, 274–75, (in Gersonides) 340, 344–45, 347–48, (in Crescas) 403, 405, 407–09, (in Albo) 426–28; *see also* Nature
 - Oral (in Saadia) 12, (in Halevi) 141, (in Maimonides) 153, 155–56, 164, 416–18, (in Crescas) 418–21, (in Albo) 442
 - Political (in Bar Ḥiyya) 102, (in Maimonides) 154, 195
 - Physical (in Saadia) 17, 28–29, (in Israeli) 43, (in Bahya) 60, (in Maimonides) 196, 199–200, 271, 273, Rational (in Gersonides) 339
 - Rational and positive (in Saadia) 13–14, 205 (n.) (in Bahya) 48, (in Maimonides) 205, (“law of justice” and “law of state” in R. Nissim) 363, 365–66, 369–70, (in Albo) 426–28
 - Religious (in Saadia) 12–14, (in Bahya) 67, (in Bar Ḥiyya) 102 (in Maimonides) 157, 167, 272, 306, (in Ibn Verga) 462–63 *see* Law, Divine
 - Torah (in Halevi) 135, (in Maimonides) 177, 291, (in Gersonides) 337, Torah as law of ideal state (in Maimonides) **154–60**, 167, 177–78, 212, 294–95, (in Falaquera) 313, (in Albalag) 320
 - Love of God (in Bahya) 66, (in Maimonides) 204, 217, 285, 289, 295, (in Crescas) 414–15, 420
- Matter (in Saadia) 20–21, (in Israeli) 40, (in Ibn Gabirol) **73–80**, (in Bar Ḥiyya) 89, 91 (n.), 92, (in Halevi) 130, 141, 144, (in Maimonides) 193, 219, 221, 248, 254, **263–72**, 284–85, 296, 307, (in Avicenna and Averroes) 327–30, (in Gersonides) **343–45**, 348, 355, (in Crescas) 381, 388, **397–401**, 411, (in Judah Abravanel) 463–64
- Messiah (in Bar Ḥiyya) 93, (in Maimonides) 172, 296, (in Crescas) 378, (in Albo) 432–33, (in Isaac Abravanel) 452
- Microcosm (in Israeli) 41, (in Ibn Gabirol) 71, 81
- Miracle (in Saadia) 15–17, 35, (in Bahya) 54, (in Halevi) 117, 120, 128, (in Maimonides) 162, 167, 197, 213–14, 254, 263–64, 268, **274–76**, 291, 294, 296, 305–06, (in Alfakar) 309–10, (in Falaquera) 312–13, (in Albalag) 322–23, (in Averroes) 330, (in Gersonides) 348, 350, (in Crescas) 366, 397, **403–410**, 413, (in Albo) 437–38, 440, (in historical outlook) 445, (in Isaac Abravanel) 455–56
- Moses (in Saadia) 16, 38, (in Halevi) 102, 117–18, 137, (in Maimonides) 150, 155, 160–61, 164, 171–72, 177–78, 194, 207, 210, 212–13, 216, 219, 233–36, 244, 247–49, 254–55, 257–59, 267, 273, 276, 284, 290, (in post-Maimonideans) 304, (in Falaquera) 312, 315, (in R. Nissim) 366, 368, (in Crescas) 377–78, 390–91, 396, 413, 416, (in Albo) 432–33, 440–42, (in Isaac Abravanel) 453–54, 457

- Moses' vision in the cleft of the rock (in Maimonides) 233–36, 247–49, 255; (in Crescas) 39–91, 396
- Nature (in Saadia) 12, 15–16, 24, 26, (in Israeli) 41–43, (in Bahya) 53–54, 60, (in Halevi) 124, 126–27, 144, (in Maimonides) 173, 176, 188, 192–94, 197, 255, 263–66, 268, 274–76, 278–79, 295–96, 397–98, (in Falaquera) 314, (in Albalag) 322–24, (in Gersonides) 345, 348, (in R. Nissim) 367–68, (in Crescas) 403–09, 412–13, (in Albo) 426–28, 435, (and history) 445, (in Isaac Abravanel) 453, 457, (in Judah Abravanel) 464; *see also* Law, Natural
- Necessity (vs. contingency/free will) (in Maimonides) 213, 228, 265, 268 (n.), 275, 295, (in Averroes) 330–31, (in Gersonides) 340, 362–3, (in Ribash) 371, (in Crescas) 387, 392, 401, **410–13**; *see also* God, Existence
- Neo-Platonism (in Israeli) 39–40, 43, (in Bahya) 46, (in Ibn Gabirol) 68–71, 76, 80–82, 84–85, (in Bar Hiyya) 89, 91, (and Halevi) 98–99, (in Maimonides) 162, 185, 224, 228, 240–41 (n.), 259, 262, 265–66, 269, 330, (in post-Maimonideans and kabbalah) 302, 306, 323, 333, 363, 399, 421, (in Avicenna) 327–28, (and Gersonides) 343, 345, 347, (and Crescas) 363, 399, (and Nahmanides) 421
- Noahides (in Albo) 433–34
- Nothingness (in Ibn Gabirol) 80, (in Maimonides) 269, (in Falaquera) 314, (in kabbalah) 323, (in Gersonides) 344, (in Crescas) 399, 401–04, 411
- Otherworldliness *see* Worldliness and Otherworldliness
- Pagan views (and Saadia) 21, (and Maimonides) 160–61, 220, 259, 271, 273, (and Ibn Verga) 449, (and Judah Abravanel) 465–67
- Perfection (human) (in Saadia) 33–34, (in Bahya) 48, 57–58, **63–66**, (in Ibn Gabirol) 76, (in Bar Hiyya) 90, 92–93, (in Halevi) 102, 108, 116, 128, 130, 134–39, (in Maimonides) 164–67, 176–80, 185–89, 193–94, 201–12, 217, 235–41, 248, 252–58, 267, 278, 288, 290, 292, 295–96, (in Falaquera) 316, (in Gersonides) 337, 354, (in R. Nissim) 367, (in Crescas) 418, (in Albo) 428, 432, 434
- Perfection (of creation) (in Saadia) 21, (in Halevi) 124, (in Maimonides) 223, 236, 279, (in Gersonides) 341, (in Crescas) 402 *see also* Imperfection
- Personal [religion, God] (in Saadia) 24–26, (in Bahya) 50, (in Ibn Gabirol) 80, 84, (in Halevi) 95, 98, 105, 108, 111, 128–29, 133, (in Maimonides) 253–55, 286, 296, (in Crescas) 396, (and Judah Abravanel) 466–67
- Philosophy and religion *see* Reason and Revelation
- Platonism x, (in Saadia) 28–29, (in Bar Hiyya) 89, (in Halevi) 100–02, 135, (in Maimonides) 152, 176, 178, 294, (in Judah Abravanel) 462–65; *see also* Plato
- Poetry (and Saadia) 3, (and Bahya) 47, (and Ibn Gabirol) 68, 70, 78, 80–81, 83–86, 465, (and Halevi) 95, 133, 145, (and Maimonides) 162, 275, 306, (and Falaquera) 310, 315–16, (and Judah Abravanel) 463, 465
- Politics (in Halevi) 96, 102–03, 112, 136, (in Maimonides) 152–54, 167–70, 172, 174–75, **176–78**, 189, 210–11, 213, 217, 255, 288, 294; *see also* Law: Torah as Law of Ideal State, and Political Uses of Religion
- Political Uses of Religion (in Bahya) 51, (in Halevi's "philosopher") 108, (in Maimonides) 167–70, 174, 273–74, 276–77, (in Falaquera) 313, (in Albalag) 319–21, 330, (in Averroes) 330
- Potential(ity) (in Saadia) 21, 26, 28, (in Israeli) 41–42, (in Ibn Gabirol) 74–78, (in Bar Hiyya) 92–93, (in Halevi) 130–31, (in Maimonides) 166, 185–87, 194, 203, 220–22, 254, 262–64, 266, 269, 283, (in Averroes) 328–30, (in Gersonides)

- 341–44, 354, (in Crescas) 388, 398–99, 411–12
- Prayer (and Saadia) 3–5, 13, 24, (and Ibn Gabirol) 68–70, 80, 85, 465 (and Halevi) 108, 122, 129, 134, **138–39**, (and Maimonides) 230, (and Ribash) 371
- Prophecy and Prophets (in Saadia) 5, 10–11, 14–16, (in Israeli) 40, 43–44, (in Ibn Gabirol) 86, (in Bar Hiyya) 89–90, (in Halevi) 98, 100, 102–04, 106, 108–111, 115, 117–18, 125, **127–34**, 139, 141–44, (in Maimonides) 152, 163, 164, 171, 173–75, 177, 180, 182, 188, 197, 207–09, **210–18**, 223–24, 226, 230, 232–36, 243–49, 252–59, 263–64, 273–74, 276, 282–83, 289–96, (in post-Maimonideans) 306, (in Falaquera) 312, 314–15, (in Albalag) 323–25, (in Averroes) 330, (in Gersonides) 335, 347, 349–51, (in R. Nissim) 366–68, 370, (in Ribash) 371, (in Duran) 373, (in Crescas) 376–78, 385–86, 391–97, 402–03, 408, 417, 419, (in Albo) 427–28, 430–33, 437–38, 440–42, (in Isaac Abravanel) 451, 454–56
- Prophet and Philosopher Compared (in Saadia) 10, (in Halevi) 129, 131–34, 141–42, (in Maimonides) 211, 215–218, 253–57, 296, 306, (in Falaquera) 315, (in Albalag) 324–25, (in R. Nissim) 366–67, (in Crescas) 391, 393–96, 402–03
- Prophet and Politician Compared (in Maimonides) 177, 209–11, 255–57
- Providence (in Saadia) 13, 25–26, (in Bahya) 49, (in Bar Hiyya) 92, (in Halevi) 108, 116, 126, (in Maimonides) 162, 198–99, 256–58, **276–94**, (in post-Maimonideans) 309 (n.), (in Falaquera) 314, (in Albalag) 320, (in Averroes) 331, (in Gersonides) 335, **347–50**, (in Ribash) 371–72, (in Duran) 373, (in Crescas) 377, **406–15**, 422, (in Albo) 428, 431, 437, (in Renaissance) 444–45, (in Isaac Abravanel) 453–55
- Reason (in Saadia) 7–14, 17, 23, 26, 28–31, 33–34, 36–37, (in Israeli) 44, (in Bahya) 48–50, 53, 55, 57, 59, (in Ibn Gabirol) 75–76, 78, 82, (in Bar Hiyya) 89–90, (in Halevi) 103, 105, 108, 114–15, 117–18, 120, 122, 128–31, 138, 140–45, (in Maimonides) 158, 162, 166, 168, 180 (n.), 183–87, 190–92, 194–95, 200, 207, 210–11, 246–47, 249, 278, 283, 285–86, 296, 306–08, (in Alfakar) 308–09, (in Falaquera) 310–15, (in Albalag) 321–24, (in Averroes) 328, 331, (in Gersonides) 336–39, 354, in R. Nissim) 367, 370, (in Ribash) 371–72, (in Duran) 373 (in Crescas) 375–77, 379–80, 384, 391, 393–96, 398, 408–09, (in Albo) 427, 430–32, 439; *see also*: Commandments: Reasons for the commandments
- Reason and Revelation (in Saadia) 10–11, (in Bahya) 48–50, (in Ibn Gabirol) 76, 82, (in Bar Hiyya) 89–90, (in Halevi) 108–09, 114–15, 131, 140–45, 332, (in Maimonides) 152–53, 159, 165–68, 246–47, 285, 296, 306–08, (in Alfakar) 308–09, (in Falaquera) 310–15, (in Albalag) 322–25, (in Averroes) 328, (in Gersonides) 337–38, (in R. Nissim) 370, (in Ribash) 371–72, (in Duran) 373, (in Crescas) 375–77, 398, (in Albo) 430–32, 439
- Religion, theory of (in Saadia) 6–12, 16, 18, (in Bahya) 47, 50–53, 65, 67, (in Ibn Gabirol) 80, 86, (in Bar Hiyya) 89–91, (in Halevi) 96–100, 104–08, 111–28, 133–40, 144–45, (in Maimonides) 160–61, 174, 261, 294–95, (in Falaquera) 313–17, (in Albalag) 320–21, (in Averroes) 327, (in post-Maimonideans) 330–33, (in R. Nissim) 365–70, (in Albo) 425–29, 433–35
- Repentance (in Saadia) 35, (in Bahya) 63–65, (in Ibn Gabirol) 85, (in Maimonides) 198, 205
- Resurrection (in Saadia) 12, 30, (in Maimonides) 151, 165, 169, 172–3, 179, 276, 304–05, (in Crescas) 377–78, 398, 409–10, (in Albo) 432, (in Isaac Abravanel) 455
- Revelation (in Saadia) 9–13, 15–17, 25, 31, (in Israeli) 45,

- (in Bahya) 48–49, 54, (in Ibn Gabirol) 71, 86, (in Bar Hiyya) 89–91, (in Halevi) 101, 103–04, 108–11, 113–15, 117–18, 121–22, 124–25, 139, 137, 140, 145–46, (in Maimonides) 174, 212, 214, 233, 236, 246, 254–55, 258, 263, 267–68, 296, (in post-Maimonideans) 306, 308, 309 (n.), (in Falaquera) 310, (in Albalag) 320, 322, (in Averroists) 328, 330, (in Gersonides) 338–39, (in R. Nissim) 366–67, 370, (in Ribash) 372, (in Duran) 373, (in Crescas) 358, 375–78, 384–85, 395–98, 402, 405–06, 409, 415, 422, (in Albo) 430, 432, 435, 437, 440, (in Renaissance) 449; *see also* Prophecy, Sinaitic Revelation
- Reward and Punishment (in Saadia) 12, 17, **25–35**, 38, (in Bahya) 60, (in Ibn Gabirol) 85, (in Halevi) 108, 114, 117, 124, (in Maimonides) 165–67, 169, 172–74, 198, 277, 281–82, 287, 289, 291, 293–94, 297, (in Falaquera) 314, (in Albalag) 320, (in Gersonides) 349, (in R. Nissim) 370, (in Crescas) 377, 407, 412–13, (in Albo) 429–32, 435, 438,
- Sabbath (in Saadia) 5, 13, 32–33, (in Halevi) 124, 138–39, (in Alfakar) 309, (in Falaquera) 312, (in Crescas) 408, (in Albo) 441
- Science (in Saadia) 18, 309 (n.), (in Israeli) 40, (in Ibn Gabirol) 71, (in Bar Hiyya) 88–89, (in Halevi) 98, 109, 144, (in Maimonides) 149, 161, 169, 185, 203, 246, 248, 252, 261, (in Falaquera) 312, 316–17, (in Gersonides) 335, 338, 340–41, 348, (in Crescas) 361–62, 380 (n.), (in Ribash) 371, (in Duran) 373, (in Albo) 426, 428–30, (in Renaissance) 443–44, (in Isaac Abravanel) 455
- Service (of God) (in Saadia) 27, 33, 35–36, (in Bahya) 46, 51, **58–64**, (in Halevi) 101–02, 108, 135, 138–39, (in Maimonides) 203, 211, 216–17, 291 (in Rabad) 305–06, (in R. Nissim) 368, (in Ribash) 372, (in Crescas) **414–15**, 436, (in Isaac Abravanel) 456
- Sinaitic revelation (in Bar Hiyya) 91, (in Halevi) 86, 102–04, 115, 117, 121–24, 137, (in Maimonides) 172, 258, 267–68, 275, 294, 322, (in post-Maimonideans) 330, (in Ribash) 371, (in Duran) 373, (in Crescas) 377, 397–98, 409, 416, 418, (in Albo) 440, (in Ibn Verga) 449
- Space (in Bahya) 53, (in Maimonides) 220, (in Averroes) 328, (in Gersonides) 342, (in Crescas) 381–84, 397–401
- Stoics x, 29, 291 (n.)
- Soul (in Saadia) 8, 28–30, 35–38, (in Israeli) 40–42, 44, (in Bahya) 47–48, 51–52, 55–64, (in Ibn Gabirol) 66–67, 77, 79–81, 84, (in Bar Hiyya) 87, 91, (in Halevi) 102, 108, 134, 136–37, 139, 144, (in Maimonides) 178–87, 189, 192, 201–02, 220, 285, (in Falaquera) 314, (in Albalag) 32–21, (in Averroes) 328–29, (in Hillel of Verona) 329, 460, (in Jedaiah Ha-Penini) 332, (in Gersonides) 335, 352–53, 356, (in R. Nissim) 367, 369, (in Crescas) 377, 382–83, 394, 411, 414–15, 419, (in Albo) 428, 435, 438
- Animal Soul 41–42, 91
- Aristotelian view of soul's faculties 178–185
- Immortality of the Soul *see* Immortality
- Intellectual (rational) Soul 41–42, 329
- Neo-Platonic view of soul 91
- Universal Soul 41
- Vegetative Soul 41, 91
- Time (in Saadia) 18 (n.), 19–21, 32, (in Bahya) 53, (in Bar Hiyya) 93, (in Halevi) 123, 138–39, (in Maimonides) 170, 219, 221, 246 (n.), 262, 266, 268 (n.), 269–73, 275, (in Albalag) 321, (in Averroes) 328, 330, (in Gersonides) 339, 341–44, (in Crescas) 381–84, 397–401, 405
- Torah: Mosaic Torah 115, 117–18, 120, 135, 154, 210, 219, 281–82, 284–85, 434, 440–42; Oral (and Written) Torah xi, 5, 101, 152–56, 161, 172, **416–20**, 422, 441; *see also* Commandments, Law, Reason

- and Revelation, Revelation, Sinaitic
Revelation
- Unity of All Being (in Ibn Gabirol)
72, 75–78, (in Avicenna) 327,
(in Gersonides) 341, (in Judah
Abravanel) 464–65
- Utility (in Saadia) 9, 14, 31–33,
(in Bahya) 65, (in Aristotle) 201,
(in Maimonides) 225, 283
- Virtue(s) (in Saadia) 37–38, (in Bahya)
62, (in Ibn Gabirol) 80–81, (in
Halevi) 135–37, (in Maimonides)
189–90, 200–02, 207–09, 288–89, (in
Falaquera) 313, 315, 317,
(in Gersonides) 350, (in Crescas)
413, 418
- World to Come (in Saadia) 11,
25, 27, 30, 33–34, 36, 38, (in Ibn
Gabirol) 85, (in Halevi) 114,
(in Maimonides) 152, 165–70,
173, 177, 244–45, (in Albo) 434;
see also Immortality, Worldliness and
Otherworldliness
- Worldliness and Otherworldliness
(in Saadia) 11, 17, 27–36, (in Bahya)
48–49, 56–59, 65–66, (in Ibn
Gabirol) 81, 85, (in Halevi)
135–36, 139, (in Maimonides)
165–66, 203–04, 290–91, 294–95,
(in Renaissance) 444, (in Isaac
Abravanel) 456–57; *see also*
Immortality, World to Come

