THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

FROM ANTIQUITY THROUGH THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

EDITORS
STEVEN NADLER
T.M. RUDAVSKY

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The first volume in this comprehensive work is an exploration of the history of Jewish philosophy from its beginnings in antiquity to the early-modern period, with a particular emphasis on medieval Jewish thought. Unlike most histories, encyclopedias, guides, or companions of Jewish philosophy, this volume is organized by philosophical topic rather than by chronology or individual figures. There are sections on logic and language; natural philosophy; epistemology, philosophy of mind and psychology; metaphysics and philosophical theology; and practical philosophy. There are also chapters on the intellectual background of Jewish philosophy, including Islamic and Greek thought and the Jewish philosophical textual traditions. With essays by leading scholars in the field, this volume provides the reader with a wonderful overview of the richness and sophistication of Jewish philosophy in its golden age.

Steven Nadler is William H. Hay II Professor of Philosophy and Max and Frieda Weinstein/Bascom Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He is author of *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); *Rembrandt's Jews* (2003), which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize; *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (2002); and *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), which won the Koret Jewish Book Award.

T. M. Rudavsky is Professor of Philosophy at The Ohio State University. She is author of *Time Matters: Time, Creation, and Cosmology in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (2000). She is editor of *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy: Islamic, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives* (1984) and *Gender and Judaism: Tradition and Transformation* (1995). Until June 2006, she was Director of The Ohio State University Melton Center for Jewish Studies.

The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy

From Antiquity through the Seventeenth Century

STEVEN NADLER
University of Wisconsin–Madison

T. M. RUDAVSKY
The Ohio State University

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CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS

Ari Ackerman
The Schechter Institute, Jerusalem

Idit Dobbs-Weinstein
Department of Philosophy, Vanderbilt University

Seymour Feldman
Rutgers University, New Brunswick

Resianne Fontaine
Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, Universiteit van Amsterdam

Carlos Fraenkel
Department of Philosophy and Department of Jewish Studies, McGill University

Daniel H. Frank
Department of Philosophy, Purdue University

Gad Freudenthal
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris

Lenn E. Goodman
Department of Philosophy, Vanderbilt University

Michah Gottlieb
Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University

Barry S. Kogan
Department of Philosophy, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati

Howard Kreisel
Department of Jewish Thought, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Charles H. Manekin
Department of Philosophy, University of Maryland–College Park

Abraham Melamed
Department of Jewish Thought, University of Haifa

Steven Nadler
Department of Philosophy, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Sarah Pessin
Department of Philosophy, University of Denver

James T. Robinson
The Divinity School, University of Chicago

T. M. Rudavsky
Department of Philosophy, The Ohio State University

Norbert M. Samuelson
Department of Religious Studies, Arizona State University

Kenneth Seeskin
Department of Philosophy, Northwestern University

Josef Stern
Department of Philosophy, University of Chicago

Sarah Stroumsa
Department of Arabic Language and Literature and Department of Jewish Thought, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Hava Tirosh-Samuelson
Department of History, Arizona State University

Mauro Zonta
Department of Philosophical and Epistemological Studies, University of Rome "La Sapienza"

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Steven Nadler
Tamar Rudavsky

INTRODUCTION

STEVEN NADLER AND T.M. RUDAVSKY

This volume of *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy* covers the period from Jewish philosophy's beginnings in the Hellenistic era with the Greek writings of Philo of Alexandria to its culmination in the seventeenth century with the radical thought of Baruch Spinoza. Because of the noticeable gap in the philosophical literature between Philo in the first century C.E. and Saadia ben Joseph in the tenth century, most of the studies in this volume are devoted to Jewish philosophy in the medieval period; Philo and Spinoza serve as extraordinary (and very different) bookends to the unprecedented and unsurpassed flourishing of Jewish philosophy in this period.

Any history of Jewish philosophy must deal with two essential questions, often posed as challenges to the whole enterprise of identifying certain writings as instances of something called Jewish philosophy. The first question is: What is Jewish *philosophy*? That is, what distinguishes Jewish philosophy from the variety of other kinds of Jewish literature – Torah and Bible commentaries, *halakhic* (legal) and *aggadic* (homiletic) *midrashim* or exegeses, rabbinic *responsa*, and so on. Sometimes, the line between philosophy and some other genre is not particularly clear, and probably not worth insisting upon. The poetry of Judah Halevi, for example, is undeniably philosophical in content; and it would be a great mistake to disregard Maimonides' *halakhic* works when studying his philosophy. Moreover, the rabbis of the Talmud and the *midrashim* were, in many respects, profoundly good philosophers. Their recorded discussions range over a host of metaphysical, ethical, and epistemological issues, and they apparently excelled as logicians; nobody knew how to use a *reductio ad absurdum* or *a fortoriori* reasoning better than the ancient sages.

Yet despite the wealth of material of great philosophic interest to be found in many rabbinic works, the primary aim of these texts is not philosophical but religious. Their authors and the figures appearing in them were concerned not with addressing philosophical questions per se but with putting their admittedly considerable analytical skills to use in resolving the legal, social, theological, exegetical, and liturgical issues of Judaism. Their aim is not so much truth, but faith and obedience. Normativity is a matter not of what is reasonable, however that is to be

gauged, but of what is alleged to be God's command. By contrast, Jewish *philosophers*, for the most part, want to know what it is rational to believe – about God, the world, and human beings – and what reason can discover about what is right to do and good to pursue in our lives. Their interest, for the most part, is in metaphysical, epistemological, logical, moral, and political questions that we now regard as "philosophical"; in the case of ancient and medieval thinkers, attention was also given to questions of natural philosophy that now fall under the particular sciences.

It is also relevant to note that the interlocutors and intellectual colleagues (if not contemporaries) of the figures discussed in this volume constitute the larger philosophical community represented by ancient Greek and Latin thinkers – Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, Epicureans, and Neoplatonists – as well as medieval Arabic and scholastic philosophers. The Jewish philosophers are engaged by the same sorts of issues that consumed their non-Jewish philosophical peers and use the tools and forms of argumentation common to other traditions, sometimes even for the same purposes.

Of course, in the case of Jewish philosophy, all of these philosophical issues were pursued within the context of a certain religious (doxological and textual) tradition. This brings us to the second, perhaps more difficult, question: What is *Jewish* philosophy? One answer to this question can be quickly dismissed. Being Jewish is neither necessary nor sufficient for participating in the Jewish philosophical enterprise. Many philosophers who happen to be Jewish (for example, Karl Marx, Jacques Derrida, or Saul Kripke) could only very problematically count as engaged in Jewish philosophy, and why should not certain writings by non-Jewish thinkers be included in the canon of Jewish philosophy?

Being a Jewish philosopher cannot be simply a question of influences on one's thought. Spinoza, for example, was strongly influenced by much philosophical thinking that is unarguably Jewish: not just Maimonides and Gersonides, but other important figures as well, such as Ibn Ezra. Then again, Thomas Aquinas was also deeply influenced by what he read in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, and nobody, on that account, sees fit to argue that Saint Thomas was a Jewish philosopher.

A more plausible answer to the question might take into account a philosophy's *content*, perhaps the types of questions that are of most concern to a thinker or the substantive way in which those questions are answered. Thus, Steven Schwarzschild argued that there is a "Jewish way of doing philosophy . . . it is not so much a matter of doing Jewish philosophy as doing philosophy Jewishly," and insisted that the defining characteristic of Jewish philosophy is "the primacy of ethics over nature."[1] Alternatively, one might insist that Jewish philosophy is philosophy that

addresses specific questions pertaining to central claims of Judaism – for example, the meaning of the "election" of Israel or the validity of the Law of Moses in the contemporary world – or that attempts rationally to articulate and justify Jewish doctrine or practice.

To be sure, some skeptics have suggested that there is and can be no such thing as Jewish philosophy. They argue that philosophy is, by definition a nondenominational enterprise, the rational approach to universal questions, and it makes no more sense to speak of Jewish philosophy than it does to speak of, say, Jewish physics. Thus, Julius Guttmann argued that rather than Jewish philosophy we should speak of the philosophy of Judaism: philosophy in which Judaism – its beliefs, ceremonies, and history – is the object of philosophizing, perhaps making it a subfield of the philosophy of religion.[2] Similarly, Isaac Husik, in his *History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy*, famously insisted that "there are Jews now and there are philosophers, but there are no Jewish philosophers and no Jewish philosophy."[3]

There is a certain truth to these kinds of claim. Whatever Jewish philosophy may be, there is (*pace* Schwarzschild) no specifically Jewish way of doing philosophy, no more than there is a Jewish way of engaging in physics, mathematics, or history. Moreover, as one recent writer notes, the notion of "Jewish philosophy" is an academic label invented by nineteenth-century historians of philosophy; neither Maimonides nor any other thinker in the medieval Jewish tradition would have identified himself as a "Jewish philosopher."[4] Still, to reject wholly the utility of such a category is rather extreme and unnecessary. One of the assumptions behind this volume is that there is indeed a particular intellectual tradition that can meaningfully be called "Jewish philosophy." Although it may be difficult to give precise criteria for identifying the members of this tradition, a general, fairly practical approach can be taken. It is all a matter of the kinds of questions one is asking, the texts to which one is responding, and the thinkers with whom one is in dialogue (which, it should be stressed, is different from the issue as to the thinkers by whom one is influenced). Being a Jewish philosopher need mean only that an individual – perhaps necessarily of Jewish descent, perhaps not – is in his or her philosophical thinking engaged in an honest dialogue with a particular philosophical and religious tradition and wrestling with a certain set of questions and responding to a certain coterie of thinkers. Even if one's answers to those questions differ radically from those provided by other, perhaps more orthodox thinkers, still, one is addressing the same questions. He or she is also referencing (for the most part) the same religious and philosophical textual canon and engaged in an extensive conversation across time with the same figures (e.g., Saadia ben Joseph, Ibn Gabirol, and Maimonides).

Such a flexible, possibly circular, but nonetheless workable definition of what is Jewish about Jewish philosophy and what distinguishes it as philosophy from other genres of Jewish writing – what one recent writer has called a "hermeneutic" or "pragmatic" criterion – does not look for the presence of any single essential factor (or set of such factors). Rather, it looks for a type of practice that approaches questions that are of central importance to Judaism with the rational tools and methods of philosophy as these have been adopted from different philosophical traditions (Greek, Arabic, scholastic, and so on). Conversely, Jewish philosophy may approach traditional questions of philosophy on the background of, and with theological assumptions embedded in, Judaism. Jewish philosophy is, on this view, "whatever is the outcome of a multifaceted engagement between, on the one hand, thinking about issues relevant to understanding the Jewish condition or the meaning of Judaism and Jewish life, and, on the other hand . . . thinking that is indebted to and responds to the tradition of . . . philosophy."[5] It is philosophizing with and about the Jewish tradition, asking questions about Judaism as well as using Jewish texts and doctrines to engage in general philosophical speculation about classic problems (freedom of the will, happiness, the nature of time, epistemological problems about prophecy, and so on).

What distinguishes this volume from other "guides" or "companions" to Jewish philosophy is its thematic orientation. Rather than being organized chronologically or by individual thinkers – something that has been done well many times over – the essays in this volume have been conceived broadly along the lines of recognizable philosophical categories: metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of logic and language, moral philosophy, natural philosophy, and political philosophy. Some fields that, over time, split off from what we now think of as "philosophy" (e.g., physics or astronomy) were, in the period under consideration, still regarded as proper philosophical topics; it would be highly anachronistic not to include in a history of Jewish philosophy in the classical, medieval, and early modern worlds chapters on cosmology or meteorology because they now belong to "the natural sciences."

Because the thought of a Jewish philosopher in this extended period was often so strongly a product of the immediate intellectual, social, linguistic, religious, and political culture within which he lived, it was also essential to include in this volume some studies of the various contexts of Jewish philosophy in antiquity and the Middle Ages. Philo was essentially a Greek thinker, strongly influenced by Plato. Saadia and Maimonides flourished in the Arabic world, and their philosophy was, in many respects, a product of Muslim philosophical theology. It is hard to

read Gersonides and his later medieval colleagues without thinking of the European scholastic milieu by which they were surrounded.

We could not include everyone, and a number of Jewish philosophers between the first and seventeenth centuries do not get their proper due in this history; there are also some gaps in the topics covered (aesthetics, for example). Nonetheless, we hope to provide the reader with a good sense of the rich and important philosophical contributions made by ancient, medieval, and early modern Jewish thinkers in a number of central areas of philosophy.

The volume begins with a look at the various contexts within which Jewish philosophy flourished in this extended period of history. Kenneth Seeskin, in "The Greek Background," examines how three non-Jewish philosophers from antiquity conceived of God and how their philosophies influenced subsequent Jewish thought. The conceptions of God proposed by Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus are, respectively, as Demiurge, Prime Mover, and ineffable First Principle. As a result of their encounters with these thinkers, Jewish philosophers changed forever the way Judaism understood itself. No longer could one read sacred texts without inquiring about their metaphysical implications. No longer could one pretend that Judaism has nothing to learn from science and metaphysics. No longer could one ignore the intellectual contributions of gentiles. The relationship also worked the other way. Greek philosophy focused on the question of essence: How is the world ordered? By introducing the idea that everything has a single (divine) source, Judaism asked a new question: Why is there a world at all? There is little doubt that each tradition both influenced and was influenced by the other, and each tradition benefited as a result of this interaction.

In "The Muslim Context," Sarah Stroumsa examines the emergence of Jewish philosophy during the heyday of Islamic philosophy, between the ninth and the twelfth centuries, and looks at the implications of the appearance and development of Jewish thought in a Muslim cultural and intellectual milieu. While providing some observations on the unique character of this context, Stroumsa analyzes the impact of various Muslim schools of thought on Jewish thinkers, both Karaites and Rabbanites, and considers methodological questions pertaining to the study of Jewish philosophy, in particular, to the study of medieval Jewish philosophy in its Muslim context. The result is a clear view of the close interdependence between Jewish thought and the surrounding world of Islamic thought, one that highlights the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the interchange of philosophical ideas.

Mauro Zonta's chapter, "Textual Traditions," considers the transmission of Judeo–Arabic and Hebrew philosophical texts written in Iraq, Egypt, Spain, Provence, and Italy between 800 and 1500. His study incorporates a number of questions about the handwritten tradition of their originals, their translations into Hebrew and even into Latin, the presence of authors' variant readings in many manuscripts, and the identification of their Arabic and Latin philosophical sources. The chapter provides a number of case studies about the textual tradition of these texts, in particular those pertaining to the works of Daud al-Muqammaṣ (Iraq, ca. 850), Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī (Iraq, first half of the tenth century), Isaac Israeli (Egypt and Tunisia, ca. 900), Solomon ibn Gabirol and Baḥya ibn Paquda (Muslim Spain, ca. 1050 or after). Other Jewish scholars coming from Andalusia and working in the first half of the eleventh century include Judah Halevi, Joseph ibn Tzaddiq, Abraham bar Ḥiyya, Moses ibn Ezra, and Abraham ibn Ezra. Finally, Zonta examines the textual tradition of a number of Aristotelian Jewish philosophers, including Abraham ibn Daud (Christian Spain, second half of the twelfth century), Maimonides (Egypt, end of the twelfth century), Gersonides (Provence, first half of the fourteenth century), Ḥasdai Crescas (Aragon, second half of the fourteenth century), and some minor authors active in thirteenth-, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Spain, Provence, and Italy.

In "Philosophical Interpretations of the Bible," Howard Kreisel traces the fundamental changes that took place in Jewish biblical exegesis in the medieval period in comparison to the rabbinic period. The sages in the talmudic era treated the Bible as an open text, at least in regard to nonlegal matters. Already in the commentaries of Saadia we find a shift of focus toward understanding the literal or plain sense of the text. This shift was balanced by a commitment to reason, which rejected the truth of rationally impossible readings, most prominently the anthropomorphic descriptions of God, which it replaced with figurative interpretations. The exegetical approach focusing on the literal meaning of the text finds its fullest expression in the commentaries of Ibn Ezra, although he, too, on rare occasions, resorted to philosophical allegory to highlight the hidden wisdom of the biblical text. The philosophical allegorical approach dominates the way in which Maimonides and his followers treated passages of the Bible, especially those they regarded as having a secret meaning. This approach brought in its wake a strong reaction, as some came to view it as undermining Judaism. Kreisel's chapter culminates in Spinoza's account of biblical hermeneutic, in which the tradition seems to come full circle. Spinoza's approach combines a literal meaning of the text and a commitment to reason. In this case, however, reason is not used to bolster the truth of the divine text but to undermine its authority.

Concentrating on another intellectual context, Michah Gottlieb looks at two paradigms of the relationship between mysticism and philosophy in his chapter "Mysticism and Philosophy." The first paradigm, exemplified by Judah Halevi, considers mysticism an alternative to rationalist attempts to grasp the divine. For Halevi, the prophet is able to visualize divine forms through an "inner eye." Gottlieb calls this "revelatory" mysticism, whereby revelation provides crucial data akin to sense perception from which reason can then infer truths about the divine. The second paradigm, exemplified by Maimonides, knows of no direct perception of divine forms. Rather, reason plays the central role in metaphysical knowledge. Maimonides insists that, at its highest level, reason recognizes its inability to know very much about God. This, however, leads not to despair but to a profound sense of awe and love for God as the philosopher is overwhelmed by the immensity of God's perfection, which overflows human understanding. Gottlieb calls this "apophatic mysticism." In this case, mysticism is the culmination of rational attempts to grasp the divine. These two different views of the relationship between mysticism and philosophy result in two very different pictures of God. For Halevi, God is a personal being who cares deeply for humans and seeks relationships with them, whereas for Maimonides God is an ineffable, unknowable other with whom a reciprocal relationship is impossible, but whose perfection leads the true philosopher to a state of rapture.

The second section of the volume is devoted to an area of philosophy that flourished in medieval thought generally: logic and the philosophy of language. In "Propositions and Propositional Inference," Charles H. Manekin shows that the doctrines of the proposition familiar to medieval Jewish intellectuals were those of the Aristotelians (or the "Neoaristotelians," because the doctrines contained stoic and Neoplatonic elements), as transmitted and transformed during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, in the Greek, Arabic, and, later, Latin traditions. These doctrines were so fundamental to the study of philosophy that elements of them are contained in some of the earliest philosophical writing among the Jews, even among thinkers who themselves did not write works in logic or who are not considered by historians of philosophers as "Aristotelian." Manekin's chapter deals with Jewish discussions of the proposition, conceived within the Aristotelian tradition as a truth-bearing statement. Although much less space is devoted in Jewish logical manuals and commentaries on propositional semantics than in those of their scholastic counterparts, there are still disagreements: for example, whether propositions have an implicit temporal signification. The chapter also discusses Jewish treatments of the various forms of propositional inference: conversion, obversion, inferences underlying the square of opposition, and so forth. Because medieval logic in Hebrew is written under the influence of two Aristotelian traditions, first

the Arabic and then the Latin, Manekin also considers the impact of these traditions on Jewish theories of propositional inference. Although most of the Jewish treatments of the proposition are rather conventional, Manekin shows that Gersonides' treatment is notable for its originality and Judah Messer Leon's for its appropriation of scholastic logic.

In "Reasoning and Demonstration," Norbert M. Samuelson, after placing the subject of logic in medieval Jewish philosophy in its historical setting, examines the distinctive role of argumentation in the writings of the rabbis who lived after the codification of the Hebrew scriptures and before the political emancipation of the Jewish people in Europe. The subject of his chapter is not formal logic in rabbinic Judaism, but rather an examination of the way that logical thinking of a variety of types shaped the thought of sophisticated medieval rabbis about philosophical topics. Samuelson provides eight examples intended to highlight how in very different ways the logic of an argument in itself shapes the content discussed and how the forms of an argument used have their own special history within Jewish philosophy.

In his chapter "Meaning and Language," Josef Stern addresses three general topics concerning meaning and language. The first topic centers on the classic question of whether language, or meaning or signification, is natural or conventional; the different ways in which that distinction was understood by various thinkers; and the significance that the question held for them. He considers Saadia, Judah Halevi, Maimonides, and Efodi (Profiat Duran) in depth, although he takes some brief glances at some other figures. The second topic is the nature and mechanism of signification. By and large, the predominant model for medieval Jewish thinkers was the Aristotelian description-like conception of reference, although Halevi hints at a theory of names that is based on perceptual, causal, and contextual relations. The third topic concerns various theories of multiple meaning and polysemy (ambiguity, amphiboly, metaphor, equivocality, etc.) and the role that these notions play in theories of divine attributes and religious language. As might be expected, the central figure in all these discussions is Maimonides, although a major contribution of this chapter is its detailed analysis of Duran's *Ma'aseh Efod*, a remarkably original speculative grammar that was the first real departure from the dominant Maimonidean model of language.

With the third section, the volume turns to issues of natural philosophy. In "Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World," Sarah Pessin draws on a range of thinkers from the first through the seventeenth centuries to explore views on the corporeal world. She primarily analyzes three categories of representative attitudes toward matter: negative, neutral, and positive. In addition to serving as a useful organizing tool for a range of views within the Jewish philosophical tradition, this

tripartite structure actually complicates the correlation between corporeality and sin/evil, a theme that often stands out in the history of ideas. Although Jewish texts do sometimes see the materiality of bodies in a decidedly negative light, it is important to contrast and consider such texts side by side with discussions of matter in neutral scientific and cosmogonic contexts, and even with decidedly positive evaluations of materiality. Pessin highlights the negative role of matter in Platonic (and Neoplatonic) themes at play in Maimonides, Gersonides, and Philo; the neutral role of matter in the creation accounts and Aristotelian metaphysics in Nahmanides, Gersonides, Abraham ibn Ezra, Maimonides, and Crescas; and the positive role of matter in Ibn Gabirol's and Isaac Israeli's commitment to a supernal grade of matter, in Simha of Troyes' stoic-inspired divinization of matter, and in Spinoza's vision of God-as-nature.

Gad Freudenthal's chapter, "Cosmology: The Heavenly Bodies," looks at the paramount role that the heavenly bodies played in medieval thought. They were construed as God's instruments in exercising His providence over the sublunar world, so that the latter's order and stability were ascribed to their "influences." This was a generally accepted notion, held by even staunch opponents of astrology. Freudenthal studies the views of Jewish thinkers about the role of the heavenly bodies in the economy of the physical world. After sketching the disciplinary traditions on this topic in Greek philosophy (primarily Aristotle, Ptolemy, and Alexander of Aphrodisias) and Arabic thought (al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Averroes), Freudenthal discusses successively the heavenly bodies in the thought of Jewish thinkers who had access to writings in Arabic (Saadia, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, Abraham ibn Ezra, and Maimonides) and of those who depended exclusively on writings in Hebrew (Gersonides).

In "Miracles," Ari Ackerman focuses on four of the most extensive and influential treatments of the topic in medieval Jewish philosophy: those of Saadia, Judah Halevi, Maimonides, and Gersonides. Each of these philosophers forges a unique balance between the Jewish and philosophical traditions on miracles. Ackerman begins with a brief examination of the differing conceptions of miracles in the biblical–rabbinic and the Greek–Islamic philosophical traditions, which lays the groundwork for the medieval Jewish analyses of the issue. He then proceeds to extensive treatments of those Jewish philosophers' views of miracles, underscoring their attempts to integrate elements of the contrasting approaches of the Jewish and philosophical traditions.

Tamar Rudavsky, in her chapter "Time, Space, and Infinity," examines the interrelationship among time, place, and the continuum in medieval Jewish philosophy, particularly in light of existing theological constraints. Although the early biblical and rabbinic works did not contain an ontology of time or place, the theological

assumptions and constraints underlying these works reverberated throughout the medieval Jewish literature. Whereas in some cases these theological constraints were challenged, as reflected in the works of Maimonides and Gersonides, in other cases (such as Spinoza) these constraints were rejected altogether. Rudavsky notes that the development of the concepts of time, place, and the continuum involves three sets of issues. The first issue has to do with divine omniscience from the perspective of the apparent discontinuity between past and future. Clearly the past appears to be fixed in a way that the future is not. More bluntly, the past is actual whereas the future is possible. From the divine perspective there is no ontological difference between past and future: All events exist in an "eternal now" for God, and so what is possible from the human perspective is actual from God's eternal gaze. A second issue is related to the notion of creation. Traditionally, God the Creator is said to be eternal, or outside of time, whereas creatures are construed as being in time or subject to the flow of time. By understanding the notion of creation and how an eternal, timeless Creator created a temporal universe, we may begin to see how the notions of eternity and time function. A third issue, having to do with infinity and the continuum, leads to consideration of the notion of space (or place). Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the problem of creation continued to occupy both Jewish and scholastic philosophers and theologians. These issues are drawn to their logical culmination in Spinoza's discussions of time, eternity, and infinity.

In "Exhalations and Other Meteorological Themes," Resianne Fontaine considers how meteorological theories in medieval Jewish literature emerged in different contexts and in various genres. A key text is *'Otot ha-Shamayim* (The Signs of Heaven), Samuel ibn Tibbon's expanded Hebrew version of the Arabic adaptation of Aristotle's *Meteorology*, completed in 1210. The most important doctrine in the Aristotelian treatise is that of the dual exhalations, a cold and moist one and a hot and dry one, that explain the occurrence of diverse meteorological phenomena. Aristotle's treatise lies at the basis of surveys of meteorology in various Hebrew encyclopedias of science and philosophy within the framework of the orderly study of Aristotle's philosophy, of Hebrew translations of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle, and of supercommentaries on them. Moreover, Aristotle's views were studied in Jewish exegetical literature, especially with regard to the question of how they relate to the biblical account of creation and to certain miracles. Meteorological theories are also found in popular works, such as books of fables, sometimes in a moralistic context. A major problem for all medieval Jewish scholars interested in meteorology, however, was the fact that Ibn Tibbon's Arabic model presented great textual difficulties, which Fontaine examines.

The volume's fourth section is devoted to topics in epistemology and psychology. Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, in "Belief, Knowledge, and Certainty," focuses on theories of cognition in the works of Saadia, Maimonides, Gersonides, and Spinoza. She examines the evolution and transformation in the Jewish philosophers' understanding of distinct species of cognition in relation to certainty and authority, arguing that medieval philosophers' inquiries into knowledge take the form of epistemic and moral psychology. As species of cognition, both belief and knowledge are held to be certain; what is in question, then, is not certainty but its source and its affective manifestations.

In "Understanding Prophecy: Four Traditions," Barry S. Kogan seeks to explicate the views of Isaac Israeli, Saadia, Judah Halevi, and Maimonides and the intellectual traditions they came to exemplify regarding prophecy, and he concludes with an examination of Spinoza's reactions to their accounts following the revolution in philosophy that cast all of those traditions into serious doubt. Kogan focuses in all cases on questions concerning the nature of prophecy in general and the circumstances under which it occurs, the specific character of Mosaic prophecy and the theophany at Sinai, and the truth-value of prophetic claims generally. Thus, he highlights Isaac Israeli's recurring references to the Neoplatonic hierarchy to explain both the similarities and the differences between philosophical and prophetic aspiration, insight, and discourse and the various domains to which their truth-claims apply. He also shows how Saadia uses the methods of scholastic theology to turn increasingly questioned religious beliefs into reasoned convictions by establishing the need for verifying the occurrence of prophecy. Moreover, he argues that a close reading of Halevi's defense of traditional Jewish belief and practice reveals not only his opposition to Neoplatonic Aristotelianism, but also his artful appropriation of many of its claims to prove the superiority of Judaism and the limitations of philosophy. A careful analysis of Maimonides' parable of the lightning flashes, Kogan claims, casts new light on his formal discussions of divinity, idolatry, and both general prophecy and Mosaic prophecy, at Sinai and beyond. Finally, Kogan's analysis of Spinoza's discussion of prophecy yields numerous examples of both agreement with and repudiation of his medieval forebears' views, but now linked to a radically new agenda – one designed, in part, to deny prophecy and religion in general any credible claim to teach truth at all.

The subject of James T. Robinson's chapter, "Soul and Intellect" is the way in which during the Middle Ages biblical and rabbinic discussions of the soul combined with Greek, Arabic–Islamic, and scholastic philosophy to produce a complex and dynamic tradition of philosophical–theological psychology. This begins already with Saadia – "the first to speak about every discipline of wisdom" – and continues

into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when Jewish thinkers were especially focused on the soul and intellect in the midst of contemporary debates about action versus contemplation and the possibility of attaining "salvation." Robinson surveys the medieval tradition of Jewish philosophical–theological psychology, concentrating on the period from the ninth to the fifteenth century. His chapter is divided into two parts: Judeo–Arabic philosophy in the Islamic–Arabic world (900–1200); and Hebrew philosophy in Christian Europe (1150–1500). He first presents the philosophical background, identifying the main philosophical sources and traditions that influenced the Jewish thinkers; he then details the Jewish responses to the non-Jewish traditions and challenges.

The fifth section, "Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology," begins with Carlos Fraenkel's essay "God's Existence and Attributes." The question whether God exists and what his attributes are is not a philosophical concern in either the Hebrew Bible or in classical rabbinical literature. Rather, it arises at those intellectual intersections where natural theology encounters the representations of God contained in the Jewish sources. Although for many Jewish thinkers philosophical and religious perfection coincide in the intellectual love of God, the issues they were interested in and how they worked them out to some extent can be usefully related to their Jewish background – for example, when they respond to the charge that the philosophical conception of God lacks fundamental features of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As philosophers, they usually creatively contribute to the philosophical debates of their time, whether it be attempts to systematize Plato's metaphysics or problems arising from Descartes' ontological dualism. Most proofs adduced for God's existence take observable features of the universe as their starting point and establish God as a first cause that is numerically and internally one. As a consequence, no feature of objects that are caused and partake in multiplicity can be predicated of God. On the other hand, the order of the universe caused by God leads to positing a number of things that God must have and do to account for that order. Much philosophical work in the period consists in resolving tensions that arise between these two lines of reasoning. Fraenkel focuses on four representative contributors to Jewish philosophical discussions of God from antiquity to the early modern era: Philo, Saadia, Maimonides, and Spinoza.

Considering another aspect of God's relationship to the universe, Lenn E. Goodman, in "Creation and Emanation," contrasts creation, a core idea in monotheism, with the Neoplatonic idea of emanation, the eternal flow of being from its timeless Source. Philo, a progenitor of the emanation idea and a fountainhead of philosophical synthesis, unites the Hebraic and Greek themes, setting the Logos, God's word, between His ultimacy and nature. Nature's pattern is the intelligible expression

of God's wisdom. Saadia, defending creation against doubters, affirms God's transcendence: Causal ultimacy is not found by the senses. So according to Goodman, it is a grave blunder to try to reduce the Ultimate discovered by reason back to the phenomena that point to it. Ibn Gabirol accommodates emanation to creation by finding freedom in God's emanative act. Baḥya soft-pedals the controversy, but Maimonides judges creation probable cosmologically and preferable theologically to the world's eternity. Goodman notes that the idea of creation preserves God's freedom and leaves room for contingency in nature and an open future. The idea of God's authorship of nature is severely attenuated without reference to creation, and Neoplatonists will have grave difficulties explaining how the world's multiplicity arises in God's simplicity if they lose the idea of divine volition, vouched for in the idea of creation. Gersonides and Crescas frame emanation as God's means of creation. Spinoza will reject temporal creation. Yet *natura naturata* for him, as Goodman reminds us, remains the infinite expression of God's infinite reality.

In "Theodicy and Providence," Steven Nadler turns to Jewish philosophical approaches to the problem of evil, or the question of why there should be any imperfections (physical defects, suffering, or sin) in a world created by an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God. Although the problem is, of course, first raised in the Bible by Job, and later receives substantial treatment by Philo, both of which Nadler discusses, the main focus of this chapter is on the approaches taken by medieval Jewish rationalists – primarily Saadia, Maimonides, and Gersonides – and the culmination of this tradition in the radical thought of Spinoza. A philosopher's solution to the problem of evil is closely bound up with his account of divine providence; figuring out why bad things happen to good people requires one to explain how God governs the world He created. Thus, in this chapter Nadler also looks closely at a certain intellectualist tendency extending from Maimonides to Spinoza, one which departs from a vulgar (and anthropomorphic) conception of God as a willful agent dispensing rewards and punishments and regards human well-being (and divine "protection") more as the causal result of the human being's perfection of his cognitive faculties – that is, as the natural effect of the pursuit of virtue.

Although Nadler considers God's goodness and justice, Seymour Feldman addresses other attributes of God and their implications for human liberty in "Divine Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Human Freedom." Medieval discussions of divine omnipotence and omniscience were generally framed in terms of two of Aristotle's laws of thought: the law of noncontradiction and the law of the excluded middle. The former was the boundary condition of divine omnipotence; the latter the criterion of whether divine foreknowledge of future contingencies is possible. All the medieval Jewish philosophers were firmly committed to the

principle that power, including divine power, is defined in terms of logical possibility. In determining the scope of divine power, in particular the power to perform miracles, they placed logical limits on what kinds of states of affairs can fall within the boundaries of divine omnipotence. Accordingly, they affirmed the irrevocability and immutability of the past: "not even God can undo the past," and if a proposition is true, it is true for evermore. There were, however, some disagreements over specific miracles, such as the sun's cessation of motion for Joshua. Some thinkers (e.g., Gersonides) deemed it logically impossible, whereas some believed it to be logically possible (e.g., Isaac Abravanel). The question of divine omniscience proved to be more difficult, and diverse solutions were proposed to show that divine foreknowledge of future contingencies is possible without annulling human choice. Feldman investigates several of the standard solutions as these are represented by medieval Jewish thinkers: Knowing the future does not imply causing it (Saadia); we do not know how God's knowledge works (Maimonides); and God knows the future timelessly, whereas the contingency of the future is preserved (Ḥasdai Crescas). The most interesting proposal, he argues, was in fact offered by Gersonides, who, although trying to provide a "compatibilist" solution, concluded that divine omniscience should be construed as God's knowing what is logically knowable, that is, the laws of nature. For Gersonides, future contingencies by virtue of their very logic are not knowable to anyone, including God. Human choice is thus preserved at the price of "limiting" divine omniscience.

Practical philosophy constitutes the subject of the volume's final part. In "Virtue and Happiness," Hava Tirosh-Samuelson traces the development of Jewish reflections on virtue and happiness from Philo to Spinoza. She argues that, although the number of Jewish texts devoted exclusively to virtue and happiness is relatively small, reflections on virtue and happiness loom large in premodern Jewish philosophy. Aristotle's *Ethics*, the major philosophical text that analyzed the interdependence of virtue and happiness, provided the conceptual vocabulary for reflections on virtue and happiness in the matrix of the Jewish religion. Tirosh-Samuelson then clarifies the metaphysical, cosmological, psychological, epistemological, political, and theological dimensions of the discourse on happiness and its contribution to Jewish culture. Jewish reflections on happiness evolved over time, reflecting their cultural context, be it Greco–Roman, Muslim, or Christian. Identifying Torah and wisdom, Jewish philosophers considered the happy life to consist of Torah study, the cultivation of moral virtues through observance of the commandments, and the acquisition of intellectual perfection through the pursuit of wisdom broadly defined to include the sciences. The happy life on earth culminates in the bliss of immortality of the individual soul in the afterlife. This outlook reached closure with

Spinoza, who negated the identification of Torah and wisdom, offering a vision of human happiness in which the Torah plays no role whatsoever.

Abraham Melamed's chapter, "Politics and the State," examines the way in which medieval and early modern Jewish political philosophy is the outcome of the great encounter between Jewish tradition, as it evolved in biblical and rabbinic literature, and the heritage of Greek science and philosophy, as the latter is transmitted to medieval culture through the great Arabic translation enterprise in the earlier Middle Ages. Like Jewish philosophy as a whole, Jewish political philosophy strived to cope with this loaded encounter in varied ways. Due to the circumstances of their constituting myths, Jewish and Muslim political theology were essentially holistic, viewing the law as encompassing all aspects of human life – material and spiritual alike. Christian political theology, by contrast, was essentially different, separating the material and the spiritual. It left material issues to the earthly government and emphasized spiritual life. This difference in political theology is reflected in the Greek political tradition to which Muslim and Jewish political thought were indebted. Although Christian political philosophy followed Aristotle's *Politics*, Muslim and Jewish political philosophy followed the Platonic tradition. Both viewed the law as encompassing all aspects of human life. In the eyes of medieval Jewish scholars, the Platonic philosopher–king resembled the Hebrew prophet, who is also a philosopher and political leader, and the Platonic ideal state was identified with the Messianic state. Jewish thinkers, from Saadia to Abrabanel, followed this tradition.

Finally, in Daniel H. Frank's "Divine Law and Human Practices," the focus is on Maimonides and Spinoza, as representatives of the rabbinic and antirabbinic traditions, respectively. A fine irony emerges, however, as one notices the considerable overlap in these antagonists' views. The topic of law has ramifications over a large set of issues in morals, politics, moral psychology, and even physics and cosmology. For both Maimonides and Spinoza, law has both political and suprapolitical aspects and is grounded in human nature and the propensity for idolatrous worship and superstition. For Maimonides, the (eternal) divine law is a beneficence given to *all* for the possibility of realizing the origin and trajectory of creation and ordering one's life accordingly. By contrast, for Spinoza divine law is the eternal, exceptionless laws of nature, the understanding of which allows one to achieve the blessedness of a life unencumbered by contingency and the vagaries of fortune. Both Maimonides and Spinoza ground human well-being (happiness and salvation) in more than mere obedience to the civil laws, and this latter point drives Spinoza to a pessimism deeper than Maimonides' about the possibility of true happiness for the mass of humankind. The communal and political roles that the divine law plays for

Maimonides are countered by Spinoza in his condemnation of the "particularism" of the divine religious laws. Spinoza offers a universal (catholic) religion that must be subscribed to by all for purposes of civil order; however, because of this, a deep cleavage emerges between the secular and the sacred for Spinoza. In sum, as Frank shows, for both Maimonides and Spinoza an understanding of the place of human beings in the world order is prerequisite for salvation and an overcoming of idolatrous superstition. For this reason Maimonides understands the revealed law as the tool for all to achieve a modicum of well-being, whereas Spinoza looks instead to science and in so doing condemns the mass of humankind to a life rendered vulnerable by a nonscientific outlook.

NOTES

1 See Schwarzschild 1987.
2 Guttmann 1964.
3 Husik 1916, p. 432.
4 Daniel Frank, in Frank and Leaman 1997, pp. 1–5.
5 Morgan and Gordon 2007, p. 5.

PART I

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

1

THE GREEK BACKGROUND

KENNETH SEESKIN

Loosely speaking, every culture has a philosophy, worldview, or outlook on life. What distinguishes Greek philosophy from others is the systematic way in which it is expressed. The phenomena we observe are orderly and can be understood by identifying causes or principles from which they follow. These principles are universal and invariant. If rain results from condensation, the same explanation applies whether there is a flood or a sprinkle, a catastrophe or a welcome relief from drought. In this context, the job of the philosopher is not just to make interesting remarks about the meaning of life but to identify principles and subject them to critique.

In the hands of the Greek philosophers, systematization affected everything from the way people view the weather to the way they conceive of divinity. If all of reality can be explained in terms of basic principles, then God is subject to them, the source of them, or a principle himself. The Greek philosophers challenged the gods and goddesses of mythology not by instituting a commandment against idol worship but by making anthropomorphism look ridiculous. For Jews this presents a problem. The Bible describes a world in which other nations might have stronger armies or larger economies than Israel, but these advantages are offset by the fact that their views of divinity are grossly inferior. The same could be said of ancient Greece if we stick to popular religion. Suppose, however, that we ignore popular religion and focus on the theology of the philosophers. It is one thing to proclaim Zeus, Ba'al, or Asherah figments of the imagination, but another to say the same thing about Aristotle's Prime Mover. Granted that the Prime Mover does not answer prayers or reveal his will to prophets, neither does he have material form. What is more, if Aristotle is right, his existence is not just a fact of life but a metaphysical necessity. How can one recognize this necessity and remain a Jew?

This is the famous question of Athens versus Jerusalem. The simple answer is that Jewish thinkers who wished to take up the challenge posed by Greek philosophy had to reinterpret biblical passages that imply anthropomorphism and ask themselves about the principles that underlie the first and second commandments. In their hands, Judaism came to be seen less as a national heritage or set of practices

intended to please God and more as a theory that could hold its own in the marketplace of ideas. Maimonides went so far as to say that the patriarchs and Moses were accomplished philosophers in their own right but that, owing to centuries of exile and persecution, their teachings were lost or ignored.[1] What the Greek philosophers taught under the aegis of physics and metaphysics, Maimonides insists, their Jewish counterparts taught under the aegis *maʿaseh bereshit* (the account of the creation) and *maʿaseh merkaba* (the account of [Ezekiel's] chariot).[2] According to Deuteronomy 6:5, love of God is a sacred commandment. Because it is impossible to love something in ignorance, Maimonides concludes that every Jew is obliged to study the world God created and as much of the metaphysical world as his understanding will allow. In sum, philosophy is thoroughly Jewish and, in Maimonides' opinion, must again become the center of Jewish life.

It is hard to say whether a medieval thinker would have reached this conclusion if he had never been exposed to Greek sources. The fact is, however, that Greek philosophy did not just affect Judaism's understanding of itself; in the case of Maimonides and others, it became an essential part of that understanding. Obviously, Greek philosophy is too broad a subject to be covered in one chapter. It is possible, however, to examine how three philosophers conceived of God and how their philosophies influenced subsequent Jewish thought. The thinkers are Plato (427–347 B.C.E), Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E), and Plotinus (205–27 C.E.); the conceptions of God they propose are as Demiurge, Prime Mover, and ineffable First Principle.[3] From a Jewish perspective, they are paradigm cases of people who perfected their intellects but were not given the gift of prophetic insight.

I. PLATO: GOD AS DEMIURGE

Plato's direct influence on medieval philosophy came mainly by way of the *Timaeus*. According to a literal reading of the dialogue, the world was produced by a cosmic artisan or Demiurge who is good and has no tint of jealousy. He therefore desired that all things be as much like him as possible. Judging that order is better than disorder, he looked to the eternal forms as a model and imposed order on the chaotic motion he confronted. It is important to recognize that the *Timaeus* is not committed to monotheism as Jewish tradition came to understand it. Instead of an all-powerful being who brings the world into existence, the Demiurge makes the world "as excellent and perfect as possible."[4] In other words, the materials he has at his disposal impose limits. Although there are passages in the Hebrew Bible that also imply God had to struggle with unruly forces during creation, the opening lines of Genesis indicate otherwise: God creates simply by issuing commands.[5]

Even if there is no struggle, the idea of a Demiurge raises the question of whether Judaism is committed to a full-blown creation *ex nihilo* or a creation from preexisting materials. A literal reading of Genesis 1:1 suggests that, when God created heaven and earth, the earth was (or had been) unformed and void (*tohu va vohu*). According to Rashi, the heavens and the earth were not the first things other than God to exist because the passage goes on to say that during creation, the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.[6] Following rabbinic tradition, he maintains that the heavens (*shamayim*) were made from water (*mayim*) and fire (*'esh*).

Although there is no mention of Plato, Rashi's interpretation of these verses calls to mind a God who creates by bringing order out of chaos. Along similar lines, Abraham ibn Ezra and Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides) both argue that creation involves a material substrate upon which God imposes order.[7] That is not all. The idea of looking to an eternal model to bring order out of chaos may have influenced the rabbinic notion that God looked to the Torah as a model when creating the world.[8]

Still the idea of a preexisting material substrate creates problems. Why does an all-powerful God need tools or materials to create something? To what do these materials owe their existence? In response to an unnamed philosopher who objected that God needed the assistance of *tohu* and *vohu*, darkness, water, wind, and the deep to create the world, Rabbi Gamaliel maintains that everything was created.[9] If everything was created, then God is the only force or principle involved in creation, which is the essence of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.[10] This view of creation found its way into Saadia and, according to some interpretations, Maimonides as well.[11]

Like the opening verses of Genesis, the creation story in the *Timaeus* raises questions about how literally it should be taken. It is well known that Plato qualified his remarks by claiming that, when dealing with the origin of the world, it is impossible to render an account "entirely consistent and exact" so that all we can hope for is a likely story (*eikos muthos*).[12] The issue is important because depending on how we interpret the phrase "maker and father of all things," we will get a different conception of what the Demiurge is.[13] Is Plato talking about a Creator analogous to God in Genesis 1 or using a literary narrative to express the fact that the world can be explained by invoking two principles: reason (order) and necessity (disorder)?[14] If the former, then even though the Demiurge is not omnipotent, the *Timaeus* is committed to creation *de novo* or the creation of the world in time.[15] If the latter, then, like Aristotle, it is committed to an eternal world.

Creation in time implies the world is the product of a free choice and that having made the world, God can change it when it suits Him. Thus creation in time allows

for spontaneous acts like the parting of the Red Sea and the giving of the Torah at Sinai. By contrast, if the world exists for all time, it is reasonable to conclude it *has* to exist.[16] This notion was generally taken to mean that the world has always existed *in the form in which we now have it*, a conclusion that rules out spontaneous acts of any kind.

One way to approach the question of how to read the *Timaeus* is to look at how it introduces the Demiurge.[17] According to the narrator, that which always is and has no beginning must be distinguished from that which is always becoming and never real. The former is apprehended by thought, the latter by belief together with sensation. Everything that comes to be must do so as a result of some cause. Sensible things are always coming to be. Therefore sensible things have to have a Creator. For different reasons Aristotle and Philoponus believe that this argument commits Plato to creation in time: Aristotle because he attacked it, Philoponus because he defended it. By the Middle Ages, the inference from the fact of crea*tion* to the existence of a Crea*tor* became a standard way for Kalām thinkers to prove the existence of God, and several versions of it can be found in Saadia.[18]

On the other hand, Neoplatonists from the Academy down through Plotinus and Proclus argue that by *becoming* (*genesis*) Plato is not talking about the temporal origin of the world but a state of eternal flux. By the same token, when the dialogue says that something is generated or comes to be, he simply means that it is dependent on something else. Thus the moon can be said to possess generated light from the sun even if both have existed for all time. As we will see later, Plotinus talks about the generation of the world from the First Principle by which he means that the world, although eternal, is not self-sufficient.

Beyond the question of creation is that of the relation between forms and sensibles. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates maintains that what makes something beautiful is not a particular color or shape but the presence of or participation in beauty itself.[19] If we say that something is beautiful because of a particular color, sooner or later we will find ourselves saying that something else is ugly for the same reason. The question is, "What do color, shape, and other things share that allows us to classify them as beautiful." Socrates uses the word *aitia* (cause) as well as the Greek causal dative to say that beauty *makes* things beautiful or that they are beautiful *because* of beauty. He obviously does not mean that the form of beauty is capable of manufacturing instances of itself. Rather the form of beauty is constitutive of beautiful things in the sense that it is their essence or defining factor.

Similar language occurs in the famous passage in the *Republic*, in which Socrates says that the form of goodness is to the intelligible world what the sun is to the

sensible.[20] Thus goodness is the cause of all that is right and good in the intelligible world and both produces and controls truth and intelligence. Does this mean that the form of goodness is divine? To Plato's original audience, the answer would be yes, although a Platonic form cannot be an object of worship as we understand it.

The puzzling nature of this reply points out the peculiarities of the Greek conception of divinity. In a nutshell, they regarded divinity mainly as a predicate.[21] Rather than a supreme being with all possible perfections, they saw it as a class of things that are uncreated and undying. In the *Apology*, for example, Socrates affirms that the sun and moon are gods.[22] In the *Phaedo*, he says repeatedly that the forms are pure, everlasting, undying, and either godlike or divine themselves.[23] Similar language occurs throughout the *Republic*.[24] In the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge is good, desires that all things be like himself, and is called a god.[25]

There is no question that Plato had deep religious sensibilities. In place of popular religion with its superstitions and fickle deities, he offered the quest for knowledge and a realm of pure, unchanging essences that serve as the objects of that knowledge. In the *Seventh Letter*, he describes the true lover of wisdom as one who:

> with the divine quality of wisdom that makes him akin to it and worthy of pursuing it, thinks that he has heard of a marvelous quest that he must at once enter upon with all earnestness, or life is not worth living; and from that time forth he pushes himself and urges on his leader without ceasing, until he has reached the end of the journey or has become capable of doing without a guide and finding the way himself.[26]

Upon reaching the end of the journey "suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it [knowledge] is born in the soul and straightaway nourishes it." It is hardly surprising then that he often compares the acquisition of knowledge to initiation into a religious cult or entry into a holy shrine.[27] Nor is it surprising that he develops a doctrine of *imitatio dei*. By contemplating objects that are divine and orderly, the philosopher will become as divine and orderly as possible.[28]

Although these passages have inspired the imaginations of poets and painters for centuries, we are still a long way from worship as normally understood. Not only is there a multiplicity of forms in Plato's heaven, but they lack any vestige of life, soul, or personality. Even if we focus on the supremacy of one form like beauty or goodness, we still do not have an analogue to creation, revelation, or redemption. We may conclude that far from espousing a traditional notion of monotheism, Plato did not take up the question. That is why it is difficult to ascribe to him anything like a systematic theology.[29] We will revisit Platonism in Section 3, when we get to Plotinus. For the present, we must turn to Aristotle for a god who lives and thinks.

II. ARISTOTLE: GOD AS PRIME MOVER

Aristotle's influence on medieval Jewish philosophy is more direct. In the first place, many of the categories that medieval philosophers took for granted – for example, substance, attribute, cause, change, intellect, demonstration, actuality, and potentiality – derive from Aristotle. In the second place, Aristotle's works were more widely disseminated. Although some of the writings attributed to Aristotle were in fact summaries of works written by Plotinus or Proclus, there is no question that when Jewish philosophers considered the Greek legacy, they thought about Aristotle first and foremost. It is no accident that Maimonides refers to him as "chief of the philosophers."[30]

Although Aristotle had many criticisms of the theory of forms, the most telling is that because Platonic forms are inactive, they do not explain phenomena like growth, change, or motion. In Aristotle's opinion, they amount to nothing more than an unnecessary duplication of the sensible world. This is another way of saying that for Aristotle, Plato's effort to explain essential causality did not succeed.

Rather than start with the imposition of order on chaos, Aristotle seeks God by looking at a phenomenon in which there was no disorder at all: the motion of the heavenly bodies. If such motion is eternal, it must be necessary; if it is necessary, there must be a principle that enables us to explain why. Whatever explains eternal motion cannot be in motion itself because then it too would require a cause of its motion, and we would be on our way to an infinite regress. It cannot be static or inert, however. Aristotle's argument is that the Prime Mover must be active but not in a way that requires motion from place to place. How can this be?

The solution is to say that the Prime Mover thinks, and by virtue of thinking is perfect. As perfect, he is the object of desire. In this way, the Prime Mover is responsible for all motion in the universe: he is the efficient cause by virtue of being the final cause.[31] He exists by necessity, and therefore his manner of existing is good.[32] In an obvious way, he is that without which good would be impossible. From this Aristotle concludes that the Prime Mover enjoys an eternal life such as the best that we enjoy for short periods of time: a life of contemplation. Unlike a Platonic form, the Prime Mover is both active and alive. It should be noted however that the contemplation Aristotle is talking about is metaphysical: The Prime Mover is neither interested nor concerned with the actions of individual people.

The key premise in this argument is that thinking is the most perfect activity. According to Aristotle, it is thinking that rules and guides us and gives us our conception of nobility and divinity.[33] So intelligence is the most valuable possession we have, and intelligence about theoretical matters is the highest form of intelligence.

Aristotle goes on to say that theoretical contemplation is final in the sense that it is pursued for its own sake and self sufficient in the sense that it presupposes little beyond the basic necessities of life. Most important for our purposes, it is that activity in which we come closest to the divine. He concludes that happiness or the human good is impossible without contemplation: The more contemplation we have, the happier we are.[34]

Needless to say, Jewish tradition put similar emphasis on the study of Torah. According to Hillel, "He who does not increase his knowledge decreases it; he who does not study deserves to die."[35] Along similar lines, Rava claims that when a person is brought before the throne of justice, he will be asked, "Did you reason wisely? Did you infer one thing from another?"[36] Maimonides argues that every Israelite is under a sacred obligation to set aside a specific time during the day and night to study the Torah.[37] Although the Torah may seem to deal more with practical than with theoretical matters and to command love of a personal God, we saw that, under the influence of Greek philosophy, Maimonides argues otherwise: Properly understood, the Torah is concerned chiefly with physics and metaphysics. When it comes to human perfection, he is equally explicit, "His ultimate perfection is to become rational in *actu*; this would consist in his knowing everything concerning all the beings that it is within the capacity of man to know in accordance with his ultimate perfection."[38]

If thought is the most perfect activity, God must be pure thought, which means that God is immaterial, does not feel passion or emotion, does not undergo change, and cannot be influenced by prayer or entreaty. It is here that we encounter what is usually called "the God of the philosophers," which means a God devoid of personality. For better or worse, this conception of God dominated Jewish philosophy for 1,500 years. It is this God that Judah Halevi questions and that rationalists such as Bahya, Maimonides, Gersonides, and Crescas defend.

For the rationalists, the challenge is to show that, despite its use of anthropomorphic terms, the Bible is really committed to an immaterial, emotionless, unchanging deity resembling the one described by Aristotle. Although anthropomorphism may be necessary to appeal to a wide audience, in their view Judaism demands that one become sophisticated enough to see that such descriptions cannot be interpreted literally. The goal of human life is the pursuit of wisdom, which culminates in the intellectual love of God. This love, which asks for nothing in the way of material rewards, directs the soul to eternal truths and thus prepares it for eternal life.

Although he did not follow Plato in espousing personal immortality, Aristotle also argues that we should try to become immortal as far as our natures allow by which he means that we should emulate the gods and pursue a life guided by

wisdom.[39] In time the idea that immortality is achieved by perfecting the intellect became so deeply rooted in Jewish self-understanding that even with the advent of the scientific revolution, Spinoza devoted the last book of his *Ethics* to immortality and the intellectual love of God.

It is well known that Aristotle argues that the world is eternal. For the most part, his arguments are based on principles derived from physics. For Aristotle change or motion involves the actualization of what was previously potential – as when a flammable object is set on fire or a movable object is set in motion. In all such cases, there is an agent, the instigator of the change, and a patient, the subject of the change. When the agent acts on the patient, the agent is actually what the patient is potentially. Thus a match that is already burning is needed to set a flammable object on fire; a thing that is already in motion is needed to impart motion to something else.

If this analysis is correct, Aristotle reasons, it is impossible for there to be a first motion because before that motion could occur, there would have to be something capable of moving but not already doing so.[40] Because an agent would be needed to actualize this potential, and that agent must already be in motion, there would have to be motion prior to the first motion, from which it follows that the idea of a first motion is absurd.

A second argument begins by observing that change always proceeds *from* something *to* something else – as when a sculptor carves a statue out of marble or an acorn grows into an oak tree. This is another way of saying that change involves a material cause, that out of which or from which a thing comes to be. If matter were itself created, there would be no way to explain from what it comes to be, which means it would have to derive from nothing at all, which is absurd.[41] For Aristotle matter is a given, a feature of the world whose existence is ultimate and unexplained. It is not subject to generation or destruction because it is that out of which or into which generation or destruction proceed. Like "necessity" in the *Timaeus*, it is opposed to form or structure but not dependent on it.

A third argument begins by observing that coming to be and passing away involve a substratum and contrary qualities: an iron bar plus cold and hot, a piece of land plus wet and dry.[42] Observation also confirms that the heavenly bodies move in circular orbits for which there is no contrary, thus no increase or decrease in speed, no change of quality, no movement to or from the center of the earth. If there is no evidence of change other than motion around a circle, there is no reason to think that such motion has a beginning or end.

Together these arguments seek to establish that God could not have brought the world into being in the way suggested by Genesis 1 so that the only way to describe

the relation between God and the world is to say that the latter presupposes or depends on the former. Keeping in mind that eternity implies necessity, we get a world in which everything proceeds according to known causal laws, and the purpose of life is to understand the principles that explain their operation, the ultimate principle being God. This picture led to centuries of debate on whether the world is as tightly structured as Aristotle seemed to think. If so, there should be scientific explanations for everything we observe and no room for a God who intervenes in the world or exercises free choice.

Opponents of Aristotle pointed out there are many features of the world for which there is no explanation and no reasonable hope of finding one.[43] Why are there parts of the heavens in which there are comparatively few stars and other parts in which there are comparatively many? Why do the heavens revolve on one axis rather than another? Why do the planets sometimes appear to change speed and reverse direction? To Aristotle's opponents, our inability to explain these phenomena indicates that some features of the world are contingent and exist as a result of divine choice rather than necessity. As Maimonides puts it, "What exists, its causes, and its effects, could be different from what they are."[44] If there is evidence of choice, we have reason to believe in a God who exercises free will and is not bound by the laws of physics, in particular the laws which say that a first motion is impossible.

Aristotle's supporters reply that just because we have no satisfactory explanation for these phenomena at present, it does not follow that no explanation will ever be found.[45] In other words, the fact that science is incomplete does not prove the existence of phenomena whose explanation lies outside the purview of natural science. Which side is Judaism on? Like their Islamic and Christian counterparts, Jewish thinkers were divided. For those who were influenced by Averroes, the answer was to side with Aristotle and natural science; for those who were influenced by the Kalām, it was to side with contingency and free will.

Still the main problem Aristotle poses for monotheism is the limited role he assigns to God. Recall that although the Prime Mover is responsible for the eternal motion of the heavens, he is not responsible for their existence. They are kept in motion by their desire for his perfection; however, Aristotle never addresses the question of why they are there in the first place. For Aristotle the fact that something exists is an accident and therefore outside the scope of scientific explanation.[46] If creation is God's decision to confer existence on the world, there is no place for it in Aristotle's philosophy. One way of coping with creation is to return to the Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Timaeus* and say that the world depends on God even though both have always existed. For that way of looking at things we turn to Plotinus.

III. PLOTINUS: GOD AS FIRST PRINCIPLE

With Plotinus, philosophy took a giant step in the direction of monotheism. Plato's Demiurge confronts unruly materials he did not create and does the best job he can of imposing order on them. Aristotle's Prime Mover accounts for the motion of the heavenly bodies but not their origin. For both thinkers the world contains features for which no philosophic explanation is sought. The key word is *features*. Instead of a single principle responsible for everything, Plato and Aristotle offer us a world in which there are a plurality of principles set against each other: reason and necessity, in one case, form and matter, in the other.

All that changes with Plotinus, who argues that everything derives from a single principle (*arché*), which is the ultimate source of value and existence. In his words, this principle is the good of everything "because all things have their being directed towards it and depend on it."[47] Simply put: Plotinus abandoned the idea that one principle is needed to explain form or structure and another to explain matter or extension. Instead, all of reality is an outgrowth of an infinite and transcendent power.

Plotinus goes on to assert that such power cannot be characterized in the normal way.

> There must be something simple before all things, and this must be other than all the things which come after it, existing by itself, not mixed with the things which derive from it, and all the same able to be present in a different way to these other things, being really one, and not a different being and then one; it is false even to say of it that it is one, and there is "no concept or knowledge" of it; it is indeed also said to be "beyond being."[48]

The idea of a simple, unmixed source "beyond being" paved the way for a long tradition of theologians who would say the same thing about God. Not only is it the goal toward which existence strives but the source from which it proceeds, in Aristotelian terms, both the efficient and the final cause.

To understand the origin of Plotinus' view, we need look no further than *Republic* VII, in which Plato says that the form of goodness is superior to and beyond being in dignity and power.[49] In the famous comparison between goodness and the sun, he goes on to say: "The sun not only gives to the objects of sight the capacity to be seen but provides for their generation, increase, and nurture." Later he enlarges on this insight by claiming that goodness is the cause (*aitia*) of all that is right and beautiful and both produces and controls truth and intelligence.[50] What was a brilliant insight expressed in colorful language for Plato became a central doctrine for Plotinus: the theory of emanation.

The crux of this theory is that it is a universal feature of reality that things produce copies or offspring of themselves according to their degree of perfection. As Plotinus describes it:

> All things which exist, as long as they remain in being, necessarily produce from their own substances [*ousias*], in dependence on their present power, a surrounding reality directed to what is outside them, a kind of image of the archetypes from which it was produced: fire produces the heat which comes from it, snow does not only keep its cold inside itself. Perfumed things show this particularly clearly. As long as they exist, something is diffused from themselves around them, and what is near them enjoys their existence. And all things when they come to perfection produce; the One is always perfect and therefore produces everlastingly.[51]

The generality of the passage implies that the ability to produce a surrounding reality or image is not the result of choice, but a necessary feature of all things. If fire, snow, and perfume generate traces of themselves, it would be absurd for the most perfect thing in the universe to be inert.

In short, perfection is not self-contained. Unlike Aristotle's Prime Mover who is complete in himself and produces nothing outside himself, Plotinus' First Principle resembles the sun in *Republic* VII to the degree that it generates and nurtures other things. Plotinus admits that emanation is a metaphor and subject to all the limitations one encounters in comparing a metaphysical relationship to a physical one.[52] Heat and light radiate from a particular point in space, whereas emanation in Plotinus' sense is obviously not a spatial relationship. The radiation of heat or light run out as the source exhausts itself; emanation from the First Principle is infinite and inexhaustible.

Most important, emanation is necessary and eternal. To say that *Y* emanates from *X* is to say that *X* is prior to *Y* so that without *X*, *Y* would not exist. The kind of priority involved here is analogous to that between the essence of triangularity and a particular triangle one draws on a blackboard. It is not that triangularity overflows into physical things but that its perfection is constitutive of them: Without triangularity there could be no individual triangles. One could say therefore that although the essence of triangularity is present in every triangle, it is not dispersed or diffused in the sense that drawing another triangle will take something away from it. The cause is simultaneous with the effect but more perfect than the effect because whatever reality we attribute to the effect must come from the cause.

Plotinus' recognition of a single principle responsible for all things raises the question of his treatment of matter. Throughout the *Enneads* he presents several arguments for why matter too is generated and owes its existence to the First

Principle.[53] The first argument maintains that if matter were ungenerated, the First Principles of the world would be multiplex and related by chance.[54] Suppose there are two ultimate principles. How could we explain their interaction? The only way would be to say that they are dependent on a more inclusive principle that accounts for how they relate to one another; however, if they are ultimate, no such principle exists. Therefore, the supposed interaction would be incoherent. It follows that if, per impossible, there were such interaction, it would be left to chance, which in this context is another name for absurdity. A similar argument can be found in the treatise against the Gnostics.[55] Matter is evil. Therefore, if matter were ungenerated, one of the First Principles would be evil.

The obvious conclusion is that if matter has any reality, it must derive it from something else – eventually from the First Principle because all of reality derives from the First Principle. I say *if* it has any reality because its ontological status is problematic. Sometimes Plotinus describes it as nothing, sometimes as a kind of something, sometimes as evil, sometimes as a phantasm, sometimes as comparable to darkness.[56] However we describe it, matter is necessary to account for the world as we know it. If we stress that it is evil, we will be led to think that it has no reality and is not generated by anything. On this reading, it is the point at which the light that emanates from the First Principle runs out. This would not give it the status of a separate principle but rather that which is opposed to principle. If, however, we stress that the existence of the first item in a series implies the existence of a last, the generation of matter by the First Principle is inescapable.

To be sure, matter, at least sensible matter, cannot be generated immediately. From the First Principle we get intelligence, and from intelligence, soul. By some accounts, sensible matter is generated by a "partial" or vegetative soul. The important point is that it is generated at all and does not exist in its own right. Unlike Plato's Demiurge, the First Principle does not shape it, confront it, or exist alongside it. Unlike Aristotle's prime matter, it is not something whose existence defies explanation. If matter existed in its own right, the First Principle would be limited, or, to use Plotinus' expression, "walled off from matter."[57] Again we reach absurdity because nothing can limit the First Principle, especially a thing that is completely lacking in perfection. This insight is supported by the image of a light that becomes darkness as it falls away from the source rather than a light that is surrounded by darkness that exists independently of the light.[58] So instead of a Demiurge who imposes form on matter, the First Principle is just that: a principle to which all of reality, including matter, owes its existence.

As applied to reality as a whole, this means that, although everything depends on the First Principle, it does not follow that the world comes into existence in the

manner suggested by a literal reading of Genesis 1. Again from Plotinus, "When we are discussing eternal realities we must not let coming into being in time be an obstacle to our thought."[59] As we saw earlier, the generation Plotinus is talking about is eternal: Although the world has always existed, its existence is dependent or derivative.

Beyond the question of temporality, there is also the question of personality. Although Plotinus sometimes talks about the will of the First Principle, he does so in a context in which he admits to reduced standards of rigor.[60] Strictly speaking, the world emanates from the First Principle not because of anything the First Principle does but simply because of what it is. Given infinite perfection, it is impossible for images or offspring not to follow.

In the same way, it is a mistake to suppose that the First Principle is engaged in thought. Strictly speaking, it does not think but is that from which thought proceeds.[61] There is no question of deliberation or of producing only a portion of what can be produced. Emanation from the First Principle is a metaphysical necessity, not the product of thought or reflection. To an Aristotelian, this makes no sense: If the First Principle does not think, it is inactive and relinquishes all claim to perfection or self-sufficiency. Generations of medieval philosophers tried to affect a synthesis between Aristotle and Plotinus by arguing that God thinks and by thinking generates the rest of reality; however, that is a later interpretation and not Plotinus' own view. Plotinus did not believe that emanation proceeds from God to the first intelligence and then to a string of intelligences and heavenly spheres; rather it proceeds from the First Principle to mind and then to soul.

It is clear then that, although Plotinus took a giant step in the direction of monotheism, he did not subscribe to anything like the biblical conception of God. The First Principle is free to the extent that it is not subject to external constraint. It is not free to the extent that it can start, stop, or reflect on the production of offspring. It does not feel love and cannot be reached by prayer or supplication. Rather than worship the First Principle, Plotinus suggests a process by which one comes to lose his own sense of personality and achieve union with the First Principle. As he describes it, "it is as if he had become someone else and he is not himself and does not count as his own . . . but has come to belong to that and so is one, having joined, as it were, center to center."[62] If emanation is the process by which things fall away from the First Principle, what Plotinus has in mind here is one by which they return to it. He also claims that the return is motivated by love and culminates in an ecstatic state in which the soul becomes "filled with God," which is both its beginning and its end (*telos*).[63]

The idea of achieving union or adhesion (*devekut*) with God plays a central role in both philosophical and mystical literature. To the philosophers, knowledge means union of the intellect, the act of apprehension, and the object apprehended.[64] In this way, the intellect becomes one with the thing apprehended, not in the sense that a mind becomes a tree or a house but in the sense that the intelligible form of the tree or house is the same as the form that activates the mind. The mind then becomes the object of its own apprehension. This raises questions about the relation between an individual mind and God. Traditional Judaism maintains a fundamental distinction between Crea*tor* and crea*tion*. Although humans are asked to worship God and do everything possible to become like God, they must also respect the infinite difference between God and them.

Maimonides dealt with the problem by saying that, strictly speaking, one does not achieve union with God but with the Active Intellect, the tenth or lowest of the heavenly intelligences.[65] Even then, union is a goal that can be achieved briefly, if at all. Although the mystical tradition was not always this precise, it has been argued that, even in moments of ecstasy, Jewish mystics generally did not claim complete submersion into God.[66]

If there is a problem with return to God in moments of ecstasy, there is also a problem with emanation or the process by which things fall away from God. It is one thing to say that the world was created *by* God, another to say that it emerges *from* God. The problem with the latter is that if one is not careful, it will seem as if the world is a manifestation *of* God, or worse, that the world *is* God, which amounts to pantheism. No doubt there are passages in Plotinus that lend themselves to a pantheistic interpretation.[67] The truth is, however, that Plotinus is committed to the claim that if the First Principle is the source of all things, it must be distinct from all things. This is what enables Plotinus to say that the First Principle is prior to thought, beyond being, and "unmixed" with everything else, all of which imply some form of separation.

The problem is that as we normally understand causality, the cause gives something of itself to the effect. It follows that if the effect is hot, the cause must possess heat as well; if the effect has life and intelligence, the cause must also have them. If that is how Plotinus understands the causality of the First Principle, the world would be a manifestation of God, and the pantheist objection would be difficult to answer. Plotinus' understanding is quite different, however. As he conceives it, the cause is prior to the effect and therefore different from the effect.

> Since the substance which is generated [from the First Principle] is form . . . and not the form of some one thing but of everything, so that no other form is left outside it, the First

Principle must be without form . . . If all things are in that which is generated [from the First Principle], which of the things in it are you going to say the First Principle is? Since it is none of them, it can only be said to be beyond them.[68]

According to this passage, the world proceeds from the First Principle but bears no resemblance to it because if there were a resemblance, the First Principle would be mixed and no longer simple. If that were the case, the First Principle would have to proceed from something more fundamental, which is absurd. Because the First Principle does not resemble the things that proceed from it, it is separate from those things, rendering the pantheist objection false.

There is a price to pay. To reject the pantheist interpretation, Plotinus has to insist that the First Principle is beyond description or characterization. How then can he talk about it? In a passage that refers to Plato's *Seventh Letter*, he replies that he is not really talking about it in a normal way but pointing the mind in the right direction and allowing those who want to see the ability to complete the path.[69] To a thinker like Maimonides, who argues that God has no attributes and can only be appreciated in moments of silent reflection, this conclusion is inevitable. Although he did not read Plotinus, he too finds it natural to talk about pointing the mind in the direction of an ineffable reality.[70] To someone who prefers the idea of a personal God who speaks to people and displays emotion, Plotinus' conclusion amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum* of the philosophical tradition.

Either way, there is no getting around the fact that emanation became the dominant way in which medieval thinkers conceived of metaphysical causation. The basic insight on which it rests is that God has enough perfection not only to sustain himself to eternity but to share some of that perfection with other things. Unlike a physical thing whose perfection is diminished when some of it is shared with another, God's perfection is infinite and unaffected. Not only did emanation describe the way that God brings the world into existence, in many cases it was used to describe the way God shares ideas with the mind of a prophet. According to Maimonides:

it has been said that the world derives from the overflow of God and that He has caused to overflow to it everything in it that is produced in time. In the same way it is said that He caused His knowledge to overflow to the prophets. The meaning of all this is that these actions are the action of one who is not a body. And it is His action that is called overflow.[71]

For some Jewish philosophers, the challenge was to accept emanation as a form of causality but reject the determinism that often goes with it. This led to theories in which God could start or stop the process of emanation at will. If the process can be started, creation is a possibility once again.

IV. CONCLUSION: GOD AND PERSONALITY

I have already mentioned that Greek philosophy forced Jewish thinkers to be more systematic and to present their religion as a theory that could hold its own in the marketplace of ideas. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that as a result of their encounter with Greek philosophy, they changed the way Judaism saw itself. No longer could one read sacred texts without inquiring about their metaphysical implications, pretend that Judaism has nothing to learn from science and metaphysics, or ignore the intellectual contributions of gentiles.

If philosophy influenced Jewish self-understanding, the relationship also went the other way. Recall that from a Jewish perspective, Greek philosophy did not have the benefit of prophecy. With prophecy and the idea of a single origin of all of existence, Jewish thinkers came to see the world in terms of the conferring of existence rather than the embodiment of essence.

The distinction between existence and essence is easy to state: The latter tells us *what* a thing is, the former tell us *that* it is. The simplicity of the distinction should not, however, prevent us from recognizing that it took centuries for people to appreciate its full significance. Aristotle discusses the distinction between essence and existence in a methodological context dealing with definition and demonstration.[72] The existence of the heavenly bodies or, more generally, the existence of the world as a whole, is not a problem for him. His question has to do with the structure of the world, not its origin.

The same is true for Plato if we follow the Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Timaeus*. Although the case of Plotinus is more complicated, to the degree that the world owes its existence to a form of essential causality, it may be said that essence takes precedence over existence. As we saw, generation for Plotinus is not an account of temporal origin but of ontological dependence.

Textbooks in medieval philosophy attribute the distinction between existence and essence to Avicenna; however, there are grounds for saying it is implied by the opening lines of Genesis, where we learn that the existence of the world follows from the will of a benevolent God.[73]

Although there were Jewish thinkers who argued for the eternity of the world, the dominant trend was to find a way to defend creation and thus to preserve the biblical view of existence. If the world comes into existence by an act of will, it makes sense to express gratitude for its creation and to look forward to its eventual redemption.

It is difficult to mention creation and redemption without being led to the issue of personality. What does it mean to describe God as a person? Minimally it

means that God acts as a result of free choice rather than from some inner necessity. Beyond that, it could mean that God feels compassion, grants forgiveness, or is outraged at the sight of innocent suffering. It is agreed by all hands that God is perfect, in Anselm's words, a being than which no greater can be or be thought. The question is: How should one conceive of perfection?

For the Neoplatonic tradition, perfection is defined in terms of richness of essence. Because God's essence is infinitely rich, it is impossible for God to lack or desire something outside himself. In the words of Plotinus, the First Principle "seeks nothing, has nothing, needs nothing."[74] Its perfection is established not by the purity of its motives but by its radical simplicity and the fact that it is the source of everything else. With certain modifications, this conception of divinity finds its natural expression in Spinoza, whose God acts by the same necessity with which he exists. As long as this is true, the idea that God acted for a purpose or chose to do one thing rather than another is absurd. So, far from enhancing God's perfection, the ascription of personality to God would diminish it by bringing in human limitations.

Although intellectual love of God is an important part of the philosophical tradition, some would protest that it is impossible to love something that cannot do otherwise. To them perfection involves the ability to make choices and act for a purpose. To act for a purpose is not the same as to act from emotion. Based on his explicit remarks, Maimonides maintains that although God's existence is necessary and does not serve a purpose, the act of creation does.[75] Nonetheless he steadfastly denies that God experiences emotion and thinks it is essential that everyone come to see this.[76] In that sense God does not have what we normally associate with personality. Maimonides' conception of divinity finds its natural expression in Leibniz, whose God chooses one among an infinite number of possible worlds to create.

Finally, there are those who find both of the previous conceptions of divinity inadequate and insist that a God who lacks personality lacks one of the primary features needed for perfection. A God who is nothing more than the source of existence is too abstract to motivate the passion and commitment Judaism demands. What is needed is something closer to the biblical God, which is to say a God who is passionately involved with his creation. According to Judah Halevi, had Socrates been confronted with this God, he would have replied that he does not contest it; he simply does not understand it.[77] This conception of divinity finds its natural expression in Pascal, Kierkegaard, and eventually Buber and Rosenzweig.

It is not the purpose of this essay to determine which conception is right. My only point is that the debate has infused the spirit of Western philosophy for centuries and is a result of the influence of Greek philosophy and Judaism on each

other. There is little doubt that both Judaism and philosophy were changed by their encounter and both improved as a result.

NOTES

1 *Mishneh Torah*, Idolatry, I.3, Maimonides 1989, Vol. 3, pp. 14–30 as well as *Guide of the Perplexed* I.71, III.29, Maimonides 1963, pp. 175–6, 514–6.
2 *Guide* I. Introduction, Maimonides 1963, p. 6.
3 Although Plotinus was not Greek by birth, he wrote in Greek and considered himself a follower and expositor of Plato. Moreover many of the ideas of Plato and Aristotle that reached medieval Jewish philosophers were infused with the thought of Plotinus. On this issue, see Ivry 1992, pp. 137–56.
4 *Timaeus* 30b.
5 See, for example, Psalms 74:12–15 and Isaiah 51:9–10.
6 Rashi 1934, p. 2.
7 *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Ibn Ezra 1988–2004; *Wars of the Lord* III.6.17, Gersonides 1987, pp. 322–31.
8 For this tradition, see Proverbs 3:19, 8:22–23 and the Mishnaic tractate *Pirkei Avot* (Chapters of the Fathers), 3:18.
9 *Midrash Genesis Rabbah*, 1.9.
10 The doctrine is not that God created the world *out of* nothing as a sculptor makes a statue out of bronze. That would make nothing a material cause, which is exactly what the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is intended to deny. Simply put, the doctrine is that God and God alone is responsible for the existence of the world. *Cf.* Isaiah 45.6–7, which implies that God is the source of everything, not just form or structure.
11 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, I.1–2, Saadia 1948, pp. 38–50. For interpretations of Maimonides, see H. Wolfson 1973a, pp. 207–21 and Seeskin 2005b, pp. 17–26. For a systematic treatment of creation in medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy, see H. Davidson 1987.
12 *Timaeus* 29d. Similar qualifications are repeated at 44d, 48d, 53d, 55d, 56a, 59c, and 68d.
13 *Timaeus* 28c.
14 For this view, see Cornford 1935, pp. 23–7 as well as Phillips 1977. For a general discussion of how literally to take the *Timaeus*, see Seeskin 2005b, pp. 35–59.
15 By "creation in time," I do not mean a creation that takes place *over* time but a creation that takes place in the first instant of time.
16 For this argument, see Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* 338a1–4, *Physics* 203b 29, *Metaphysics* 1050b8–15.
17 *Timaeus* 27c–28c.
18 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, I. 1–2, Saadia 1948, pp. 38–50.
19 *Phaedo* 99d-101b.
20 *Republic* 517c.
21 On this point, see Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1920 p. 348.
22 *Apology* 26c-d.
23 *Phaedo* 80b, 81a, 83e, 84a, 86a.
24 *Republic* 477a, 478d, 479, 500e, 611e.
25 *Timaeus* 29e-30a.
26 *Seventh Letter* 340c.
27 *Phaedo* 69b–d, *Phaedrus* 250b–c.
28 *Republic* 500d.

29 For Plato's account of piety however, see Morgan 1990.
30 *Guide* I.5, Maimonides 1963, p. 29.
31 Ross 1970, pp. cxxxiii–cxxiv.
32 *Metaphysics* 1072b10–12.
33 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177a12–16.
34 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1178b27–31.
35 *Pirkei Avot* 1.13.
36 *Shabbat* 31a.
37 *Mishneh Torah*, Study of the Torah, I. 8, pp. 168–74.
38 *Guide* III.27, Maimonides 1963, p. 511.
39 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b31–34.
40 This is an abbreviated version of the argument found in *Physics* 8.1.
41 *Physics* 192a27–34.
42 This argument can be found in *On the Heavens* 1.3.
43 See for example *Guide* II. 19–24.
44 *Guide* III.13, Maimonides 1963, p. 452. There is a tradition going back to medieval times that reads Maimonides as an Aristotelian. For a modern version of this view, see W. Harvey 1981c.
45 See, for example, Narboni 1852, II.19. It is worth noting that many Jewish thinkers became enamored of Averroes after Maimonides' death; Moses Narboni is just one example. For a modern version of Narboni's criticism, see Husik 1916, p. 275.
46 On this point see *Metaphysics* 1017a18–21, 1026b13–21 as well as Kahn 1966.
47 *Enneads* V.5.9, Plotinus 1966, p. 185.
48 *Enneads* 5.4.1, p. 141.
49 *Republic* 509b.
50 *Republic* 517c.
51 *Enneads* 5.1.6, pp. 31–2.
52 *Enneads* 6.4.7, pp. 293–7.
53 As we will see, it is not generated in the sense that it has a temporal beginning but in the sense that it depends on and derives from something else.
54 *Enneads* 2.4.2. For further discussion of the generation of matter in Plotinus, see Rist 1967, pp. 117–9 and O'Brien 1991.
55 *Enneads* 2.9.12.
56 See *Enneads* 1.8.3, 2.4.5, 2.4.16, 2.5.5, 3.6.6, 3.6.11, 3.6.14, 3.9.3. Here too we face the fact that Plotinus is using metaphors to express complicated metaphysical ideas.
57 *Enneads* 2.9.3.
58 See O'Brien 1991, p. 20. The passage in question is *Enneads* 4.3.9.
59 *Enneads* 5.1.6. Also see 2.9.3 and 3.2.1.
60 See, for example, *Enneads* 6.8.13. For someone who attributes a limited form of voluntarism to Plotinus, see Rist 1967, pp. 66–83.
61 *Enneads* 3.9.9, 5.6.2.
62 *Enneads* 6.9.10.
63 *Enneads* 6.9.9.
64 See, for example, *Guide I.68.*
65 See *Guide* III.52, Maimonides 1963, p. 629.
66 The most distinguished representative of this view is Gershom Scholem; see Scholem 1995, pp. 122–3, as well as "Devekut or Communion with God," Scholem 1971, pp. 203–4.
67 For example *Enneads* 4.5.7, 5.3.15, 5.5.9, 6.8.18, and 6.5.1.

68 *Enneads* 5.5.6.
69 *Enneads* 6.9.4.
70 *Guide* I.57, p. 133; I.58, p. 135.
71 *Guide* II.12, p. 279.
72 *Posterior Analytics* 89b33, 91a1.
73 This argument is made by Gilson 1940, p. 436. Cf. Kahn 1966 as well as 1982, p. 7: "My general view of the historical development is that existence in the modern sense becomes a central concept in philosophy only in the period when Greek ontology is radically revised in the light of a metaphysics of creation: that is to say under the influence of Biblical religion."
74 *Enneads* 5.2.1, p. 59.
75 I say "based on his explicit remarks," because there is a long-standing tradition that argues Maimonides' views on creation are esoteric and that in the end, he is much closer to Spinoza than he seems. Again see W. Harvey 1981b. Against Harvey, see Seeskin 2005c.
76 *Guide* I.35.
77 *Kuzari* IV.13.

2

THE MUSLIM CONTEXT

SARAH STROUMSA

The period with which this chapter is concerned is the heyday of Islamic philosophy, between the ninth and the twelfth centuries, in the area dominated by Islam and stretching between Persia in the east and the Iberian peninsula in the west and as far south as Yemen. Islamic political hegemony over these vast terrains, combined with the ubiquitous presence of the ruling Muslim religion, and the adoption of Arabic as a *lingua franca* for all walks of life and in all cultural milieus, had a unifying cultural effect and created the reality that we call "Islamic medieval culture." In medieval terms, this was a world-culture, encompassing both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, and expressed in Arabic as well as in other languages.[1]

Jews living in these times and areas were part and parcel of the greater Islamic culture, and their belonging to it was a decisive factor in shaping medieval Jewish thought. We know very little about the Jewish communities during the first two centuries of Islamic rule, but from the beginning of the third Islamic century (which corresponds to the middle of the ninth century CE) a vigorous Jewish culture surfaces. The old learning centers – the *yeshivot* – of Iraq (Baghdad) continued to play a leading role for world Jewry, but other competing centers also flourished: in Palestine and Syria (Jerusalem and Aleppo), North Africa (such as Cairo, Alexandria, and Qayrawan), and in the Iberian peninsula (such as Cordoba and Toledo). Only the language of liturgical poetry remained what it had been before the rise of Islam, that is, Hebrew (a peculiarity that was later extended to include the newly introduced genre of secular poetry). In all other intellectual endeavors – religious law and legal *responsa*, Hebrew linguistics and Bible exegesis, homiletic literature and ethics, science and philosophy, religious polemics and mysticism – Arabic came to replace Aramaic as the language in which Jews normally expressed themselves. More often than not, the Arabic used by Jews (called Judeo–Arabic) was written in Hebrew characters, laced with Hebrew words and interspersed with references to Jewish religious texts. Judeo–Arabic is spoken to this day by oriental Jews, remnants of the communities that lived in Arab countries, but from the ninth to the twelfth

century, this was the main language of the majority of the Jewish world, used in everyday life as well as in learned compositions. Most of the seminal texts of Jewish thought written in this period were thus written in Arabic.

That early medieval Jewish thought should be studied in its Muslim context seems to be widely recognized in modern scholarship. This recognition is usually reflected in what appears to be a commonly held assumption, namely, that to understand the terminology and the concerns of early medieval Jewish philosophy, one must be familiar with Islamic philosophy of the same period. In an article entitled "The Islamic context of Jewish philosophy," Joel Kraemer offers a broad analytical survey of the Islamic background to Jewish philosophy. Kraemer summarizes the legacy of Plato and Neoplatonism, Aristotle and Aristotelianism, and the responses that these legacies found in Islam, as well as the theological and esoteric traditions that developed in the Islamic world. Methodologically, after examining the Islamic context *of* Jewish philosophy (namely, its Islamic background), one should continue to analyze medieval Jewish philosophy *in* this context (that is to say, the way Jewish philosophy was integrated into the Islamic world). Indeed, many major digests of Jewish philosophy adopt this approach.[2] This is usually done by setting Jewish philosophy against the background of Islamic philosophy: After presenting a brief description of the history of each philosophical school in Islam, its ideas and main figures, these works discuss in some detail the Jewish philosophers supposedly belonging to that particular school. Saadia Gaon (d. 942) is thus studied on the background of Islamic scholastic theology or *Kalām*, and in particular the school of the *Muʿtazilah*; Isaac Israeli (d. 955) and Solomon ibn Gabirol (d.1058) – on the background of Neoplatonism; Bahya ibn Paquda (first half of the eleventh century) – on the background of Sufism, and Abraham ibn Daud (d. ca. 1180) and Maimonides (d. 1204) – on the background of Aristotelian philosophy.

The availability of these excellent studies allows us to dispense with the need to repeat here the same schema, or to update it in different terms and with slightly different emphasis. Instead, I will attempt to highlight the implications of the emergence and development of Jewish thought in the Muslim milieu and in the same cultural climate, and to offer some observations pertaining to the unique character of this context. Needless to say, in such a vast area and over a period of several centuries, there are also vast cultural differences: The religious and intellectual climate of Sunni, Abbasid Baghdad in the early ninth century is in many ways unlike that of Fatimide, Ismāʿili Cairo in the tenth century, or of Almohad Cordoba in the twelfth century. The following pages will attempt mainly to offer general observations that in some manner are relevant to this milieu as a whole.

I. THE EMERGENCE OF JEWISH MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

This seemingly straightforward title calls for some clarifications, as almost each word in it lends itself to more than one understanding.

Emergence

Perhaps the clearest acknowledgment of the significance of the Muslim context for medieval Jewish philosophy is presented by an envious outsider, the "father of the translators" Judah ibn Tibbon (d. 1190). In his Introduction to the Hebrew translation of Baḥya ibn Paquda's *Guide to the Duties of the Heart*, Judah ibn Tibbon marvels at the richness and diversity of the literary output of the Jews in Islamic lands: commentaries on the Bible and on the Talmud, original compositions, and *responsa*. Most of these compositions, he says "were written in the Arabic language in all matters, both in the science of the Torah and in other sciences." This practice, according to Judah ibn Tibbon, was typical for the Jews living under Islam, whereas the Jews of Christendom, although great scholars in rabbinic matters, "were not concerned with other sciences, because they made the Torah their sole occupation, and also because they had no access to books in other sciences." Ibn Tibbon thus highlights the pivotal role of the linguistic context for the dissemination of sciences and philosophy among the Jews of Arab lands: Jews of these countries, he says, were all fluent in Arabic, a language that he describes as both rich and supple, amenable to the use in sciences and philosophy, in a way that Hebrew in his time was not.[3]

Ibn Tibbon is undoubtedly correct in presenting the spread of the Arabic language as a major factor in the development of Judeo–Arabic culture. Jewish communities scattered over a vast area now found themselves in an empire where the same language and the same religion dominated the cultural scene of Jews and non-Jews alike. One cannot overemphasize the earth-shaking impact of this unifying factor for the creation and shaping of Judeo–Arabic culture.

Implicit in Ibn Tibbon's words is another judicious observation, namely, that, except for a "few grains" of philosophical wisdom that are to be found in the Mishnah and the Talmud, Jewish writing on science and philosophy as Ibn Tibbon understands it was not merely shaped or changed, but actually emerged under Islam. Although Ibn Tibbon refrains from stating this observation too forcefully, his acute awareness of it underlies his analysis.

A similar view is expressed, with a slightly more apologetic twist, by Moses Maimonides. In his *Guide of the Perplexed* (I. 71) Maimonides argues that the components of his own philosophy are all to be found in the Jewish heritage,

both biblical and talmudic. Being aware of the scarcity of evidence available to substantiate this claim, however, he opens the chapter with the following rueful statement:

> Know that the many sciences devoted to establishing the truth in these matters that have existed in our religious community, have perished.

Although Maimonides insists on the past existence of philosophical knowledge in ancient Judaism, he admits the absence of any systematic philosophical writings in the ancient period. Like Ibn Tibbon, he mentions the "few grains" of metaphysical and physical wisdom in talmudic literature. The "many sciences," however, were handed down only orally, and, with the dispersion of the Jews among "the ignorant nations" have consequently perished.[4] Maimonides' own philosophy is, therefore, from his own viewpoint, not a continuation but a rediscovery, a re-creation of that ancient lore. Although Maimonides states that this philosophical lore was part and parcel of the ancient Jewish oral legacy, he is aware of the fact that hardly any trace of it remained before the rise of Islam. Maimonides thus implicitly admits that, for all practical purposes, it was under Islam that philosophy was introduced into the Jewish world.

Yet another, more blatant testimony to this effect can be found in the words of the ninth-century Muslim littérateur and theologian al-Jāhiz (d. 868), who says in his *Refutation of Christianity*.

> The Jews consider philosophical contemplation heresy, and theology reprehensible innovation. [They think that] it introduces every false idea, and that there is no science except in the Torah and in the books of the prophets; that the belief in medicine and giving credence to the astronomers is among the causes of disbelief; that it leads to materialism and to divergence from the ways of the forefathers and the people who should serve as model. So much so, that they allow shedding the blood of those famous for this [philosophical occupation] with impunity, and they censor the writings of those who follow this road.[5]

The implication of al-Jāhiz's words is that the absence of Jewish philosophical literature is not an accident of history, as it is for Maimonides. Like Ibn Tibbon, al-Jāhiz believes that the Jews opted for an exclusive study of the Torah and assumed that an interest in science and philosophy would be incompatible with it. In al-Jāhiz's description, however, this choice is said to reflect an active Jewish hostility to the sciences, which, he says, continues to his own day.

The observations of these three authors – Judah ibn Tibbon, Maimonides, and al-Jāhiz – speaking each from his own perspective, thus lead to the same conclusion; namely, that there were no Jewish philosophical writings before the rise of Islam, and therefore, the Islamic culture provides not only the context

in which Jewish philosophy must be read, but also the background for its first appearance as philosophy.

Medieval

The combined testimony of Ibn Tibbon, Maimonides, and al-Jāhiz highlights the problematic nature of the term "Medieval Jewish Philosophy." Normally, the term "medieval" implies an intermediate place in a threefold periodization between the classical and the modern. It would, however, be misleading to establish an unqualified use of the term "classical Jewish philosophy." To be sure, the Talmud and the Mishnah include many statements that reflect a philosophical understanding, or rather an interest in problems upon which there existed already a long tradition of philosophical reflection in Greek. We may recognize in these statements the "few grains" referred to by Ibn Tibbon and Maimonides and attempt to uncover their underlying worldview and beliefs.[6] The rabbis themselves, however, did not bother to develop these reflections to a systematic philosophy. In their thought, philosophical notions took a secondary place and were fitted into a nonphilosophical system.

The one exception to this prephilosophical expression of Jewish thought is of course Philo, in whose writings Hellenized Alexandrian Judaism of the first century C.E. seems to be reflected at its acme. With the destruction of the Hellenized Jewish communities and the disappearance of Greek as a major Jewish language, however, Philo's world was wiped out, and his Greek writings remained inaccessible for the remaining Jewish communities. Philo's principles of exegesis were absorbed by the Christians but had no impact on Jewish thought in the subsequent few centuries. With all due appreciation of Philo himself, this sole author does not entitle us to speak of "classical Jewish philosophy." With the next Jewish philosopher appearing only under the rule of Islam, some 700 years after Philo, what we called "the emergence of medieval Jewish philosophy under Islam" turns out to be, for all practical purposes, the emergence of Jewish philosophy *tout court*. We may call this philosophy "medieval" only insofar as it is contemporaneous with what is called "medieval Islamic philosophy" (also a problematic term, for similar reasons), or that Jewish philosophy that coincides chronologically with the European Middle Ages.

When the first medieval Jewish philosophical writings appear, they already have the full attire of Aristotelian logic, Platonic political thought, and Neoplatonist understanding of God's attributes. Maimonides, who, despite his previously mentioned reluctance, cannot ignore the fact that there were, prior to him, several Jewish thinkers, attributes this pre-Maimonidean Jewish philosophy to the encounter of Jews (the Geonim and the Karaites) with Muslim theology (*Kalām*). Because he regards this theology as a distortion of philosophy, resulting from the encounter

of the Muslim theologians with the (already manipulated and distorted) version of Greek philosophy developed by Christian theologians, he discards them as not worthy of the title "philosophers."

As has been argued by Shlomo Pines, Maimonides is indebted to the Muslim philosopher al-Fārābī (d. 942) in his reconstruction of the emergence of Muslim scholastic theology (*Kalām*).[7] Maimonides develops al-Fārābī's brief sketch and includes in it Jewish thought as another link in the same transmission chain: The encounter of Christianity with Greek philosophy generated the theology of the Church Fathers; the encounter of Islam with Christianity engendered Muslim *Kalām*; and the encounter of the Jews (Rabbanite Geonim and the Karaites) with Muslim *Kalām* fathered Jewish *Kalām*. Maimonides' outline, however, is skewed in that it ignores the multicultural nature of early Islamic society. Contacts in such a society are never neatly arranged in pairs, and influences do not travel in a single linear track. There is no reason to assume, a priori, that, while Muslims met with Christians and were exposed to their theology, their Jewish contemporaries waited patiently on the side until Muslims developed their own theology, and then met with Muslims alone. A more reasonable working hypothesis would be that, once the gates of communication were open, due to the unifying political and linguistic setting, Jews entered the arena along with everybody else.

The available evidence indeed corroborates this working hypothesis. The first Jewish medieval thinker known to us, Daud al-Muqammaṣ, had studied with the Christians in Nisibis (probably with Nonnus of Nisibis, who flourished in the middle of the ninth century). At some point in his life, al-Muqammaṣ had even been a convert to Christianity but then returned to Judaism. The fruits of his long years of Christian education are the first Jewish exegetical works in Arabic, which he translated and adapted from similar works in Syriac;[8] the first dated Jewish polemical works (mostly against Christianity);[9] and the first Jewish theological summa, known as *Twenty Chapters*.[10] These works reflect his position as a Jew in the contemporary crossroads, absorbing both Christian and Muslim cultural heritage. Unlike most of his Jewish successors, al-Muqammaṣ writes Arabic in Arabic characters and has little recourse to proof-texts from Jewish sources. Christian literary models and theologumena appear in his work in an Arabic garb, using Arabic formulae and technical terminology and transformed in ways that already bear the stamp of Muslim thought. His borrowed material occasionally betrays its origin in Christian or Muslim texts (as, for instance, where his terminology and his argumentation echo Trinitarian or Christological themes). It is nevertheless clear that he made a conscious attempt to fashion these borrowed ingredients to fit a Jewish theology, and as far as we know, he is the first medieval Jew to do so. Indeed, it is precisely

the occasional awkwardness of his attempts that most clearly reflect his pioneering place in the formative period of Jewish philosophy, navigating his way in what was, apparently, a yet uncharted terrain.

At about the same time as al-Muqammaṣ, or shortly thereafter, the same marks of the formative period appear in the works of the Karaite Daniel al-Qūmisī. Writing in Hebrew, al-Qūmisī's works echo the influence of Muslim *Kalām*: His Hebrew terminology includes Arabic calques, and his theology struggles with ideas that are prevalent in Muslim theology.[11]

Saadia Gaon, coming at least one generation after these two trail blazers, reaps the fruits of their efforts, and his work demonstrates a rather more mature Jewish thought. His theological summa, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, has the same structure as al-Muqammaṣ' work. Saadia's theology, however, constantly relates to the Jewish tradition, and his arguments have already been honed to serve as appropriate building blocks for a distinctly Jewish thought. His voice is much more confident than that of his predecessors, and the task he takes upon himself is both more ambitious and more nuanced than theirs: the task of a "culture planner,"[12] a mission that befits the intellectual and spiritual leader of his community.[13] Saadia broadens the scope of intellectual endeavor, expanding the exegetical project to include all biblical material, venturing into new fields, like linguistics and law, and introducing new literary genres. Having attained the position of Gaon, or head of the rabbinic school in Baghdad, and with the authority that this position entailed, Saadia manages to introduce philosophical, rational discourse into the world of the rabbanite establishment. From that point on, there seems to be no question whatsoever as to the legitimacy of debating theological questions and of having recourse to rational argumentation, or to rationalized interpretation of the sacred tradition. Moreover, Saadia's example seems to have set the tone for future generations, in which Jewish philosophers were often also the leaders of their community, universally recognized as authorities in Jewish law and learning, and sometimes (as in the case of Maimonides and his descendants) also representatives of the community toward the Muslim authorities. Their interest in philosophical questions was perceived as concomitant to their high education, and the various branches of their scholarship, both religious and secular, were often (although not always) seen as both compatible and mutually complementing.

A similar phenomenon appears in the Karaite Jewish community, where Saadia's contemporary Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī combines biblical hermeneutic and theological concerns, to fashion what can be seen as Karaite theology. The full naturalization of rational discourse in Judeo–Arabic thought is noteworthy, in particular, when compared with the situation in the Muslim society, where the legitimacy of such

endeavors never stopped to be questioned, and where those who initiated them were criticized and even persecuted.

Jewish

In medieval Islamic society there are actually two different kinds of Jewish communities: Rabbanites, who follow talmudic tradition and regard it as the divinely sanctioned Oral Law and the only authoritative interpretation of the Bible; and Karaites, who reject this tradition. The origin and development of the schism lie beyond the scope of the present chapter. For our purpose, suffice it to say that toward the end of the ninth century this schism is already an established fact. During the late ninth and the tenth centuries, the heated arguments between these two interpretations of Judaism shook the Jewish world. Thereafter, however, the two communities usually lived side by side, cooperating despite their differences. It is particularly noteworthy that, in their religious self-perception and set against the non-Jewish world, thinkers of both communities most commonly identify simply as Jews. Moreover, as Jews within the Muslim context, their receptivity and response to its intellectual challenges followed similar patterns.

Philosophy

In the medieval Islamic world "philosophy" (*falsafa*) has more than one meaning. Although the term is sometimes loosely used to describe speculative thought in general and the search for wisdom, more frequent is its use in a narrower technical sense, denoting Aristotelian philosophy. Between the eighth and tenth centuries, the "translation movement," a concentrated scholarly effort, supported and subsidized by Muslim rulers, led to a massive translation of scientific and philosophical works, mostly from Greek. A philosopher (*faylasūf*, pl. *falāsifa*) in the narrow technical sense would be a person schooled in the Aristotelian tradition on the basis of the translated works of Aristotle, his Greek commentators (Themistius and Alexander of Aphrodisias), and their Muslim followers (like al-Fārābī in the east or Averroes in the west). Neoplatonist thinkers were also sometimes called philosophers (like the ninth-century al-Kindī, "The Philosopher of the Arabs"), but more often were referred to by other names, such as "the Wise." Muslim Neoplatonism also developed on the basis of translated texts, but its scholarly tradition was less rigorously monitored. Neoplatonist works of late antiquity circulated in paraphrases rather than in translations, and their authorship was often rather hazy. A partial paraphrase of Plotinus's *Enneads* came to be known as *The Theology of Aristotle*, and a paraphrase of Proclus's *Elements of Theology* circulated as the *Book on the Pure Good*, attributed to a variety of authors.

Whereas both these philosophical traditions relied heavily on translated texts, Muslim scholastic theology (*Kalām*) appeared before the full-fledged inception of the translation movement. Already the eighth century sees the emergence of the *Mu'tazilah*, a rationalist school that cultivated speculative thought and attempted to reconcile it with the teaching of Islam. Alongside a highly technical vocabulary and a rigorously structured system of argumentation, the Mutazilites developed rational hermeneutics of the Qur'an, and these traits are also found in other schools of *Kalām*. In modern scholarship, the followers of *Kalām* (*Mutakallimūn*) are usually called "theologians" because of their preoccupation with the religious scriptures. Medieval Aristotelian philosophers like al-Fārābī accuse the *Mutakallimūn* of molding their thought to fit their religion, but there is no reason to doubt their sincerity in their quest for the truth. Moreover, Aristotelian philosophers like Maimonides or Averroes also attempt to offer rationalistic interpretations for problematic scriptural passages, and they too struggle to reconcile their religion with the results of their speculation. Both groups can thus be called "philosophical theologians." Rather than defining each philosopher by attaching him to a certain school, it is often more accurate to name the particular activity in which he engages. A speculative work that does not refer to the revealed scriptures will herein be referred to as philosophical, as distinct from the scripture-oriented theology. More often than not, however, these terms must be used in a relative sense, and the same person may thus write one work that is, on balance, more philosophical (like Maimonides' *Guide* or Saadia's *Commentary on the Book of Creation*) and another that is, on balance, more theological (like the speculative parts of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* or Saadia's *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*).

II. ADAPTATIONS OF THE JEWISH TRADITION IN A MULTICULTURAL SETTING

When attempting to follow the itinerary of ideas, one can often rely on manuscripts, books, and texts in general to provide physical, solid evidence. From the late eighth to the tenth century an impressive number of classical scientific and philosophical Greek texts were translated (via Syriac or Pahlavi) to Arabic. The concerted effort to transmit major parts of the classical library to the Arabic speaking world involved not only intellectuals but also large segments of the ruling classes in the Abbasid Empire. Due to this translation movement, we can follow the route made by books as they traveled from one religious community to the other, and the way ideas were interpreted and transformed in the process. Books, whether bought, copied, or borrowed, changed hands frequently, and around the study of books, in public

or private libraries or in the book market, old ideas were adopted and new ones fermented.

The spread of ideas, however, is often an oral process, and although oral transmission is not as well documented as the written one and is much harder to prove in individual cases, its ubiquitous existence must always be borne in mind. In the multireligious, linguistically uniform setting, everyday-life occurrences such as simple business transactions provided ample opportunities for interreligious encounters and allowed ideas to circulate. In addition to such daily encounters, however, intellectuals had their own, more structured venues for mutual fertilization. It was a common practice for men of letters of all religious backgrounds – scientists, linguists, poets, philosophers, religious scholars, and educated professionals – to get together to discuss and debate ideas. Such sessions (called *majālis* [sing. *majlis]*) were often sponsored by rulers or other prominent public figures, as an intellectual divertissement of sorts. Debates and discussions in the *majlis* had a set structure and were strictly regulated. From numerous preserved records of such sessions it transpires that the discussions covered an impressive array of topics, and allowed for the expositions of diverse ideas. At times, the *majlis* focused on interreligious debate; at others, it examined a philosophical question that cut across religious divides (as, for instance, the relative virtue of logic and linguistics).[14]

In addition to such sessions, intellectuals' paths crossed in other, less structured contexts. Many philosophers in this period earned their living as physicians, and a few of the more famous physicians were Jews or Christians. The abundant bio-bibliographical literature on the physicians lists Jews and Christians alongside their Muslim colleagues and bears witness to the fact that members of the various religions worked side by side in the practice of the medical profession. Another popular profession among scholars was bookselling, and the shop of the bookseller (*warrāq*) was a natural focal point, where ideas could be discussed and exchanged.

Whether in writing or by word of mouth, Jews were thus abundantly exposed to traditions of thought of non-Jewish origin and were engulfed in the discussion and elaboration of these traditions. As opposed to Jewish receptivity, however, which is evident in all Judeo–Arabic philosophical works, the active role played by Jews in this process is very difficult to gauge. Occasionally, we find explicit references to Jewish material in a Muslim philosophical text: the work of the first Muslim thinker of al-Andalus, the mystical philosopher Muhammad ibn Masarra (d. 931), reveals his fascination with Jews and Judaism and strongly suggests familiarity with the *Book of Creation* (*Sefer Yetzirah*).[15] The eleventh century Ismāʿili author al-Kirmāni uses Hebrew quotations in Arabic characters.[16] Such explicit references, however,

are both rare and anecdotal. The overwhelming presence of the majority culture usually dominates the final literary outcome.

A rare example of Jewish involvement in the making of Islamic philosophy relates to one of the most important texts of Islamic Neoplatonism, the Long Version of the so-called *The Theology of Aristotle*. This paraphrase of Plotinus' first four *Enneads* introduces major conceptual changes into Plotinus' original text, changes that render it more compatible with a monotheistic system. Perhaps the most conspicuous of such changes is the introduction of Divine Will into the flow of emanation from the One, transforming the ineluctable nature of emanation so that it can conform to the biblical and Qur'anic narrative of creation. This major text of Islamic Neoplatonism was of paramount importance to the Ismā'ilis. These Shi'ite Muslims adopted Neoplatonism as their theology, and it is in their circles, as argued by Shlomo Pines, that the paraphrastic Long Version of The *Theology* must have been composed.[17] Scholars have long noticed the intriguing fact that all existing manuscripts of the Arabic Long Version are in Judeo–Arabic (that is to say, Arabic written in Hebrew characters). It has been suggested that the circle of Jewish scholars around Isaac Israeli, who served as the court physician to the first Ismā'ili Fatimid Caliphs in Qayrawan, may have been instrumental in adapting Plotinus' philosophy to the world of Islamic thought.[18] Be that as it may, the manuscript evidence mirrors the intense Jewish interest and involvement in Islamic Neoplatonist tradition during its formative period.

III. MUSLIM SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT, JEWISH INTERPRETATIONS

The realization of the intensity of Jewish interest in the philosophical developments in the Islamic world lies behind the prevalent scholarly approach mentioned previously, to wit: the taxonomy of medieval Jewish philosophy according to Islamic schools of thought. This taxonomy, however, is known to be problematic also beyond Judaism, in the study of Islamic philosophy itself. For instance, as demonstrated by the case of the *Theology of Aristotle,* Neoplatonist books circulated in Arabic under the name of Aristotle, and Neoplatonist elements are thus prominent in the thought of the so-called Aristotelians. The schematic taxonomy, however, is kept in use, as a convenient device for the categorization of thinkers. We thus distinguish between mystical thought, or Sufism, philosophy itself divided between the Aristotelian and the Neoplatonist schools, and dialectical theology or *Kalām*.

The problematic nature of this categorization seems even more pronounced regarding the Jewish philosophers. A closer examination of each Jewish thinker forces us to qualify whatever affiliation we ascribe to him. The writings of Saadia Gaon, a *Mutakallim*, include many Aristotelian and Neoplatonic components; and in the writings of the Neoplatonist Isaac Israeli, there is clear evidence of *Kalām* influence. Bahya ibn Paquda is sometimes classified as a Neoplatonist, but the first chapter of his book is strongly influenced by *Kalām*, and the impact of the mystical–ascetic tradition of Sufism is evident throughout his work.

A case in point is Maimonides, who undoubtedly regarded himself as an Aristotelian philosopher. In his correspondence with his student Joseph ibn Shimʿon (d. 1226) and with his translator Samuel ibn Tibbon (d. 1230), Maimonides instructs them to follow the time-honored school curriculum and indicates to them the authoritative texts of Aristotle and his Alexandrian commentators.[19] In another instance he takes pain, almost pedantically, to note his personal connection to the school: He read texts under the guidance of a pupil of one of the contemporary masters, Ibn Bajja, and met the son of another, the astronomer Ibn al-Aflahī.[20] Yet, even Maimonides, a self-declared Aristotelian, exhibits both *Kalām* and Neoplatonic tendencies.[21] It is also noteworthy that, although both Muslim and Christian Aristotelians compose commentaries on works of Aristotle and of his followers, Maimonides chooses to comment only on the *Mishnah*. In this context, it is interesting to note that Maimonides' Aristotelian predecessor, Abraham ibn Daud, did write a commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*.[22] The few extant lines of this unique Judeo–Arabic commentary demonstrate that Jews were conversant with the school tradition and able to participate in its discussion. At the same time, the fact that Jewish philosophical tradition did not see fit to preserve this text by copying it, despite the fact that it has no parallel in the Judeo–Arabic tradition, may also be significant. The conspicuous absence of commentaries on Aristotle from the preserved Judeo–Arabic philosophical output may indicate that, rejecting the distinctive genre of the school, Judeo–Arabic philosophers opted out of actually belonging to the school. As recipients, they were assiduous students who wholeheartedly absorbed the school's teachings. As authors, however, they addressed their teaching to the educated elites of the Jewish community, and the audience dictated different forms of writing.

Another example of the relative literary independence of Jewish authors can be seen in the works of Jewish *Kalām*. Al-Muqammaṣ and Saadia each wrote a full theological *summa*, which in many ways follows Muslim *Kalām*: Both works are written in the same formulaic language as Muslim *Kalām*, use a similar terminology, discuss identical topics, and often propound the same ideas. Yet, although the structural similarity of these works to Christian *summae* was noted by Shlomo

Pines,[23] one is hard put to find an exact Muslim antecedent to them, and the closest Muslim parallel – the *Book of Unity* by the tenth century al-Māturidi – is much less rigorously structured than either of these two Jewish works. The independence is not only literary: both works exhibit familiarity with nonkalamic material, both Aristotelian and Neoplatonist. In the case of al-Muqammaṣ, this peculiar combination can be attributed to the education he received in the Christian academies, where Aristotelian logic was integrated into theological teaching in the school curriculum, but it is noteworthy that Saadia displays a similar admixture. One may argue that al-Muqammaṣ set the example in this respect for Saadia. This may well be the case, but as the case of the Jewish Aristotelians shows, we seem to have here a phenomenon that goes beyond the *Mutakallimūn* and may apply to all Judeo–Arabic thinkers.

Indeed, although each one of the emblematic writings of Jewish philosophers reveals its author's proximity to a certain school in Islamic philosophy, none of them duplicate that school's typical literary genre. In one way or another, they are all theological works, aimed at demonstrating the compatibility of the Jewish canon with the prevalent philosophy. They develop their own version of whatever genre they use and are relatively flexible in adopting ideas from other schools. The applicability and usefulness of the concept "philosophical schools" in medieval Judeo–Arabic thought remains, therefore, highly questionable.

One conspicuous exception to the rule is the case of the Karaite Jews, who wholeheartedly adopted Mutazilite *Kalām*. Both their theology and their biblical exegesis are built on Mutazilite principles, couched in the unmistakable Mutazilite technical language. Furthermore, Karaites studied the works of their Muslim colleagues and participated in Mutazilite scholarly sessions. As in the case of the *Theology of Aristotle*, here too it is the material manuscript evidence that most strikingly demonstrates this connection. The *Muʿtazilah* played a decisive role in shaping Muslim theology in its formative period, and during the ninth century parts of it were even included in the "state theology." After the eleventh century, however, the *Muʿtazilah* became marginalized and in fact, ostracized in Muslim circles, and Mutazilite works were actively shunned by Muslims (with the exception of the Zaydi Shi'ites). Karaite Jews, on the other hand, continued to study Mutazilite works and to copy them assiduously. As a result, much of the massive Mutazilite literary output is preserved in Judeo–Arabic manuscripts. In particular, the now available Firkovich manuscript collection in St. Petersburg contains a large quantity of Mutazilite texts, many of which were until recently considered lost.

Even in this case, however, one should note the peculiar position of Karaites vis-à-vis "their" school. Whereas Muslim Mutazilites refer to the school's authorities

as "our masters," Karaites refrain from using this honorific title and refer to them by name. Karaites also do not belong to the school in the sense that the school does not count them as members: In the biobibliographical literature of the *Muʿtazilah*'s "generations," Jews are never listed. The proximity of their theology was, of course, noted by Muslims, and the historian al-Masʿūdi (d. 957) can say that the Karaites are *like* the *Muʿtazilah*. In Islam as in late antiquity, however, philosophical schools had also a social function. As a school, the *Muʿtazilah* was a Muslim school, with legal as well as theological concerns, and Jews did not belong there.

IV. THE MUSLIM CONTEXT

That the *Muʿtazilah* preserved a strong religious identity, to which Jews remained outsiders, should not come as a surprise. It should be emphasized that although medieval Islamic culture encompassed both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, the place of Islam in this culture was not on a par with the religions of other communities. As underlined by Shlomo Dov Goitein, the society of the medieval Islamic world was a religious society.[24] Social boundaries between the communities were respected, and the minority status of the Jews was rarely forgotten even among philosophers. Moreover, the fact that Islam was the religion of the majority naturally favored the dissemination of ideas associated with Islam. In our attempts to do justice to the multicultural character of medieval Islamic society, the consequences of the fact that Islam was the dominant religion should not be underestimated.

The difficulty of isolating distinct Muslim influences (that is to say, influences that are specifically tied to the Muslim religion) in the work of Jewish philosophers is a tribute to the literary achievements of these philosophers. Their integration of Muslim material is often artfully realized, and the resulting work does not always reveal the borrowed elements that went into its making. Nevertheless, our working hypothesis must be that Jews in general had frequent contacts with their Muslim neighbors and that Jewish thinkers, motivated by intellectual curiosity, sought out such contacts. If we bear this in mind as we approach the texts, then we may become more sensitive to the existences of such borrowed elements and more likely to uncover them, and the result may be very instructive.

The polemical milieu, which provided a fertile ground for an exchange of ideas, also provides us with clues to identify specifically Muslim elements. In espousing a belief in a sole God, Islam had no argument with either Christianity or Judaism. The disagreement with the other two monotheistic religions focused on Muhammad's prophecy, a belief central to Islam and rejected by both Jews and Christians. The veracity of Muhammad's prophecy, the characteristic traits that prove his prophecy,

and in general the role and characteristic traits of a prophet (e.g., moral integrity, intellectual superiority, and a record of performing miracles) thus became essential to Muslim thought, apparent in all its expressions. In the attempts to prove the veracity of Muhammad's prophecy, Muslim theologians developed a literary genre of "signs of prophecy." Muslim philosophers identified the Prophet with Plato's philosopher–king, and developed a political philosophy in which the philosopher ruled the virtuous city. Muslim mystics and pietists modeled the saints on the figure of Muhammad, creating a cult of the Prophet and his family. The centrality of prophetology can thus be regarded as an identifying *shibboleth*, a characteristic trait of Muslim thought and its specific contribution to the multireligious discussion.

Jewish thinkers adopted the centrality of prophecy quickly and wholly, adapting it, of course, to their own religion, and replacing Muhammad with the biblical prophets and in particular with Moses. Jewish theologians thus offer lengthy discussions of the proofs of prophecy, aimed to uphold the veracity of Moses' prophecy and its finality. Jewish philosophers discuss political philosophy, depicting Moses as the model philosopher–king, and Jews writing in the mystical vein (whether pietists or Neoplatonists) dwell on the revelation on Mt. Sinai as an emblematic mystical experience. The significance of this Jewish whole-hearted adaptation of Muslim prophetology can be better appreciated if we compare it with the almost complete absence of prophetology from Christian–Arabic literature. For the Christian Arabs, the model figure was that of Jesus, the son of God, and there was no reason to downgrade him to the rank of a prophet. Consequently, instead of "signs of prophecy," Christian–Arab theologians, like the ninth-century ʿAmmār al-Baṣri or the tenth-century Theodore abū Qurra, develop lists of signs for the true religions;[25] and political philosophy is hardly represented in the writings of Christian–Arab philosophers such as the tenth-century Yahyā ibn ʿAdī.

The impact of Islam is not only apparent in the common interest and common topics; it is also attested by the Jewish adoption of typically Muslim language. Instances of terminological borrowings are many and varied. Perhaps the most striking example of the adoption of Muslim terminology is the usage of the term Qur'an to denote the Hebrew Bible. Such borrowings were so frequent that they must have been done unconsciously, and can be said to have become an integral part of Judeo–Arabic thought. The integration of Muslim religious material – Qur'an and prophetic traditions (*hadith*) – into Jewish texts is less frequent, and their significance is more difficult to assess. When Maimonides or Saadia, for instance, use Qur'anic verses or locutions,[26] one suspects that they were conscious of their source and used it for a purpose. Such borrowings may also reflect a high level of familiarity with Muslim texts. Philosophers such as Maimonides or like Ibn Gabirol, who belonged

to a minute intellectual elite, were avid readers. They were curious about other cultures, and (as explicitly stated by Maimonides)[27] did not apply self-censorship to their readings. Ibn Gabirol may thus use in his religious poem the *Royal Crown* a Hebrew calque that depends on Avicenna's *Commentary* on a chapter of the Qur'an;[28] Maimonides may integrate Almohad theology, which treats anthropomorphism as heresy, into his Thirteen Principles, thus fashioning a Jewish Credo on the basis of a Muslim catechism.[29]

V. METAPHORS AND METHODOLOGY

As already mentioned, the relevance of the Muslim context is commonly admitted by scholars of medieval Jewish philosophy. This in itself is not self-evident: In studying Jewish philosophy in other periods, scholarly methods vary, and scholars disagree in the evaluation of the relevance of the non-Jewish context. Whereas Shlomo Pines emphasizes the cultural circles that nurture Jewish philosophy, Eliezer Schweid views the development of Jewish philosophy as mainly an internal process, in which Jewish thinkers carry on a dialogue with previous generations of Jewish scholars. Regarding the early medieval period, however, Schweid too accepts the existence of direct influences of the immediate non-Jewish environment on Jewish thought. What remains in dispute are subtler nuances regarding the scope and nature of this influence. For Schweid, the Islamic world (and the non-Jewish world in general) provides the background to Jewish philosophy, within which we can distinguish "a continuous Jewish speculative literature, with a fair amount of internal influence." Pines, on the other hand, states that in this period, "in the sphere of philosophical literature . . . Jewish thinkers had recourse primarily to the books of their Muslim counterparts," whereas "rare and of secondary significance is that relationship to the teaching of their Jewish predecessors."[30] Rather than admitting occasional influences, this last approach assumes medieval Jewish philosophy to be shaped and impregnated by the surrounding culture. It would be impossible, according to this view, to correctly understand medieval Jewish philosophers outside the Islamic context, just as it would be impossible to understand them correctly if we ignored their Jewish identity.

In the attempts to fathom, in a more subtle and nuanced way, the complex relations between Jewish thinkers and their surrounding culture, scholars often revert to metaphors. Contemporary scholarship on Judeo–Arabic culture often resorts to the term "symbiosis." The usage of this term became widespread following Goitein, who borrowed the term from the field of biology to characterize the nature of contacts between Jews and the Muslim world in all matters. This term illustrates the

separate identity that Jews managed to preserve within the dominant culture, while being full participants in it.[31] As the previous discussion of Jewish participation in the philosophical schools shows, in social terms the notion of symbiosis is indeed correct. Regarding the contents of Jewish philosophy, however, the involvement of Jews in the Muslim surrounding world often extends beyond a symbiosis, and participation becomes full integration. An extreme example is found in the case of several Jewish philosophers, whose writings betray no sign of their Judaism: Solomon ibn Gabirol, whose *Fons Vitae* was long mistakenly thought to be written by a Muslim Avicebron, or Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. after 1165), whose work was studied by Muslims but had little impact on Jewish thought.

The term "context" used in the title of the present chapter is also a metaphor, borrowed from the world of textiles. It recalls the fabric (that is to say, the material of the textile), and the harmonious texture created by the mutual dependence of the warp and weft of the woven cloth. This metaphor thus aptly depicts the multiple directions of contact between Jewish and Muslim, or Jewish and Christian, philosophers and the mutual dependency between them. This is clearly the case in Jewish philosophy as well as in the sciences, although the contact is not necessarily harmonious in all domains. A philosopher such as Maimonides, who may adopt the ideas of his Muslim colleagues and speak about them in laudatory terms, may also polemicize fiercely with Islam and denigrate it. Both expressions accurately reflect different ways in which Jews experienced their contact with the Islamic society, different threads in the same context. The textile imagery of the word "context" remains, however, two-dimensional and rather static, whereas the interchange of philosophical ideas was highly dynamic and multifaceted. Ideas, their elaborations and their interpretations, were swiftly exchanged between intellectuals, and more or less adapted to the overall system into which they were grafted.

In the domains of theology and of polemics, this dynamism has been depicted by the metaphor of a marketplace, where the same coins change hands. This metaphor is also misleading because in the fiscal transaction the coins remain intact and unchanging (except for the usual wear by continuous use). In the medieval intellectual marketplace, on the other hand, ideas and motifs moved from one religious or theological system to another, slightly modifying the system into which they were adopted, and, in the process, undergoing some transformation themselves. Like colored drops falling into a whirlpool, new ideas were immediately carried away by the stream, coloring the whole body of water while changing their own color in the process. In the swift flow of ideas that characterized the Islamic world, it is rarely possible to follow neat trajectories of "influences" or "impacts" that allow us to isolate the source of the influence and to accurately measure the

force of its impact. Moreover, when such trajectories are occasionally traced, this is sure to satisfy our detective curiosity, but it does not necessarily reveal the balance of the full picture. To give just one example: Medieval Jewish discussions of the divine attributes bear the marks of medieval Muslim thought. They struggle with the same questions (such as the issues summarized by Harry Austryn Wolfson as "the antinomies of free will"[32] or the relations between God's essence and His attributes), expressed in the same Arabic formulae. A correct analysis of the evidence, however, will necessarily take into account the *direct* influence of pre-Islamic Christian thought, as well as the indirect influence of this same Christian thought, which, filtered through Muslim thought, reached Jewish thinkers through Muslim channels. The inherent complexity of the picture cannot be overemphasized, and it would be a mistake to simplify it.

An interesting and important new methodology was introduced into the discussion by Rina Drori. Drori points out the limitations of both the historical philological and the comparative literary approaches for a fruitful discussion of the contacts between the Jewish and Arabic cultures. Instead, she offers the poly-system theory as a conceptual framework for the study of the Judeo–Arabic heterogeneous literary corpus.[33] Drori examines what she calls "The Jewish Literary System" at the beginning of the tenth century, and she characterizes the Rabbanite system as both canonized and stagnant, and therefore impermeable to outside influences. The emerging Karaite system, on the other hand, was yet noncanonized, and therefore more receptive to the new literary models of the Arabic world. "The models appropriated from Arabic entered Jewish literature mainly through noncanonized sections, such as Karaite literature," Drori argues. In her view, it was Karaite Judaism that adopted the Arabic model of a cultural system centered on the holy book, as well as the specific genres of philosophy, exegesis, and linguistics. It then remained to Saadia Gaon, who rose up to the Karaite challenge, to reshape Jewish Rabbanite culture by creating a new repertoire of literary models, adopted from the Arabic.[34]

Drori's general approach offers a fruitful methodology for the analysis of cultural changes. By focusing on the question of newly introduced literary genres, she presents an excellent criterion to recognize major shifts in cultural trends and to follow their itinerary. If examined in the realm of philosophy in particular, her approach allows us to see the emergence and early development of Jewish philosophy in the wider context of the development of Judeo–Arabic culture. Some of her particular suggestions regarding the speculative domain cannot, however, be accepted. One should first of all note the lack of evidence for the claim that Karaites preceded Rabbanites in writing philosophy or systematic exegesis or that they were more receptive to the cultural novelties offered in Arabic. In fact, the

available evidence suggests the contrary: Although the exact dates of the first Jewish philosopher, Daud al-Muqammaṣ, are not known to us, there is nothing in his writings to suggest any awareness of the Karaite–Rabbanite schism, a schism that he probably predates. Furthermore, and somewhat paradoxically, Drori's broad and ambitious theory unduly narrows the parameters of the discussion. Her analysis focuses on the developments *within* the Jewish world, comparing them with what had happened previously in the Muslim world. This approach underestimates the effect, both immediate and enduring, of Jewish exposure *in real time* to the powerful cultural storms that shook the world of intellectuals outside Judaism. To assume that Judaism – Rabbanite Judaism – could have remained untouched by these storms until the first half of the tenth century is to assume a completely isolated Jewish society within the Islamic world: a society that, despite everyday contacts, a common language, and a unifying politicoreligious dominant system, could remain impermeable to revolutionary intellectual torrents outside it. Such a presentation not only counters common sense but also contradicts the evidence at our disposal.

Philosophy was indeed a genre that, until the rise of Islam, remained foreign to the canonical Rabbanite literary corpus. Its emergence, however, predates the Rabbanite–Karaite schism. Although it first appears outside the center of the Jewish establishment (to which al-Muqammaṣ, like the Karaites, did not belong), it emerges in Judaism in the same way that it emerged in Islam, and in the same place: gradually, through contacts with Christians, and in the interface between the Arabic and Syriac cultures in the Christian centers. Saadia follows al-Muqammaṣ' example and refines it, further adopting the theological–philosophical literary model of the *summa* to Jewish readership, interlacing it with proof-texts from the Jewish canon and imprinting it with a specifically Jewish character. One must, however, take full cognizance of the gradual absorption of new ideas, where isolated texts allow us to draw the chart of continuously growing expressions of previously heard ideas.

VI. CONCLUSION

As far as we know, Jews played a very minor role in the first, oriental "translation movement," in which scientific and philosophical texts passed from Greek into Arabic. By contrast, they played a decisive role in the second, western "translation movement," which, beginning in the eleventh century, transmitted Arabic texts (both translations and original compositions) to Latin, often via Hebrew and the vernaculars. The two translation movements mark two crossroads of paramount importance in the relay race that produced our civilization. Bracketed between these two is the heyday of Islamic science and philosophy. The discrepancy between

the Jewish role in the first and second brackets demonstrates the radical change in Jewish involvement in philosophy. From the middle of the third Islamic century, Jews came to be full participants in the culture ensuing from the first translation movement, part and parcel of the adaptation and appropriation process of the Greek philosophical and scientific legacy.

Several centuries later, along with the vicissitudes of political power, the linguistic scene also changes. Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 1167) and Abraham bar Ḥiyya (d. 1136), although steeped in Arabic culture, write their works in Hebrew, inventing a suitable Hebrew vocabulary as they go. European Jews such as Judah ibn Tibbon, humbled by the achievements of their oriental coreligionists, use translations into Hebrew to absorb the Judeo–Arabic cultural heritage and make it their own. Subsequent luminaries of medieval Jewish philosophy, such as Nahmanides and Gersonides, thus became heirs to the Islamic philosophical tradition. Arguably, they too must be studied in the Islamic context. In their case, however, the context is indeed only the background.

NOTES

1 On the term "Islamic," see Kraemer 2003, note 5, p. 62; Nasr and Leaman 1996, Introduction.
2 Guttmann 1964; Vajda 1947; Sirat 1985; Frank and Leaman 2003.
3 Bahya 1928, p. 2.
4 *Guide* I. 71, Maimonides 1963, pp. 175–7.
5 Finkel 1926, p. 16.
6 As was done, for example, in Urbach 1975.
7 Maimonides 1963, p. lxxxv.
8 See Stroumsa 2002.
9 See Lasker and Stroumsa 1996, Introduction.
10 On al-Muqammaṣ and his works, see Stroumsa 1989.
11 Ben-Shammai 2003a, pp. 341–4.
12 Drori 2000, chap. 5.
13 See Ben-Shammai 1993.
14 On various aspects of the *majlis*, see Laszarus-Yafeh et al. 1999.
15 Stroumsa 2006.
16 Kraus 1930; De Smet and Van Reeth 1998, pp. 148–51.
17 Pines 1954.
18 Fenton 1986.
19 Marx 1935; Maimonides 1963.
20 *Guide* II. 2 9, Maimonides 1963, p. 269; and see Kraemer 1999.
21 See Strauss 1952 (who calls him "an enlightened *mutakallim*"); Ivry 1991a.
22 Identified in a Genizah fragment by Krisztina Sziladgyi, in the framework of the Friedberg Genizah Project.
23 Pines 1976.
24 Goitein 1971, p. 273, and see Goitein 1974.
25 Stroumsa 1985.

26 *Cf.* W. Harvey 1989; Freidenreich 2003.
27 *Guide* III. 26.
28 Pines 1980–1.
29 Stroumsa 2005.
30 Pines 1967, p. 1; Schweid 1970a, pp. 18–9.
31 Goitein 1955, pp. 127–38, 140–54.
32 H. Wolfson 1976.
33 Drori 2000, p. 127–9.
34 Drori 2000, chap. five.

3

TEXTUAL TRADITIONS

MAURO ZONTA

The history of the textual traditions of the philosophical works written down in two different languages (either in Judeo–Arabic or in Hebrew) by medieval Jewish authors active in the near east (mainly in Iraq and Egypt) and in the Mediterranean area (mainly in Spain, Provence, and Italy) during the Middle Ages, from circa 800 to 1500, appears to have been much complicated by various factors, and different aspects of it have to be considered.

Obviously, a detailed study of the handwritten tradition of the original texts of these works is very relevant for a correct philological reconstruction of those texts. Among the most important problems to be solved by scholars of medieval Jewish philosophy, in particular if they are planning a critical edition or a faithful modern translation of one of these texts, is the existence of a lesser or greater number of manuscripts, or at least handwritten fragments, of the original of that text. The language chosen by the authors of the texts was of some importance for their tradition and further diffusion, in particular in Europe during the late Middle Ages (thirteenth–fifteenth centuries) – the period when most of the extant manuscripts were copied, read, and preserved. Some of these texts were originally written in Judeo–Arabic – in reality, a form of Arabic, whose grammatical and syntactical rules, and most of its technical terms, are not substantially different from those of medieval Arabo–Islamic philosophical works. Because of this, the originals of such texts had a scanty diffusion among Jewish communities, especially in Europe, so that only few of their manuscripts are extant, and sometimes even none of them is yet found; their subjects were diffused and known mainly through translations.

Things are different for a number of medieval Jewish philosophical texts written in Hebrew. Apart from some single previous cases, the first of them was probably written in northern Spain (Aragon or Catalonia) circa 1125, when Abraham bar Ḥiyya wrote down his encyclopedia *The Foundations in Reason and the Tower of Faith* in medieval Hebrew. This form of Hebrew was enriched by a new lexicon based upon, or at least inspired by Arabic, and was adopted as the "official" language of Jewish philosophers working in Provence and in western Europe from 1200 onward. In this period, mostly in the last decades of the Middle Ages, medieval

Hebrew was more and more enlarged by a growing list of new philosophical terms, derived from the language of contemporary Latin scholasticism. This fact stimulated the diffusion of these texts among European Jewish communities, so that, in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, their copyists produced a number of manuscripts in which such Hebrew philosophical works were reproduced. In some of these manuscripts, the presence of more or less textual annotations suggests that most of such texts were not simply "copied": they were also attentively read and, possibly, even commented on and discussed in some of the Jewish academies (*yeshivot*) that, especially in the fifteenth century, were devoted to philosophy, rather than to Jewish religious studies (those by Abraham Bibago in Aragon, and by Judah Messer Leon in northern Italy).[1]

Moreover, it should be noticed that a number of manuscripts of medieval Jewish philosophical works in Hebrew are found in some libraries of eastern Europe – in particular, in the Library of the Saint Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Science, in the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg, and in the Russian State Library in Moscow, where the well-known Günzburg collection of Hebrew manuscripts (including also Judeo–Arabic ones) is preserved. Many of these manuscripts have been there for years, but have been identified and studied in detail only from 1990 onward, and some of them contain unique works pertaining to this field of study.

A similar case is that of the Hebrew manuscripts preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria in Turin, which were almost totally destroyed or seriously damaged by fire during the burning of the library in 1904: A number of them, which have been restored during the twentieth century and are now readable, preserve the original texts of medieval Hebrew works, some of which concern philosophy proper (among them, for example, there is the unique copy of a thirteenth-century anonymous Arabic–Hebrew philosophical dictionary, mostly related to the key terms of the introduction to book 2 of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*).[2] Finally, some formerly unknown fifteenth-century scholastical works written in Hebrew by Jewish scholars have been discovered in various manuscripts: Among them, there is one of the biggest medieval Jewish philosophical texts, Judah Messer Leon's commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*.[3]

As noted previously, the complete or partial translations of a number of these texts, especially those of Judeo–Arabic philosophical works into Hebrew, played an important role in their textual tradition and in their transmission as well. This fact is relevant in the case of medieval translations – that is to say, translations made in different times and in different geographical areas in the twelfth–fifteenth centuries. Most of them, of course, are Arabic into Hebrew translations: They were made

between 1160 and 1400 in northern Spain or in Provence, where the knowledge of the original language of these works among some learned Jews continued after the end of the Arabic rule over most of Spain. Some important cases of Arabic into Latin translations of medieval Jewish philosophical works should also be added to them: For example, Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Source of Life* was translated into Latin in the second half of the twelfth century but was never totally translated into Hebrew, and Maimonides' *Guide* was the object of two partial remakings and one complete translation into Latin in the first half of the thirteenth century. These translations are still very important for the reconstruction of the original texts, because they give better variant readings of some words and expressions, or they offer a text partially different from that found in the Judeo–Arabic tradition (and this difference might be due to alterations of the text by the author himself), or they preserve the whole work, whose original has been lost. (The last case is true both for the textual tradition of the *Source of Life* and for that of Abraham ibn Daud's *The Exalted Faith*, whose Judeo–Arabic texts are no more extant.) The results of a first, compendious study of the relevance of Hebrew translations of the main Judeo–Arabic works by medieval Jewish philosophers for their textual tradition and history are found in Moritz Steinschneider's *Die hebraeischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher*.[4] Steinschneider's work, which is still fundamental for understanding the importance of such tradition and for a deeper knowledge of some aspects of it, paved the way, during the twentieth century, to a more detailed analysis of the Hebrew tradition of some works by those philosophers: This analysis has resulted in new conclusions about their textual history and, in some cases, even in important discoveries about the writings of those authors.

As a matter of fact, an important object of research about the textual tradition of medieval Jewish philosophical works is given by the so-called "author's variant readings" – that is to say, minor or major alterations of their own texts made by the authors themselves. This fact, which is much studied by medieval Romance philologers, is not so deeply studied by scholars of Jewish philosophy. In reality, the comparison of a number of manuscripts including the original text of the same work shows the existence of many variant readings in each of them. In some cases, these variant readings are very few and very short, and concern mostly one word or one expression: Of course, they can be ascribed either to the author or to the copyist of the manuscript who, by this way, might have tried to make the text more understandable to the readers. In some other cases, such variant readings are more numerous or more extensive (the so-called "macroscopic variants"): They cannot usually be ascribed to a mere copyist, but seem to be the result of a radical revision of some parts of his text by the author. Finally, there are some cases in

which the author appears to have "remade" his own main work (or even many of his works), in different versions, during his life. Sometimes, these different texts having the same title were copied many times, and their different parts were mixed together, so that it has been difficult for modern scholars to distinguish their various versions. In medieval Jewish philosophy there were at least three authors who more or less apparently submitted their own works to such remakings: Abraham ibn Ezra, Gersonides, and Hasdai Crescas. In doing so, these authors, who lived and worked in various places in western Europe between 1140 and 1410, probably followed the way of a number of their Christian colleagues, that is to say, of some philosophers writing in Latin in the same period and in the same places. A more detailed study of the textual tradition of medieval Jewish philosophical works might increase the number of these cases.[5]

A fourth field of study concerning the history of textual tradition is given by the identification of philosophical sources and the research about their origin and their use: They are very useful for clarifying the exact meaning of a number of points of these texts, as well as for correcting or even reconstructing some passages of the texts themselves. This field of study is important in the case of medieval Jewish philosophy, especially as far as the works of late-medieval philosophers are concerned. In fact, these works often make use of a number of Greek, Arabo–Islamic, and Latin scholastic sources, either in an indirect way (without any reference to the authors of some doctrines or some affirmations), or through direct and explicit long quotations in Hebrew, as it happens in the case of Arabic texts in fourteenth-century Provence, and in the case of Latin texts in fifteenth-century Spain and Italy. The major source of medieval Jewish philosophy from 1200 onward is, of course, Aristotle; however, he is not usually quoted directly, but mostly through the medieval Arabo–Islamic interpreters of his works, in particular through Averroes' epitomes and commentaries ("middle" and "long" ones) on them. As far as one can infer from the extant manuscripts, medieval Jewish philosophers used among their Arabic sources also al-Fārābī (mostly as a logician) and Avicenna (often not directly, but through al-Ghazālī's interpretation of him); more rarely, they referred to Ibn Bājja. As for Latin sources, there are proofs of the fact that Jewish philosophers working in Italy from 1250 onward did know well, and used as sources contemporary Latin scholastic authors, such as Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Giles of Rome. In the period 1450–1500, a number of Jewish philosophers quoted or exploited later authors, such as Walter Burley, William Ockham, John of Jandun, Paul of Venice, and their followers and opponents (Averroists, Thomists, Scotists, and Nominalists). Of course, most of these references and quotations might have been, and in some cases surely were, taken from the medieval Hebrew

complete or partial translations of the previously mentioned texts, written from circa 1200 to 1350. Those translations, most of which are still extant, were first listed and studied by Steinschneider in the second half of the nineteenth century, and have been the object of new and detailed research from the end of the twentieth century onward.[6]

What follows is a cursory glance at the most interesting cases of textual tradition concerning medieval Jewish philosophy, also including, in some instances, science (as far as such sciences as mathematics, astronomy, or astrology are concerned) – a field that has seldom been studied by scholars as a whole.[7] They will be examined in chronological order, and particular attention will be paid to those few texts that have already been the object of critical editions, of philological studies concerning their textual history, or of detailed research about their sources. Of course, this historical overview will be particularly devoted to the results of the most recent work, and I will try to suggest new areas for research.

It should be noticed that the first traces of Jewish philosophical thought in the Middle Ages occur in the ninth and tenth centuries. Apparently, in this period there are only very few examples of the existence of a "Jewish philosophy" in the strict sense of the words: Apart from the important case of Isaac Israeli, it is known that in 933 two Jewish philosophers, Ibn Abī Ṣa'īd al-Mauṣilī and Bišr ibn Samʿān ibn 'Irs, worked in Baghdad in cooperation with Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, al-Fārābī's major disciple; however, the extant traces of their Judeo–Arabic philosophical works (there are only short references by Ibn ʿAdī himself) are really very scarce and very feeble.[8] There are, however, relevant cases of theological or exegetical Jewish works written in Judeo–Arabic during this period, which have been discovered or seriously studied from the last two decades of the twentieth century onwards. They can be ascribed to a sort of "Jewish apologetic theology (*Kalām*)," but include some sections of philosophical interest too. According to the extant data, the authors pertaining to this period and writing such works were active in the geographical area between Palestine and Iraq. The works of two of them, in particular, show interesting traces of an intricate textual history.

The first of them is Daud al-Muqammaṣ. He was active in ninth-century Syria and northern Iraq, probably between circa 825 and 850, and wrote a series of works, some of which are at least partially of philosophical relevance. The most important of them is also the most ancient Jewish *summa theologica*, the *Twenty Chapters* (in Judeo–Arabic, *ʿIšrūn maqāla*). Treatises 1–15 and part of treatise 16, devoted not only to theology and eschatology, but also to such philosophical themes as epistemology, cosmology, anthropology, and ethics, were published in 1989. This is an accurate critical edition based mostly upon the most important example of

the extant handwritten tradition (a codex found in the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg).[9] Notwithstanding this, this edition appears to be incomplete: From a further analysis of the textual history of this work, it appears that this history is more intricate than even the editor realized.[10] In particular, it has been observed that a comparison of the fragments of the *Twenty Chapters* once found in the *Cairo Genizah* and now preserved in the Cambridge University Library shows that there existed a second version of the Judeo–Arabic original of the work, partially different from that found in the critical edition. These fragments suggest that, very probably, the author himself revised his work after having diffused the first version of it – as is usual in medieval literature. Moreover, some traces of another work by al-Muqammaṣ, whose Judeo–Arabic original is lost, has been found in an Oxford manuscript, in the form of marginal quotations in Hebrew:[11] They might be the only extant fragments of his philosophical work *The Scope of the Categories According to Logic* (in Judeo–Arabic, *ʿArḍ al-maqūlāt ʿalā l-manṭiq*), whose existence is otherwise known from this title only. In fact, such a text is listed among al-Muqammaṣ' works by some medieval Arabic bibliographers.

A second and wider case of the importance of the study of textual tradition for reconstructing the philosophical thought of some early medieval Jewish authors is that of Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī. Until 1990 this Karaite author, active in Iraq in the first half of the tenth century, was known mostly through his major work, *Book of Lights and Watching Towers* (in Judeo–Arabic, *Kitāb al-anwār wa-l-marāqib*), which is a commentary on the juridical sections of the Pentateuch. In 1990, the almost complete text of another major work by al-Qirqisānī, the *Book of Gardens* (in Judeo–Arabic, *Kitāb al-riyāḍ*), a commentary on the nonjuridical, narrative sections of the Pentateuch, was found in two manuscripts, preserved in the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg.[12] (As a matter of fact, before this discovery such commentary was thought to have been almost completely lost, apart from some fragments.) The *Book of Gardens* appears to be full of passages concerning scientific and philosophical themes, where some doctrines of ancient Greek and medieval Arabo–Islamic philosophy and science, known to the author, are mentioned and discussed. Brief hints of the existence of these passages and their subjects have appeared in some studies.[13] A complete analysis of the real extension of al-Qirqisānī's textual dependence on philosophical and scientific sources should result from the projected critical edition of the *Book of Gardens*, the preparation of which was first announced in 1992.[14]

The real beginning of medieval Jewish philosophy as a new discipline, completely independent from the theology of *Kalām*, should be put in Egypt and Tunisia, circa 900–930. In this period and milieu, the Jewish scholar Isaac Israeli was active not

only as a physician but also as a philosopher – and these facts appear both from the data about him given by the medieval Arabic bibliographers and from his extant philosophical works. Unfortunately, the textual traditions of these works have been much complicated by the many "black holes" found in them. All of these works were originally written in Judeo–Arabic, and some fragments of these originals have been identified in the twentieth century; however, in most cases their complete texts are still found in medieval Hebrew and Latin translations only. The best studies about it were made around the middle of the twentieth century: these studies, whose conclusions appeared in 1958 (together with annotated English translations of most of Israeli's philosophical works),[15] are still regarded by scholars as definitive about Israeli as a philosopher. Further studies show that at least one new discovery about Israeli's textual tradition has been made; moreover, complete critical editions of some of these works are still needed, and new hypotheses about the textual tradition of Israeli's philosophy might be raised.

As a matter of fact, Israeli's philosophical work having the most intricate textual tradition is the *Book of Definitions* (in Judeo–Arabic, *Kitāb al-ḥudūd*). There are a large number of medieval translations of this work. Approximately two-thirds of the Judeo–Arabic original, discovered in the *Cairo Genizah*, were published in a noncritical edition in 1903.[16] There is a complete Latin translation of the Judeo–Arabic text, made by Gerard of Cremona around 1175, which was first published in 1515, and an accurate critical edition was published in 1938.[17] There is a complete Hebrew translation made by one Nissim ben Solomon, which was written in an unknown period and milieu and published in a noncritical edition in 1896[18] (Stern's long-promised critical edition[19] has not yet been published); it appears to have been based on the Judeo–Arabic original as well as on the Latin translation (possibly, it was made in the same time and place as Gerard's translation).[20] There is also another, fragmentary and anonymous Hebrew translation, discovered and published in a critical edition in 1957,[21] which appears to be better than that of Nissim, and might have been written in the thirteenth century by some member of Ibn Tibbon's family. It should be noticed that some other fragments of the Judeo–Arabic original are quoted by Moses ibn Ezra in his *Treatise of the Garden*.[22] Finally, according to a scholarly hypothesis, a still extant Latin compendium of the work, edited together with Gerard's translation,[23] might have been written circa 1150 by Domingo Gundisalvi, the well-known Spanish translator of Arabic philosophical texts, on the basis of the Judeo–Arabic original – although this hypothesis has yet to be proven.[24] A comparison of these four major texts suggests that each of them includes some author's variant readings.[25] Apparently, Israeli wrote a first draft of his work and diffused it, then corrected it several times and diffused each of

these corrected versions; these corrected versions were used by Latin and Hebrew translators, and should be compared in the light of a critical edition of the whole text.

Another very interesting case of textual tradition is that of Israeli's *Book of Elements* (in Judeo–Arabic, *Kitāb al-usṭuqusāt*). Here the Judeo–Arabic original has been almost totally lost: Only three short fragments of it have been found among the sources quoted by Moses ibn Ezra in his *Treatise of the Garden*, and they were published in 1976.[26] There are at least three medieval translations of the *Treatise*, which appear to have been based on the same original text, but in different ways: Gerard's Latin translation, first printed in the sixteenth century, which has not yet been published in a critical edition; the first Hebrew translation, made by Abraham ibn Ḥasdai of Barcelona for David Qimhi, in the period 1210–1230, which was published in 1900 in a good, although not really critical edition;[27] and the second, anonymous Hebrew translation, which is found in only one manuscript (in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich), and was probably made by Moses ibn Tibbon circa 1250 and is still unpublished.[28] In this case, a critical edition of the *Book of Elements* should first study and compare all the evidence of its textual history, which has not yet been subjected to a deep philological examination.[29] A similar case is that of Israeli's *Book on Spirit and Soul* (in Judeo–Arabic, *Kitāb al-rūḥ wa-l-nafs*). Of its Judeo–Arabic original, only a short fragment is extant;[30] this work is known mostly through an anonymous thirteenth-century Hebrew translation, published in a noncritical edition in 1872.[31] This translation was probably written by Abraham ibn Ḥasdai and based not on a previous Latin translation[32] (of which no trace has been found), but on the original text – as it appears from the traces of this work found in Abraham ibn Ḥasdai's *The Son of the King and the Hermit* (in Hebrew, *Ben ha-Melekh ve-ha-Nazir*).[33]

The medieval Jewish tradition of Israeli's works includes two other philosophical texts, which are not mentioned by medieval Arabic bibliographers. The most relevant of them is the *Book of Substances* (in Judeo–Arabic, *Kitāb al-ǧawāhir*), whose extant Judeo–Arabic fragments (eight as a whole), found in two manuscripts (in Saint Petersburg and in London), were published in 1957 in a critical edition:[34] Here, part of fragment seven has been identified with a passage found in Abraham ibn Ḥasdai's work, and this has enabled the reconstruction of a lost section of Israeli's text. This identification is of the utmost importance because there are no other traces of this work in the medieval Hebrew and Latin traditions. A different case is that of another, shorter work, very probably by Israeli, which bears the title *Chapter on Elements* (in Hebrew, *Pereq ha-Yesodot*). This work, published in a critical edition in 1957, has been found in a Hebrew version preserved in a manuscript of

the Biblioteca Comunale in Mantua, where it is falsely ascribed to Aristotle,[35] but no trace of its Judeo–Arabic original (if any) is extant; also the hypothesis that it was translated into Latin, and was quoted by Petrus Alfonsi (ca. 1062–1110),[36] has not been proved. In any case, the fact that neither of these works is ever mentioned by other sources, and both of them concern metaphysics and treat it in a similar way, suggests some hypotheses about a possible common origin. They might be two different versions, a minor one (the *Chapter on Elements*) and a major one (the *Book of Substances*), of the same metaphysical treatise; in its turn, this treatise might be part of a collection of philosophical texts by Israeli, possibly identical to the *Garden of the Wise* (in Judeo–Arabic, *Busṭān al-Ḥakīm*), listed among Israeli's works by medieval Arabic bibliographers. It is even possible that the *Book on Spirit and Soul* – whose subjects are not totally different from those of the above works – was a part of this collection. Of course, here too only a deeper philological comparison of all the extant sources could solve the question of the history of the textual tradition of these works.

Another case of a rather intricate textual tradition concerns one of the most well-known works of medieval Jewish philosophy: Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Source of Life* (in Judeo–Arabic, *Yanbūʿal-Ḥayāt*). This work was written in Judeo–Arabic, maybe in Zaragoza (Aragon) or in Granada (Andalusia) – two places in Spain which, in those days, were under Arabic rule, and where the author stayed for a period of his life between circa 1040 and 1050. Unfortunately, as in the case of some of Israeli's works, only a few fragments of the Judeo–Arabic original are still extant. These are the twenty-six shorter or longer quotations inserted by Moses ibn Ezra into his *Treatise of the Garden*: Twenty of them were discovered and published in 1957[37] and the critical edition of all of them appeared in 1997.[38] No other traces of the Judeo–Arabic text (not in the form of whole manuscripts or in the form of fragments or separate pages or even in the form of quotations) have been found after this important discovery. As a matter of fact, the textual tradition of this work still almost exclusively consists in two different and independent medieval versions of it, both of which raise some questions about their origin. The first of them is the Latin translation, *Fons Vitae*, written by two Spanish authors, Domingo Gundisalvi and Johannes Hispanus (the latter being probably different from the many other Spanish translators named "Johannes" and working in the twelfth century),[39] possibly in Toledo circa 1150: A first critical edition of it was published at the end of the nineteenth century,[40] but the editor was not able to take advantage of five other extant manuscripts of the work, whose existence was not yet known.[41] The second medieval version of the *Source of Life* was written in Hebrew by Shem Tov ibn Falaquera, a well-known Spanish Jewish philosopher and translator active between

1250 and 1290, probably in northern Spain. A first, not yet critical edition of it, accompanied by a French translation, was published in 1859, according to a unique manuscript found in the Bibliothèque Nationale;[42] a critical edition of it appeared only at the beginning of the twenty-first century, according to a comparison of the other manuscript of the work, found in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, which seems to be more ancient and substantially more faithful to the original text than the Paris one.[43] (Unfortunately, this otherwise accurate edition, accompanied by an Italian translation, omits almost all of Book Three of the work, probably because it is not found in the Parma manuscript.) A textual comparison of the two versions of the *Source of Life* shows that they are close in their subjects, but partially different in their form.[44] There is no doubt that Falaquera's version is not a complete translation of the original text: As is clear from the title of his version, Falaquera rather wrote a compendium of the *Source of Life*, as he describes it as a series of "extracts" (in Hebrew, *liqquttim*) taken from this work. Yet, if compared to the extant quotations of the original, most of these "extracts" seem to be substantially identical to them, both in their subjects and in their form – as is clear from the notes to the critical edition of the latter.[45] On the other hand, things are different when these "extracts" are compared with the corresponding passages of the Latin translation in their literary form. The most evident difference between them is that, whereas Falaquera's "extracts" appear as parts of a continuous philosophical treatise (the same form found in the Judeo–Arabic fragments), the Latin translation appears as a sort of "Platonic dialogue" between a teacher (who is expounding his doctrines) and his disciple (who is simply asking him questions, and in some cases only is completing his affirmations). Gundisalvi and Hispanus have usually been regarded as the most faithful translators of the Judeo–Arabic original of Ibn Gabirol's work; however, because no trace of this "dialogical" scheme is found either in Hebrew or in Judeo–Arabic, an important question concerning the history of the textual tradition of the *Source of Life* arises. Was a first Judeo–Arabic original text of this work, after having been diffused among Jewish readers, reworked in its form by the author himself, so that a second, partially different original was diffused and then translated into Latin or was the unique Judeo–Arabic original reworked, and possibly even expanded by Gundisalvi when he, together with Hispanus, wrote his own Latin translation? The second hypothesis might be more credible because Gundisalvi used to do such remakings and amplifications of the Arabic texts he "translated" into Latin: For example, in his *De Scientiis* he introduced many and deep alterations to the Arabic original of its source, al-Fārābī's *Classification of Sciences* (in Arabic, *Iḥṣā' al-ʿulūm*), as it appears from its twentieth-century critical edition[46] – and the alterations are not found in the very literal Latin translation of the Arabic text

by Gerard of Cremona. Probably, a new critical edition, or at least a new modern translation of the whole work, should be based on a radical comparison of all the extant witnesses in Judeo–Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin to allow an expert to perform an exact reconstruction of both the subjects and the form of the lost original text.

Other Judeo–Arabic philosophical or, better, "philosophical–religious" works written in the eleventh and twelfth centuries appear to have had a textual history that probably reflects their character of "life-works." This is true in the case of the *Book of Guide to the Duties of the Heart* (in Arabic, *Kitāb al-hidāya ilā farā'iḍ al-qulūb*) by a famous Spanish Jewish "theologian" and philosopher, Baḥya ibn Paquda. The Judeo–Arabic original of this work was written during the second half of the eleventh century, probably circa 1080; only a few manuscripts of it survive, and only three of them were used for the first, noncritical edition of this text, published in 1912.[47] Unfortunately, the other edition of it, which appeared in 1973, was a noncritical one because it was not based on a detailed examination of the entire textual tradition.[48] As a matter of fact, the medieval and most of the modern tradition of the *Duties of the Heart* was based on the second Hebrew translation of the work: that made by Judah ibn Tibbon in 1160–1161 in Lunel (Provence). This translation appears to be substantially literal, according to Ibn Tibbon's usual translation technique. In some cases, the form of the original text was adapted to the requirements of the non–Arabic-speaking Jewish readers, assuring its diffusion among the Jews of the whole of Europe: Of it, there exist many scores of manuscripts, some medieval compendia, more than twenty-five printed editions (the first one going back to 1489), and a number of translations into modern European languages.[49] Ibn Tibbon's translation was probably made soon after another Hebrew translation: that by Joseph Qimhi, written in Narbonne surely before 1170 (and very probably before 1160). Qimhi's translation was apparently more elegant, but less literal than that by Ibn Tibbon and it was easily submerged by the latter. In all likelihood, its text ceased to be copied very early, so that the only extant section of it is, as it seems, a passage of chapter 7 of the work, published in 1846.[50] Therefore, the current knowledge of the subjects and the text of the *Duties of the Heart* is substantially still entrusted to Ibn Tibbon's translation; there is not a true critical edition of the Judeo–Arabic original, which should be based not only on the Arabic tradition, but also on a detailed textual comparison of both medieval Hebrew translations to reconstruct the text as it was first written and diffused, and then corrected by the author himself and copied various times – as happened in most medieval literatures.

The case of another Judeo–Arabic "philosophical–religious" work written only some decades after this appears to be very similar. The well-known *Book of the*

Khazar, or *Kuzari* (in Hebrew, *Sefer Kuzari*) by Judah Halevi has an intricate textual history, as is apparent even from the very title of the work. The Judeo–Arabic original title of its definitive version, finished in Egypt in 1141 (the so-called "oriental version"), was the *Book of Reply and Proof in Favour of the Despised Religion* (in Arabic, *Kitāb al-Radd wa̓l-Dalīl fī̓l Din al-dhalīl*) – or a title very similar to this. From the author's letters once found in the *Cairo Genizah*, it seems that the first version of the work was written in Spain circa 1120–1125, as a reply to religious questions put to him by a local Karaite; probably, this first version included the subjects of treatise 3 of the final work.[51] The widest version of the work written before the author left Egypt in 1140 (the so-called "occidental version") consisted in the whole text of its five treatises and might have had the title *Book of the Khazar*, which was adopted by the Hebrew tradition. The "oriental version," exemplified by a very limited Judeo–Arabic textual tradition (only one manuscript, in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and twelve fragments), was published in 1977, the critical edition of the last, definitive version of the work, as revised by the author himself.[52] (A first edition of the Judeo–Arabic text was published in 1887, but was full of mistakes.)[53] As a matter of fact, before the twentieth century Judah Halevi's work was known only in its "occidental version," which is no longer found in its Judeo–Arabic original, but through its medieval Hebrew translation made by Judah ibn Tibbon in Lunel in 1167. As in the case of the *Duties of the Heart*, Ibn Tibbon's literal translation was copied in many manuscripts, was commented on many times during the Middle Ages, was published in many editions from 1506 onward, and was translated into many European languages. In reality, a first Hebrew translation of the work had been made before this, in Spain, by Judah ibn Cardinal: however, it seems not to have been as literal as that of Ibn Tibbon and was diffused only among some religious men and kabbalists,[54] so that the whole text is lost, and only the translator's introduction and some brief fragments are still extant.[55]

Unfortunately, as in the case of Ibn Gabirol's *Source of Life*, some of the most well-known Jewish philosophical works written in twelfth-century Spain are now lost in their Judeo–Arabic originals, so that it is impossible to read and publish them in the very same way they were written by their authors. To read and interpret them, both philologists and historians of philosophy have to rely upon the extant medieval Hebrew translations. Unfortunately, these translations occasionally show some evident alterations or obvious mistakes with respect to their probable originals so that only the tentative reconstruction of the original text of the relevant passages (or even of the original variant readings of single words) can help modern scholars to understand their real meaning.

There are at least two cases of this. Joseph ibn Tzaddiq's *Book on the Microcosm* (in Arabic, *Kitāb al-ʿālam al-ṣaghīr*) was written in Cordoba between circa 1130 (probably after Moses ibn Ezra's *Treatise of the Garden*, which might have been among its sources) and 1149 (when the author died). Here, the textual tradition consists in only one anonymous Hebrew translation, possibly written in Spain during the thirteenth century. This translation was published two times: first in a noncritical edition, around the middle of the nineteenth century,[56] and then in a critical edition, based on the five extant manuscripts of the complete text, at the beginning of the twentieth century.[57] Finally, it has been accurately translated into English.[58] However, not all the difficulties of its text (some of whose points are not yet fully intelligible) have yet been solved.

Another relevant case is that of Abraham ibn Daud's *The Exalted Faith* (in Arabic, *Kitāb al-ʿaqīda al-rafīʿa*). The Judeo–Arabic original, one of the first examples of medieval Jewish Aristotelianism, was written in Toledo in 1160–1161, but it was lost, probably shortly after the fourteenth century. Only two Hebrew translations of it are still extant: one by the Aragonese philosopher Solomon ibn Labi, a member of Hasdai Crescas' team, written circa 1370; the other one by the Castilian philosopher and kabbalist Samuel ibn Motot, dating back to 1391–1392. The former, which is more faithful to the usual technique and lexicon found in late-medieval Hebrew translations of philosophical texts, is found in a number of manuscripts. It was first published in 1852[59] and had a new edition, together with a literal English translation, in 1986,[60] but has not yet been published in a critical edition. The latter, which has a more characteristic vocabulary, is witnessed by one codex only, found in the Biblioteca Comunale in Mantua, and is still unpublished.[61] Evidently, the two Hebrew translations have some textual differences: In a critical edition of the work, such differences would cause some problems, which could not be easily solved. Only in some particular cases have scholars found a solution for them. For example, in a 1964 article Shlomo Pines suggested a solution for a textual difference between Ibn Labi's and Ibn Motot's translations.[62] According to the one by Ibn Labi, Ibn Daud accused his predecessor Salomon ibn Gabirol of having "spoken very ill of (or: with) the (Jewish) people" (in Hebrew, *sarah gedolah ʿal ha-ʾummah*); however, according to the translation by Ibn Motot, he accused him of having "led astray the (Jewish) people through a great sophism" (in Hebrew, *hitʿah ʾet ha-ʾummah hatʿaʾah gedolah*). As suggested by Pines, the original text of this passage probably included a form 3 or 4 of the Arabic verb *ġaliṭa*: Probably, Ibn Motot correctly read it as *ġāliṭa* or *aġliṭa*, "to deceive" or "to commit a mistake" (in the sense of "to lead astray"), whereas Ibn Labi incorrectly read it as if it were written *ġāliza* or *aġliza*, "to treat harshly" or "to speak rudely with (somebody)."

Of course, only an accurate and comparative study of the textual tradition of the complete work would allow scholars to publish a really critical edition of it.[63] It should be noted that, according to a quotation in Hebrew found in the work of a medieval Jewish author, Ibn Daud also wrote another philosophical work, probably in Judeo–Arabic: a commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, which appears to have been lost.[64]

By contrast, the major philosophical or scientific works of other twelfth-century Spanish Jewish authors are transmitted in their originals better than in their translations. The most important example of a Judeo–Arabic work at least partially devoted to philosophy, written in this period and milieu, and mostly preserved in its original language is Moses ibn Ezra's *Treatise of the Garden About the Metaphorical and Proper Senses (of the Bible)* (in Arabic, *Maqāla al-ḥadīqa fī maʿnā l-maǧāz wa-l-ḥaqīqa*). As a matter of fact, only the first section of this work is devoted to the subjects of Jewish theology (inspired by Arabo–Islamic Muʿtazilism) and philosophy (inspired by Arabic Neoplatonism), whereas the second section is a lexicographical exposition of the various terms concerning the human body. The Judeo–Arabic original was probably written while the author was in Christian Spain, maybe between circa 1120 and 1130. Paul Fenton, who has published a book about the subjects, sources, and influences of this work,[65] has shown that the original is still preserved by some exemplars: one almost complete manuscript (now in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem), another manuscript including the text of the first half of the work (in the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg), and six fragments (found in various places not only in Saint Peterburg, but also in the Cambridge University Library, and in the Bodleian Library in Oxford). Fenton has used the first of them for quoting in his book a number of the work's passages, translated into English. On the other hand, medieval Hebrew translation, made in Lunel (Provence) circa 1170 by a certain "Judah" (very probably, he was Judah al-Ḥarizi, although somebody has identified him with Judah ibn Tibbon),[66] appears to be not as useful for the reconstruction of the original text as the Hebrew translations by Ibn Tibbon's family are for some of these works. First of all, if compared with the Judeo–Arabic text, this translation appears to be not always a literal rendering of the original wording of this book. Second, it is not yet certain whether it also covered the second section of the work because the preserved parts of this translation concern some chapters of the first section only – although three short Hebrew quotations of the second section have been found in a fourteenth-century Jewish lexicographer, who also quoted some passages of al-Harizi's translation of the first section.[67] Third, the four Hebrew manuscripts of al-Harizi's translation are not really good exemplars: The Rome manuscript, found

in the Biblioteca Vaticana, is marred by a number of textual mistakes; the folios of the main Oxford manuscript, although their text is better than that of the Rome manuscript, are in disorder and have many lacunas; and the other two manuscripts, found in the Stadtbibliothek in Hamburg and in the Bodleian Library, are mere "patchworks of quotations," taken here and there from different passages of the Hebrew translation of the work. There are, however, some medieval quotations of al-Harizi's translation, mainly found in some Hebrew mystical works,[68] which might be useful for the textual reconstruction. Of course, the much desired critical edition of the *Treatise of the Garden* should first of all be based on the Judeo–Arabic original, and only in second place on al-Ḥarizi's translation.[69]

In the same period, while Moses ibn Ezra, Joseph ibn Tzaddiq, and Abraham ibn Daud wrote their philosophical works in Judeo–Arabic, first in northern Spain (Aragon and Catalonia) and then in western Europe (northern Italy, France, even England), two well-known Jewish scholars wrote the original texts of their scientific and philosophical–scientific works in Hebrew, and even rendered some of them into Latin. They lived in countries where Judeo–Arabic was not read, and where Christian scholars writing in Latin could cooperate with them in translating their works into that language, sometimes in a revised form. A number of the various versions of their original texts and of their Latin translations or remakings have been identified and studied.

In some cases, the textual tradition of these works is really very scanty. For example, of Abraham bar Ḥiyya's *The Foundations in Reason and the Towers of Faith* (in Hebrew, *Yesodei ha-Tevunah u-Migdal ha-Emunah*) there is only a score of pages, in four manuscripts preserved in different libraries (the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Staatsbibliothek–Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, and the Biblioteca Vaticana in Rome), which were used for the critical edition of this work.[70] These pages include only the author's introduction and the first two chapters of the work about arithmetic and geometry. From the introduction, it seems that bar Hiyya wrote, or at least intended to write, a much wider work, the first medieval Hebrew encyclopedia of science and philosophy, including not only mathematics and the medieval *quadrivium*, but also physics and natural sciences, ethics, and metaphysics. The textual tradition is so limited, however, that many doubts have been raised about the real existence of such a longer work. Was it really composed as a whole, and then almost completely lost, as it was replaced by the new thirteenth-century Hebrew encyclopedias or was it only begun, but never finished by the author? Both these hypotheses have been suggested by an examination of the subjects of the work and by its textual tradition;[71] however, no sure conclusion about this question has yet been reached.

In other cases, twelfth-century scientific and philosophical–scientific works in Hebrew were surely rewritten and totally revised one or more times by the author himself: This fact complicates their handwritten tradition, so that it has been seriously examined only from the end of the twentieth century onward. This happened to a number of works by Abraham ibn Ezra, the well-known Spanish Jewish polymath, who worked in various regions of western Europe (Rome and Tuscany, north-eastern Italy, Provence, Normandy, and England) between circa 1140 and 1160. He first wrote, or let one of his pupils write, his texts, and spread them among his public – sometimes in two different versions, in Hebrew and (probably helped by a dragoman) in Latin; then, he revised some of them and diffused these revisions. In some cases, the texts of such revisions might have been confused and mixed with the already existing ones.[72] As a matter of fact, from a general overview of the textual history and tradition of Abraham ibn Ezra's prose works, both published and unpublished, be they about astronomy and astrology, mathematics, Hebrew grammar, Jewish religion, or the Bible, with the exclusion of mere translations (four in all), it appears that there were thirty-nine at least. Among them, seven appear to have been subjected to two revisions, and in the case of four of them, the second revision appears only in Latin; in any case, eighteen of them surely underwent one revision by the author.[73] The very intricate question of the textual history of Abraham ibn Ezra's works, which has just been faced in detail, is still waiting for more accurate studies, which should lead to more certain conclusions about what has been tentatively suggested at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Even in the case of the textual tradition of the most important and well-known work of medieval Jewish philosophy, Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* (in Arabic, *Dalālat al-Ḥāʾirīn*), there are a number of much discussed, still-open questions. As is well known, this work was written in Judeo–Arabic, between circa 1180 (maybe from 1185, when Maimonides' pupil to whom it is dedicated, Joseph ben Judah, went from Cairo to Aleppo) and 1191 (when, from one of Maimonides' works, the *Treatise on the Resurrection of the Dead*, appears to have been already finished). It would be justified to suppose that the original text was first written down in a provisional form, and then rewritten, revised, and possibly widened one or more times, maybe after 1191, thus being a sort of "life-work," just like other of Maimonides' works: his *Commentary on the Mishnah* and his *Aphorisms of Moses*; however, no evidence of this has yet been found. The original text of the *Guide of the Perplexed* is still read, reproduced, and translated as it was published by Salomon Munk after the middle of the nineteenth century, in a good but noncritical edition based on only a few manuscripts (those preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale

in Paris, in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and in the Bibliotheek der Rijks Universiteit in Leiden).[74] Some variant readings, found in various manuscripts and printed editions of the book, were added in a short appendix to a 1931 republication of Munk's edition;[75] others, found in manuscripts from Yemen and from Turkey, were used in two editions of the text and appeared in the 1970s, for correcting some points of Munk's edition.[76] In any case, the Judeo–Arabic text of Maimonides' main philosophical work has not yet been the object of a critical edition, and even a preliminary, systematic collection and study of the whole handwritten tradition (which is much more extensive than the one already examined) was begun in 1990, chiefly (but not solely)[77] by Colette Sirat and her team.[78]

The *Guide of the Perplexed* was diffused through some medieval translations as well, which should be taken into serious consideration in the preparation of a critical edition. This is due to the fact that at least three of these translations go back to the first half of the thirteenth century, thus being very close to the time when the work was written, and two of them were directly based on a critical examination and interpretation of the Judeo–Arabic original. Of the two Hebrew translations of the whole work, the former (a more literal one) was made by Samuel ibn Tibbon, under Maimonides' "blessing," and was finished in 1204; the latter (a more free one) was made by Judah al-Harizi between 1205 and 1213. It should be observed that, although the former was copied and is still extant in many manuscripts, the latter had a very tiny diffusion, so that it is now found in three codices only. Both translations have been published a number of times (the former from the fifteenth century onward, the latter mostly in the second half of the nineteenth century), but no critical edition of them has yet been published. Moreover, at the end of the twentieth century scholarly research has pointed out the importance of a third fragmentary Hebrew translation of the Judeo–Arabic original by Shem Tov ibn Falaquera, whose text, first published in 1837, had not yet been studied in detail. This "translation" consists in Falaquera's quotations of a number of passages and terms of Maimonides' work, found in an appendix (*Marvellous Commentary*, in Hebrew *Be'ur Nifla'*) to his commentary on it, *Guide to the Guide*: These quotations are very useful for clarifying some point of the textual reconstruction and the history of the textual tradition of the *Guide*.[79] The medieval Latin tradition of the work has been examined, and some of its textual problems have been tentatively solved. This tradition has been studied by a number of scholars, from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, and a number of different hypotheses about it have been suggested. In reality, as shown by the most accurate study of the Latin textual tradition of Maimonides' *Guide*,[80] of the three anonymous Latin "translations" of it, the first one, written in Rome in 1224, and the second one, written in

an unknown place (maybe in France) circa 1240, were not real translations, but rather "remakings" of some chosen sections of the text (the introduction to book 2, chapters 26–49 of book 3). These remakings were apparently based upon Ibn Tibbon's translation, so that their usefulness for the textual reconstruction of the original is very limited. The only complete and literal Latin translation playing a key role in the textual tradition of Maimonides' work is the *Dux Neutrorum*, whose exact date and place of composition is still discussed by scholars;[81] surely, it was based on al-Harizi's translation, thus serving as an important foundation for the reconstruction of the latter. Although this translation appeared in an *editio princeps* in 1520, it should still be published in a critical edition, on the grounds not only of this early-sixteenth-century edition, but also of the thirteen extant manuscripts of it (the most ancient of them goes back to the same period as that edition). Therefore, in the case of Maimonides' *Guide*, just as in the case of Isaac Israeli's philosophical works and Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Source of Life*, a complete and detailed examination of its textual tradition both in Judeo–Arabic and in Hebrew and Latin should be made, in consideration of a future critical edition of this work.

The philosophical and scientific works of some major Jewish authors of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had an even more intricate textual tradition. They were not translated as a whole into other medieval literary languages: All of them were directly written in Hebrew, as their authors lived and worked in European countries after 1300, when Judeo–Arabic was no longer the main language of philosophy and science among Jews. They were not the object of a complete medieval Latin translation, as Maimonides' *Guide* had been. Some of them were real "life-works," as their writing out took up many years of the authors' life, and included many remakings and extensions; in some cases, their authors wrote and diffused different versions of them, just as some of their Christian colleagues did. Obviously, this fact has complicated the production of critical editions, so that some of these texts are still read in their old sixteenth-century *editiones principes*. In particular, this happens to two major philosophical masterpieces: Gersonides' *Wars of the Lord*, and Crescas' *Light of the Lord*.

The textual tradition of Gersonides' philosophical and scientific works had been occasionally studied before the last decade of the twentieth century, but it has become the object of a number of serious and detailed examinations only from 1990 onward. Some of the first important studies about it have appeared in a volume on Gersonides as a "philosopher–scientist," published in 1992;[82] they have paved the way to accurate studies on the subjects and sources of Gersonides' works and, in some cases, to critical editions of them. In 1992 an annotated English translation of the main pillar of Gersonides' logic, the *Book on Correct Syllogism* (in Hebrew,

Sefer ha-Heqqesh ha-Yashar), based on a critical edition of the text according to its two versions, was published.[83] In the following years, some unknown works by him have been discovered: In 1993, the unique copy of his supercommentary on Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's *De Caelo* was found in a manuscript in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma,[84] and in 1998 the extant traces of his lost supercommentary on the first books of Averroes' *Long Commentary* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* were identified and analyzed;[85] in 2000, the second revised version (unknown until then) of his *Book of the Art of Calculation* (in Hebrew, *Sefer Ma'aseh Ḥoshev*), which was first written in 1321 and rewritten with some additions one year later, was identified, and part of the whole text has been translated into English.[86] However, Gersonides' philosophical "life-work" was *Wars of the Lord* (in Hebrew, *Milḥamot Adonai*), which was probably begun in 1317, was certainly completed in 1329, and was probably revised by the author until his death in 1344. Very likely, it was written while the author was in Avignon or near it, maybe at the court of Robert of Anjou King of Naples (1319–1324),[87] and certainly at the Papal court (from 1334 to his death, Gersonides was the astronomer and astrologer of two popes: Benedict XII and Clemens VI). As shown by detailed study,[88] the textual genesis and history of this work appear to be rather intricate. Probably, in the years 1317–1321 Gersonides wrote only book five, parts two and three, and book six of the whole work: He could have intended them as a monograph about the question of word's eternity. In the following years (1321–1325), while writing his supercommentaries on Averroes, he changed his mind, and added books one through four, about some key questions of Jewish religion and medieval philosophy: the soul's immortality, prophecy, divine omniscience, and providence. He then revised the work and, before ending it, inserted part one of book five, about astronomy. This very long section, which includes 136 chapters, was very early separated from the other parts of the work, as shown by the handwritten tradition. (Only one manuscript of the complete text of *Wars*, once preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria in Turin and destroyed in 1904, included this section of the work.)[89] This section of the work only was almost completely translated into Latin by the Italian Augustinian Peter of Alessandria, in the last years of the author's life.[90] Of course, a critical edition of *Wars* is much desired: Its first, noncritical edition, in which the section on astronomy is lacking, appeared in 1560, and the Berlin edition, published in 1866, was based on it;[91] only a critical edition would solve all the questions raised by the complex history of this text. Many questions concern the textual tradition of other Gersonides' works too. It has been suggested that Gersonides might have revised at least some of his own supercommentaries on Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle.[92] There are also traces of the fact that Gersonides, like other contemporary

Hebrew commentators, consulted and compared different texts of Averroes' works. Moreover, it has been shown that Gersonides was probably able to read Arabic, but was not able to translate Arabic texts into Hebrew.[93] Did he know Latin too? It has been suggested that the Latin translations of some of Gersonides' scientific works were made by Peter of Alessandria upon an immediate oral translation into Provençal by the author himself;[94] but the manuscript evidence might rather suggest that Gersonides directly dictated an oral Latin translation to Peter, who made linguistic and stylistic revisions of it into better Latin (just as a Christian pupil for Abraham ibn Ezra, and Domingo Gundisalvi for Abraham ibn Daud might have done).[95] Surely, there is some evidence that Gersonides' Provençal versions of some of his own works were not simply "intermediate" translations between the Hebrew originals and their Latin translations, but independent texts, to be attributed to the author himself.[96]

The textual tradition of another well-known late medieval Jewish philosophical work, Ḥasdai Crescas' *Light of the Lord* (in Hebrew, *'Or ha-Shem*), appears to have been similar to that of Gersonides' *Wars* – although it has not yet been the object of a detailed study. Crescas' work was probably the result of a long remaking: It was probably begun after the Jewish pogrom in Barcelona (1391) and was concluded in 1410, two years before the author's death. The most important manuscript of what is usually regarded to be the final version of the work is found in the Biblioteca Mediceo-Laurenziana in Florence; however, some "author's variant readings," which are probably more recent than this "final" version, have been found in other manuscripts.[97] Of course, in this case too a critical edition of the work is much desired: It should be substituted for the only existing one, first published in Ferrara in 1555, which is full of mistakes and omissions – probably, even more than those found in that of Gersonides.

Some late-medieval Jewish minor authors who worked in western Europe and wrote mainly in Hebrew have been the object of detailed studies about the textual traditions of their philosophical works; these studies have concluded that a number of those works had an intricate textual history. New discoveries have been made about the sources and use of sources of three thirteenth-century Hebrew philosophical–scientific encyclopedias: Judah ha-Cohen ibn Matqah's *The Study of the Science* (in Hebrew, *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah*), Shem Tov ibn Falaquera's *The Opinions of the Philosophers* (in Hebrew, *De'ot ha-Filosofim*), and Gershom ben Shelomoh of Arles' *The Gate of Heavens* (in Hebrew, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*).

The Study of the Science, first written in Judeo–Arabic circa 1235, while the author was still in his homeland (Spain), was translated by the author himself into Hebrew in 1247, while he was in Italy at the court of the emperor Frederick

II, where he possibly worked as an astrologer. The Hebrew text only, hitherto unpublished, is preserved in a number of manuscripts, and the Judeo–Arabic text appears to have been lost; the first part of it deals with Aristotelian philosophy (logic, physics and natural science, and metaphysics) and includes both literal quotations and shorter syntheses of Averroes' commentaries on it, which have been studied in view of a critical edition of this work.[98] *The Opinions of the Philosophers*, written in Hebrew, probably in northern Spain, circa 1270, and dealing with physics, natural science, and metaphysics, is still preserved in two almost complete manuscripts; it is unpublished (apart from some short sections of it, e.g., its philosophical dictionary)[99] and shows no signs of having been altered by the author. It is full of explicit and implicit references to Arabic philosophical and scientific sources, some of which have been already identified,[100] whereas many others are still in need of a deeper study. *The Gate of Heavens*, written in Hebrew, probably in Provence, circa 1300, was the most diffused of them: Not only was it copied in a number of manuscripts, it was also published several times, from 1547 onward. It deals mostly with the natural sciences (mineralogy, botany, and zoology), anthropology, and astronomy, according to the order of creation; its Arabic and Jewish sources have been identified,[101] but its textual tradition might be more intricate than that of the other two, and is still in need of further investigation. Of course, there are other thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Hebrew philosophical–scientific encyclopedias, whose textual tradition has not yet been examined in detail; in other cases, such examination has just begun. This is true, in particular, for Levi ben Abraham of Villefranche's *Chaplet of Grace* (in Hebrew, *Livyat Ḥen*), written in Provence circa 1300 in six books, of which only some parts are still extant,[102] and whose sections of book 6, about creation and about prophecy and the secrets of Law, have been published in a critical edition.[103]

The textual histories of some philosophical works of three Jewish minor authors, active in Spain, Provence, or Italy between circa 1250 and 1350, have been the object of detailed examinations. In chronological order, the first of them is Falaquera's *Guide to the Guide* (in Hebrew, *Moreh ha-Moreh*), a commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* written in 1280, whose critical edition appeared in 2001.[104] What is relevant here is the huge number of Falaquera's references to Arabic philosophical sources; in many cases, they consist in literal quotations, part of which have not been identified by the editor. Some of their sources are not used in Falaquera's other works; some of these quotations are ignored by other previous or contemporary Jewish authors and can be useful for the textual reconstruction of those works;[105] some others might even be taken from lost passages or lost works,

and can be found only here.[106] Some years after Falaquera's book, another Hebrew philosophical work appeared: Hillel ben Samuel of Verona's *Book on the Rewards of Souls* (in Hebrew, *Sefer Tagmulei ha-Nefesh*), completed in Forlì (northern Italy) in 1291. It had some diffusion in Italy in the late Middle Ages, and was first published in 1874 in a noncritical edition based on only one manuscript, which was full of omissions and mistakes; a very accurate critical edition, based on a complete examination of all the handwritten tradition, was published only one century later in 1981.[107] Such an edition leads to two important conclusions about the textual tradition of this work. First, the first part of this work, about the nature of human soul, is full of implicit, often literal quotations of Latin sources – Avendauth's (Ibn Daud's?) Latin translation of Avicenna's *On Soul* (a section of his encyclopedia *The Cure*; in Arabic, *al-Šifāʾ*), Domingo Gundisalvi's *De Anima*, and Thomas Aquinas' *De Unitate Intellectus contra Averroim* – so that it proves the existence, before 1300, of a sort of Italian "Hebrew Thomism." Second, it is evident that the author wrote and diffused at least two different versions of the whole work. It has been supposed that Hillel of Verona was involved in the writing of another philosophical work: the Latin treatise *De Beatitudine Animae*, first published in 1501, which has some striking similarities to a part of *Book on the Rewards of Souls*; according to some scholars, before being translated into Latin, it could have been composed in Hebrew either by some pupil of Hillel[108] or even by Hillel himself.[109] A later representative of this "Hebrew Thomism," Judah ben Moses ben Daniel of Rome (known as Giuda Romano), living in Rome and Naples in the period 1310–1330, wrote a number of Hebrew philosophical works based on Latin scholastic sources. The textual tradition and sources of some of these works have been examined in detail. Studies about the handwritten tradition of Giuda Romano's *Philosophical Anthology* (in Hebrew, *Maʾamarim*), as well as about his commentaries on pseudo-Aristotle's *De Causis*, on Averroes' *De Substantia Orbis* and on chapters 1–2 of *Genesis* (in Hebrew, *Beʾur Maʿaseh Bereshit*), have suggested that these works were the object of remakings by the author, who used to insert into the versions of his own works literal quotations from scholastic texts by Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, as well as minor Italian scholars such as Alexander of Alessandria and Angel of Camerino.[110] Also an original philosophical work by Moses Narboni, a Jewish philosopher living in Provence in the first half of the fourteenth century, and his commentaries on some medieval Arabic texts (which he might have personally translated into Hebrew or allowed to be translated by a still anonymous member of his team) has been published in critical editions, so that their textual traditions have been the object of more attentive study.[111]

Some minor Jewish philosophers lived, worked, and wrote in Hebrew in Spain (Castilia and Aragon) and in northern Italy during the second half of the fifteenth century. They appear to have reproduced and sometimes even mixed up the doctrines of different philosophical schools; some of their works, as shown by textual analysis, reflect the trends of contemporary Latin scholasticism, although in a sort of eclectic way. Some studies have come to new, sometimes important discoveries about such works, their sources, and their use of sources. Some of these philosophers, especially in Spain, appear to have belonged to a Jewish Averroism, but they did know Thomism well: This is evident in most of the philosophers of the Ibn Shem Tov family, active in Castilia in the period 1440–1480. The philosopher Joseph ibn Shem Tov (active ca. 1442–1455) used among the sources of his commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* a Hebrew supercommentary on Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on this work, written in Spain circa 1400, which was in turn partially inspired by Thomas Aquinas' own commentary on Aristotle;[112] also in his philosophical–theological work *The Glory of God* (in Hebrew, *Kevod 'Elohim*) he used as sources both Aquinas' commentary on book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and his *Summa Theologica*.[113] As for Joseph's two sons, Isaac ibn Shem Tov wrote different supercommentaries on Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on *Physics*, as is clear from the study of their textual histories,[114] whereas Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov inserted into his commentaries on Averroes' *Middle Commentaries* on Aristotle's *Physics*, *De Generatione*, and *De Anima* (1478–1480) references to Aquinas' commentaries on Aristotle.[115] A similar brand of Jewish Averroism mixed together with references to contemporary Latin scholasticism is found in the Italian Jewish philosopher Elijah del Medigo (1460–1493). In this case, the textual tradition is complicated by a new fact: Del Medigo's extant scholastic works in Hebrew, the commentary on Averroes' *De Substantia Orbis* and the *Two Questions on Soul*, were originally written in Latin and later translated into Hebrew by the author himself. Del Medigo's still unpublished Hebrew versions of these philosophical works appear to differ from their Latin originals only in some passages, concerning autobiographical data and references to religious questions.[116]

As a matter of fact, in addition to Averroism, other trends appeared among Jewish philosophers in late fifteenth-century Spain and Italy; some of these trends constitute a real "Hebrew scholasticism," whose textual tradition has been first studied in detail only from the end of the twentieth century onward. There was a "Hebrew Thomism" in Baruch ibn Ya'ish, a Jewish schoolman active either in Castile or in southern Italy (this is still an open question) circa 1485: Three Hebrew manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris preserve a sort of *reportatio* (that is to say, a literal report of a philosopher's teachings, written down by one of his

pupils) of his long and detailed commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aquinas is quoted on many points and used as an implicit source in others.[117] Ibn Ya'ish also wrote a "Hebrew scholastic" commentary on the *De Anima*, discovered in a Moscow manuscript, which has not yet been analyzed as a whole, although its dependence on Aquinas' commentary on the same book appears to be very probable.[118] There was a "Hebrew Scotism" in Eli Habillo, active in the period circa 1465–1480 in Aragon, where he worked both as a philosopher and as a translator of scholastic works from Latin into Hebrew. (According to Jean-Pierre Rothschild, he might have been connected to the Ibn Shem Tovs' circle.)[119] Although his philosophical work appears to have been rather limited (until now, only some of his philosophical questions, found in a manuscript in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, have been studied in detail),[120] the translating work was really quite wide, and ranged from Thomism (in particular, fifteenth-century Thomism as represented by the Parisian Latin philosopher Jean Letourneur) to Scotism. It included a Hebrew translation of Antonius Andreas' questions on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, found in two manuscripts (one in the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria in Turin, and the other – an apparent copy of the former – in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma), where, in a long introduction, there is an attempt to spread among Jewish philosophers an interest in the works and doctrines of fourteenth-century Scotist authors (not only Antonius Andreas, but also Francis of Meyronnes and John the Canon). Another, more original attempt to create a "Hebrew Scotism" is found in some works by Abraham Bibago, a well-known Jewish philosopher and theologian active in Aragon between 1446 and 1489, as has been shown by a study about the textual tradition and the subjects of some of his major philosophical works – in particular, of his *Treatise on the Plurality of Forms* (in Hebrew, *Ma'amar be-ribbui ha-Tzurot*), where, together with Thomas Aquinas and various scholastic texts, John Duns Scot and Scotist Latin scholars are often quoted or used as sources.[121] Of course, Bibago too appears to have been an eclectic philosopher, and his "Hebrew Scotism" did not exclude other interests, as shown by his quotations from Averroes' *Long Commentary* on the *De Anima*, found in a manuscript in the Biblioteca Estense in Modena.[122] Finally, the case of the Italian Jewish schoolman, Judah Messer Leon, who studied and worked as a philosopher in some places in northern Italy (Padua, Bologna, Mantua) in the period circa 1450–1475, should be mentioned: His philosophical works appear to have been partially based on contemporary Paduan Latin Averroism and had an important textual tradition, which has begun to be studied only at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In particular, Messer Leon's huge commentary on books 1–3 of Aristotle's *Physics* (covering more than 1000 pages) has been discovered in three manuscripts;[123] a summary account of its subjects and a list of its numerous

explicit quotations of some Latin schoolmen (Messer Leon mentions many times Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, William Ockham, John of Jandun, Walter Burley, as well as – without naming them – Paul of Venice and Gaetano de' Thiene), together with the discovery of two other manuscripts of it, was published in 2006.[124] These works are still waiting for critical editions, or at least for a complete study and detailed analysis of their scholastic sources, which should show their textual relationship to them.

NOTES

1 About these academies, see Sirat and Geoffroy 2005, pp. 77–86; Tirosh-Rothschild 1991, pp. 35–7.
2 Zonta 2007.
3 About some of these works, see Zonta 2006b.
4 Steinschneider 1893, pp. 368–460.
5 For example, the case of Isaac ibn Shem Tov.
6 For a general overview of the research about this field, see Steinschneider 1893, pp. 1–367, 461–500. For the general results of twentieth-century research about it, see Zonta 1996. Of course, the data and the conclusions found in both these books should be enriched and improved, as a consequence of more recent studies about these translations.
7 See one of the few recent studies about it in Sirat 1988.
8 Pines 1955.
9 Stroumsa 1989.
10 See Chiesa 1996, pp. 137–8, where partial hints at the textual tradition of the *Twenty Chapters* are found.
11 The manuscript is Oxford, Bodleian Library, Mich. 335 (Neubauer 1318), where, on folios 21r–36v, the marginal quotations from al-Muqammaṣ on logic are found. See Zonta 2002, p. 17.
12 Noja 1990.
13 Chiesa 1989, pp. 93–7. Other examples of the relationship between some doctrines found in al-Qirqisānī's *Book of Gardens* and Arabo–Islamic philosophy are found in an article about late-twentieth-century studies on the Judeo–Arabic literature. See Chiesa 2002, pp. 48–51.
14 Chiesa and Lockwood 1992.
15 Altmann and Stern 1958.
16 Hirschfeld 1903. (This edition appears to be full of omissions and mistakes.)
17 Muckle 1937–1938, pp. 299–327.
18 Hirschfeld 1896. (This edition was based on only one manuscript, and then preserved in London, Jews' College.)
19 Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 6.
20 According to Jacob L. Teicher (see Teicher 1956, pp. 416–22), Nissim's translation was based on the Latin one *only*; however, this assumption has not been proved.
21 Altmann 1957.
22 S. M. Stern 1957.
23 Muckle 1937–1938, pp. 328–40.

24 Alonso 1947, pp. 325–8.
25 Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 233.
26 Fenton 1976, pp. 289–91.
27 Fried 1900. (This edition is based on only one manuscript, found in Leiden in the Bibliotheek der Rijks Universiteit, whose text is compared with that preserved in the other two translations.)
28 Fried 1900, pp. 75–83. The manuscript is in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, hebr. 43, folios 22v–52r.
29 This fact appears from the partial English translation of the central section of the work. See Altmann and Stern 1958, pp. 133–45.
30 Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 106. (This fragment, found in the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg, was identified and published by Andrei I. Borisov; see Borisov 1935, pp. 621–4.)
31 Steinschneider 1871–1872. (This edition is based on only one of the two extant manuscripts of this translation, that found in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich.)
32 This assumption is found in Teicher 1956, p. 424.
33 S. M. Stern 1961.
34 S. M. Stern 1956–1957.
35 Altmann 1956–1957.
36 d'Alverny 1986.
37 Pines 1957.
38 Fenton 1997, pp. 393–403.
39 Burnett 2002.
40 Ibn Gabirol 1895.
41 These five manuscripts are in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, and in the Biblioteca Vaticana in Rome, as well as in Paris, Perugia, and Toledo.
42 Munk 1859, pp. 1r–36v (Hebrew text) and 1–148 (French translation).
43 Ibn Gabirol 2001, pp. 177–82.
44 Falaquera's version appears not to have been based on the Latin translation, as assumed (without any sure proof) in Teicher 1956, pp. 425–40.
45 Fenton 1997, pp. 393–403 (footnotes).
46 Alonso 1954.
47 Ibn Paquda 1912. (The edition was based on three manuscripts in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and in Saint Petersburg.)
48 Ibn Paquda 1973b.
49 About the textual history of Ibn Tibbon's translation, see the short details in Ibn Paquda 1973a, pp. 1–3.
50 See Adolf Jellinek's edition of it in Benjacob 1846; Steinschneider 1893, p. 375.
51 Baneth 1957.
52 Baneth and Ben Shammai 1977.
53 Halevi 1887. (This edition was based on the Oxford manuscript only.)
54 Sonne 1928.
55 They were published in Halevi 1853, pp. 344–61.
56 Jellinek 1854.
57 Ibn Zaddiq 1903.
58 Ibn Zaddiq 2003.
59 Ibn Daud 1852.
60 Ibn Daud 1986.

61 Amira Eran, who has published some studies and a book about this work, is preparing a critical edition of Ibn Labi's translation. See the provisional edition of Ibn Motot's translation in Eran 1990.
62 Pines 1964a.
63 Some aspects of the textual tradition of *The Exalted Faith* have been studied in Eran 1996a and Eran 1997; see also Eran 1998. (According to Eran, Ibn Motot's translation is a reworked version of Ibn Labi's.)
64 I owe this information to Resianne Smidt-Fontaine (University of Amsterdam).
65 Fenton 1997.
66 Idel 1976.
67 Fenton 1997, p. 53 note 161.
68 Fenton 1997, pp. 50–51 and 196–234.
69 When this essay was written, the critical edition of both texts, announced in Fenton 1997, p. 51, was still awaited. A provisional, noncritical edition of a small part of al-Harizi's translation of the first section of the book appeared long ago: see Dukes 1842.
70 Millás Vallicrosa 1952.
71 Rubio 2000.
72 Sela 2003; about the Latin versions of these works, see Smithuis 2006a and Smithuis 2006b.
73 Sela and Freudenthal 2006.
74 Maimonides 1856–1866.
75 Maimonides 1930–1931, pp. 473–90.
76 Maimonides 1972; Maimonides 1974.
77 Langermann 2000b.
78 Sirat 1991.
79 Shiffman 1994 and Shiffman 1999.
80 Hasselhoff 2004, pp. 88–122.
81 According to the most recent suggestion by Görge K. Hasselhoff, it was made in Paris around 1242. See Hasselhoff 2004, pp. 122–221.
82 Freudenthal 1992.
83 Manekin 1992.
84 Glasner 1993.
85 Glasner 1998.
86 Simonson 2000.
87 Zonta 1994, pp. 343–5.
88 Glasner 1996.
89 This was the manuscript of Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, A. II. 1. See Peyron 1880, pp. 27–8.
90 Mancha 1992.
91 Only chapters 1–20 of this section have been published, translated into English, and commented on. See Goldstein 1985.
92 Glasner 2003, p. 94.
93 Glasner 2002.
94 Mancha 1992, p. 35.
95 Zonta 2006c, pp. 104–5 note 64. About Gersonides' knowledge of Latin and of Latin scholastic sources, see also the still-open discussion in Sirat, Klein-Braslavy, and Weijers 2003.
96 Mancha 1998, pp. 277–8.

97 W. Harvey 1998b, pp. xi–ii and n. 2. (Harvey is preparing the critical edition of Crescas' work.)
98 Fontaine 2000.
99 Zonta 1992b.
100 W. Harvey 2000a; Zonta 2004.
101 Steinschneider 1893, pp. 12–16; Robinson 2000.
102 About this encyclopedia and its possible subjects, see W. Harvey 2000b.
103 Levi ben Abraham 2004.
104 Shiffman 2001.
105 See, e.g., W. Harvey 1998a.
106 See, e.g., Shiffman 2001, p. 234 (for a possible quotation of al-Fārābī's lost *Long Commentary* on Aristotle's *Physics*); Zonta 2004, p. 132 (for a possible quotation of Averroes' lost treatise *On the First Mover*).
107 Hillel of Verona 1981.
108 H. Davidson 1988a.
109 Geoffroy and Steel 2001, pp. 17–31, 126–7.
110 See Sermoneta 1980, for Thomas Aquinas' quotations; Rigo 1989, Rigo 1993c, Rigo 1994, and Rigo 1995, for all the Latin sources.
111 Narbonne 1977; Hayoun 1990; and Hayoun 2002.
112 Berman 1978.
113 Rothschild 2003; Tirosh-Rothschild 1998, pp. 212–24.
114 H. Wolfson 1929b.
115 Zonta 2006a, pp. 17–8.
116 Bland 1991.
117 Zonta 2006a, pp. 115–20.
118 Zonta 2006a, pp. 155–7.
119 Rothschild 2006, pp. 90–7.
120 Rothschild 1994.
121 Zonta 2006a, pp. 41–5.
122 Sirat and Geoffroy 2005, pp. 63–8.
123 Zonta 2001b.
124 Zonta 2006b.

4

PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE BIBLE

HOWARD KREISEL

I. INTRODUCTION[1]

In both introductions to his two commentaries on Genesis, written in Hebrew for his non-Arabic speaking Jewish readers living in western Europe, the twelfth-century Spanish Jewish exegete Abraham ibn Ezra outlines five different approaches to interpreting the Torah.[2] Using the analogy of a circle, he indicates, in rhymed prose, how far each approach is from the center. The one that is furthest, in his view, is that of the Christian scholars, who treat the Torah in its entirety as allegory – whether the stories in Genesis or the laws given by Moses. Although Ibn Ezra agrees that "it is proper that these matters have secrets,"[3] he stresses that not only is the esoteric level true but also the literal one (*peshat*). In denying the truth of the plain meaning of the Torah, the approach of the Christians is placed by Ibn Ezra outside the circle entirely. The authority of the Torah is clearly undermined once its legal pronouncements are treated as allegorical in nature. Moreover, the allegorical method enables Christian exegetes to read into the Torah their fundamental religious beliefs.

The second approach he presents is that of the Karaites, who although accepting the literal truth of the Torah, deny the authenticity of the oral tradition presented by the Sages of the Talmud. According to Ibn Ezra, at times their interpretations "are at the center [of the circle], at times close by and at times outside its boundaries."[4] Rejecting the tradition of the Sages, the Karaites rely on their own understanding of the literal meaning of the text of the Torah. This often results in their misinterpreting the intent of the Torah, particularly in legal matters, although at times their interpretations find the mark and hit on the true meaning of the text.

The third approach Ibn Ezra discusses is that of the Geonim, the heads of the rabbinic academies in Babylon after the period of the Talmud, such as Saadia Gaon and Samuel ben Hofni Gaon. Their interpretations "run to and fro the center while at other times they go around the circumference."[5] Ibn Ezra attacks the verbosity of their commentaries, which tend to include lengthy excurses into scientific matters, such as a discussion of astronomy when dealing with the creation of the planets

in the first chapter of Genesis or a digression into the meaning of dreams while interpreting the story of Jacob's ladder. All these matters he finds extraneous to an understanding of the true meaning of the text.

The fourth approach is that of the Sages of the Talmud, which is "at the center and also around it."[6] Ibn Ezra refers here to the exegetical homilies, the *midrashim* found both in the Talmud and in classic compilations such as Genesis Rabbah. Although he displays a positive attitude to the great authorities of Jewish tradition, as is to be expected, he hints to his disapproval of this approach by criticizing as superfluous the creation of new homilies in the lands of Christendom during the medieval period, such as the compilation *Leqaḥ Tov*. Moreover, to "rescue," from a rationalistic perspective, the classic rabbinic homilies, he treats the more fanciful ones – such as "seven things were created prior to the world"[7] or that the Torah preceded the world by 2000 years[8] – as allusions to profound truths presented by the Sages in parable form. In the words of Ibn Ezra, "There is a homily (*derash*) that is opposite of a homily. It has a secret that is not explicit."[9] The Sages, according to Ibn Ezra, at times explained by means of parables the parables they discerned in the Bible. The rabbinic homilies are certainly not to be understood literally as some are wont to do. Ibn Ezra treats the homilies of the Sages as serving additional purposes as well, such as imparting moral lessons, supporting legal opinions, or even as intellectual entertainment. He maintains that in every instance in which there is a contradiction between scripture, tradition, and reason, these three sources must be brought into harmony by various methods of interpretation. Ibn Ezra goes on to decipher some of the deep philosophical secrets he finds in a number of *midrashim*.

At the end of both introductions he turns to his own approach, "to explain scripture in accordance with its correct interpretation, its grammar and plain meaning."[10] Ibn Ezra realizes that his approach may lead to interpretations that are at odds with the understanding of the precepts of the Torah in rabbinic tradition. To avoid this problem, he indicates that he will rely on the rulings of the Sages in legal matters and frame his grammatical explanations accordingly. In other matters he defers to no one in his quest to determine the true interpretation.

Ibn Ezra's commentaries reflect a quiet revolution that took place in the Jewish approach to biblical exegesis. The main goal of this exegetical approach is to ascertain the true interpretation of the text or its original intent – the "plain meaning of scripture (*peshuto shel miqra*)." This can be done only by a proper understanding of Hebrew grammar and linguistic usage in determining the exact meaning of each term. Also underlying Ibn Ezra's approach is the notion that the fruits of human reason – the proven conclusions of philosophy and science – must be accepted in making this determination. In short, for Ibn Ezra there are true

interpretations and false ones, and linguistic study coupled with reason hold the key to determining which is which.

How far is this view from the one that underlies rabbinic *midrash*, which treats the Torah as an open text to be deconstructed by the reader. The countless possibilities of interpretation are limited only by the level of creativity of the homilist, at least when legal issues are not involved. Verses are interpreted out of context, connected on the basis of some slight linguistic similarity with other verses that deal with entirely different matters, and lessons are drawn from them that have little, if any, relationship to the plain sense of the text. The Sages bring many homiletical interpretations to verses, but in no case do they attempt to harmonize between them or to determine which one is correct. There are no true or false *midrashim*. It is as though each product of human creativity in finding different meanings of the text reflects divine intention. The Sages do not deny that scripture possesses a literal or plain meaning; they even maintain that "a verse never forgoes its simple meaning."[11] This level, however, does not concern them. Yet it is precisely this level that becomes the object of Ibn Ezra's commentary, with the aim of reaching objective truth on what is the real – that is to say, intended – meaning of the verse. Ibn Ezra agrees that the "Torah has seventy faces,"[12] but a clear distinction is to be made between the meanings that reflect divine intent and those that are the product of human creativity. That there is a multiplicity of meanings that belong to linguistic terms is hardly denied by Ibn Ezra, but a careful study of the context in which the term appears will reveal its true meaning (or level of meanings) in each case. At times, particularly in regard to the scriptural corporeal descriptions of God, it is philosophy that shows that a secondary meaning of the term is the intended one and the plain meaning is to be dismissed altogether. Although Hellenistic cultural influences certainly left their mark on many of the rabbinic *midrashim*, one can discern few attempts on the part of the Sages to understand the biblical text in light of ideas borrowed from Greek philosophy. After Philo, it is only in medieval biblical exegesis that Greek philosophical ideas play a dominant role.

Ibn Ezra's efforts in ascertaining the true meaning of the text rest on the foundations built by the pioneering works on biblical grammar written in Andalusia by Judah ibn Ḥayyuj and Jonah ibn Jannaḥ, among others, as well as on the Arabic commentaries on the Torah written by the Babylonian academy heads, foremost among them Saadia Gaon, by Karaite exegetes (despite his critique of their approaches), and by Ibn Ezra's predecessors among the Spanish commentators, who were guided by philosophical considerations as well.[13] He brought the fruits of this tradition to his Hebrew readers in the Christian lands of western Europe where he wrote his various commentaries. In a crucial sense the soil there was ripe for

Ibn Ezra's approach because the greatest of the French exegetes, R. Solomon ben Isaac (Rashi), already in the eleventh century turned his attention to the quest of determining the literal meaning of verses, although he continued to rely heavily on rabbinic *midrash* in his biblical commentaries. The effort to uncover the plain meaning of the text continued in the following generation in northern France, with such figures as R. Joseph Qara, and culminated in the Torah commentary of Rashi's grandson, R. Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam), an older contemporary of Ibn Ezra.[14] This is not to say that in the attempt to understand the plain meaning of the Torah the commentators shared an identical set of assumptions about biblical language. Any perusal of the commentaries of Rashbam and Ibn Ezra reveals not only how often they disagree in their interpretations but also on the principles underlying them.[15] For example, does the Torah at times convey the same exact notion by using synonymous terms as human beings are apt to do (Ibn Ezra), or does every change in terminology point to a different notion as befitting the preciseness of divine speech (Rashbam)? Furthermore, to what degree do philosophical conclusions dictate how the Torah is to be understood? Should one reject the corporeal descriptions of God by arguing that the "the Torah speaks in a manner similar to human beings" (Ibn Ezra),[16] or dismiss the literal interpretation of the Garden of Eden and treat it solely as a parable because of the natural impossibilities it presents (a question at least raised by Ibn Ezra)? Both commentators well understood how difficult it is to reach their goal of understanding the plain meaning of the text, yet neither doubted that this goal was in principle attainable. Rashbam lacked Ibn Ezra's philosophical training, leaving him unaware of some of the theological problems raised by a literal understanding of the text. Moreover, he did not have at his disposal the works of the great Andalusian Hebrew grammarians that Ibn Ezra was able to utilize and that contributed much to his critical-linguistic approach. Ibn Ezra's Torah commentary quickly assumed the status of being the Jewish rationalist commentary par excellence and in the following centuries became the object of numerous supercommentaries.[17]

One of the main factors that brought about this change of approach in biblical exegesis in the Christian world is the Jewish–Christian polemic.[18] Because Christianity sought to prove the truth of its creed by way of figurative interpretations of the Bible, the Jewish response was to undermine these efforts by stressing the literal meaning of the text. Even in Muslim lands this factor played an important role in Jewish biblical exegesis as can be seen in Saadia's polemic against Christian attempts to uncover the doctrine of the Trinity in the Bible.[19] Other cultural factors also contributed, including the growing interest shown in the Islamic and Christian worlds on the critical literary–grammatical study of sacred texts in an attempt to

properly understand their external meaning (*zahir* in Arabic), as well as the growing interest in speculative theology and philosophy to show when the external meaning is to be rejected and a figurative meaning is to be substituted (*ta'wīl*) or to ascertain the internal, esoteric meaning (*bātin*).[20] As much as Jewish exegesis reflects a reaction to the interpretations of competing religions, it reflects the assimilation of the cultural–intellectual trends taking place in the surrounding cultures.

II. THE BEGINNING OF JEWISH PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE BIBLE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

A momentous change in the exegesis of the Torah is already evident in pioneering works of the first of the medieval Jewish theologians, Saadia Gaon (882–942). Saadia, who rose to the position of head of the Babylonian academy in Sura, translated the Bible into Arabic and wrote lengthy commentaries in Arabic on the Torah and many of the books of the Bible.[21] He also wrote the first major treatise in medieval Jewish theology, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*. In this work, heavily influenced by the Mutazilite School of speculative Muslim theology,[22] he clarifies many of the principles upon which his biblical exegesis is based. Saadia is convinced that sense perception and reason, both intuitive first principles and the conclusions of demonstrative proofs, are sources for attaining the truth. Otherwise God would not have bestowed these gifts upon humanity. He maintains a correspondence theory of truth – namely, truth is when a person's opinion corresponds to objective reality. Reliable tradition, particularly the writings of the prophets and the Sages of the Talmud, also provides true and certain knowledge. Because all these sources are valid in his view, there cannot be any real contradictions between them (or between different verses, or between scripture and the oral tradition). Saadia is aware that these assumptions lead to a host of problems, for there are many apparent contradictions between what the Bible informs us and what we ascertain by way of our senses or by rational analysis. This is particularly true of the doctrine of the incorporeality of God, which is proven by reason, whereas scripture frequently describes the Deity in corporeal terms. Saadia's solution to this difficulty is to maintain that in those cases in which such contradictions arise, *and only in those cases*, one must interpret scripture metaphorically, and even our metaphorical interpretations must be in accordance with Hebrew linguistic usage.[23] The metaphorical meaning is treated in these instances as the intended meaning. For example, "hand" and "mouth" when they appear in the Bible do not always refer to an actual hand and mouth, such as when the Bible speaks of the "hand of the river" (Daniel 10:4) or "the earth opened her mouth" (Numbers 16:32). So too a figurative meaning

must be substituted when these terms are applied to God – the hand of God refers to divine actions, the mouth of God to the divine word.[24] In Saadia's view, not only are various limbs to be negated of God but also all the Aristotelian categories pertaining to material objects – for example, quality, quantity, place, and time.[25] In this manner he attempts to avoid both the danger of making the Bible an object of ridicule from the perspective of reason – thereby undermining its authority among the educated, as certain heretics had attempted to do[26] – and the danger of allowing *all* passages to be interpreted figuratively, thereby abandoning the plain meaning and true intent of the text as the Christians had done in his view.

Apparent contradictions that arise between the sources of truth pose for Saadia a theological as well as an epistemological problem, for they raise doubts as to God's wisdom. God is the source of reliable tradition and is also the Creator of human beings endowed with reason for discovering truth. In the case of the corporeal descriptions of God, tradition itself appears to be the source of error. The problem of the many misleading corporeal descriptions of the incorporeal Deity is resolved by Saadia not only by pointing out secondary meanings of the various terms used, but also by arguing the pedagogical need for such descriptions, as otherwise almost nothing could be said of God in educating the people.[27]

It is important to keep in mind that reason, in Saadia's view, proves that God created the world in its entirety *ex nihilo*. Hence he sees no difficulty in accepting the traditional notion that God is cognizant of all creatures, exercises individual providence, including the performance of miracles, legislates the divine Law, speaks to chosen individuals, either directly or by way of angels, and rewards and punishes individuals in accordance with their actions. In short, Saadia's God is an incorporeal deity as maintained by the philosophers but at the same time remains a personal deity as taught by tradition. In his desire to uphold the literal meaning of the Bible as much as possible, Saadia sees many of the prophetic visions consisting of actual sights created by God that the prophets beheld with their eyes, while the speech heard by them were words that God created in the air. When the prophets report seeing God and bring a description of the sights they beheld, they are not speaking allegorically. They are referring to a special luminous being created by God, the Created Glory, whose task is to confirm to the prophet the divine origin of the message they hear.[28] Saadia's theory of prophecy has crucial ramifications for his biblical exegesis. In addition to limiting the need to resort to allegorical interpretations to resolve theologically problematic passages, it provides a basis for tracing all prophetic speech, and not just the Torah, directly to God.

In his commentary on the Torah, written prior to his theological treatise, Saadia shows concern for both the contents and form of the divine text.[29] He pays careful

attention to linguistic rules, which he lists in his introduction, to understand the Torah properly.[30] He does not content himself, however, solely with presenting this level of the text. As a theologian he is concerned also with problems the text raises from the standpoint of reason. For example, in Saadia's view the three main components of the Torah are (1) the commandments; (2) reward and punishment (the ultimate purpose of the commandments); and (3) exemplary tales (moral lessons) – all three which he describes in detail. The Torah, however, does not present its three main components in an ordered manner, but as intertwined with each other. The lack of a rational order, as perceived in accordance with the standards of the period, is a theological problem for Saadia, inasmuch as it casts aspersions on the wisdom of the divine author. He resolves this difficulty by arguing that the intended purpose of this apparent lack of order is to prod the reader to make greater efforts to understand the divine text, thereby earning added reward for his endeavors.[31] Saadia continuously raises questions and apparent problems that emerge from the narrative of the Torah – some of them undoubtedly originating with heretics who rejected the divinity of the text – to resolve them and point out the great wisdom and lovingkindness reflected by everything that is reported in the Torah, as is true of all divine actions. Insofar as Saadia views the Torah as the product of perfect wisdom and knowledge, he also attempts to complete the knowledge to which the Torah alludes by lengthy excursions into scientific matters – all in accordance with the subject matter of the story – for which he earned the criticism of Ibn Ezra, as we have seen. Given his view of God as the Creator of the world, as proven by reason, Saadia sees no difficulty in accepting the literal truth of the creation story (substituting divine will for speech), or even the Garden of Eden story, which he rejects treating allegorically as he knows some are wont to do. Even the talking serpent he treats as a miraculous creation of God.[32]

Saadia, whose foremost consideration in his literary activities is to defend the received Jewish tradition and not to transform it, nevertheless lays down principles of interpretation that lead to a new understanding of the tradition and of the sacred texts that stand at its core. He is committed to the idea that reason, independent of scripture and religious tradition, provides a source of absolute truth and, moreover, scripture must be interpreted in harmony with the dictates of reason. Although his view of the dictates of reason is derived primarily from the Muslim theologians, and not from the philosophers in the Neoplatonic–Aristotelian tradition – hence narrowing the gap between reason and tradition – the notion that there is a body of truth discovered independently of the accepted religious tradition provides the foundation for the philosophical interpretation of scripture.

III. THE PHILOSOPHICAL–ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE TORAH: ABRAHAM IBN EZRA AND MAIMONIDES

Other problems with a literal understanding of scripture, even when it does not stand in contradiction to reason, concerned later Jewish thinkers, particularly those who were attracted to the Neoplatonic–Aristotelian philosophical tradition. The truths uncovered by the plain meaning of the Bible were not the profound truths of philosophy. How can the Torah and the prophets, who impart divine wisdom, generally deal with matters – legal and historical – that are not the ones illuminated by philosophical thought? Even when profound subjects are presented in the Bible, such as the Account of Creation at the beginning of Genesis or the Account of the Chariot at the beginning of Ezekiel, the descriptions are sketchy at best and bear little if any relation to the conceptions elucidated by the philosophers, particularly Plato, Aristotle, and their followers. The concern to wed the philosophical tradition to the Bible, thereby attempting to remain loyal to both and to bring to light the inherent speculative wisdom in the Bible, leads to the allegorical interpretation of certain biblical narratives on the part of Jewish philosophical exegetes.[33]

Ibn Ezra alludes to a deeper level embodied in the text when he talks of the secret matters found in the Torah. In his biblical commentaries, Ibn Ezra rarely delves into these secrets, although he occasionally refers to a certain matter as a secret, and in several places enters into a philosophical excursus focusing on God, the structure of the world, the nature of the soul, and divine providence.[34] The brevity of most of his remarks on these secrets gave rise to a genre of supercommentaries devoted to the attempt to elucidate them.[35] Most of these secrets were interpreted as referring to philosophical (predominantly Neoplatonic) and scientific (including astrological) ideas, many of them suggesting a naturalistic explanation for miraculous events depicted in the Torah.[36] Others appear to hint to the view that certain verses were written long after the time of Moses and later inserted into the Torah.[37] Ibn Ezra appears to accept the philosophical conception that human perfection lies in the perfection of the intellect by mastering all the sciences, and this leads to immortality.[38] His approach to some of the rabbinic *midrashim*, using philosophy as a means to uncover what he regards as their true meaning, essentially treats the Sages as philosophers who present their views in an allegorical manner, although he does not expand upon this view.

The most important Jewish philosopher for the subsequent development of the philosophical interpretation of the Bible, Maimonides (1138–1204), never wrote a biblical commentary at all, at least not in the conventional sense. Yet his philosophical *magnum opus*, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, is in a crucial sense primarily a

commentary on the Torah, or, in Maimonides' words: "the science of the Law in its true sense."[39] Unlike Ibn Ezra, Maimonides was not primarily interested in uncovering the literal meaning of scripture, but solely its deeper meaning in respect to the weightier topics with which it deals, such as God, divine governance of the world, creation, prophecy, and providence.[40] Much of the first part of the treatise is devoted to elucidating the meaning of biblical terms that entail, from an Aristotelian perspective, the corporeality of God, in an attempt to point out the true interpretation of these terms when applied to the Deity. Maimonides goes into much more detail in this matter than his predecessors. He also discusses the meaning of the attributes used in describing God, viewing all of them as either attributes of action or negative attributes, as well as the philosophical notions that are conveyed by the various divine names mentioned in the Bible.[41] Moreover, he is convinced that the Aristotelian natural sciences, particularly the *Meteorology*, hold the key to understanding the biblical creation story, which he discusses in an obscure manner in part two of his treatise (chapter 30), and Aristotelian metaphysics (in its Neoplatonic garb) unlocks the meaning of the Account of the Chariot found at the beginning of the book of Ezekiel, the topic that opens the third part of the *Guide*. Maimonides' discussion alludes to the view that the creation story essentially deals with the earth and its inhabitants and the natural processes governing them, not the creation of the cosmos. Described are the climactic conditions that make the appearance of life possible on earth. The Garden of Eden story is treated as a philosophical parable focusing on the ideal human condition, the manner in which intellectual perfection is attained, and the obstacles to achieving it. The persona of the story, Adam, Eve, and the serpent, all represent different aspects or faculties of the individual – the intellect, the body together with the corporeal faculties of the soul, and the imaginative faculty.[42] The Account of the Chariot is seen as an allegorical description of the world of the Separate Intellects, the spheres they govern, and the manner that the spheres influence the behavior of the four basic sublunar elements: fire, air, water, and earth. Maimonides' view of the divine governance of the world follows the dominant Islamic Aristotelian view of the order of nature, particularly as it finds expression in the philosophy of al-Fārābī and its emanationist cosmogony. Maimonides approaches many of the *midrashim* of the talmudic Sages as presenting philosophical–scientific ideas in the form of parable, often serving to elucidate the philosophical–scientific ideas found in the biblical text, also presented in parable form. For the most part he hints at the ideas contained in the prophetic and rabbinic parables without elucidating them. For example, he points to the *midrash* that Samael was the rider of the serpent in the Garden of Eden story, who is also called Satan, and it was he who was the tempted Eve. Maimonides, however,

does not spell out what these two figures represent,[43] leaving his commentators to decipher his meaning. Most concluded that Maimonides hints that when the appetitive faculty, represented by the figure of the serpent, is driven by the imagination, represented as Samael, this causes the individual to stray from the path to perfection. By adding the figure of Samael to the story, the *midrash* in this manner expounds on the biblical story in which only the serpent is mentioned.

Maimonides' insistence in seeing a naturalistic worldview as underlying much of Jewish tradition is poignantly demonstrated by the following polemical remark in *Guide* II.6:

> All these texts state plainly that all this – including the various parts of that which exists and even the creation of the limbs of the animals as they are – has been brought about through the intermediation of angels. For all forces are angels. How great is the blindness of ignorance and how harmful! If you told a man who is one of those who deem themselves the Sages of Israel that the Deity sends an angel, who enters the womb of a woman and forms the fetus there, he would be pleased with this assertion and would accept it and would regard it as a manifestation of greatness and power on the part of the Deity, and also of His wisdom, may He be exalted. Nevertheless he would also believe at the same time that the angel is a body formed of burning fire and that his size is equal to that of a third part of the whole world. He would regard all this as possible with respect to God. But if you tell him that God has placed in the sperm a formative force shaping the limbs and giving them their configuration and that this force is the angel, or that all the forms derive from the act of the Active Intellect and that the latter is the angel and the prince of the world constantly mentioned by the Sages, the man would shrink from this opinion. For he does not understand the notion of the true greatness and power that consists in the bringing into existence of forces active in a thing, forces that cannot be apprehended by any sense.[44]

Maimonides goes on to explain, albeit in a cryptic manner, how the naturalistic view of angels underlies various biblical and rabbinic statements concerning them. His comments in *Guide* II.10 suggest, for example, that the angels descending and ascending Jacob's ladder are a parable for the elements of the sublunar world, all possessing a common first matter. The Sages allude to this view (and elucidate on it) by indicating that there were four steps on the ladder, each angel occupying a different one, with two of them ascending – an image apparently referring to the motion of air and fire – and two descending, a reference to water and earth.[45] According to Maimonides, all existent beings and forces are termed "angels" (*Guide* II.7),[46] with the notable exception of the angels themselves – that is, winged creatures that fly between heaven and earth on divine errands – for such creatures he does not regard as existing at all.

Maimonides' theory of prophecy provides the foundation for his allegorical approach. Unlike Saadia, who sees the sights described by the prophets and the

words heard by them as being creations of God, Maimonides views prophecy as a natural phenomenon that results from an emanation from the Active Intellect to the perfect individual's rational and imaginative faculties.[47] Prophecy is in essence an intellectual illumination that takes the form of images and speech due to the activity of the prophet's own imagination, and they do not exist outside of the prophet's mind. This conception entails that prophetic visions by their very nature are allegorical and should be treated accordingly. For Maimonides, all biblical narratives in which God or an angel appears occurred in a prophetic vision even if it is not indicated in the text explicitly.[48] Although Maimonides maintains that *all* prophetic visions, as opposed to ordinary dreams, are true – that is to say, they reveal truths about the world to one who understands their underlying message – his theory of revelation introduces an important human dimension into the divine text. The biblical exegete must look to deciphering the underlying message and not treat the images or words themselves as divine. The Sages of the Talmud chose to elucidate the prophetic visions in the same idiom used by the prophets themselves, which entails utilizing a similar exegetical strategy in approaching *midrash*.[49] Maimonides understands that this approach to prophecy creates a major problem in the interpretation of the Torah, for it opens the door to treating it too as an extended allegory, and moreover, not absolutely divine but the product of Moses' own rational and imaginative faculties. For this reason, he posits the unique nature of Mosaic prophecy that did not involve the imagination at all, only the rational faculty. Moreover, he treats God as the immediate author of the prophetic speech heard by Moses. Whether this is Maimonides' private belief on the subject is a matter of dispute among scholars, but it undoubtedly serves to uphold the Jewish people's faith in the divinity of the Torah and the literal meaning of its commands.[50]

Maimonides devoted himself to the twin pursuit of guiding his coreligionists to the truth at the same time that he attempted to strengthen their commitment to Jewish tradition. This dictated his own writing strategy as well as how he understood the strategies adopted by the prophets and the Sages who held in his opinion the same worldview and the same objectives. In a famous passage in the introduction to *Guide* Maimonides depicts King Solomon as revealing the true manner in which to understand scripture when it deals with subtle speculative matters:

> The Sage has said: *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings [maskiyyoth] of silver* (Prov. 25:11). The term *maskiyyoth* denotes filigree traceries; I mean to say traceries in which there are apertures with very small eyelets, like the handiwork of silversmiths . . . The Sage accordingly said that a saying uttered with a view to two meanings is like an apple of gold overlaid with silver filigree-work having very small holes. Now see how marvelously this dictum describes a well constructed parable. For he says that in a saying that has two

meanings – he means an external and an internal one – the external meaning ought to be as beautiful as silver, while its internal meaning ought to be more beautiful than the external one, the former being in comparison to the latter as gold to silver. Its external meaning also ought to contain in it something that indicates to someone considering it what is to be found in its internal meaning . . . The parables of the prophets, peace be upon them are similar. The external meaning contains wisdom that is useful in many respects, among which is the welfare of human societies . . . Their internal meaning, on the other hand, contains wisdom that is useful for beliefs concerned with the truth as it is.[51]

Maimonides follows the Platonic tradition in viewing parables of philosophical truths as the manner in which these truths are communicated to the masses in accordance with their limited understanding. In this way they attain some inkling of the truth, or at least are prodded to moral behavior, while their allegiance to the tradition is preserved. At the same time the parables are constructed in a manner that guides the wise to an understanding of the deeper truths that underlie them.[52]

From Maimonides' perspective, those who interpret everything in scripture and in rabbinic literature literally, and as a result reject tradition as false, are worse than the masses of Jews who interpret everything literally, and accept tradition in accordance with their false literalist interpretation. Those who attain some understanding of the true nature of reality but who do not understand that tradition, when dealing with profound topics, is meant to be interpreted figuratively commit the ultimate folly by severing their allegiance to tradition and the guidance it provides. The challenge, as seen by Maimonides, is how to guide the wise individual to a true understanding of the world, leading at the same time to the correct understanding of the Bible and Jewish tradition, while avoiding the twin dangers of the pious literalists and the heretical literalists. By making more explicit the allegorical reading of scripture and *midrash*, Maimonides seeks to meet the challenge posed by the heretical literalist. Yet the elucidation of the philosophical secrets alluded to in these sources is presented by Maimonides in an enigmatic manner in the *Guide of the Perplexed* in an effort to hide their meaning from the ordinary reader, the pious literalist, whose commitment to Judaism might be harmed if these secrets were made too explicit. The major exception he makes to this rule is in regard to the corporeal descriptions of God whose true nonliteral meaning he feels must be revealed explicitly to the masses. In the past, while Israel was still subject to the influence of the pagan religions, these descriptions were important in preserving the masses' belief in God's existence. Historical changes no longer make it necessary to obscure the fundamental truth of God's incorporeality.[53]

Although the allegorical interpretation of the Bible provides a crucial tool for harmonizing the sacred texts of Judaism with the philosophical tradition, the

question remains open to what degree Maimonides, as well as Ibn Ezra, accept the teachings of the philosophers (and in cases of conflicting views among the philosophers, which view they accept) and interpret scripture accordingly. The worldview of the Islamic Aristotelian philosophers of God being the first cause of a world without beginning and from whom the world eternally emanates in a hierarchical order, who governs the world solely through the laws of nature, who does not know individuals qua individuals and who can exercise no volitional acts that violate the fixed order is diametrically opposed to the conception characterizing the religious tradition of a miracle-working Creator-God who is cognizant of all individuals, can act in a direct manner in history, who personally legislated and revealed the Torah, and rewards and punishes in accordance with one's obedience to the divine Law. Maimonides and Ibn Ezra embrace much of the philosophical approach, but many of their comments suggest that they continue to uphold the dominant features of the traditional religious view. The conception of the God of nature in their opinion better reflects divine power and wisdom than the conception of a miracle-working deity, yet both thinkers appear to view God as the Creator capable of performing miracles when deemed necessary. The philosophical conception leaves no room for viewing God as the immediate legislator of the divine Law, yet both thinkers ascribe the Law directly to God. This leads to the question of how to interpret the interpreters. Some of the comments and biblical interpretations of Maimonides and Ibn Ezra can be understood as alluding to an esoteric position that is in essential agreement with the conception of the philosophers who posit a world eternally emanating from God and whose order never undergoes any change. This issue assumes cardinal significance for the subsequent history of Jewish philosophical exegesis.

IV. JEWISH PHILOSOPHICAL EXEGESIS IN PROVENCE

The following generations of Maimonides' philosophical disciples, particularly those in Provence, took upon themselves the task of writing commentaries on the books of the Bible and on rabbinic *midrash* that build upon Maimonides' approach. At the same time they also tend to utilize many of Ibn Ezra's interpretations, including his astrological ones,[54] despite Maimonides' denouncement of this subject.[55] The biblical commentary for most of them is the genre of choice in expressing speculative philosophical ideas as well as social and moral ones. In a sense they set out to complete Maimonides' program of showing the agreement between the religious and philosophical traditions, the former lending divine authority to the latter and the latter providing the key to understanding the true meaning of the

former. Commentaries on biblical texts also provide an excellent means for disseminating philosophical ideas among educated Jews and winning more adherents to the philosophical approach in the face of conflicting approaches within the Jewish world. The philosophical commentators were not of one mind, however, whether to understand Maimonides and Jewish tradition as being in complete agreement with the philosophical tradition or whether a crucial gap remains between the two. Nonetheless, one can detect in their writings a general tendency to discern in the writings of Maimonides and Ibn Ezra esoteric teachings that were in conformity with the philosophers' views. It should be noted that Islamic philosophy underwent a major transformation in the period of Ibn Ezra and Maimonides in the wake of the commentaries and treatises written by Averroes (1126–1198). Averroes posits an eternal *a parte ante* world, but essentially rejects the earlier Neoplatonic emanationist cosmogony maintained by his philosophical predecessors. Although the Jewish exegetes in Provence are much indebted to Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle, they tend to uphold the doctrine of emanation that underlies both Maimonides' and Ibn Ezra's worldview.

Already in the beginning of the thirteenth century the Hebrew translator of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Samuel ibn Tibbon, writes a philosophical commentary on Ecclesiastes based on Maimonides' approach,[56] as well as a commentary on sections of the Bible dealing with the Account of Creation and the Account of the Chariot, entitled *Treatise on the Gathering of the Waters*.[57] Ibn Tibbon plays a crucial role in the development of the school of interpretation that reads Maimonides' *Guide* in an esoteric manner.[58] Against the spirit of the *Guide*, however, ibn Tibbon is of the opinion that the time is ripe to reveal the philosophical secrets openly given the more philosophically enlightened climate of Christian society in western Europe[59] (just as Maimonides felt that it was time to insist that all be educated in the belief in God's incorporeality given the change in historical conditions). Although some of the Jewish philosophers following Ibn Tibbon maintain that certain teachings should continue to be expressed in an esoteric manner, many choose to express even their more radical views in an exoteric manner in their commentaries.

Samuel ibn Tibbon's contemporary, R. David Kimḥi (Radak) by and large follows in Ibn Ezra's footsteps by elucidating on the literal meaning of the text in his biblical commentaries,[60] but he wrote at least two commentaries on the esoteric meaning of the text – one an allegorical commentary on the Garden of Eden story and the other on the beginning of Ezekiel (the Account of the Chariot) – both in the spirit of Maimonides' approach.[61] Samuel ibn Tibbon's son, Moses ibn Tibbon, continues this exegetical trend by writing philosophical commentaries on *Song of Songs*, which he treats as a philosophical allegory pertaining to the soul and its

perfection, the creation story (*Treatise on the Taninim*; only a portion of this work has survived), and on rabbinic *midrash* (*Book of Peah*), among other works.[62] R. Samuel ibn Tibbon's son-in-law, R. Jacob Anatoli, is responsible for the first book of philosophical sermons, *Malmad ha-Talmidim*. This treatise is arranged in accordance with the weekly Torah reading and presents numerous allegorical interpretations.[63]

In the latter half of the thirteenth century, a number of scholars in Provence, Spain, and Italy continue to develop the allegorical–philosophical interpretation of the Bible. In Provence this trend reaches its zenith at the end of the century in the encyclopedia *Livyat Ḥen* by Levi ben Abraham.[64] Levi was very much influenced by the members of the Ibn Tibbon family in his biblical exegesis. He became the main victim of the attacks of the opponents of philosophical allegory and of philosophical naturalism in the controversy that erupted in Provence at the beginning of the fourteenth century.[65] Levi devotes the second part of his encyclopedic work to a discussion of Judaism (the first part provides a detailed compendium of the sciences). He includes sections on the secrets of the Torah (dealing with prophecy, the Revelation at Sinai, the reasons for the Commandments, and the stories of the Patriarchs and of Moses and Israel in the desert), the secrets of the Faith (dealing with the names and attributes of God, prayer, Creation, miracles, providence, and reward and punishment), the Account of Creation, the Account of the Chariot, and rabbinic lore (*aggadah*).[66] Much of his discussion assumes the form of a philosophic commentary on biblical passages. In keeping with the encyclopedic nature of the work, Levi rarely rests content with one explanation of any matter on which he comments. He also continuously interweaves into his commentary rabbinic homilies, showing how they too are to be interpreted in a philosophic manner. Philosophical–allegorical and naturalistic (including astrological) explanations are offered for many of the commandments, such as the laws of the Temple service and the dietary laws. The allegorical explanations do not come as a substitute for a literal understanding of the actions to be performed but to enhance their meaning.

The most openly radical of the Provençal philosophical exegetes is Nissim of Marseilles, whose early-fourteenth-century treatise, *Ma'ase Nissim*, is written to provide a naturalistic interpretation of all supernatural matters presented in the Torah.[67] Nissim arranges the main part of his treatise in accordance with the sections of the Torah, singling out for comment only those items that suggest violations of the natural order. He sees himself as a disciple of Maimonides, cites Ibn Ezra frequently, and is very much influenced by the members of the Ibn Tibbon family and by Levi ben Abraham in his interpretations of biblical events. In effect, Nissim presents the most explicit expression of what we may characterize as the Tibbonide school of exegesis, and so it is instructive to expand on his approach.

All the miracles recorded in the Torah are treated by Nissim either as exceptional events that the prophet was able to perform on the basis of his superior understanding of reality attained in the state of illumination or as unusual events he was able to foretell as a result of this state. Other miracles were not actual events at all but occurred only in the prophetic vision and hence should be treated allegorically. Nissim denies neither divine will nor creation. God's unchanging will is thought to give continuous existence to a world that always has been. Nature is perfectly planned by God, who does not intervene in nature or in history. One should not deduce, however, that history is "blind," with everything left to chance. Values and purpose are built into nature. The Torah *in all its details* is perfect, in Nissim's view, although he does not view God as personally and directly communicating it. It is the immediate product of Moses' supreme perfection and the intellectual illumination he experienced, allowing him to lay down an ideal law guiding its adherents to perfection in accordance with each person's capacity. This does not make the Torah any less divine to one with proper understanding, because what is ideal is divine. Still, its true origin must remain hidden from the general populace. The biblical prophets and the Sages of the Talmud attempted to educate the masses of Jews in accord with their limited intelligence. The general populace can appreciate only the corporeal as real and are cowed into obedience only by belief in a personal deity who commands and watches one's every move. They are not prepared to perform the good for its own sake or to view reward and punishment as natural consequences of the manner in which one leads one's life.

The Torah's Account of Creation is interpreted by Nissim as a description of the stages of change taking place on earth, with "day" referring to each stage in the process rather than a twenty-four-hour period. Moreover, the "stages" should be viewed as logical ones, not temporal, for the world is without beginning. The account of the planets on the fourth day does not deal with the creation of the heavenly world but with their relation to the manifestation of higher life forms. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is treated by Nissim solely as a philosophical parable, and not as an event that actually occurred. The same is true of the story of Cain and Abel, who represent different powers of the intellect. Even the story of the binding of Isaac is regarded by Nissim as occurring in a vision of prophecy, rather than in external reality, as is the case with the burning bush and Balaam's talking ass.[68] The vision follows the concerns of the dreamer in images taken from his environment. Abraham's custom was to practice hospitality, so his vision took the form of travelers he ran to welcome and who imparted to him knowledge of the future. The view that some of the accounts in the Torah are allegorical, without being historical, does not make them less truthful in Nissim's eyes. The lessons they

are designed to impart are far more important than the question of their historical veracity. The recordings of the long lives of the ancients, however, have a historical basis: They perhaps represent the span of the dynasties of these founding fathers.[69] Nissim also does not question the historicity of the Patriarchs, but understands the miracles associated with them in a naturalistic manner. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah resulted from an earthquake. Abraham, who foresaw it in a prophetic vision, sent word to Lot to escape, or Lot himself had an intuition that he should leave. Lot's wife turned back and returned to Sodom, becoming a victim of the destruction. As for the plagues in Egypt – all of them were natural events predicted by Moses and Aaron, or they were brought about by them by means of their knowledge of the workings of nature. The killing of the first born, for example, was a special type of pestilence that affected only these individuals. Moses was able to predict its appearance and to ward it off from the Israelite households by commanding the burning of the paschal lamb, while remaining enclosed in one's dwelling, thereby purifying the surrounding air. The parting of the Sea of Reeds was in essence a very low tide caused by strong winds – an event also predicted by Moses and utilized by him to save Israel from the Egyptians by bringing about their drowning. The heavenly voice heard at Sinai was the amplification of Moses' own voice that was made possible by the use of a natural instrument he found on the mountain.

The seemingly supernaturalistic characteristics of some of the commandments, such as the purity laws (particularly the law of the red heifer), are explained in a naturalistic manner by pointing out the special properties of the ingredients used in these rituals. Even the rewards and punishments promised in the Bible are treated to naturalistic explanations in R. Nissim's commentary. They inevitably follow from one's actions and the type of life one lives. One who helps the needy and treats others fairly promotes social harmony and increases prosperity. Observing the agricultural laws is beneficial to the land and increases its productivity. The laws of forbidden foods prevent one from eating unhealthy foods and thereby preserve one's health. Nissim's main message, repeated in a variety of forms is: live a life of intellect and all that such a life entails – pursuit of the moral virtues – in a well-ordered, just society following the dictates of the Torah, and you will experience the avoidance of many evils and attain many goods in a natural manner.

Many of these ideas Nissim sees as alluded to in the *midrash*. Even Moses' authorship of the Torah he attempts to show is revealed by the Sages in a veiled manner.

Another citation (Leviticus Rabbah 1:7) commenting on the first verse: *And He [God] called to Moses* (Leviticus 1:1) – It is written above in the section on the Tabernacle: *As the Lord commanded Moses*. This is analogous to a king who commanded his servant: "Build me a

palace." On each item the servant built, he would write the name of the king – on the walls, pillars and ceilings. Similarly, when the Lord said to Moses: *Build me a tabernacle* – on each item that he built he would write: *As the Lord had commanded Moses*. God said: Moses paid me the highest honor and here I am inside and he is on the outside. Call him to enter before Me inside. For this reason it is said: *And He called to Moses*.[70]

Nissim goes on to explain:

The Sages alluded to a great secret that is related to what we hinted in this chapter – namely, that the command in general was to the intellect of Moses. God communicated the matters in general – namely, all the commands of the Torah – to the rational faculty in order to govern the corporeal part, directing it always to the salutary, and to abolish what is harmful to the body and to the soul. And Moses would write by each detail: *As the Lord commanded Moses* in order to honor God, and to increase the significance of these matters in the eyes of the Israelites in order that they fear God and refrain from sin.[71]

Nissim, as is true of his philosophical predecessors in Provence, does not write his commentary to discredit the Torah and Jewish tradition. Underlying the personal, miracle-working Deity found on the surface of scripture, and intended for the masses whose obedience depends on this view, is the impersonal God of the world order as seen by the enlightened interpreter of scripture. That Moses "received" the Torah in a state of prophetic illumination, rather than by means of a created voice that dictated to him each letter of the Torah, makes the Torah no less divine or its commandments any less meaningful or obligatory. The wise person who understands this truth and actively pursues intellectual and moral perfection by way of observance of the Torah is the type of individual the Torah ultimately seeks to mold.

Another noteworthy Provençal philosophical exegete of the early fourteenth century who belongs to the Maimonidean circle is R. Joseph Kaspi. Kaspi wrote numerous works, including two commentaries on the Torah, short commentaries on a host of biblical books, a supercommentary on Ibn Ezra, and commentaries on biblical passages according to topic, such as the Account of the Chariot.[72] He too appears to have accepted a completely naturalistic approach, although in a slightly more veiled manner than did Nissim.[73]

The most original of the Bible commentaries emerging from Provence in the first half of the fourteenth century appropriately belongs to the most original of the Jewish philosophers of this period, if not of the entire Middle Ages, Gersonides (1288–1344). Gersonides wrote a lengthy commentary on the Torah (1329–1338), as well as on many other biblical books.[74] In many crucial respects he continues the Maimonidean tradition of his predecessors but in some respects breaks with it.

Gersonides wrote his Torah commentary after completing his philosophical *magnum opus*, *Wars of the Lord*.[75] Although his philosophy grew from Maimonidean

and Islamic Aristotelian roots, Gersonides adopts novel positions on a number of central issues ranging from human immortality to creation and miracles.[76] He accepts the Aristotelian position that God cannot know particulars as particulars, and hence God can act only in an impersonal manner, but he does not confine God's activity to the natural order as conceived by the Aristotelian philosophers. Gersonides accepts the principles of astrology as a true science and posits that God, as Creator of the order (and Gersonides believes in creation from eternal matter), knows all the affects of all the heavenly bodies on all individuals in accordance with their time and place of birth without knowing the individuals themselves – that is to say, who actually is born at any given time and place. The detailed knowledge possessed by God emanates to the Separate Intellects and from them to the Active Intellect, which stands in immediate relation to the sublunar world. This view becomes the basis for Gersonides' approach to prophecy, providence, and miracles.[77] The Active Intellect, according to Gersonides, has an ability not only to confer knowledge of how the order will affect certain individuals without knowing the individual receiving this information or the one the information pertains to – the process of "particularizing" the knowledge takes place in the mind of the prophet or soothsayer who receives the knowledge on the basis of a natural preparedness – but also has the ability to suspend the evil effects of the order on the person attaining conjunction without knowing the individual involved. The person attaining conjunction in essence is automatically governed by a different level of order in which he or she, and even those close to this individual, are protected from harm. In this manner Gersonides explains the miracles recorded in the Bible and other acts of individual providence. In short, although Gersonides sees the order as being completely impersonal, his theory allows him to accept the occurrence of supernatural events without ascribing to God or to the Active Intellect knowledge of historical individuals. Gersonides absolutely denies that God or the Active Intellect can possess any knowledge of any historical individual for that would necessitate a deterministic universe and negate human free will. Astrology shows the influences exerted on human beings by the heavenly bodies but human beings possess the ability to act in accordance with reason and contrary to these influences. God can neither know what human beings actually choose in their free will, which is in principle unknowable, or what they already chose, because this would entail changes in divine knowledge. God and the Active Intellect can only know how individuals are destined to behave if they act solely in accordance with the astral influences.[78]

Given his acceptance of creation, Gersonides in his Torah commentary accepts the historicity of Adam and Eve, and the Torah's description of the early generations. In light of his philosophical approach to providence, he sees no need to resort

to the type of naturalistic explanations used by his philosophical predecessors to explain many of the miracles. He stretches his theory of providence to include even the miraculous voice heard at Sinai and God's legislation of the Torah, although God has no personal knowledge of Moses or of Israel. This is not to say that Gersonides acknowledges the literal truth of all of the biblical miracles. He agrees with Maimonides' view that all appearances of an angel occur in a dream or vision, not in waking life (unless the term "angel" refers to a prophet), hence the miracle of Balaam's talking ass never really occurred. Although he accepts the existence of the Garden of Eden, he follows Maimonides and his circle in understanding the story itself as a philosophical parable. Gersonides, however, makes sparing use of allegorical explanations in his interpretation. Only biblical books that are allegorical by their very nature in his view, such as Job and Song of Songs,[79] are explained accordingly. Verses dealing with divine knowledge are interpreted by Gersonides in light of his theory of the conditional manner in which God knows human beings and their actions.

Gersonides often adopts a more pious stance in his commentary than in his philosophical treatise, ascribing to God actions that he sees the Active Intellect immediately responsible for, and not going into detail as to the impersonal manner of divine governance. Yet he continuously refers his readers to the appropriate sections in the *Wars of the Lord* where they can study these matters, and at times even allows himself some bold philosophical remarks on the subject at hand. In summing up one of the lessons learned from the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, for example, Gersonides writes in his commentary on Genesis.

> We are taught something exceptionally remarkable about God's knowledge, which has eluded all our predecessors whose writings have reached us – namely, what God knows of the activities taking place on earth is other than what people actually do. God knows the human actions that ought to take place in accordance with what the astral bodies, placed by God to exercise general providence over the individuals of the human race, prearranged for them on the day of their birth. Yet human free will prevails over the ordering of their activities on the part of the astral bodies. Therefore it is possible that what people actually do differs from what God knows of the ordering of their activities. God knows their activities from the aspect that knowledge is possible – namely the aspect in which they are ordered and determinate. He cannot, however, have any knowledge of them from the aspect in which they are contingent. If we assume that such knowledge is possible – they would not be contingent. For this reason Scripture says, for example, that God will see if the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah performed the evils in accordance of His knowledge of them. It is possible that what they did was other than what God knew of them. We already explained this matter pertaining to divine knowledge of particulars in the third treatise of *Wars of the Lord*. We explained there, in a manner beyond any doubt, that this type of knowledge is necessitated from the viewpoint of Torah and the viewpoint of philosophy.[80]

In this comment Gersonides reveals his view of the conditional nature of divine knowledge – clearly a problematic doctrine from a religious perspective. At the same time, he hides the even more problematic doctrine that what God does not know in advance, He also does not know after the fact. His comment leaves the readers with the false impression that God attains this knowledge. Only one who studies his philosophical treatise understands the full implication of his comments in his biblical commentary.

In the introduction to his commentary Gersonides indicates that the Torah is concerned with three areas: commandments, political (and moral) wisdom, theoretical knowledge (natural science and metaphysics). He adopts Maimonides' view that the Torah is concerned with the well-being of the body politic and with the inculcation of true beliefs. The true perfection of the individual lies in the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and that the goal of the commandments and the moral virtues is to aid the individual in the attainment of this perfection. Gersonides stresses the pedagogical value of the speculative views imparted by the Torah, arguing that without its guidance it would be exceptionally hard to attain this knowledge on the basis of philosophy alone. He goes even further than Maimonides in showing how the Torah aids philosophic inquiry both by the views it imparts and the actions it commands, many serving to stimulate contemplation. He does not consider the Torah to be a substitute for philosophic inquiry, for true knowledge lies in the apprehension of an object together with its causes. Moreover, he ascribes no inherent superiority to the prophet over the philosopher in the domain of theoretical knowledge. He even presents the view that underlying the vision may be a false conception held by the prophet which his prophecy does not set right.[81]

> Similarly, you will find that Ezekiel saw during his prophecy that the spheres have voices since he believed this to be the case, as Maimonides had indicated. It is not necessary that the prophet possess true opinions regarding the secrets of reality.[82]

The view that the spheres have voices is based on the false conception that the planets move and the spheres remain stationary. Maimonides, Gersonides maintains, already alluded to Ezekiel's false view.[83] Gersonides makes this point explicitly, in a crucial sense foreshadowing Spinoza's understanding of the biblical visions.

The bulk of Gersonides' commentary is not concerned with theoretical knowledge but with the commandments and the moral lessons imparted by the Torah. Gersonides, following Ibn Ezra, devotes much attention in his commentary to an understanding of the Torah's literal meaning. Alone among the philosophical exegetes, he devotes much of his commentary to an attempt to derive the Oral Law from the text of the Torah based on nine logical principles that differ from the

thirteen rabbinic principles of legal exegesis. The very structure of his commentary is unique in that each section, which is generally smaller than the weekly Torah reading, is divided into three parts: a literal commentary on the verses; a general interpretation of the matters mentioned in the section; and a list of "lessons" (*to'aliyot*) that summarizes what we learn in regard to the commandments, moral virtues, and speculative truths in each section.

At the root of the philosophical interpretation of the Bible developed by Maimonides and his school is the notion that philosophy and science, for all their shortcomings, essentially provide one with a true understanding of God and of the structure of the world. Hence the "secrets" of the Bible are interpreted in accordance with a worldview that was developed independent of the Jewish tradition. The rationale for this move is clear. There cannot be conflicting truths. Thus if one is convinced in the truth of the philosophers' view, the Bible must be alluding to the same view, but dressed in images to appeal to the understanding of the common person. Although the authority of the Bible is upheld in this manner, from a practical standpoint the teachings of the philosopher essentially replace it as a source of truth. If one wishes to understand the secrets of creation or the account of the chariot presented by Isaiah and Ezekiel, then one does not find them spelled out in the Bible itself or even in rabbinic tradition but in the Aristotelian sciences. It is easy to see why conservative Jews would find such an approach an anathema. The allegorical approach to the Torah was seen as particularly problematic insofar as it serves to undermine its literal truth and essentially follows the path of the Christians, who applied it also to the commandments, no longer treating them as physical actions that are commanded or prohibited. No less problematic from a conservative perspective were the naturalistic explanations offered for many of the miracles that run counter to the notion of God's ability to exercise His power in history in a manner not confined to the workings of nature. These perceived dangers led to the eruption of a number of controversies in the thirteenth and first decade of the fourteenth centuries in Provence surrounding the study of philosophy, the use of philosophical allegory in the interpretation of the Bible and the naturalistic explanations of miracles. As can be seen in the case of Nissim, Kaspi, and Gersonides – who flourished after the ban proclaimed in 1305 forbidding the study of sciences by anyone under the age of twenty-five and the public teaching of philosophical allegorical interpretations of the Torah – these controversies hardly curtailed the philosophical enterprise.[84]

Two further points are worthy of note. Despite the fact that the Provençal philosophical exegetes flourished in a Christian environment, their philosophies were shaped mainly by Islamic Aristotelian philosophy, both through the mediation

of Maimonides and directly. Scholastic ideas played at best a marginal role in their approach. Few, if any, of them knew Latin so any exchange of ideas with Christian thinkers would have been in face-to-face encounters in the vernacular. In short, book culture, which in large part consisted of Hebrew translations of Arabic works, served as the dominant influence on their thought and exegesis. Yet encounters with Christian scholars did take place and also played an important role in Jewish biblical exegesis in the period. In addition to polemical reactions to Christian interpretations of scripture,[85] we find Jewish philosophical exegetes who borrow interpretations from their Christian acquaintances and report this fact explicitly, such as Jacob Anatoli who cites his Christian colleague, Michael Scot.[86] In some cases, particularly that of Gersonides who had extensive dealings with Christian scholars, we can detect influences on the very structure of the commentary and its components.[87]

The second point concerns the relation between Jewish philosophy and the other principal intellectual–spiritual movement that developed in Provence in the same period, that of the nascent *Kabbalah*. Many of the kabbalists also made use of allegorical interpretations, and some of these interpretations are based on philosophical ideas. As for the philosophers, some of them, such as Levi ben Abraham, show an awareness of the kabbalistic approach and utilize the early kabbalistic–*midrashic* text, *Sefer ha-Bahir* in their own exegesis. For both groups of exegetes the allegorical method allowed them to expand significantly the number of interpretations that can be given to the biblical narratives, reminiscent of the classical *midrash* as well as of Christian exegesis. The same biblical story can be understood as referring simultaneously to many different levels of truth and even to many different esoteric truths belonging to the same level. For both groups there also existed an external point of reference that provided a conceptual model on which their interpretations were built – the Aristotelian worldview for the Jewish philosophers and the world of the *sefirot* and the *sitra aḥra* (the "other" or evil side) for the kabbalists.[88]

V. LATE-MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE PHILOSOPHICAL EXEGESIS

The center of Jewish philosophical creativity in the second half of the fourteenth century moved to Spain. Even prior to this period the influence of Ibn Ezra and Maimonides are clearly discernable in thirteenth-century Spanish commentaries. These include those written by opponents of the philosophical worldview, most notably Nahmanides, who often grappled with the comments of both these

thinkers. The extent to which the allegorical and naturalistic approach of the philosophers infiltrated Spanish Jewish thought is probably best exemplified by the Torah commentary of the kabbalist Bahya ben Asher (1291). In the introduction to his commentary, Bahya outlines four different exegetical approaches to the Torah: literal, homiletical, the way of the intellect (philosophy), and that of *Kabbalah*. Although most of his commentary is based on the first two approaches, he frequently brings interpretations based on the latter two. He sees the philosophical approach as existing in harmony with the kabbalistic approach, although casting light on less profound truths. In general, he cites approvingly philosophical allegorical interpretations and even naturalistic interpretations, only on occasion dismissing them as false. As he explains: "The third way, the way of the intellect, I will offer in places, in order to show that our Torah comprises all of the sciences. All the other sciences are her handmaidens, presented by way of reason and speculation, while our Torah is from God and is primary."[89]

The following two centuries witnessed a good number of philosophical commentaries on the Bible, many written in the form of supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra.[90] Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah achieved near-canonical status for the rationalist camp. The exegetes generally interpret Ibn Ezra in light of Maimonides' philosophy – the former's commentary and the latter's philosophical opus seen as complementing one another. One can detect a number of conflicting currents in the direction of the commentaries, whether on Ibn Ezra or directly on the Torah and other biblical texts. Many promote the philosophical naturalism, in its Neoplatonic garb (including astrology), characterizing the earlier Provençal commentaries. This is evident, for example, in the late-fourteenth-century commentary on the Torah and supercommentary on Ibn Ezra, *Meqqor Ḥayyim* by Samuel Tzartza. Tzartza also follows Ibn Ezra and Maimonides in veiling his belief in the eternity of the world – assuming that this indeed is the doctrine held by the latter two thinkers – although his comments clearly allude to this doctrine.[91] Other exegetes react against the trend of philosophical naturalism and attempt to uphold the idea of divine volition, thereby restoring an immediate personal dimension to God's activity in the world while still making use of philosophical ideas. This approach, for example, characterizes the late-fifteenth- early-sixteenth-century Iberian philosopher and exegete, Don Isaac Abrabanel.[92]

Abrabanel was a prolific author, writing lengthy commentaries on most books of the Bible. He undertook the writing of a commentary on the Torah in 1505 while living in Venice, having already written his other biblical commentaries. His exceptionally verbose commentary reflects both the medieval tradition and some of the trends charactering the Renaissance. Much of his Torah commentary, in

addition to presenting his own views, reads as a compendium of the interpretations of earlier exegetes – principally, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Nahmanides, Gersonides, and Nissim Gerondi – in which he analyzes and critiques them. He also brings rabbinic *midrashim*, which he feels add to the discussion at hand, interpreting them figuratively. His concern is to ascertain the literal meaning of the divine text as well as the philosophical–theological truths underlying it. Unlike Ibn Ezra, Abrabanel does not concentrate on grammatical points in his interpretations. He is much more sensitive to literary issues, such as resumptive repetition in biblical narrative and rhetorical speech, reminiscent of Nahmanides' approach. On a theological level he grapples mainly with the views of the philosophers but he is influenced also by kabbalistic ideas. The acceptance of God's creation of the world and performance of miracles leads Abrabanel to break with those philosophers who reject the literal meaning of the text when it reports supernatural events. He deeply respects Maimonides and continuously wrestles with his thought, interpreting him in what he regards as the best possible light – that is to say, as less of a radical Aristotelian philosopher than many of his predecessors interpret him – although still often criticizing him for going too far in the direction of Aristotelian philosophy.

A good example of Abrabanel's approach can be found in his interpretation of the Garden of Eden story. Against Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, and Gersonides – who treat much of the story, if not all of it, solely as a philosophical parable – Abrabanel accepts its historical reality. The Garden of Eden is a real place beneath the equator where Adam and Eve lived a life of intellect without experiencing any physical passion. The Tree of Life is a medicinal tree and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is aphrodisiac in nature stimulating the sexual appetite. For a number of reasons Abrabanel rejects the notion that the serpent in the story actually talked, not even by way of miracle – although he has no trouble in accepting such miracles in principle, for example, the miracle of Balaam's talking ass. He sees the conversation between the serpent and Eve as one occurring in Eve's mind as she viewed the serpent eating from the Tree of Knowledge without experiencing any negative effects. As against the Maimonidean view that only the intellectually and morally perfect can attain prophecy, Abrabanel maintains that God's speech comes to Adam and Eve despite their sin. Interestingly, his reading of the Torah's account leads him to single out astrological factors associated with the time and place involved as aiding them in the reception of prophecy. In other places in his commentary, however, he has no trouble in conceiving God granting prophecy even to the unworthy to serve His end, as in the case of Balaam. In the case of Adam and Eve prophecy assumes the form of created speech – a view reminiscent of Saadia's approach. In a later discussion of Abraham's vision at Elone Mamre, Abrabanel

enters into a discussion of the different forms prophecy assumes, including the form of created images of the angels that are impressed upon the prophet's sense of sight, and not just images received by the prophet's imagination as a result of a divine emanation.[93] In each instance of prophecy God is depicted as being directly involved. Abrabanel interprets the punishments meted out to the serpent, Eve, and Adam in a literal manner. The cherubs with the revolving sword placed by God to guard the entrance to the Garden, on the other hand, are interpreted figuratively to signify the young children of Adam and Eve and all the sorrows they bring to their parents that prevent their return to the Garden. It is at this stage of his interpretation that Abrabanel turns to other levels of the story – first as presaging later biblical history and then as a philosophical allegory – dealing at length with the approach of Maimonides to the story.[94]

Although Abrabanel's commentary is anchored mainly in the medieval tradition it is heavily influenced also by Renaissance humanism. Abrabanel was well versed in Latin literature, and more than a few ideas of classical and Christian thinkers, early and contemporary ones, find their way into his biblical commentaries. For example, Abrabanel's "return to nature" ideal, favoring a simple noncentralized and nonmonarchical society, is reminiscent of the ideal of the Cynics and some of the Church Fathers, and was shared by a number of contemporary humanists.[95] The very form in which Abrabanel presents his commentary points to Christian influences. Although Jewish precedents may be discerned for the formats of his introductions, often analyzing the book in question according to Aristotle's four causes, his subdivisions of the biblical texts, and his introduction of each subsection by a series of problems, are more reminiscent of Christian exegetical approaches.[96] Christian humanist influence is most pervasive in Abrabanel's commentaries on the books belonging to the Early Prophets and on Chronicles in which he engages in questions of their authorship and critically questions traditional attributions – a stance he would not think of adopting in respect to the Torah. He sees them written by later prophets based on compilations of earlier material and on divine inspiration – Jeremiah composed the Book of Samuel and Ezra Chronicles – although at times, in his view, they misunderstood certain points in their sources.[97]

Renaissance trends influenced subsequent Italian Jewish thinkers as well, Azariah de Rossi being the most notable example of how the new spirit of textual criticism and critical historiography makes a deep impression on Jewish scholarship. Jewish authors in this period generally were well versed in Latin literature unlike those in the previous centuries. Yet the biblical commentaries written in the sixteenth century tend to remain anchored primarily in medieval Jewish thought while absorbing a number of ideas from their cultural environment. This is true, for

example, of the Torah commentary of Obadiah Sforno, the most popular of the sixteenth-century commentaries.[98]

VI. SPINOZA

In Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*,[99] published in 1670, we find an emphasis on the literal reading of the Bible, while denying the very existence of an underlying deeper layer.[100] As opposed to Jewish philosophical predecessors, his aim in adopting this approach is to eliminate the authority of the Bible as a source of truth.[101] Ibn Ezra focuses on a literal reading to uncover God's intent and preserve the divine truth, at the same time that he saw figurative meanings as reflecting God's intent when reason rejects the literal interpretation. Maimonides and his disciples concentrate on what they regarded as the deeper level of the Bible, essentially treating it as conveying philosophical truths belonging to the Aristotelian tradition. One may judge their activity as a way of rescuing the Bible in the face of their commitment to human reason by attempting to bring it into harmony with philosophy. The Torah is seen by them as the ideal legislation for leading individuals to moral and intellectual perfection as posited in the philosophical tradition. Spinoza sets out to show that the reading of philosophical truths into the Bible is the product of the vain imaginings of the philosophical exegetes. In short, the Bible is not designed to convey any sort of philosophical truths and hence cannot be regarded as a source of authority for understanding the deeper secrets of reality. The prophets were not philosophers who attained the profound truths of existence or a true understanding of ethics. They were simple individuals possessing commonsense notions of morality and addressing simple people like themselves in a manner that could be understood. They shared with their coreligionists the same false views of reality. They possessed a highly developed imagination, as reflected by their visions, but not intellect. If they described God in corporeal terms it is because they themselves conceived of God in corporeal terms. Moreover, the Torah is nothing more than a state law designed to produce the social welfare of the recently freed Hebrews at the expense of freedom of thought. Moses was hardly the ultimate philosopher-king as depicted by Maimonides and his followers. Even much of the Torah was not produced by Moses but by later figures, most prominent among them Ezra. Precisely the literal reading of the Torah without religious preconceptions, but with a solid grounding in the Hebrew language, according to Spinoza, will show this to be the case. Spinoza's treatise thus became a milestone in the development of biblical criticism. Yet as in the case of the medieval philosophical exegetical tradition, Spinoza's interpretation is very much molded by his philosophical conclusions. Because for

Spinoza there can be no expressions of divine activity outside the order of nature in his view, all the biblical miracles reported in the Bible must have existed only in the minds of their beholders. In other words, they were natural events that were not properly understood and treated in an exaggerated supernatural manner. Spinoza's God does not communicate in audible created words, thus, all such communications recorded in the Bible must refer to the vain product of the prophet's imagination. It is not simply a literal reading of the Bible that leads to these interpretations but a reading that is guided by what Spinoza regards as a true understanding of reality.

No less than Maimonides and his followers, Spinoza was motivated by philosophical–political concerns in his biblical exegesis. Writing in a period of political upheaval in Holland, his criticism of the Jewish readings of the Bible is a way of combating those Protestants who feel that the State should be subservient to the Church, particularly those who espoused establishing a theocracy based on the Old Testament model. If the Bible in general and the Torah in particular can be shown to be devoid of divine wisdom, which for Spinoza is attained only by human reason, then all church claims to possessing truth on the basis of a correct understanding of the divine revelation found in the Bible is without basis. Human reason, free from religious strictures, is the *sole* source for understanding divine truth. Biblical exegesis may be important for an understanding of history but not for attaining the Word of the Living God. Whereas some of the medieval thinkers, as we have seen, viewed the Torah as a product of the union between the divine and the human – Moses attaining a level of divine illumination that resulted in his laying down a perfect legislation – Spinoza sees the Torah as a completely outmoded and nonbinding legislation that was the product of the human imagination alone, as is true of the rest of the Bible. With this conclusion and the challenge it poses to subsequent Jewish philosophical exegetes we enter into the modern era.

NOTES

1 For recent English surveys of medieval Jewish philosophical interpretations of the Bible see, for example, Klein-Braslavy 2000, pp. 302–20; Tirosh-Samuelson 2004, pp. 1951–61.
2 Ibn Ezra 1976, vol. 1, pp. 1–10, 137–46. For an annotated English translation of the introduction see Lancaster 2003, pp. 142–75. For a succinct study of Ibn Ezra's exegesis see Sarna 1993b, pp. 1–27. See also Simon 2000, pp. 377–87.
3 Ibid., p. 137; cf. p. 6.
4 Ibid., p. 138.
5 Ibid., pp. 138–9; cf. p. 1.
6 Ibid., p. 139; cf. p. 7 where he writes that it is close to the center.
7 Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim 54a.
8 Genesis Rabbah 8:2.

9 Ibn Ezra 1976, vol. 1, p. 7; cf. p. 139.
10 Ibid., p. 141; cf. p. 10.
11 Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 63a.
12 Commentary on Numbers 10:29, Ibn Ezra 1976, vol. 3, p. 141; cf. Numbers Rabbah 13:15.
13 For a discussion of Ibn Ezra's Jewish sources see Lancaster 2003, pp. 101–41.
14 For a survey of Rashi and his school see Grossman 2000, pp. 321–71.
15 For a comparison between these two thinkers, particularly in their interpretation of verses dealing with Jewish law, see Lockshin 1989, pp. 173–86. See also Lockshin 2003, 83–91.
16 See for example Commentary on Exodus 32:14, Ibn Ezra 1976, vol. 2, p. 208.
17 See Simon 1993, pp. 86–128. See also below.
18 There are few direct references to Christian interpreters in the commentaries of Rashi and his disciples, or in Ibn Ezra, but scholars have attempted to identify where their interpretations appear to be aimed at combating Christian exegesis. In western Europe polemical anti-Christian exegetical literature became widespread beginning in the thirteenth century, particularly in the writings of David Kimhi. See Talmage 1999, pp. 189–211. For one of the best anthologies of this literature see Berger 1979.
19 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.5–6, Saadia 1948, pp. 103–7. See Lasker 1995, pp. 165–77.
20 For a study of Islamic exegesis see, for example, the collection of articles in Rippin 1988. For Christian exegesis the classic study remains Smalley 1948; see also the collection of articles in Saebø 2000.
21 See Malter 1921, pp. 141–6, 308–29. For a study of Saadia's exegetical approach see Ben-Shammai 2003b, pp. 33–50.
22 On the influence of speculative Moslem theology on Jewish philosophy in general and on Saadia in particular see Wolfson 1979.
23 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* IV.8, VII.2, Saadia 1948, pp. 232, 265–7, 415.
24 Ibid. II.9-10, Saadia 1948, pp. 116–20.
25 See Rawidowicz 1943, pp. 139–65.
26 See, for example, Saadia 1915.
27 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.10, Saadia 1948, pp. 117–8.
28 For a discussion of Saadia's theory of prophecy see Kreisel 2001a, pp. 27–93.
29 See his introduction in Saadia 1984, pp. 165–205.
30 Ibid., pp. 191–5.
31 Ibid., p. 167.
32 Ibid., p. 283. It is interesting to note that Ibn Ezra ascribes a different interpretation to Saadia in which he is quoted as maintaining that the serpent did not speak but an angel spoke through the serpent. See Ibn Ezra 1976, vol. 1, p. 25. This raises the question of Ibn Ezra's sources for his citations of Saadia as well as whether Moshe Zucker correctly identified the authorship of all the fragments he sees as belonging to Saadia's commentary on Genesis.
33 For a discussion of the philosophical–allegorical interpretation of Scripture in medieval Jewish commentaries see Talmage 1999, pp. 108–50. Philosophical allegory characterizes the commentaries of the first-century Jewish biblical exegete, Philo of Alexandria, but Philo's works, all written in Greek, do not seem to have made much, if any, impact on subsequent rabbinic exegesis or on medieval Jewish exegesis.
34 See in particular his Commentary on Exodus 3:15, 20:1, 33:21, Ibn Ezra 1976, vol. 2, pp. 24–35, 127–134, 215–9; Commentary on Daniel 10:21.

35 See above, note 17. For a more detailed study of many of these commentaries see Schwartz 1996. See also below.
36 See, for example, his Commentary on Numbers 20:8, Ibn Ezra 1976, vol. 3, p. 171, where he alludes to a naturalistic understanding of miracles, such as that of the water that gushed forth from the rock ("When the part knows all it conjoins with the All and it performs in all signs and miracles"). For a discussion of Ibn Ezra's view on this issue and its subsequent influence see Ravitzky 1984, pp. 231–72. On the use of astrology in Ibn Ezra's biblical commentaries see in particular Sela 1999. See also Langerman 1993, pp. 28–85.
37 Commentary on Deuteronomy 1:2, Ibn Ezra 1976, vol. 3, pp. 213–5.
38 Ibn Ezra offers few allegorical interpretations of the Torah. Perhaps the most significant is the elliptic one he offers to the story of the Garden of Eden. Although he treats the story as true on the literal level (although it is far from certain that this is his private view on the matter) he sees it also containing profound secrets, explaining: "From the light of the intellect went out the will, and from the second – that which arose. For the movement of the will is from the front (or: from beforehand). The fig leaves are also a sign. And the third is called by the name 'discernment,' for at the beginning there is potentiality without actuality. The one who understands this secret understands how the river separates. This is the secret of the Garden of Eden and the garments of skin. This secret also teaches that the human being has the ability to live forever. The knower understands that this is the entirety of the human being" (Commentary on Genesis 3:24, Ibn Ezra 1976, vol. 1, p. 30). It is easy to see from this passage why the secrets to which Ibn Ezra alludes pose a challenge to his interpreters through the centuries.
39 *Guide*, Introduction, Maimonides 1963, p. 5. For a bibliography of articles devoted to Maimonides' biblical exegesis see Dienstag 1970, pp. 151–90.
40 For a brief survey of Maimonides' philosophy see Kreisel 1997, pp. 245–80.
41 *Guide* I.51-64, Maimonides 1963, pp. 112–57.
42 The most detailed study of Maimonides' exegesis of the creation story and the Garden of Eden story can be found in two Hebrew books by Sara Klein-Braslavy; see Klein-Braslavy 1986, Klein-Braslavy 1987.
43 *Guide* II.30, Maimonides 1963, p. 356.
44 Ibid., pp. 263–4.
45 Ibid., p. 272. For a study of Maimonides' various interpretations of Jacob's dream see Klein-Braslavy 1988, pp. 329–49.
46 Ibid., p. 266.
47 For a detailed discussion of Maimonides' theory of prophecy see Kreisel 2001a, pp. 148–315.
48 *Guide* II.41-43, Maimonides 1963, pp. 385–93.
49 There are, however, a number of important differences between the two groups. The Sages composed their parables in a conscious manner, whereas the prophets "received" them in a vision of prophecy. More significant, whereas Maimonides regards prophetic visions as invariably true, he does not regard all the speculative views of the Sages as true, just as not all the positions of the philosophers are true.
50 See Kreisel 2001a, pp. 171–7, 189–94, 230–42, 257–62, 281–4.
51 Maimonides 1963, pp. 11–2.
52 For an in-depth treatment of this theme and the various types of parable that Maimonides uncovers in traditional literature see Klein-Braslavy 1996. See also Diamond 2002.
53 See Kreisel 1999, pp. 189–23.
54 For the influence of astrology on Jewish philosophy see Schwartz 2005b.

55 On Maimonides' approach to astrology see Langermann 1991, pp. 123–58.
56 See Robinson 2002. In addition to a critical edition of the text Robinson presents English translations of select passages.
57 Ibn Tibbon 1837. For a recent study of Ibn Tibbon see Robinson 2006. Commentaries on selected biblical texts in accordance with their underlying topic, instead of a running commentary on an entire biblical book, were to become an important genre of literature in this period, although the latter form of commentary continued to predominate.
58 See Ravitzky 1981a, pp. 87–123. On the development of the esoteric tradition for reading the *Guide* see Ravitzky 1990b, pp. 159–207.
59 Ibn Tibbon 1837, p. 173–5.
60 For a study of Kimhi see Talmage 1975; Talmage 1999, pp. 3–70. Mordechai Cohen 2000, pp. 398–415.
61 The commentary on the Garden of Eden is found in Kimhi 1926, pp. liii–ixxiv. The esoteric Ezekiel commentary is printed in the back of Mikraot Gedolot editions of Ezekiel. Kimhi also refers to Maimonides' approach in his commentary on Isaiah, chap. 6 (Kimhi 1926, pp. 37ff.). One should note that Kimhi's exoteric commentary on the beginning of Genesis elaborates on naturalistic explanations for the various phenomena described in the Torah's account. See Kimhi 1986, pp. 1–43.
62 For a study of Moses ibn Tibbon's philosophy and treatises, together with a critical edition of the commentary on Song of Songs and a German translation, see Fraisse 2004. I plan to publish together with Colette Sirat an annotated edition of the *Book of Peah*. Moses ibn Tibbon also wrote one of the earliest supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra but very little of this work has survived.
63 Anatoli 1866. For a study of one aspect of these sermons see Saperstein 1996, pp. 55–74. For an English translation of one of the sermons see Saperstein 1989, pp. 113–23.
64 See Harvey 2000a, pp. 171–88.
65 See Halkin 1966, pp. 65–76.
66 For an annotated edition of the section on the Account of Creation see Levi ben Abraham 2004; on the secrets of the Torah see Levi ben Abraham 2007. I am currently preparing an annotated edition of the section on the Account of the Chariot.
67 See Kreisel 2001b, pp. 20–36. For an annotated edition of this work see Nissim of Marseilles 2000.
68 Maimonides certainly agrees that the latter two events occurred solely in a vision of prophecy. He treats the first, however, as a historical event, although whether this is also his private view on the matter is open to question. See Kreisel 2001a, pp. 220–1, 265, 284–5.
69 This interpretation is taken from Levi ben Abraham who brings it in the name of Moses ibn Tibbon. Levi brings also Maimonides' interpretation that the individuals singled out by the Torah were exceptional in this regard and not representative of their generation, as well as a naturalistic explanation based on the view that climactic conditions were different before the flood allowing for greater longevity. See Levi ben Abraham 2004, pp. 318–25.
70 Nissim of Marseilles 2000, pp. 177–8.
71 Ibid., p. 178.
72 For a discussion and English translation of Kaspi's own description of his works see Mesch 1975, pp. 7–58. See also Kupfer and Kasher 2007, pp. 823–5. For a study of Kaspi's biblical exegesis see H. Kasher 1983.
73 On the basis of his comments in *Tirat Kesef*, Kaspi was accused by Kalonymous ben Kalonymous of viewing the prophet himself as the author of the miracles; see Kreisel 1984a, pp. 126–30.

74 For a bibliography of studies on Gersonides' biblical exegesis see Kellner 1992, pp. 382–5; Kellner 2003, pp. 352–4. See more recently Klein-Braslavy, Sirat, and Dahan 2003, pp. 193–280.
75 Seymour Feldman completed an annotated English translation of this work in three volumes. See Gersonides 1984–1999. At the end of the second volume, pp. 213–47, Feldman devotes an appendix to Gersonides' biblical exegesis.
76 For a comprehensive study of Gersonides' philosophy see in particular Touati 1973.
77 For a study of Gersonides' approach to prophecy and a further discussion of this point see Kreisel 2001a, pp. 316–424. See also Klein-Braslavy 1998, pp. 171–199.
78 For the nature of divine knowledge and prophetic divination see Rudavsky 1985b, pp. 161–81.
79 For English translations of these commentaries, see Gersonides 1946, 1998a.
80 See Gersonides 1993, pp. 272–3. The translation is my own. See Feldman's translation and discussion in Gersonides 1987, vol. 2, p. 229.
81 See Touati 1968, pp. 169–97.
82 Gersonides 1993, pp. 222–4.
83 See *Guide* II.8, Maimonides 1963, p. 267.
84 For a historical overview of these controversies and the issues that were raised see Sarachek 1935. See also G. Stern 2000, pp. 189–209. It should be noted that at times there was confusion on the part of the critics on the nature of allegorical interpretation – more specifically on the issue when it was designed to replace the simple meaning of scripture and when it was meant to supplement it while uncovering the deeper meaning of the text. In many cases in which the critics accused the allegorists of denying the historicity of the text the latter were in fact seeking to bring to light the additional significance of the stories. The interpretation that Abraham and Sarah represent form and matter, for example, was not intended to deny their existence. This is also the case with the view that the twelve sons of Jacob represent the twelve constellations – an interpretation that may also signify that each was born under a different astrological sign.
85 See above, note 18.
86 See Saperstein 1996, pp. 55–74. Anatoli and Michael Scot were in contact in Naples where they both served Emperor Frederick II.
87 See Sirat 2001, pp. 210–23. See also Lawee 2003, pp. 157–79.
88 In the case of the kabbalists it may cogently be argued that much of their view of the higher worlds developed in the very process of their exegesis. The Jewish philosophers, on the other hand, found a fully developed worldview outside of Judaism that provided the key to their interpretation. Despite this and many other significant differences in their manner of exegesis, there exists a close relation between these two movements and the modes of exegesis they adopted, which requires further study. For the classic study of the emergence of Kabbalah in Province see Scholem 1987, pp. 199–364.
89 Bahya ben Asher 1982, vol. 1, p. 5. Bayha's commentary provides a wealth of philosophical interpretations, some not known to us from other sources.
90 See Simon 1993, pp. 111–21; and in more detail Schwartz 1996.
91 See Schwartz 1996, pp. 72–90.
92 For Abrabanel's philosophical exegesis see in particular Lawee 2001, and Feldman 2003. See also Lawee forthcoming, pp. 190–214.
93 For Abrabanel's approach to prophecy see Feldman 2003, pp. 83–99.
94 Abrabanel 1964, vol. 1, pp. 85–122.
95 For a discussion of how this ideal finds its expression in Abrabanel's commentary on the Tower of Babel story, and of the different scholarly views as to his sources for this ideal, see Roni 2006, pp. 194–221.

96 See Lawee 2003, pp. 157–79; Saperstein 2003, pp. 133–56.
97 See Lawee forthcoming, pp. 190–214.
98 For a description of this commentary and its sources see Zeev Gottlieb's introduction in Sforno 1992, pp. 10–56. See also Schwartz 1993, pp. 250–7.
99 Spinoza 2001.
100 For a study of Spinoza's biblical exegesis and its intellectual background see Preuss 1998, pp. 3–27, 111–38. See also *Jewish Political Studies* 7 (1995), which devotes the entire issue to Spinoza and the Bible.
101 For a more detailed discussion of the analysis that follows see Kreisel 2001a, pp. 544–86.

5

MYSTICISM AND PHILOSOPHY

MICHAH GOTTLIEB

Kabbalah is the formal term designating the Jewish mystical tradition.[1] How one defines *Kabbalah* is a matter of dispute. *Kabbalah* literally means "tradition," but scholars note that *Kabbalah* involves an application of individual mystical insight to revealed texts that results in an esoteric interpretation of the revealed texts.[2] Major texts in the kabbalistic corpus include the *Heikhalot* literature (first–eighth centuries); *Book of Creation* (first–eighth centuries);[3] *Book of Bahir* (edited in the twelfth century); the literature of the medieval German Pietists twelfth–thirteenth centuries); works emerging from the mystical centers in Provence and Spain whose most famous product was the *Zohar* (thirteenth century); literature of the sixteenth-century Safed circle; and the works of modern Hasidism eighteenth century–present).

Gershom Scholem draws a sharp distinction between *Kabbalah* and Jewish philosophy, noting five contrasts between them. First, philosophers use allegory, which involves assigning definite metaphysical referents to biblical terms. Kabbalists, however, interpret the Bible as a series of symbols, that is, poetic ways of representing truths that can neither be clearly understood nor precisely articulated using rational, discursive thought.[4] Second, whereas for philosophers the practice of Jewish law (*Halakha*) has no intrinsic significance, for kabbalists *Halakha* is of supreme importance as a theurgic instrument to effect changes in the Godhead that help preserve the cosmos.[5] Third, whereas philosophers denigrate rabbinic fantasies (*'aggadot*) as stumbling blocks to truth, kabbalists embrace *'aggada*, seeing it as continuous with their mystical experience and containing esoteric wisdom.[6] Fourth, whereas philosophers devalue prayer, kabbalists infuse it with meaning by assigning prayer theurgic functions.[7] Finally, whereas philosophers deny the reality of evil, seeing it as a mere privation of being, kabbalists affirm the ontological reality of evil.[8]

Recent scholars have rightly criticized Scholem's sharp dichotomy between mysticism and philosophy.[9] In the context of this chapter, however, it is neither possible nor desirable to undertake a systematic analysis of Scholem. Rather, I will outline two approaches to the relationship between philosophy and mysticism in medieval Jewish philosophy. Before I begin, a word on the term "mysticism."

Although the definition of mysticism is a matter of dispute,[10] I find Idel's broad definition of mysticism as "contact with the Divine, differing from the common religious experience cultivated in a certain religion both in intensity and spiritual impact" to be useful, and this chapter will proceed on the basis of this expansive understanding of mysticism.[11]

I. TWO TYPES OF MYSTICISM

In his classic study of vision and imagination in medieval Jewish mysticism, Elliot Wolfson makes a trenchant distinction between two forms of mysticism. "Cognitive" mysticism (which I will call "revelatory" mysticism) affirms that spiritual knowledge "comes by way of revelation, intuition, or illumination."[12] For the revelatory mystic, God is perceived "within the parameters of phenomenal human experience" in sensible images through the imagination. Imagination is superior to reason for imagination is "the divine element of the soul that enables one to gain access to the realm of incorporeality . . . through a process of understanding that transcends sensory data and rational understanding."[13] In contrast, "introvertive" mysticism (which I will call "apophatic" mysticism) rejects the idea that images are adequate to mystical insight. The apophatic mystic believes that God is beyond all representation whether through the imagination or through the intellect and is most accurately conceived *via negativa*. Images are only appropriate as educational vehicles to inculcate recognition of God's existence to those for whom mystical insight, "an intellectual vision devoid of percept or concept" is unavailable.[14]

Now the Bible abounds with accounts of revelatory visions of God such as Isaiah 6:

> In the year that King Uzziah died, I beheld my Lord seated on high on a lofty throne and the skirts of His robe filled the Temple. Seraphs stood in attendance on Him. Each of them had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his legs and with two he would fly. And one would call to the other, "Holy, holy, holy! The Lord of Hosts His presence fills all the earth." The doorposts would shake at the sound of the one who called, and the House kept filling with smoke.[15]

These mystical visions likewise occur in the earliest texts of the *Kabbalah*. Consider the following text from *Shi'ur Qomah*:

> How much is the measure of the stature of the Holy One, blessed be He, who is concealed from all creatures? . . . The circumference of His head (*'igul rosho*) is three hundred thousand and thirty three and a third [parasangs] something which the mouth cannot speak nor the ear hear . . . The appearance of His face and the appearance of His cheeks are like the image

of the spirit and the form of the soul, for no creature can recognize Him. His body is like beryl (*ketarshish*), His splendor is luminous and glows from within the darkness, and cloud and thick darkness surround Him . . . There is no measurement in our hands but only the names are revealed to us.[16]

This text presents a remarkably anthropomorphic revelatory vision of God. What is striking, however, is that although it presents a visual image of God, which includes precise measurements of God, it likewise recoils from this image remarking that "God is concealed from all creatures," and that "there is no measurement in our hands." This tension between visualization of God and the sense that visualization is impossible is implicit in the Bible itself where visions of God such as Isaiah 6 are counterbalanced by passages like Isaiah 40:18, "To whom will you liken God? What likeness [*demut*] will you compare Him to?"

Elliot Wolfson shows that the tension between the desire to visualize God and the sense that God cannot be visualized lies at the heart of Jewish mysticism. Indeed, he goes so far as to claim, "in great measure the history of theosophical speculation and mystical practice in Judaism has been driven by a hermeneutical effort to resolve this fundamental tension."[17] A number of questions thus emerge from revelatory mysticism: Does mystical vision occur by means of the outer eye or by means of some other sense? If the latter, what is this sense and how does it operate? Does the mystic see something real or is what is visualized a construct of the mystic's imagination? If it is a construct, is there any correlation between the object of vision and the image constructed in the mystic's imagination? Does the mystic visualize God or some other created divine being? If the mystic sees a created divine being, what is the relationship between this being and God? How do mystical visions of God relate to rational approaches to knowing God?[18]

Turning to apophatic mysticism, scholars trace the impact of the *via negativa* on medieval Jewish mysticism to a number of sources. One of the most important of these sources is Neoplatonism. Plotinus, whose work was known to medieval Jewish and Muslim thinkers in a number of forms,[19] provides a classic formulation of negative theology:

The beyond-being does not refer to a some-thing since it does not posit any-thing nor does it "speak its name." It merely indicates that it is not that. No attempt is made to circumscribe it. It would be absurd to circumscribe that immense nature. To wish to do so is to cut oneself off from its slightest trace.[20]

Medieval Jewish philosophers such as Isaac Israeli, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Baḥya ibn Paquda, and Maimonides were important mediating sources transmitting

Neoplatonic negative theology to kabbalists.[21] The apophatic view of God is represented by the concept of *'ein-sof* (literally "infinite"), the aspect of *deus absconditus* first described by kabbalists in the thirteenth century.[22] Azriel of Gerona (1160–1238) expresses the convergence of philosophical negative theology with *Kabbalah* in his statement that "the philosophers [*ḥakhmei ha-meḥqar*] agree with us that our comprehension [of God] is solely *via negativa* [*ki'im'al derekh lo'*]."[23]

Alongside *'ein-sof*, central to kabbalistic theosophy are the *sefirot*, the divine potencies that emanate from *'ein-sof*. Although there are different kabbalistic understandings of the precise nature of the *sefirot*, they are clearly linked with the positive attributes of God found in biblical and rabbinic texts, and so represent *deus revelatus*.[24] A tension therefore emerges between *'ein-sof*, which is described apophatically, and the *sefirot,* which are described kataphatically. How do these two accounts of the deity cohere? More philosophically, if kataphatic descriptions of God involve positing distinction and differentiation in the deity whereas apophatic descriptions assume a unique deity beyond all differentiation, how do we resolve this contradiction? Can one have any relationship with God conceived apophatically? What is the connection among philosophical ratiocination, apophasis, and mystical experience?[25]

We therefore have two sets of problems emerging from revelatory and apophatic mysticism, respectively. In what follows, I will sketch two influential approaches to these problems. For problems emerging from revelatory mysticism I choose Judah Halevi (1085–1141), whereas for problems emerging from apophatic mysticism I choose Moses Maimonides (1138–1204).[26] Other thinkers could have been selected, but I have chosen to focus on Halevi and Maimonides for two reasons. First, each provides a perspicuous theoretical discussion of the problems mentioned, especially as regards the relationship between mystical experience and philosophical ratiocination, which forms the main subject of this chapter. Second, although Halevi and Maimonides are philosophers,[27] they also had mystical inclinations,[28] and their approaches to the relationship between mysticism and philosophy proved very influential for later kabbalists and philosophers alike.[29]

II. HALEVI'S REVELATORY MYSTICISM

Halevi's only philosophical work, *Kuzari*, considers a range of challenges to Judaism, including Christianity, Islam, Karaism, and Kalām. As Leo Strauss points out, "one is entitled to consider *Kuzari* primarily as a defense of Judaism against philosophy."[30] The confrontation between the philosophical approach to truth and a mystical alternative grounded in a revelatory experience of the divine is the major theme of

the work. I divide Halevi's defense of a mystical alternative to philosophy into three parts: (1) a reformulation and analysis of philosophy; (2) criticisms of philosophy; and (3) a defense of revelatory mysticism.

Analysis of Philosophy

Although philosophers pride themselves on their critical faculties, they too often take the *project* of philosophy for granted, simply assuming its value and capacity to attain truth. Philosophers think that human beings have a divine faculty, which they call "intellect" (*ʿaql*).[31] By using the proper philosophical method, human beings can know objective truth through this faculty. Halevi asks us to consider the structural features of the philosophical mindset. Philosophers prize theoretical knowledge above all else. Truth is reached through a dispassionate application of one's mind to the object contemplated. Philosophers try to exclude all nontheoretical interest from this study for they are concerned that such interest will lead to subjective distortion. Because they seek knowledge of a fixed truth, the object being studied is conceived as inert.[32] Hence philosophers focus on understanding *being*, and it is not incidental that the most fundamental of Aristotle's ten categories is substance.

Although God is the highest object of knowledge, philosophers are moved to seek knowledge of God from the same *curiosity* that moves them to inquire into any truth. So, for example, knowing God is on par with knowing the place of the earth in the planetary economy.[33] As such, knowledge of God is not momentous or dramatic. It is cold, safe knowledge, for which one would not risk one's life.[34] Philosophers train their intellectual gaze toward the object they seek to grasp. Being finite human beings, they must use discursive reason,[35] and as such, the process of philosophizing is *time-bound*. For this reason, Halevi describes philosophizing as akin to "narrating" (*ka-al-ḥadīth*).[36]

Following Aristotle, Halevi divides philosophy into theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy.[37] The aim of philosophers is to achieve perfection, which involves activity and at its best is constituted by doing theoretical philosophy.[38] In doing philosophy one's aim is to achieve a state in which one's mind accurately mirrors external reality.[39] To better understand this, it is useful to set out Halevi's account of the philosophers' theory of knowledge, which he presents in part five, chapter twelve of *Kuzari*. Halevi's account is drawn from an early treatise of Avicenna entitled *Treatise on the Soul* (*Risala fi al-nafs*).[40]

Knowledge is attained through a complex interplay of different faculties. The philosophers distinguish between outer (*al-ẓāhira*) and inner (*al-bāṭina*) senses. The outer senses are the five senses. The inner senses include common sense (*al-mushtarika*), which is identified with retentive imagination, productive imagination

(al-qūwa al-mutakhayyila), memory (*al-qūwwa al-mutadhakira al-ḥafiẓa*), and the faculty of estimation (*al-qūwa al-mutawahhima*).[41] Knowledge of the external world begins with our five senses. To transform sense perception into knowledge, sense perceptions must be analyzed. Here common sense plays a central role: Its function is to coordinate data originating from different senses. Through common sense the "common sensibles" are known, which include notions such as figure, number, size, motion, and rest.[42] The faculty of estimation instinctually judges whether the object perceived should be pursued or avoided. So, for example, the faculty of estimation signals that one should flee from a hungry lion.[43]

To attain knowledge of external objects, we must store perceptions so that we can compare perceptions recorded at different times with one another. The faculty of memory stores perceptions as well as the judgments of the faculty of estimation. Now while the outer senses passively receive sensations, the productive imagination is active, accessing perceptions stored in memory and combining them. Hence the productive imagination is also called the "combining faculty" (*qūwat al-tarkīb*). If the productive imagination combines images and compares them according to the dictates of the intellect, then it generates true knowledge. The intellect includes self-evident, primary truths, which are known intuitively such as the law of noncontradiction or the axiom that the whole is greater than the part. It attains truth by telling the productive imagination how to combine perceptions received through the five senses and stored in memory so that the intellect can form syllogisms and demonstrative proofs. In this way, we derive philosophical knowledge of ontology, physics, cosmology, and metaphysics.[44]

Practical philosophy includes both moral and political philosophy. It is grounded in optimism about the human capacity to control/organize society and individual desires. At the center of practical philosophy is *law*. "Rational laws" (*al-sharā'iʿ al-ʿaqliyya*) (also called "political laws" (*al-sharā'iʿ al-siyāsiyya*)) include laws of justice, which are necessary for any society to function.[45] Religious laws instill "humility, worship of God, and moral virtue," which help the individual "purify his heart" and so prepare him to contemplate God.[46] In light of this, it is not surprising that philosophers consider all law, including religious law, to be of instrumental value. The philosopher tells the Khazar king not to "worry about which religious law you adhere to"[47] for the king can "create his own religion" or "ground his religion in the rational laws of the philosophers."[48]

Critique of Philosophy

Philosophers commonly critique popular religious beliefs for being anthropomorphic and anthropopathic. They invoke metaphor as a way of explaining biblical

texts that seem to ascribe all-too-human characteristics to God such as limbs and emotions.[49] Now philosophers think that reason provides a way of grasping God in God's otherness. Halevi charges that philosophers themselves anthropomorphize God. The difference is that, rather than conceiving God through the lens of the imagination, they conceive God through the lens of the intellect. The intellect is not, however, a clear glass through which one perceives truth – it is itself a filter that gives the percept a particular coloration.

The philosophers' God is "elevated above all desire (*munazzah ʿan al-irādāt*)."[50] Will is denied of God, for having a will to do something would imply a lack in God.[51] Using intellect, philosophers seek fixed truth. This leads them to focus on God's being, and it is not incidental that they describe God as a substance whose existence is identical with His essence.[52] This is reflected in the philosophical interpretation of the Tetragrammaton, the most sublime biblical name of God, which philosophers take to refer to God's necessary existence.[53] Furthermore, God is the most perfect being whose perfection is constituted by God always knowing the most perfect object in the most perfect way. Because God is the most perfect being, God is always in the process of contemplating Himself, and what follows from His nature, that is, the cosmos. As true knowledge is eternal and unchanging, God cannot know particulars. For particulars change with time, and although God could know all future events eternally there would be a change in God's knowledge when an event went from being potential to being actual.[54]

Halevi notes that the philosophers' God is remarkably similar to the perfect philosopher. Like the perfect philosopher, God is dispassionate and focused on contemplating eternal truth. Like the philosopher, God's perfection rests in God's relation to Himself rather than in God's relation to others.[55] God's governance of the world flows incidentally from God's being and is not the primary aim of God's activity.[56] Halevi's critique calls to mind Spinoza who remarks that "if a triangle could speak it would say that God is eminently triangular."[57]

Now philosophers are skeptical by nature – they do not wish to believe anything not confirmed by sense perception and rational understanding.[58] Although for philosophers all knowledge begins with sense perception,[59] they do not believe that sense perception of God is possible.[60] Hence, philosophers hold that knowledge of God is deduced cosmologically from our understanding of nature.[61]

The philosophers' understanding of nature is determined by their intellectual orientation. Nature is approached as an *object* to be grasped by the intellect. The way of the intellect is to seek rational order, so it is no accident that philosophers conceive of nature as a totality whose constituent parts are eternal and which operates in a determined way.[62] In particular, they observe finite physical causes and effects

in the universe, and seek to transform their *ad hoc* observations into universal, inexorable laws.[63] As they only perceive natural causes and effects, they (unjustly) assert the absolute principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit* (nothing comes from nothing), and so conclude that the world is eternal, and that miracles are impossible.[64] Although the world is eternal according to philosophers, they still need to explain the cause of the *entire* infinite series of causes. Once again they intellectually overreach for not only do they assume that the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit* applies absolutely to *events within the world*, they likewise assume that the *entire series of events* is subject to this principle and so conclude that the cosmos as a whole is metaphysically necessary. Now given that the cosmos is eternal and that an actual infinite series of events is impossible, the philosophers require a self-caused starting point for the whole series. They therefore posit an eternal, necessarily existent God whom they call the "first cause" (*al-sabab al-awwal*).[65] As God is eternal, God's nature must be defined by something eternal. Furthermore, as a perfectly ordered cosmos proceeds from God, God must be an ordering principle.[66] From the philosophers' own experiences, however, it is intellect which systematizes, and intellect is the only faculty that operates outside of time.[67] Hence they conclude that God must be an intellect and the world must proceed from God's eternal thought. Given that the cosmos exists necessarily, God cannot have a will.

Despite the impressive rhetoric of philosophers,[68] Halevi thinks that they enjoy prestige that they do not deserve. Echoing a theme found in his older Muslim contemporary Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī, Halevi claims that because philosophers achieve a high degree of certainty in mathematics and logic, people unjustly assume that they achieve the same certainty in physics and metaphysics.[69] When one examines the state of cosmology and metaphysics, one finds endless disagreements.[70] In cosmology, Halevi echoes some of al-Ghazālī's critiques of the philosophical view,[71] and there are even more serious problems in metaphysics.

First, although philosophers ascribe knowledge, will, and power to God, they acknowledge that God's knowledge, will, and power are structurally different from human beings'. Human beings represent truth through three different capacities, which following *Book of Creation* (*Sefer Yetzirah*) Halevi calls "calculation" (*sefar*), "speech" (*sippur*), and "writing" (*sefer*). One represents truths mentally through intellect, one communicates truths orally through speech, and one transmits them in written form through writing. Human knowledge is *receptive* and involves accommodating our mind to truth. In contrast, God's knowledge is *creative*. God's capacity for calculation (*sefar*), speech (*sippur*), and writing (*sefer*) is a unity through which God brings the world into existence. God's ability to calculate is His thought, which comprises the mathematical relations between objects. God's speech is His

will through which things are created (as in Genesis where God creates through speech), and God's writing is His action, which expresses His power and is coextensive with His will. Now for Halevi philosophical ratiocination must use language.[72] Given that we use the same words to describe God's attributes as to describe our own, philosophical ratiocinations concerning God's nature are necessarily misleading and imprecise.[73] Along similar lines, Halevi notes that philosophers agree that God is a timeless unity.[74] Given that, as finite creatures, human beings use discursive reason and so must represent God's attributes separately over time, we can never properly grasp God's nature.[75] Halevi's critique of the human ability to grasp God is ontological as well as epistemological. Given the discrepancy between God's infinite essence and human beings' finite intellect, any being grasped by human beings could not be God.[76]

Halevi likewise notes an inconsistency in the philosophers' claim not to accept anything not derived through rational analysis. His criticism is related to a criticism mounted by al-Ghazālī, and so it is worth beginning with al-Ghazālī. At the beginning of his great autobiography, *The Deliverance From Error* (*al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*), al-Ghazālī notes the inability of reason and the senses to ground themselves. Al-Ghazālī recounts his youthful confusion over the many theological disputes among Muslims. To escape this confusion, he resolves only to accept ideas about which he cannot entertain the slightest doubt.[77] He begins with two apparently infallible sources of knowledge, sense perception (*al-ḥissiyāt*) and self-evident truths (*al-ḍarūriyyāt*) such as the law of noncontradiction. Al-Ghazālī begins by noting that sense perception is not always infallible. For example, a star appears to the senses as a small dot, whereas reason judges it to be much larger than the earth. Reason likewise can be doubted, for although the self-evident truths seem certain, who is not to say that what seems certain in light of reason might not be doubtful in light of a higher faculty? Just as reason is able to correct sense perception, so a higher faculty may be able to correct reason. Al-Ghazālī reinforces this idea by appealing to the state of dreaming. We are often certain in dreaming that what we perceive is true, but when we awaken it becomes clear that what we dreamed was false. If reason can be doubted, however, there seems to be no hope of ever escaping the skeptical predicament for it is then impossible to ever formulate an argument with certainty. Al-Ghazālī notes that this realization made him a complete skeptic for two months. He describes his overcoming his skepticism as follows:

> At length God most high cured me of that sickness [i.e. skepticism]. My soul regained its health and equilibrium. The necessary truths of intellect became once more accepted as I regained confidence in their certain and trustworthy character. But this was not achieved by

constructing a proof or putting together an argument. On the contrary, it was the effect of a light, which God most high cast into my breast. *And that light is the key to most knowledge* (emphasis mine).[78]

Because we can never perceive reality as it is *in se*, we can never be certain that reason accurately represents reality. This realization brings al-Ghazālī to a critical insight – all trust in reason presupposes ungrounded faith in God, for only God can guarantee the correspondence between reason and external reality. As skeptical as philosophers may seem, their trust in reason belies an implicit, ungrounded faith in God.[79]

Halevi offers a similar critique of philosophy. Philosophers think that human knowledge of external reality must begin with sense perception. What characterizes the senses is that they perceive accidental properties of things rather than essences. Essences are known by intellect rendering *judgments* on sense perceptions. Halevi gives the example of perceiving a king. One sees a person one day waging war, another day adjudicating a case, and another day giving a speech to his people. One sees the person as a child, in middle age, and on his deathbed. Intellect judges that all these representations are of a single individual who is the king. As soon as the person on his deathbed dies, however, intellect judges that what one perceives is no longer a king, but rather a corpse.[80] What guarantee do we have that our sense perceptions give us accurate data about external reality? Perhaps our senses so distort what they perceive as to make knowledge of external reality impossible. Because philosophers hold that we have no way of knowing external reality independently of our senses, there is no way that we can verify that our senses give us reliable data. How then can we attain certainty? Halevi's response is reminiscent of al-Ghazālī's:

> But our intellect . . . cannot penetrate into the true nature of things except through *God's grace*, which implanted powers in our senses, which correctly mirror the sensible accidents (emphasis mine).[81]

The myth of philosophy is that we can know based on our native powers alone, and that God is a conclusion only reached at the end of inquiry. In reality, belief in God is a necessary presupposition for the very project of philosophy. For philosophers' trust in their ability to attain truth presupposes ungrounded faith in God who ordains a correspondence between sense perceptions and external reality.[82]

The philosophical mindset likewise has deleterious moral consequences. The philosopher claims that he is the most moral individual. For as he only cares for intellectual perfection and regards religious norms as arbitrary, he is supremely tolerant.[83] Halevi notes, however, that given that intellectual perfection is the supreme value for the philosopher, morality is only of instrumental importance in

achieving intellectual perfection, and God, having no will, is unconcerned with moral obedience. As such, in cases in which the philosopher's perfection can be furthered by compromising ethics, there is nothing to restrain the philosopher from deviating from moral norms.[84] Indeed, it was this perception of *Halakha* as of merely instrumental value, which led the great rabbinic sage Elisha ben Abuya to sin.[85]

Furthermore, philosophers seek to fill their minds with knowledge of eternal, unchanging things, thinking that such knowledge will bring them peace and tranquility. As we have seen, through reason philosophers are unable to achieve certainty in cosmology and metaphysics.[86] Given their inability to achieve their aims through intellect alone, philosophers often assume dogmatic, tyrannical dispositions. Although they are fond of critiquing adherents of positive religion for servile conformism [*taqlīd*], any agreement found among philosophers is "not the result of research and investigation which established their views decisively, but because they belong to the same philosophical sect which they conform to such as the schools of Pythagoras, Empedocles, Aristotle, Plato, or others."[87] Devoid of certainty, philosophers become zealous partisans who seek to impose their views on others through force of personality and prestige rather than through demonstrative argument.[88] Interestingly, Halevi thinks that this approach to philosophical truth has its counterpart in religious groups. Lacking the certainty, which derives from true revelation and authentic tradition, the Karaites, Christians, and Muslims invent religious systems based on arbitrary interpretations of scripture. Given their arbitrary interpretations of scripture, these religious sects have no certainty that their religious views are correct and, feeling insecure, they seek to impose their views on others through rhetoric and/or force.[89] For this reason, Halevi calls adherents of these religious groups those who "*philosophize* in relation to God (emphasis mine)."[90]

Halevi's Mystical Alternative

Philosophy is seductive. It dangles before us the possibility of escaping this world of suffering and passion, and becoming godlike beings who know neither pain nor desire and blissfully contemplate eternal truth. Philosophers are by nature distrustful – they do not wish to rely on others whom they fear may deceive or disappoint them. So they clutch at the illusion that they can attain this peace and tranquility through their native powers. Honest analysis, however, shows the futility and contradictions in the philosophers' approach. Philosophers, who pride themselves on being so critical, should know this and perhaps do at some level; however, wishful thinking is very powerful, and it is only because of the philosophers' need to deaden their suffering that they can delude themselves into having faith in their Sisyphean project.

Clearing away philosophical illusion opens an alternative approach. Although philosophers seek to curb passion,[91] which they see as an impediment to knowing truth, Halevi sees passion as the very condition of truth. Philosophers claim that all knowledge must originate in sense perception, and God must be deduced from our perception of the cosmos. Halevi accepts the principle that sense perception is the foundation of knowledge, but he thinks that the only adequate way to know God is through mystical sense perception. The people who sensibly perceive divine forms are the prophets. It is important to note, however, that for Halevi, prophecy is not just a remote event in the past. Any authentic mystical vision is prophecy for the prophet is a visionary mystic, albeit a perfect type.[92] If God has no physical form, how can He be sensed?[93] Halevi's approach to this problem is best understood against the background of one of his most important Jewish philosophical predecessors, Saadia Gaon (882–942).

Saadia assumes four sources of knowledge: sense perception; self-evident truths;[94] logical inference;[95] and authentic, revealed tradition. Now if one is in possession of revealed truth, one must accept it in its literal meaning as the basis of all of one's knowledge.[96] This does not mean rejecting the other sources of knowledge, for the paradigmatic example of authentic, revealed truth, the Torah, corroborates the validity of the other sources of knowledge.[97] What then happens if revealed truth contradicts the other sources of knowledge such as when we read corporeal descriptions of God while reason and tradition confirm that God cannot have a body?[98] Saadia offers two ways of resolving this contradiction. As regards texts that incidentally seem to describe God in corporeal terms such as the ascription of eyes to God in Deuteronomy 11:12,[99] Saadia argues that such texts must be interpreted figuratively.[100] In the case of Deut. 11:12, Saadia notes other places where the Torah uses the term "eye" (*'Ayin*) metaphorically such as Genesis 44:21[101] where "eye" is a metaphor for watchfulness and Saadia therefore takes Deuteronomy 11:12 to refer to divine providence.[102]

Although Saadia thinks that metaphorical interpretations are appropriate for individual terms that seem to ascribe corporeality to God, he thinks that in cases of elaborate visions of God such as Isaiah 6, it is impossible to appeal to metaphor, for the prophet is clearly describing something perceived through sense perception and what is perceived through sense perception is true.[103] How could one perceive God sensibly? Saadia squares this circle by accepting that the prophets report real visions, but claiming that these visions are of a created light, which he identifies with the biblical divine glory[104] or the feminine presence of God, the *shekhina*.[105] In his commentary on the *Book of Creation*, Saadia presents an expanded explanation of the nature of this created glory. He distinguishes between two "airs," a first air,

which permeates all beings and a second air (*'avir sheni*) into which God creates light and forms into visible images, which God then reveals to His prophets.[106] So prophetic visions are real visions of divine forms seen with one's eyes, but they are not of God Himself.[107]

Turning to Halevi, in his discussion of divine attributes the Khazar king asks how the Torah could use terms, which imply corporeality and change in God when both reason and the Torah itself reject these ideas.[108] In response, the Rabbi replies that the attributes of God found in the Torah form three classes, none of which describe the divine essence.[109] Relative attributes include terms such as "blessed" (*barukh*), "holy" (*qadosh*), and "praised" (*mehulal*), and are simply designations that people use to exalt God. Negative attributes are terms that are phrased positively, but whose sole purpose is to negate their opposites. For example, God is described as "living" (*ḥai*),[110] but finite human beings only comprehend life by means of our senses when we sense something that moves. God, however, is incorporeal and immutable, so the sole meaning of the attribute "living" is to negate from God the attributes of being inanimate and dead.[111] In truth, it would be correct to likewise negate "living" from God because "living" does not apply to God in the way that we generally understand the term (i.e., connected with corporeality and movement). Because there is a sense in which God lives that we do not fully understand (as it is unconnected with corporeality and movement), the Torah does not deny life of God.[112] Attributes of action are names that people give to God on the basis of their experiencing God's actions in the world, and they form two classes. The first class includes attributes, which people ascribe to God in virtue of good and evil, which befall them. Hence when people experience good fortune they call God "merciful" (*raḥum*),[113] whereas when they suffer they call God "vengeful" (*qan'a*).[114] In truth, God is an unchanging, just judge and these attributes are simply human projections.[115] The second class includes attributes, which describe God in anthropomorphic ways such as "seeing" (*ro'eh*). Halevi interprets such attributes as metaphors so, for example, God's "seeing" refers to divine omniscience.[116]

Like Saadia, Halevi does not think that metaphor can explain elaborate prophetic visions, and Halevi agrees that God, being incorporeal, cannot be perceived sensibly.[117] He therefore offers two interpretations of prophetic visions. The first interpretation follows Saadia as Halevi suggests that the prophet may see a created glory, which God fashions into particular images out of a fine substance, which Halevi calls the "holy spirit" (*ruaḥ ha-qodesh*).[118] God creates these forms by shining a ray of divine light into the fine substance. But Halevi is careful to make clear that this light is created and hence the spiritual form seen by the prophet is not identical with God's essence in any respect.[119] The second possibility is that the glory seen by the

prophet includes an array of spiritual beings including all the angels, the firmament, and the divine throne, chariot, and wheels, which the prophet sees in the form of a luminous *anthropos*.[120] This *anthropos* is a created being, which is eternal *a parte poste*. Alexander Altmann has pointed out that this is a Karaite doctrine, although Elliot Wolfson has suggested that Halevi may also have been influenced by the chariot-mysticism of the Jewish tradition.[121]

Halevi goes beyond Saadia in an important respect, however. Given that the created glory is a fine spiritual substance, there seems to be no way that our physical eye could perceive it. Halevi carves epistemological space for such a perception by adding a fifth inner sense to the four inner senses of the philosophers. This so-called "inner" (*al-bāṭina*) eye, which Halevi sometimes links with a special operation of the imagination,[122] parallels the operations of the outer eye.[123] Just as the outer eye provides the raw data concerning sensible things, which is then analyzed, synthesized, and interpreted by intellect, so the inner eye provides the raw data concerning the spiritual forms, which must be analyzed, synthesized, and interpreted by the intellect.[124] The imagination plays a special role here for what the inner eye "sees" has no visible corporeal form. The images "seen" by the prophet are, in fact, supplied by the imagination.[125] This is not, however, a product of the independent, free play of the prophet's imagination. For God creates spiritual forms in such a way that when perceived by the inner eye, the prophet's imagination is stimulated to "clothe" these spiritual perceptions in particular forms. The perceptions of the inner eye are therefore the product of the direct, specific will of God. Furthermore, God wills prophecy to Jews alone,[126] and only in the land of Israel.[127] The preparation needed to achieve prophecy is not the observance of "rational" moral and political laws, but only obedience to the law (*Halakha*) revealed to the Jews.[128]

If prophetic perceptions are not of God Himself, what is their purpose and why is God often perceived as a human being? As we have seen, sense perception and intellect work in tandem. In the example of the king mentioned above, the intellect judges various sense perceptions to be of a king.[129] In a similar manner, while the inner eye perceives spiritual forms, the intellect links these perceptions with the divine referent. So, for example, Halevi interprets Isaiah's seeing God seated on a throne as a visual, poetic metaphor for God's being exalted above all beings.[130] If this is the case, what is the advantage to the perception of these spiritual forms? Why not just deduce God's existence from the world as the philosophers do? And is it not very misleading to represent God in corporeal form as a human being?[131]

In response, Halevi distinguishes between the perception of the world through the outer eye and the perception of the spiritual forms through the inner eye. In perceiving the world through the outer eye, we set ourselves against the world

and seek to distinguish and categorize material objects and determine the eternal, unchanging principles underlying the natural order. The *mode* of cognition, however, conditions the *substance* of the cognition. As we have seen, by rigorously subjecting physical reality to the principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit*, the philosopher views the world as an eternal necessary order, and the God deduced from this order is a static God of *being* whose most important attribute is intellect and who possesses no will. In such a world miracles are impossible, God has no chosen people, and there is no divinely revealed *Halakha*.

God, however, cannot be placed in neat categories. By perceiving the spiritual forms as an *anthropos*, the prophet encounters God as one who calls to him as a lover, a friend, a father, and a king. The prophet encounters God as one who expresses love and demands that he reciprocate. God thus encountered is not an *object* of knowledge but is a dynamic *subject,* with whom the prophet forms a personal relationship and for whom he is willing to die.[132] Passion is not an impediment to knowledge of truth, but rather is its very condition. The prophet's God, the so-called "God of Abraham" is thus very different from the philosopher's God, the so-called "God of Aristotle."[133] The prophet encounters a God of *becoming* whose most important attribute is will. As a result, the prophet understands creation to occur *ex nihilo* as the result of God's spontaneous free will, and nature is subject to God's unexpected, miraculous intervention at any time. God has a chosen people to whom He reveals His divine Law.[134] The difference between the philosopher and the prophet is expressed in Halevi's account of the Tetragrammaton. Unlike the philosopher for whom the Tetragrammaton is an impersonal noun expressing necessary existence, for the prophet Tetragrammaton is a personal name, which signifies creation without intermediaries.[135] In line with this, Halevi tells us that "the matter of the Tetragrammaton cannot be comprehended through logic, and there is no proof of it except through prophetic vision."[136]

Visualizing the divine *anthropos* is thus critical to knowing God, for it is one thing to say that God knows and cares for us, but it is entirely another thing to be led to this notion through the sense perception of a king who is lovingly looking down upon us from His throne. The distinction between one who encounters divine forms directly and one who learns discursively about God's traits is like the difference between one who lives in a country and one who reads about it. What is represented discursively is a pale shadow of what is experienced immediately, and one can never fully capture in discursive language all that one experiences in a single moment.[137]

There are other reasons why the prophetic way of knowing God is vastly superior to the philosophical way. As we have mentioned, because philosophy uses discursive

reasoning, it requires a long process to unpack and "narrate" God's attributes, and as such it is unable to represent adequately God's unity. The prophet who grasps the divine *anthropos* "in the blink of an eye" through a sudden, immediate experience is, however, better able to apprehend God's unity.[138] Indeed, Halevi thinks that suddenness and spontaneity are marks of divinity.[139] Whereas according to the natural order individuals develop gradually over time as they strive to actualize their essences,[140] God can miraculously effect radical changes at any time. This then marks the difference between human and divine religions. Human religions develop slowly over time appearing "among single individuals who support one another in upholding the faith which it pleased God they should promulgate. Their number increases continually, they grow more powerful or a king arises and assists them and also compels his subjects to adopt the same creed."[141] In contrast, a divine religion "arises suddenly. It is bidden to arise and it is there like the creation of the world."[142] Judaism is such a religion for it begins with Israelite slaves being miraculously taken out from Egypt and revealed the Torah on Mount Sinai.[143]

The prophetic approach to metaphysical truth is likewise superior to the philosophical approach from an ethical standpoint. As we have seen, for the philosopher the moral law is of merely instrumental value and God, having no will, neither rewards obedience nor punishes disobedience. This then admits the possibility of exceptions to the moral law. In contrast, for the prophet God ordains religious law, which includes the moral law, and its full purpose is beyond human scrutiny. The omniscient, omnipotent God rewards obedience and punishes disobedience; hence, the moral law is always binding and allows no exceptions.[144]

Furthermore, unlike the philosopher the prophet recognizes that through his own powers he is unable to know metaphysical truth. This, however, leads him to be more confident and peaceful, for the prophet has certain faith in his self-confirming divine illumination. Whereas the philosopher is filled with self-doubt and arrogantly seeks to impose his opinions on others, the prophet is secure in his faith and is thus more allowing and peaceful. Halevi therefore concludes that those who have the exalted virtue of "faith" (*al-īmān*) that comes "naturally" (*bi-al-ṭabīʿa*) are much more fortunate than skeptics who, tormented by doubt, must rely on uncertain philosophical reasoning to grope for a truth that they may never attain.[145]

III. MAIMONIDES' APOPHATIC MYSTICISM

Maimonides has often been cast as a harsh critic of mysticism. In his *History of the Jews*, Heinrich Graetz contrasts Maimonides with the kabbalist Nahmanides:

If Judaism for Maimonides was a cult of the intellect, for Nahmanides it was a religion of feeling. According to the former, there was no secret in Judaism, which could not be disclosed to thought; according to the latter, the mystical and unknown were the holiest elements of Judaism, and were not to be profaned by reflection.[146]

Although scholars generally agree that Maimonides' thought bears little imprint of *Kabbalah*,[147] some recent scholars have seen intimations of mysticism in Maimonides' account of passionate love of God [Arabic: *'ishq*, Hebrew: *ḥesheq*] and in his apophatic (negative) theology.[148] These mystical impulses, which are deeply bound with philosophical ratiocination, can only be understood against the background of Maimonides' discussion of biblical and rabbinic kataphatic descriptions of God. In this section, I will sketch the relationship between apophatic and kataphatic expression in Maimonides' dialectical philosophical mysticism.

Love and Fear of God

Maimonides offers two accounts of the relationship between love and fear of God. In a number of places, he describes a developmental relationship between the two. One begins by worshipping God out of fear of punishment [*yir'ah*] or hope for reward. This is the method of worship of "ignoramuses, women, and children."[149] Training in this method of worship can lead one to a state in which one worships through love and, "believes in the truth for its own sake."[150] In his "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," however, Maimonides offers this famous account of the relationship between love and fear of God.

> And by what means is one to attain to this love and fear of Him [*le'ahavato veyir'ato*]? When a person meditates on His wondrous, majestic works and creatures and beholds in them His transcendent, boundless wisdom, he will straightaway love, praise, glorify, and passionately desire [*umit'aveh ta'avah gedolah*] to know the Great Name, as David said: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God (Ps. 42: 3)." But on contemplating [*besha'a sheyitbonen*] these very things, he will straightaway recoil, in fear and dread, knowing that he is but a petty creature, ignoble and opaque, standing with paltry, trifling knowledge, before the Perfect in knowledge, as David said: "When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers . . . what is man that You are mindful of him [and the son of man that You care for him] (Ps. 8: 4–5)?"[151]

Here love and fear are *simultaneous* reactions to contemplating God's work. Although Maimonides uses the same word for "fear" (*yir'ah*) in this passage as he does in the "Laws of Repentance," here *yir'ah* is more akin to awe at God's sublime wisdom, rather than the fear of punishment described in the "Laws of Repentance." These two types of *yir'ah* correspond to two ways of worshipping

God, one bordering on idolatry and the other being the proper method of worship. Maimonides sees the main task of the Torah as guiding individuals from idolatry to correct apprehension of God.[152] What characterizes idolatry in its many forms is that while it seems to involve pious reverence for the deity, it is really a type of egoism, in which one looks to God to satisfy one's desires, or in which one projects one's desired perfections on to God with which one then falls in love. To move individuals to a proper relationship to God, the Torah initiates individuals into a dialectical process of affirmation and denial in which one rises from infantile wish-fulfillment to openness to God who is paradoxically both a mysterious, ungraspable Other, and an overwhelming presence who inspires passionate love, and sublime awe, fear, and respect.

As we have seen, from the passage just quoted in the "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah," love of God involves the desire to know His great name, that is, love derives from *seeking* knowledge of God. In the "Laws of Repentance" 10:6, Maimonides writes that, "a person only loves God according to the knowledge with which he knows Him. Love is proportionate to apprehension – if there is little apprehension there will be little love, if there is much apprehension there will be much love."[153] So here love follows *possessing* knowledge of God.[154] On my interpretation, there is a complex interplay between love and awe and knowledge and ignorance that illustrates a crucial Neoplatonic current in Maimonides' thought. Love of God flows from knowledge in the sense that true knowledge involves recognizing our inability to comprehend God's essence, which fills us with awe and passionate love for God.

Idolatry

Maimonides identifies at least two types of idolatry. In his famous discussion of the origins of idolatry, Maimonides notes that idolatry began as star worship. The ancients believed that the stars were living beings whose movements impacted events on earth. The stars were seen as God's regents whom God deemed worthy of worship. Although the stars were originally worshipped as a way of honoring God, they came to be worshipped as *substitutes* for God.[155] For false prophets arose who claimed that God or the stars had spoken to them and commanded them to create physical representations so that the stars could be worshipped more easily.[156] These idols were said to be able to "do good and evil thus it was worthwhile to worship and fear them."[157] The people became so preoccupied with the worship of these physical idols that they forgot about God completely.[158] This type of idolatry is deeply tied to belief in astrology and magic. For false prophets and priests told the people that by worshipping the stars through the performance of ritual acts, they

could bring about propitious events such as rainfall, fertility, the prolongation of life, and protection from calamity.[159] For example, pagan priests commanded their faithful to have a beautiful girl graft the bough of one tree to a tree of a different species while a man had intercourse with her to increase the trees' fertility.[160]

In sum, this type of idolatry is ultimately a means to fulfill human desires. People were drawn to it because they felt weak and sought the means to control their fates.[161] Priests and prophets took advantage of the people and induced them to follow the priests' and prophets' dictates through fear of punishment and hope for reward, which was said to accompany the performance of (or failure to perform) pagan rituals. Now in general the pagan prophets' warnings would not materialize – there was no connection between performing pagan rituals and receiving good things. On occasion, due to pure chance, the prophets' warnings would be borne out, and the performance of a pagan ritual would be followed by a beneficial event or the failure to perform a pagan ritual would be followed by a calamity. The people, being very prone to superstition, would latch on to these chance occurrences and completely ignore the majority of cases in which the prophetic promises and warnings did not come to pass. In this way, people came to believe that performing pagan rituals allowed them to control nature.[162]

In addition to the first type of idolatry, Maimonides identifies a second type that is both more pervasive and insidious. Although the worship of stars and physical idols involves worshipping *substitutes* for God, there is also a form of idolatry that involves misconceiving God Himself. This is the idolatry of anthropomorphism and anthropopathism in which one projects imaginative conceptions of human perfection onto God. For example, one assumes on the basis of one's limited imaginative experience that everything that exists must have a body.[163] God, being the most perfect being, must therefore have the most perfect body, a body "bigger and more resplendent than ours, the matter of which is not composed of flesh and blood."[164] Similarly, the most exalted human beings such as kings and princes rightly expect to be adored and get angry with those who do not show them proper respect. God, being the most exalted and honored of all beings, must therefore feel extreme anger toward those who do not worship Him properly.[165] Ascribing anger and indignation to a disrespected deity in turn reinforces the idea that feeling anger is an appropriate response to not receiving the honor one is due.

Now Maimonides makes clear that idolaters can love their deities.[166] What unites the two species of idolatrous love is their being grounded in imperfect imagination, intemperate desire, and narcissistic inwardness.[167] For although the first type of idolatry involves imagining God as a means to satisfy one's bodily needs, the second type involves hypostasizing one's imagined perfections, which are then deified and

deemed worthy of reverence and imitation. So idolatrous love is, in all cases, rooted in self-love.

The Torah As Corrective

The Torah is an educational tool par excellence whose aim is that everyone should be perfect, that is, to wean individuals from childish, imaginative views of God to mature, intellectual apprehension of God.[168] Given the power of imagination, accomplishing this is no mean task, for not everyone is able to free themselves from inadequate conceptions of God.[169] The Torah's brilliance lies in its ability to address individuals at different stages of intellectual maturity and move them each according to their capacity to more adequate ways of conceiving God. For there are many levels of apprehension of God.[170]

The key to the Torah's method of education is the doctrine of accommodation whose basic principle is, "a sudden transition from one opposite to another is impossible, and therefore man, according to his nature [*ṭabīʿat al-insān*], is not capable of abandoning suddenly all to which he was accustomed."[171] If the Torah were written as a recondite philosophical work, it would be useless to most people. So given the Torah's interest in the perfection of the Jewish nation as a whole, it must address individuals at their particular level of understanding. Now, as we have seen, the root cause of idolatry is that individuals are under the sway of imagination, and the way to proper worship God is through intellect. It is therefore worthwhile noting some of the differences between the imaginative and rational faculties for Maimonides.[172]

The imaginative faculty (*al-qūwa al-mutakhayyila*) is bound to matter and to the use of sensible images.[173] It includes two powers. First, imagination "apprehends what is individual and composite as a whole."[174] This apparently corresponds to the operations of common sense and the retentive imagination, which coordinate and preserve different perceptions.[175] Second, it has a productive function, combining images that are separate to represent objects that have never been perceived by the senses before.[176] The rational faculty (*al-qūwa al-nāṭqah*) comprises practical (*ʿamalī*) and theoretical (*naẓarī*) reason. Practical reason includes a productive (*mihnī*) part through which one acquires skills such as carpentry and agriculture, and a reflective (*fikrī*) part through which one considers which acts are to be done and which are not to be done. Reflective practical reason includes political and ethical thinking (what Maimonides calls reflection on "noble (*al-jamīl/al-ḥasan*) and base (*al-qabīḥ*) actions").[177] Theoretical reason includes the intellect, which knows the essences of things, that is, the intelligibles (*al-ʿulūm*).[178]

Now Maimonides calls intellect "the contrary" of the imagination.[179] As an Aristotelian, Maimonides thinks that knowledge must begin with the senses.[180] Nevertheless, intellect treats sense data very differently than imagination. Whereas imagination is tied to sensible representations, intellect abstracts from sensible representations conceiving objects not according to how they present themselves to the senses, but rather according to their rationally apprehended causes. Once intellect abstracts from the sensible objects, it can form syllogisms that allow it to know independently of the senses. Whereas the imagination perceives multiplicity in the world by focusing on individual phenomenal representations, the intellect apprehends unity by seeking the single, universal, unchanging essence underlying diverse phenomena. Whereas the productive imagination unites representations arbitrarily, intellect divides and abstracts essences according to the strict rules of demonstration found in logic and mathematics.[181]

For Maimonides, the difference between the operations of the imagination and the intellect is the difference between accurate and inaccurate measures of necessity, possibility, and impossibility. Imagination represents many things to itself as possible, which are impossible, and it represents many things to itself as impossible, which are possible. For example, imagination conceives of God as having a body. On the other hand, imagination cannot conceive of the asymptote, that is, two lines, one curved and one straight, which begin at a certain distance from one another where the distance between the two diminishes without the lines ever meeting. Intellect, however, demonstrates that it is impossible for God to have a body and that it is possible for two lines to approach one another without ever meeting.[182]

Recognizing intellect as the proper measure of necessity, possibility, and impossibility plays a crucial role in how one conceives the world. Because imagination represents things arbitrarily and not according to fixed rules, the imaginative conception of the world is grounded in seeing truth as conventional.[183] As Maimonides puts it, "there can be no critical examination in the imagination."[184] It is thus not surprising that the *Mutakallimūn*, Islamic dialectical theologians who took the imagination as the measure of truth, were occasionalists who did not believe in fixed laws of nature and who thought that God arbitrarily creates the world anew at every moment.[185] In contrast, philosophers who consider the strict rules of logic and mathematics as the measure of truth conceive of the world as operating according to fixed, natural laws.[186]

Now the belief in magic is an imaginative belief for it implies that through performing ritual acts in service of pagan deities human beings can cause effects to follow from causes that violate the natural laws of physics.[187] Undermining the

belief in magic is a central aim of the Torah,[188] and using the principle of accommodation the Torah prescribes rituals and teaches opinions, which are designed to gradually wean people away from this idolatrous belief.[189] So, for example, because of the pagan belief that through a sex-ritual involving grafting trees of different species the trees could be made fertile, the Torah forbids grafting trees of two different species.[190] Similarly, whereas pagans claim that worshipping certain deities will bring good fortune, the Torah teaches that worshipping these gods will bring calamity, whereas if one worships God alone and performs proper rituals in His service, one will receive benefits such as rainfall, fertile land, and peace and security.[191]

Although all this applies to counteracting belief in *substitutes* for God, the harder and more important task of education involves curing people of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic conceptions of God. Anthropomorphism/anthropopathism originates either from a *dearth* of thought or from an *excess* of it. Recall that imagination is necessarily bound to sense perception. A simple person conceiving God according to the imagination will imagine God in a familiar way as the most perfect, powerful human being they can conceive of, frequently as the perfect father who will protect, reward, and punish people and who is on this account to be feared and loved. It is not only simple people who hold imaginative beliefs about God, even sophisticated thinkers can fall prey to imagination. For reasons that we will see later, Maimonides thinks that it is impossible to grasp God's essence intellectually. Although true philosophers embrace this, emotionally immature thinkers seek clear knowledge of God's essence. Given the impossibility of such knowledge, they end up retreating to the only way of giving a clear description of God – through the imagination – and God becomes the hypostasis of imagined perfections. Indeed according to Maimonides it was the failure to accept the impossibility of grasping the divine nature that led to the great rabbinic sage Elisha ben Abuya to sin.[192]

Yir'ah (fear/awe) has a crucial prophylactic function: It helps prevent individuals from seeking what is beyond their grasp. Whereas Elisha ben Abuya is a model of one who overreached his ability and so ended up in error, Moses is an example of one who correctly recognized the bounds of what he could understand. So Maimonides explains the verse "And Moses hid his face because he was afraid (*yareh*) to look upon God" (Exod. 3:6) as referring to the fact that Moses felt awe (*yistaḥiyyu*) at God's sublimity and so held back from seeking to understand what was beyond his capacity. On account of this intellectual humility, Moses was able to grasp more than any other human being.[193]

The Torah addresses individuals at different stages of intellectual development. It does so through the use of parables (*al-mathal*). Unlike philosophical discourse,

which is abstract and appeals to the intellect alone, parables use images, which make them an appropriate educational vehicle for people under the sway of imagination. Furthermore, unlike philosophical discourse, which is precise and in which a single intention is conveyed, parables are open to multiple interpretations and so can convey numerous intentions. At one level the parable may convey an imaginative understanding of truth, but at a deeper level it can point to a rational conception of the same truth. Finally, parables are ambiguous and their meaning is obscure and elusive. This obscurity mirrors the obscurity of metaphysics itself so the form of instruction is appropriate to its content.[194]

Now parables are constructs of the imagination; however, given the deceptiveness of the imagination, how can parables ever be used? In *Guide of the Perplexed* Maimonides claims that one of the characteristics of the prophet is a perfected imagination.[195] The imagination is a bodily function tied to desire.[196] If a person is ruled by intemperate desire, his imagination will reflect this and he will conceive reality according to his desires. By achieving rational and moral virtue, however, the imagination can be trained to be obedient to intellect. To be a prophet, one must have acquired all the rational virtues, most of the moral virtues, and have perfected one's imagination.[197] Despite the emphasis on the role of human activity in prophecy, Maimonides still seeks to preserve a measure of divine voluntarism by noting that, even after a person has acquired all of these perfections, God can still withhold prophecy.[198] But while God could potentially withhold prophecy from one who is worthy, He never actually does so.[199] The prophet's perfected imagination serves an important political function enabling the prophet to communicate metaphysical truths grasped rationally to the majority of people who are under the sway of the imagination. This occurs by the prophet's metaphysical knowledge known through his intellect "overflowing" to his imaginative faculty so that he communicates his intellectual apprehension in parables.[200] It is the task of the sage to instruct individuals in the figurative meaning of these parables, thereby guiding individuals from imaginative conceptions of God to rational ones through a dialectical process of affirmation and negation.

The Dialectical Process in Action: Maimonides on Divine Knowledge

The first task of the Torah is to direct people to the existence of a perfect being. This is especially important because if people were never taught about the existence of God, even the most brilliant minds might never attain this knowledge.[201] Indeed, it took the great philosopher Abraham until he was forty years old to discover the existence of a unique deity who governs the universe.[202] The Torah therefore seeks to instill proper beliefs as a way of preparing people to attain

philosophical understanding of God. Maimonides calls the acquisition of these beliefs the "welfare of the soul" [Arabic: *ṣalāḥ al-nafs*, Hebrew: *tiqqun ha-nefesh*].[203] Given that at the outset people only conceive things according to their imaginations, the Torah introduces belief in a perfect deity through imaginative descriptions of God, which accord with what the *imagination* deems perfection.[204] One of the ideas that the Torah seeks to instill is the idea of God as the perfect knower. At an early developmental stage, people realize that their eyes play a central role in how they know the world, so the Torah describes God as having eyes.[205] To prove that the Torah actually uses the principle of accommodation, Maimonides makes the interesting observation that the Torah only ascribes certain sensible faculties to God and not others. Although God is described as seeing, hearing, and occasionally as smelling, God is never described as tasting or touching. The reason is that people generally conceive the senses of sight, hearing, and smell, which do not involve direct physical contact with objects as more perfect ways of perceiving than the senses of touch and taste, which require direct contact with the object perceived.[206]

Given God's incorporeality, however, ascribing eyes and sight to God "abolishe[s] belief in the existence of the deity."[207] For in order for a person to hold a belief, the belief must refer to something outside the mind.[208] Saying that God has eyes and sees, however, is like saying that an elephant has one leg, three wings, swims in the sea, and talks. For the person with this understanding of the term "elephant," the term does not refer incorrectly – it does not refer at all.[209] To remedy this problem, Maimonides claims that once the idea of the existence of God is firmly implanted in people's minds they must be commanded to believe that God does not have eyes and sight whether they can understand this or not.[210] Now as people become habituated to the idea that God does not have eyes or sight, they will become perplexed over traditional biblical texts, which seem to ascribe these things to God. At this point, perplexed individuals must be initiated into the subtleties of biblical interpretation. The terms "eye" (*ʿayin*) and "sight" (*raʾoh*) have, in addition to their literal sense, a figurative sense according to which they mean intellectual apprehension. Whenever it is said that God sees something through His eyes, this in fact means that God apprehends something intellectually.[211]

Most people never get beyond this level of understanding. More philosophically inclined individuals are taught that ascribing knowledge to God is likewise a distortion, for it compromises divine unity by conceiving of God as a subject with attributes superadded to His essence.[212] In reality, God's knowledge is identical to His essence.[213] We only imagine knowledge as an attribute added to God's essence because knowledge is an accidental quality in relation to our essence. Now given that God's knowledge is not an attribute that is distinguished from God's

essence, it is problematic to say that God is knowing. An alternative suggested by the *Kalām* thinker Nazzam is to gloss "God is knowing" as "God is knowing but not through knowledge because knowledge is his essence and his essence is knowledge."[214] Although this formulation is an improvement on the proposition "God is knowing" *simpliciter*, it is still misleading. Although Nazzam's proposition states that God's knowledge is nothing other than God's essence, the logical structure of this proposition is a third adjacent with a subject linked to a predicate through a copula that implies that the subject (God) has a quality added to His essence.[215] Furthermore, the proposition is misleading because it uses the term "knowing," which suggests that God's knowledge is like human knowledge only of a greater degree. In reality, God's knowledge is completely unlike ours for at least six reasons. First, if God is all-knowing, God must know many things; however, given God's absolute unity, God knows many things with a single knowledge. According to our concept of knowledge, however, one who knows many things must have multiple numerous insights, which would compromise divine unity.[216] Second, if God is all-knowing, God must know all events future and past. According to our conception of knowledge this contradicts God's immutability for if God knows the future His knowledge must change when He knows that future events actually come to pass.[217] Third, it is impossible for us to conceive how a being could know infinitely many things, but God knows infinitely many things.[218] Fourth, there are three elements of knowledge: the potentially intellectually cognizing subject, the potentially intellectually cognized object, and the potential intellect itself. When human beings' intellects are actual, these three elements become one, but given our finitude, these three elements are often separate. God's intellect, however, is always actual, and these three elements are always one in Him.[219] Fifth, given that we are finite beings, our knowledge of finite particulars depends on our sense perceptions of the world. In a word, our knowledge is receptive. God's knowledge, however, is spontaneous and creative, for God knows all things before they come into existence and causes them to come into existence.[220] Sixth, although God knows all future events, God's knowledge does not compromise human free will. This is impossible according to our conception of knowledge.[221] These differences between God's knowledge and ours show that it is impossible for us to ever adequately understand God's knowledge.[222] The only way we could ever understand it would be to become God.[223] The term "knowledge" as applied to God's knowledge and ours is therefore purely equivocal as there is absolutely no relation between our knowledge and God's.[224]

To what then do the descriptions of God's knowledge in the Torah amount? Here Maimonides introduces his famous doctrine of negative attributes. Given the enormous differences between our knowledge and God's, if knowledge is to

be predicated of God's essence it must be glossed negatively as a negation of a privation. "God is knowing" should therefore be understood to mean that God is not ignorant. Now there are two ways that privation can be negated. Privation can be negated in the sense that it implies that the subject possesses a particular habit. So, for example, saying that Adam is not blind means that Adam sees because sight and blindness are applicable to Adam and there is no intermediary between having sight and being blind. Privation, however, can also be negated in the sense that the whole category to which the privation belongs is inapplicable to the subject. Thus, when one says that the wall is not blind this does not imply that the wall sees, but rather that blindness/sight does not apply to the wall. For Maimonides, negative attributes are of the second kind. When "God has knowledge" is glossed as "God is not ignorant," this implies that the category of knowledge/ignorance as we typically understand it is inapplicable to God. Given this meaning of negative attributes, negative attributes can only "conduct the mind towards the utmost reach that man may attain in apprehension of Him, may He be exalted."[225]

What then is referred to in the proposition "God is not ignorant"? The only positive content we can give to this is that it refers to God's existence, which is inseparable from God's essence. For all that we can understand in the proposition "God is not ignorant" is that God apprehends in the most basic sense that apprehension involves living, that is, that God exists.[226] Hence attributing knowledge to God is just a way of affirming that God is. Indeed, Maimonides repeats many times that we can only apprehend the fact that God is and not his quiddity. Beyond this we only have silence.[227] Why then do we gloss "God is knowing" as "God is not ignorant" and not as "God is not knowing"? Strictly speaking, it would be proper to gloss "God is knowing" as "God is not knowing" given that in the usual sense of the term, "knowing" refers to human knowledge. The Torah, however, seeks to lead us to conceive of God as the most perfect being, and because knowledge is deemed a perfection by us to say that "God is not knowing" implies that God is imperfect.[228]

Still, there remains a sense in which the *via negativa* is misleading because it uses discursive language to represent God who is a pure unity.[229] Therefore, Maimonides claims that there is a higher form of apprehending God than the *via negativa*. Although he is quite brief on this point, Maimonides speaks of a power of "intuition" (*shuʿūr/ḥads*) through which "the mind goes over premises and conclusion in the shortest time so that it is thought to happen in no time at all."[230] Through this power truth "flashes" to the knower such that she is able to grasp speculative matters intuitively without recourse to discursive reasoning.[231] This way of immediate knowing, which we might call intellectual intuition is a much more

adequate way of representing God's timeless unity. This intuition can, however, only be grasped at particular instants, and for most people it is impossible to sustain this insight over extended periods of time.[232]

Apophasis and Mysticism

Does the *via negativa* constitute knowledge of God? What is the difference between the philosopher who speaks *via negativa* and the simple person who on authority says that he understands nothing of God? The difference could not be greater. Maimonides distinguishes among three levels of understanding. The first level is where one voices opinions, but has no understanding of what these opinions actually signify. The second level is where one is able to give reasons for one's opinions, although not demonstrative reasons. The third and highest level is where one is able to give demonstrative reasons for one's beliefs such that "a different belief is in no way possible."[233]

There is a huge gulf separating the individual who simply utters the claim that he knows nothing about God and the individual who can give demonstrative reasons why he has no knowledge of God. The difference is akin to that between one who cannot see because of an absence of light and one who cannot see because of overpowering light. For the person who expresses ignorance without reasons, God's existence is an empty word. God is absent. For the philosopher who has gone through the dialectical process of affirmation and negation, God's being is understood to be so transcendent and perfect, that it overwhelms his understanding and stuns him into silence.

> Thus, all the philosophers say: We are dazzled by His beauty, and He is hidden from us because of the intensity with which He becomes manifest, just as the sun is hidden to eyes that are too weak to apprehend it . . . The most apt phrase concerning this subject is the dictum occurring in *Psalms*, "Silence is Praise to Thee" (Ps. 65: 2), which interpreted signifies: silence with regard to You is praise.[234]

Whereas the person who uncomprehendingly says that he knows nothing of God is left cold by his utterance, the philosopher who understands that God is unknowable is filled with love and awe. Like a person madly in love with a beloved who coquettishly appears only to withdraw, the philosopher is consumed with passion for God who is ungraspable in His overwhelming presence.

> What is the proper love of God? It is that one should love God with a great, powerful love until his soul is entwined with the love of God and he is madly obsessed [*shogeh*] as if he is sick with love. [It is like the love of a woman] where one's thoughts are never free from loving this woman and one is madly obsessed with her when he sits, when he rises, when

he eats and when he drinks. The love of God in the hearts of those who are madly obsessed with God is stronger than this.[235]

Just as a lover will do anything to come closer to his elusive beloved, so the philosopher seeks to link his entire being, body and soul, to God. At the highest level, he will be preoccupied with God in all of his activities and will experience great pleasure in this love:

> And there may be a human individual who, through his apprehension of the true realities [*al-ḥaqā'iq*] and his joy [*al-ghibṭa*] in what he has apprehended, achieves a state in which he talks with people and is occupied with his bodily necessities while his intellect is turned wholly towards Him, may He be exalted, while outwardly he is with people in the sort of way described by the poetical parables that have been invented for these notions: "I sleep but my heart waketh: the voice of my beloved knocketh" (*Song of Songs* 5:2).[236]

The person who enjoys this passionate love of God is said to be experiencing a divine "kiss" [*neshiqa*].[237] Unlike Sufi thinkers, however, Maimonides does not think that union with God is possible.[238] Love and awe come from recognizing God's overwhelming presence, which is inaccessible to reason. Whereas the immature person, guided by imagination, loves and fears God by assimilating God to her own categories of thought, the mature thinker loves God and is in awe of Him by recognizing God's supreme otherness, which breaks through all categories of human thought and fills her with erotic desire to know Him. This divine "kiss," which involves continually, obsessively contemplating God in silence constitutes the mystical culmination of Maimonides' philosophy.

IV. CONCLUSION

I began by distinguishing between two types of mysticism, "revelatory" and "apophatic" mysticism. To clarify problems emerging from each type, I presented close readings of Judah Halevi and Moses Maimonides. I will conclude by briefly summarizing some of the main differences between Halevi's and Maimonides' accounts of the relationship of mysticism to philosophy.

For Halevi, the prophet is a revelatory mystic who passively receives visions of divine forms through his inner eye and the imagination. In contrast to philosophers who are tormented by doubt and so must resort to discursive rational inquiry to seek a religious truth, which they may never attain, the prophet enjoys "peace of the soul" in his self-confirming divine visions. Love of God comes from the passion of engagement. The prophet passively encounters God through a supernatural act of divine grace. God reveals the divine forms to the prophet's inner spiritual eye and causes the prophet's imagination to clothe these inner perceptions with specific

images. These forms then serve as sensible metaphors for God, inculcating proper knowledge, love, and fear of God. God chooses with whom He will communicate. He has chosen the Jewish people and, among the Jewish people, He chooses the prophets with whom He only communicates in the Land of Israel. God ordains commandments to the Jew as a prerequisite for achieving mystical vision, but fulfilling these commandments is no guarantee of achieving mystical vision. The prophets are not philosophers, but rather pious individuals who contemplate God imaginatively.

In contrast, Maimonides derogates opinion/faith (*itiqād*) without rational understanding as vastly inferior to philosophical knowledge. One who approaches God through the imagination alone risks worshipping his own projected fantasy, which constitutes the essence of idolatry. Maimonides acknowledges that attaining correct apprehension of God is hard work and requires active, spontaneous effort. One cannot know God directly, but must rise in understanding slowly, first learning logic and mathematics, then physics and cosmology, and finally metaphysics. Furthermore, one must perfect one's moral traits and one's imagination. Prophetic knowledge is rational – the imagination is the vehicle through which the prophet communicates his insights to the people for their gradual education. Prophecy is the culmination of an active, natural process involving acquiring moral, intellectual, and imaginative perfection. The pinnacle of knowledge involves recognizing one's inability to know God positively, which fills one with awe and passionate love for God. This constitutes true worship of God and is the mystical peak of Maimonides' philosophical–religious system. Although the path to knowing God is open to all human beings, the numerous obstacles along this path mean that the majority of people will never enjoy the divine "kiss." So Maimonides would certainly agree with Spinoza's famous dictum that "all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare."[239,240]

NOTES

1 See Scholem 1974, p. 3. Scholem distinguishes between a "wider" sense of the term *Kabbalah* that refers to Jewish mysticism from the Second Temple period onward and a narrower sense that refers to specific forms of Jewish mysticism from the twelfth century onward. Throughout this essay, I use *Kabbalah* in the wider sense.

2 See Idel 2002, pp. 1–25; Scholem 1995, p. 21; E. Wolfson 2005, pp. 1–45.

3 On the debate over the dating of *Book of Creation*, see Liebes 2000, pp. 229–37.

4 Scholem 1995, pp. 25–8; idem 1975, pp. 226–9; idem 1969, p. 36. Also see Dan 1986, pp. 9–12; Tishby 1964, pp. 11–14. For a sophisticated philosophical rendering of the concept of kabbalistic symbol, see E. Wolfson 2005, pp. 26–40. Yehuda Liebes attempts to distinguish between kabbalistic myth and symbol. See Liebes 1993, p. 179 n. 116; idem 1995, p. 213. See Wolfson's critique of Liebes in E. Wolfson 2005, pp. 36–45.

5 Scholem 1995, pp. 28–30; Altmann 1991, pp. 18–9; Matt 1986, pp. 370–400.
6 Scholem 1995, pp. 30–2.
7 Scholem 1995, pp. 33–4; idem 1981, pp. 162–80; Gottlieb 1976, pp. 38–55.
8 Scholem 1995, pp. 34–7; idem 1991, pp. 56–87; Tishby 1989, pp. 449–58.
9 Scholem's dichotomy has been understood as stemming from his interest in reversing what he perceived to be the unjust dismissal of *Kabbalah* by the nineteenth-century bourgeois originators of modern Jewish studies (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*). According to Scholem, these scholars tendentiously cast rationality as the essence of Judaism, which resulted in a desiccated version of Judaism that could only be remedied by a retrieval of the dynamic, mythical, and imaginative elements found in *Kabbalah*. See Scholem 1995, pp. 1–3; idem 1997, pp. 53–71; Schweid 1985, pp. 145–65. Compare Idel's critique of Scholem's reading of nineteenth-century scholarship on *Kabbalah* in Idel 1988a, pp. 13–4. For critique of Scholem's distinction between philosophical allegory and kabbalistic symbol, see Idel 1988a, pp. 200–22; idem 2002, pp. 272–351; Schweid 1985, pp. 126–8; Talmage 1987, pp. 343–4. For critique of Scholem's account of kabbalistic theurgy, see Idel 1988a, pp. 156–99; idem 1988b, p. viii; E. Wolfson 2005, pp. 36–7. Idel and Wolfson question Scholem's distinction between the kabbalists' theurgic interpretation of *Halakha* and the philosophers' instrumental interpretation of *Halakha*, noting nontheurgic kabbalistic interpretations of *Halakha*. See Idel 1994, pp. 127–30; idem 1988a, pp. 39–49; idem 1988c, pp. 137–45. E. Wolfson 2000, pp. 178–228; idem 2006, pp. 188–90. Frank Talmage questions Scholem's contention that the authority of *Halakha* is lessened for Jewish philosophers. See Talmage 1987, pp. 337–44. For critique of Scholem's theurgical interpretation of kabbalistic prayer, see Idel 1988a, pp. 103–11. For critique of Scholem's account of the kabbalistic view of evil, see Tishby 1989, p. 449; E. Wolfson 2006, pp. 212–21.
10 Important discussions of the definition of mysticism include: James 1928, pp. 379–82; Russell 1951, pp. 1–32; Baumgardt 1963, pp. 7–21; Jones 1993, p. 1; Scholem 1995, pp. 3–7.
11 Idel 1988a, p. xviii.
12 E. Wolfson 1994a, p. 60.
13 Ibid., p. 63.
14 Ibid., p. 59.
15 Isaiah 6: 1–5.
16 Schäfer 1981, p. 294 (§948-949); Partially cited in E. Wolfson 1994a, p. 90.
17 E. Wolfson 1994a, p. 394.
18 E. Wolfson 1994a is a deep account of medieval Jewish attempts to conceptualize the nature of mystical visionary experience. Pedaya 2002 is largely derivative of E. Wolfson.
19 These sources include *Theology of Aristotle*, *Long Theology*, and *Risāla fil-'Ilm al-Ilāhī* (mistakenly attributed to Fārābī). See Ivry 1991a, p. 117, n. 5.
20 Plotinus *Enneads* 5.5.6 11–17 cited in Sells 1994, p. 15. For discussion, see Sells 1994, pp. 14–33.
21 See Matt 1995, pp. 73–5; Scholem 1983, pp. 25–6; idem 1987, pp. 422–3; Altmann 1966, pp. 46–54; On Maimonides' adoption of Neoplatonic negative theology, see Ivry 1991a, pp. 127–8, 133; idem 1992, p. 138. Aside from Neoplatonism other sources of negative theology that may have influenced *Kabbalah* include Pseudo-Dionysus as adapted by John Scotus Erigena, Ismā'ili mysticism, and Mutazilite *Kalām*. For discussion, see Scholem 1970, pp. 70–5; idem 1983, pp. 25–6; idem 1987, pp. 422–4; Matt 1995, pp. 67–73; Altmann 1966, pp. 41–5; H. Wolfson 1956; idem, 1959.

According to Harry Wolfson, Philo is the first thinker to articulate negative theology, which he derives from biblical sources rendered philosophically. The Church fathers, the Gnostic Basilides, Plotinus, and Albinus adopt negative theology from Philo. On Philo's negative theology, see H. Wolfson 1947, pp. 94–164. On the negative theology of the Church fathers, see H. Wolfson 1973e, pp. 131–9. On Basilides' negative theology, see H. Wolfson 1973e, pp. 139–42; Scholem 1970, pp. 68–9; Matt 1995, p. 69. On Albinus' negative theology, see H. Wolfson 1947, pp. 158–60; H. Wolfson 1973b, pp. 119–22. On Plotinus' negative theology, see H. Wolfson 1973b, pp. 124–30; Sells 1994, pp. 14–33; Bussanich 1996, pp. 38–42; Schroeder 1996. Wolfson's thesis that the impetus for Philo's negative theology derives from the Bible has been challenged. David Winston notes that Philo's doctrine involves "the convergence of his Jewish inheritance with his Greek philosophical antecedents" by which Winston refers to Middle Platonism and Neopythagorean traditions, but Winston concludes that Philo's "philosophical commitment . . . (pace Wolfson) was clearly the decisive element." See Winston 1992, esp. pp. 21–3.

22 On the concept of *'ein-sof* and the emergence of apophasis in Kabbalah see Scholem 1970; idem 1974, pp. 88–96; idem 1987, pp. 265–72, 420–44; idem 1987, pp. 28–35; E. Wolfson 1994b, pp. v–xi; Matt 1995. Idel has called into question the extent to which the early kabbalistic account of *'ein-sof* reflects Neoplatonic negative theology, noting that many kabbalists hold negative theology to be an exoteric view while esoterically maintaining that *'ein-sof* can be described as a luminous *anthropos* comprising ten supernal *sefirot*. Idel does concede, however, that this "esoteric" view was not put forward consistently and that at times kabbalists reverted to a more rigorous account of the unknowability of *'ein-sof,* which reflects the Neoplatonic view. See Idel 1980; idem 1982; idem 1992, pp. 339–44; E. Wolfson 1994b, pp. xii–xxii.

23 See Azriel of Gerona 1850, p. 1a cited in E. Wolfson 1994b, p. vii; Matt 1995, p. 74. I have altered the translation slightly.

24 On various kabbalistic interpretations of the *sefirot* see Scholem 1969, pp. 96–116; Idel 1988a, pp. 136–53.

25 See E. Wolfson 1994b, p. xii.

26 This is not to deny that there are apophatic themes in Halevi and revelatory themes in Maimonides, but I think that Halevi provides the fullest discussion of problems emerging from revelatory mysticism and Maimonides provides the fullest discussion of problems emerging from apophatic mysticism.

27 Halevi's being considered a philosopher has been called into question. See Strauss 1952, pp. 98–104; Schwartz 2002. Although it is true that Halevi is sharply critical of philosophy, in categorizing Halevi as a philosopher I follow Elliot Wolfson who emphasizes the fact that Halevi's "terms and modes of discourse [are] derived from philosophy proper." See E. Wolfson 1990a, p. 184 n. 15.

28 I will demonstrate this later.

29 For Halevi's influence on later kabbalists see Scholem 1995, p. 24: "There is a direct connection between Jehudah Halevi, the most Jewish of Jewish philosophers and the Kabbalists"; ibid. p. 173; idem 1987, pp. 222–4, 410–11; Kaufmann 1877, pp. 166–7 n. 120; E. Wolfson 1994a, pp. 181, 184 n. 247, 294–96, 303. For a specific example of the Zohar's use of Halevi, see W. Harvey 1996, pp. 153–5. Scholars have noted the influence of Maimonides' negative theology on *Kabbalah*. See note 22. On the Zohar's dependence on Maimonides see Scholem 1974, pp. 156, 159, 224; idem 1995, pp. 173, 183–4, 240, 390–1 n. 77, 395 n. 141; W. Harvey 1996, p. 155. On kabbalists' appropriation of Maimonides' identification of God and nature, see Idel 2000. There is a burgeoning literature on the influence of Maimonides' esotericism and his notion of conjunction

with God on kabbalists. See Scholem 1995, pp. 138–9, 383 n. 76; Idel, 1988b, pp. 1–38; idem 1990, pp. 54–80; idem 2002, pp. 438–47; idem 2004; E. Wolson 2000 esp. pp. 52–93, 152–85, 197–204; E. Wolfson 2004. Maimonides' centrality for subsequent Jewish philosophers is well established. Consider Julius Guttmann's judgment that "Maimonides is not only the basis of all [Jewish] philosophical activity which follows him, but this activity is always connected with him anew – at times continuing where he left off and at times criticizing him. Therefore one can explicate the problems of medieval Jewish philosophy as a whole in light of Maimonides' system." See Guttmann 1955, p. 86. Zeev Harvey renders a similar judgment. See W. Harvey 2005, pp. 27–32. On Halevi's influence on later Jewish philosophy see Schwartz 2000; idem 2005; Schweid 1994; Shear 2003; idem 2004. For Halevi's influence on Rosenzweig in particular, see note 122.

30 See Strauss 1952, p. 103.

31 See *Kuzari* V.12, Halevi 1968, pp. 265–6. I will cite from the Hirschfeld translation (which is badly out of date, but the only full English translation currently available) according to part number, section number, and page number. In preparing this chapter, I have consulted Yosef Qāfih's Hebrew-Arabic edition, Judah ibn Tibbon's medieval Hebrew translation, Yehuda Even-Shmuel's modern Hebrew translation, and Charles Touati's French translation.

32 See *Kuzari* V. 12, Halevi 1964, pp. 265–6 where Halevi reports the philosophers' view that although reasoning operates in time the knowledge that it achieves is timeless.

33 See *Kuzari* IV. 13, Halevi 1964, pp. 217–9; Baneth 1981, p. 185.

34 See *Kuzari* IV. 17, Halevi 1964, pp. 223–4 where Halevi claims that Abraham began knowing God as a philosopher through logic. It was only after God revealed Himself to Abraham and told Abraham to leave aside his "philosophizing" that Abraham was willing to suffer for God. Also see *Kuzari* IV. 5, Halevi 1964, pp. 213–4.

35 See *Kuzari* IV. 3, Halevi 1964, pp. 206–7.

36 See *Kuzari* IV. 6, Halevi 1964, p. 214; V. 12, pp. 265–6.

37 See *Kuzari* V. 12, Halevi 1996, pp. 265–6.

38 See *Kuzari* I. 1, Halevi 1964, pp. 37–39.

39 *Kuzari* IV. 13, Halevi 1964, pp. 217–9.

40 Samuel Landauer published the complete Avicennian text with a partial German translation. See Landauer 1876. There is also an English translation of this work. See Avicenna 1906.

41 For a good discussion of the inner senses in ancient and medieval philosophy see H. Wolfson 1973c, especially pp. 267–94. I divide Halevi's account of the inner senses somewhat differently than does Wolfson. Also see Wolfson's discussion of Maimonides' account of the internal senses in H. Wolfson 1973d.

42 See H. Wolfson 1973f, p. 565.

43 For discussion of Avicenna's account of the faculty of estimation, see Lobel 2006, pp. 71–6.

44 Although Avicenna claims to be able to know the first cause a priori through the ontological proof, Wolfson points out that Halevi believes that philosophers can only establish God's existence through the *a posteriori* cosmological proof. See H. Wolfson 1973f, pp. 568–72. On Avicenna's proofs for God's existence, see Gutas 1988, pp. 261–5.

45 See *Kuzari* II. 48, Halevi 1964, pp. 111–2.

46 *Kuzari* I. 1, Halevi 1964, pp. 38–9.

47 *Kuzari* I. 1, Halevi 1964, pp. 38–9.

48 Ibid. See *Kuzari* II. 49, Halevi 1964, p. 112 where the Khazar king notes that according to the philosophers it is irrelevant whether one approaches God through "Judaism, Christianity, something else, or whatever religion you create for yourself."

49 For example, see *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, part VII, section 2, Saadia 1948, pp. 265–7. I cite from the Rosenblatt translation according to part number, section number, and page number. In preparing this chapter, I have also consulted Yosef Qāfih's Hebrew–Arabic edition.
50 *Kuzari* I. 1, Halevi 1964, p. 36.
51 Ibid.
52 See *Kuzari* IV. 25, Halevi 1964, p. 236. See *Incoherence of the Philosophers* second introduction, al-Ghāzālī 1997, p. 5.
53 See *Kuzari* IV. 25, Halevi 1964, p. 236. The contrast between Halevi's treatment of the Tetragrammaton and Maimonides' is especially perspicuous. For Maimonides, the Tetragrammaton signifies, "there is no association between God, may He be exalted, and what is other than He." Maimonides likewise suggests that the name may indicate necessary existence. As I will show later, for Halevi the Tetragrammaton is a personal name that signifies God's direct creation without intermediaries. For Maimonides' interpretation of the Tetragrammaton, see *Guide of the Perplexed,* I.61, Maimonides 1963, pp. 147–8. I have likewise consulted Yosef Qafah's Arabic/Hebrew edition, Samuel ibn Tibbon's medieval Hebrew translation, and Michael Schwarz's recent Hebrew translation.
54 See *Kuzari* I. 1, Halevi 1964, p. 36.
55 See *Kuzari* IV. 19, Halevi 1964, pp. 224–5.
56 See *Kuzari* IV. 13, Halevi 1964, pp. 217–9.
57 Letter 56, Spinoza 1995. This line of criticism ultimately goes back to Xenophanes who famously quipped that if horses and oxen had hands and could draw pictures, their gods would look like horses and oxen.
58 Leo Strauss stresses the skeptical disposition of the philosopher by noting that the philosopher's speeches always begin with the philosopher stating what he does *not* believe in. See Strauss 1952, p. 112; *Kuzari* I. 1, Halevi 1964, p. 36; I. 3, p. 39.
59 See *Kuzari* V. 12, Halevi 1964, p. 265. The only exception is the "primary intelligibles," which are known "by nature" and include axioms such as that the whole is greater than its parts. See *Kuzari* V. 12, Halevi 1964, p. 263–8. Halevi's view of whether mathematical truths are known a priori or *a posteriori* is unclear to me.
60 See *Kuzari* IV. 3, Halevi 1964, p. 210; *Kuzari* V. 14, Halevi 1964, pp. 272–3. On philosophers' distrust of mystical experience see Strauss 1952, p. 105.
61 In the entire dialogue, Halevi never mentions the ontological argument for God. See H. Wolfson 1973f, pp. 568–72.
62 See *Kuzari* V. 10, Halevi 1964, pp. 256–9.
63 See *Kuzari* IV. 3, Halevi 1964, pp. 210–1. Al-Ghazālī makes a similar point. See, al-Ghazālī 2000, p. 74: "[The philosophers] conceived things to be in accord with their own experience and comprehension, while presuming the impossibility of what was unfamiliar to them." For trenchant comparisons of Halevi and al-Ghazālī see Baneth 1981; Kogan 2002.
64 See *Kuzari* I. 1, Halevi 1964, p. 36; IV. 3, pp. 210–1; V. 10, pp. 256–9; I. 65, pp. 53–4.
65 *Kuzari* I. 1, Halevi 1964, p. 36; IV. 13, pp. 217–9.
66 *Kuzari* IV. 15, Halevi 1964, pp. 220–3.
67 *Kuzari* V. 12, Halevi 1964, p. 265.
68 *Kuzari* IV. 17, Halevi 1964, p. 224.
69 *Kuzari* V. 14, Halevi 1964, p. 268; al-Ghazālī 2000, pp. 31–2, 34; *Incoherence of the Philosophers* first introduction, al-Ghazālī 1997, p. 4.
70 See *Kuzari* I. 13, Halevi 1964, p. 45; IV. 25, p. 239; V. 14, p. 273. See Lobel 2000, pp. 68–71.

71 See *Kuzari* IV. 25, Halevi 1964, pp. 238–49; V. 14, p. 273. The philosophers' cosmology is based on the principle that from one only one follows. The philosophers (here Halevi seems to refer to Fārābī, Avicenna's account is slightly more complex) assume that from God thinking Himself the first intellect is emanated. From the first intellect contemplating its cause the first intellect emanates a second intellect and from the first intellect contemplating itself, it emanates the sphere of the fixed stars. From the second intellect contemplating itself and its cause the second intellect emanates a third intellect and the sphere of Saturn. All this continues until it terminates with the tenth intellect, the agent intellect. Halevi raises a number of problems with this schema. First, why are there only ten emanations? Why does not the agent intellect emanate more intellects and spheres? Second, why does the third intellect only emanate two things? It should emanate four things one from thinking itself, another from thinking the second intellect, a third from thinking the first intellect, and a fourth from contemplating God. Third, why does the intellect thinking itself emanate a sphere and thinking its cause emanate an intellect and not vice versa? Fourth, why when Aristotle thinks himself does he not emanate a sphere, and when he thinks of God not emanate a separate intellect? Fifth, does not the fact that an intellect emanates two things violate the principle of from one only one follows? Halevi's criticisms seem to have been suggested by Ghazālī. See *Incoherence of the Philosophers* discussion 3, third aspect, al-Ghazālī 1997, pp. 65–78. Maimonides likewise mentions some of the Ghazalian critiques. See *Guide of the Perplexed* II. 22, Maimonides 1963, pp. 317–8. For discussion of Halevi and Maimonides' criticisms of the philosophers' cosmology and their relation to al-Ghazālī see H. Wolfson 1977e, pp. 8–15; Hyman 1992, pp. 111–35; Baneth 1981, p. 184.

72 *Kuzari* IV. 5, Halevi 1964, pp. 213–4.

73 See *Kuzari* IV. 25, Halevi 1964, pp. 228–9.

74 See *Kuzari* II. 2, Halevi 1964, p. 84.

75 Putting together *Kuzari* IV. 25, Halevi 1964, pp. 228–9; IV. 5, pp. 213–4; IV. 6, p. 214.

76 See Halevi, *Kuzari* V. 21, p. 291. Guttmann points out that F. H. Jacobi later makes the same point. See Guttmann 1955, p. 67.

77 Al-Ghazālī 2000, p. 20.

78 Ibid., p. 23.

79 Ibid., pp. 17–24.

80 See *Kuzari* IV. 3, Halevi 1964, pp. 205–8. The analogy is slightly imprecise since being a king is an accidental attribute rather than an essential one for a human being, but the point is still clear.

81 *Kuzari* IV. 3, Halevi 1964, pp. 206–7. The translation is my own.

82 This conclusion is similar, *mutatis mutandi*, to Descartes' in *Meditations*.

83 *Kuzari* I. 3, Halevi 1964, p. 39; IV.13, pp. 217–9.

84 See *Kuzari* IV. 19, Halevi 1964, pp. 224–5. Strauss emphasizes this point. See Strauss 1952, pp. 113–4, 135-141; Guttmann 1955, p. 77. Howard Kreisel discusses the philosopher's possible response to this criticism. See Kreisel 1993.

85 *Kuzari* III. 65, Halevi 1964, p. 190.

86 See *Kuzari* V. 14, Halevi 1964, p. 268, and compare *Incoherence of the Philosophers* first introduction, al-Ghazālī 1997, p. 4. Halevi not only criticizes philosophical cosmology and metaphysics, he likewise presents astute criticisms of philosophical physics. See *Kuzari* V. 14, Halevi 1964, pp. 269–70.

87 *Kuzari* IV. 25, Halevi 1964, pp. 238–9. Compare *Incoherence of the Philosophers* religious preface, al-Ghazālī 1997, p. 2. See Lobel 2000, p. 71.

88 See al-Ghazālī who claims that philosophers seek to impose their opinions by claiming that metaphysics is a very subtle science, which requires special intelligence to understand. By using highly abstract concepts, philosophers try to obscure their inability to provide truly demonstrative proofs of their positions and account objections to their positions as failure to understand them. See *Incoherence of the Philosophers* fourth introduction, al-Ghazālī 1997, pp. 8–9.

89 See *Kuzari* III. 37, Halevi 1964, pp. 168–9. Daniel Lasker and Diana Lobel both correctly point out the connection between Halevi's critique of Karaism and his critique of philosophy. See Lasker 1989; Lobel 2000, pp. 55–78.

90 *Kuzari* IV. 11, Halevi 1964, p. 216. I have altered Hirschfeld's translation.

91 See *Kuzari* IV. 19, Halevi 1964, pp. 224–5.

92 *Kuzari* III. 65, Halevi 1964, pp. 189–9. See E. Wolfson 1994a, p. 172: "For Halevi . . . the mystical vision of the chariot approximates the prophetic experience . . . "; idem 1990, p. 241. Wolfson likewise shows that this identification of prophecy and revelatory mysticism is prevalent among medieval kabbalists. See E. Wolfson 1994a, p. 288: "the kabbalists considered visionary gnosis of the *sefirot* phenomenologically on a par with prophetic experience, which was understood to be a contemplative or mental vision." Scholem likewise makes this point. See Scholem 1987, p. 419.

93 See *Kuzari* I. 89, Halevi 1964, pp. 62–3; II. 1, p. 83; IV. 3, pp. 203–4. Halevi alludes to the tension between the desire to visualize God and the idea that God cannot be sensed in his poem "Your Glory Fills the World" (*K'vodkha Male'Olam*) translated as "God in All." See Halevi 1946, pp. 134–5.

94 See *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Intro, 5, Saadia 1948, pp. 16–8. See Efros 1943, pp. 138–49; Heschel 1943, pp. 274–86. Self-evident truths include, for example, the principle of identity and the principle of noncontradiction. Scholars debate whether this knowledge is innate or empirically derived. Efros favors the view that the knowledge is innate, but that it is awakened through empirical experience. See Efros 1943, pp. 144–9.

95 Logical inference involves the denial of ideas, which contradict sense perceptions or self-evident truths, and the affirmation of ideas the denial of which entail the denial of sense perceptions or self-evident truths. See *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Intro, 5, Saadia 1948, pp. 16–7; Efros 1943, pp. 149–59.

96 See *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* VII. 2, Saadia 1948, p. 265; *Saadia's Commentary on Genesis*, Saadia 1984, p. 191.

97 See *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Intro, 5, Saadia 1948, pp. 18–9; Efros 1943, pp. 162–4.

98 On reason's affirming that God cannot have a body, see *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II. Exordium, Saadia 1948, p. 92; II. 8, pp. 111–2. Also see Saadia's refutation of the Trinity in II. 5, pp. 103–7; II. 7, pp. 109–10. For discussion, see H. Wolfson 1977h.

99 "[Canaan] is a land which the Lord your God looks after, on which the Lord your God always keeps his eyes (*'einei YHVH*) from year's beginning to year's end."

100 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II. 2, Saadia 1948, p. 100; II. 10, pp. 116–7; *Saadia's Commentary on Genesis*, Saadia 1984, pp. 191–2.

101 "Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes [*'eini*] on him.'"

102 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II. 10, Saadia 1948, p. 118.

103 See *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Intro, 5, Saadia 1948, pp. 19–20. Saadia does allow that sense perceptions may be mistaken, but true prophets are never deceived. Of course this begs the question of who are true prophets. On Saadia's criteria for determining

true prophecy see *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* III. 5, Saadia 1948, p. 151. See Efros 1943, pp. 136, 155; Heschel 1943, p. 276.

104 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Saadia 1948, II. 10, pp. 121–2; II. 12, pp. 130–1. The divine glory is mentioned in Exod. 24:16-17, Exod. 40:34-35, and Ezek. 1:27-28 among other places.

105 *The Book of Daniel Translated and Commentary by Saadia Gaon* commentary to Daniel 7:9, Saadia 1981, pp. 132-6; See *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II. 10, Saadia 1948, pp. 120–2: II.12, pp. 130–1. Also see Saadia's comments quoted in Bar-Barzilei 1885, pp. 20–2.

106 *Commentary on the Book of Creation* commentary to 4:1, Saadia 1972b, pp. 105–8.

107 E. Wolfson 1994a, pp. 126–7; Altmann 1969c.

108 See *Kuzari* II. 1, Halevi 1964, pp. 83.

109 See *Kuzari* II. 2, Halevi 1964, p. 83–6. The one exception is the Tetragrammaton, which is a proper name as I will discuss below.

110 See, for example, Joshua 3:10, Deuteronomy 5:22.

111 See *Kuzari* II. 2, Halevi 1964, p. 84.

112 What exactly it means to understand that God is "living" given that our usual understanding of the term is inapplicable to God is unclear to me, and Halevi does not flesh out this point.

113 E.g., Exodus 34:6.

114 E.g., Nahum 1:2.

115 See *Kuzari* II. 2, Halevi 1964, p. 83.

116 See *Kuzari* II. 2–4, Halevi 1964, pp. 86–7.

117 See W. Harvey 1996, p. 145.

118 See *Kuzari* II. 2, Halevi 1964, p. 87.

119 See *Kuzari* II. 7-8, Halevi 1964, p. 88. For discussion see H. Wolfson 1977d, pp. 88–9. Wolfson notes the possible influence of Neoplatonism on this doctrine.

120 See *Kuzari* IV. 3, Halevi 1964, p. 211. See H. Wolfson 1977d, pp. 86–95.

121 See Altmann 1969c, pp. 154–5; Idel 1986, pp. 15–9; Lasker 1989, p. 115; idem 1988, pp. 487–9; W. Harvey 1996, pp. 148–9; E. Wolfson 1990b, pp. 194–235. Lasker points out that there are three Karaite views on when the luminous *anthropos* was created. Benjamin Nahwandi's view is that it was the first thing created, Yefet ben-Ali holds that it was created on the second day, and Sali ben-Matzliaḥ holds that it was created on the fourth day.

122 See *Kuzari* IV. 3, Halevi 1964, pp. 205–12; Lobel 2000, pp. 89–146. On the relationship between the inner eye and the imagination see W. Harvey 1996, pp. 143–9. My reading of Halevi is informed by what Alfred Ivry has called an "existentialist" interpretation of Halevi. See Ivry 1983, pp. 29–31. Elliot Wolfson has provided an excellent reading of Halevi in this vein. See E. Wolfson 1994a, pp. 163–87. Franz Rosenzweig points to this dimension of Halevi's thought, which Rosenzweig sees as prefiguring his own philosophy. Thus in a letter to his mother Rosenzweig describes himself as a reincarnation of Halevi. See Glatzer 1961, p. 167. Similarly, Rosenzweig translated Halevi's poems and commented on them seeing his comments as an example of his "new thinking." For discussion, see Galli 1994; idem 1995; Schwarz 2006.

123 Scholars have pointed out that Halevi's notion of the "inner eye" is probably drawn from Ghazali and Sufism. See W. Harvey 1996, p. 145. Also see E. Wolfson 1994a, pp. 163–87. W. Harvey points out that although Halevi's discussion of the "inner eye" occurs within the context of Aristotelian psychology (according to its Avicennian formulation), he breaks sharply from Aristotelian psychology insofar as he allows the inner eye, *qua* inner

sense to perceive external things directly, whereas according to Aristotelian psychology inner senses can only process data received by the outer senses. See W. Harvey 1996, p. 147.

124 See *Kuzari* IV. 3, Halevi 1964, pp. 205–12.

125 W. Harvey calls this a "synesthetic" process involving a coordination of senses similar to when a mystic sees voices (cf. Exod. 19:14; 20:18). See W. Harvey 1996, pp. 147–51.

126 See *Kuzari* I. 115, Halevi 1964, pp. 79–81; I. 25-27, pp. 46–7. See H. Wolfson 1977e, pp. 97–8. For an interesting discussion of Halevi's attitude toward non-Jewish prophecy see Eisen 1994.

127 See *Kuzari* II. 10–14, Halevi 1964, pp. 88–92; Altmann 1944a. Halevi notes that although prophets living outside of the land of Israel record prophecies, these prophets still prophesied for the sake of the land.

128 *Kuzari* I. 109, Halevi 1964, pp. 75–7; II. 34, pp. 107–8; III. 7, pp. 141–2; III. 11, pp. 143–50; III. 23, pp. 161–4. For discussion, see H. Wolfson 1977d, pp. 97–8, 116–7; Lobel 2000, pp. 47–8. Guttmann points out that Halevi's view that only specific practices ordained by God bring about divine illumination is found in al-Ghazālī. See Guttmann 1955, p. 24. On the similarities as well as crucial differences between Halevi's theory of prophecy and the Neoplatonic theory see W. Harvey 1996, pp. 149–51.

129 See *Kuzari* IV. 3, Halevi 1964, p. 206.

130 See *Kuzari* IV. 3, Halevi 1964, p. 203. On the role of metaphor in prophet vision for Halevi, see W. Harvey 1996, pp. 152–3.

131 See *Kuzari* IV. 4, Halevi 1964, p. 212.

132 See *Kuzari* IV. 5, Halevi 1964, pp. 213–4. See Guttmann 1955, pp. 76–7.

133 *Kuzari* IV. 16, Halevi 1964, p. 223.

134 See *Kuzari* V. 21, Halevi 1964, pp. 290–2.

135 *Kuzari* IV. 1, Halevi 1964, p. 199; II. 2, pp. 85–6.

136 *Kuzari* IV. 15, Halevi 1964, p. 222. Note that Hirschfeld's translation mistakenly replaces the Tetragrammaton with the name *'adonai*. Also see IV. 3, pp. 202–3. See E. Wolfson 1990a, pp. 237–40.

137 See *Kuzari* IV. 5, Halevi 1964, pp. 213–4; IV. 6, p. 214; V. 16, pp. 274–5. See Guttmann 1955, pp. 66, 76.

138 *Kuzari* IV. 5, Halevi 1964, pp. 213–4. Guttmann 1955, p. 76.

139 *Kuzari* I. 81, Halevi 1964, p. 58.

140 See *Kuzari* I. 73–4, Halevi 1964, p. 55.

141 *Kuzari* I. 80, Halevi 1964, pp. 57–8.

142 *Kuzari* I. 81, Halevi 1964, p. 58.

143 *Kuzari* I. 83, Halevi 1964, pp. 58–9. A problem stemming from Halevi's account of prophecy is that it seems that only the prophets are able to know and love God and the other members of the Jewish religion must learn of prophetic visions secondhand. Halevi's response, although not completely developed, is that the pious who observe *Halakha* are able to encounter the divine firsthand by seeing what Halevi sometimes calls spiritual "lights," and at other times a "hidden spiritual shekhina." The nature of this "hidden shekhina" is, however, not clear. See *Kuzari* V. 16, Halevi 1964, p. 275; V. 23, p. 293. For discussion, see Guttmann 1955, p. 79.

144 See *Kuzari* IV. 17, Halevi 1964, p. 223; Guttmann 1955, p. 77; Strauss 1952, pp. 113–4, 135–41.

145 See *Kuzari* III. 37, Halevi 1964, pp. 168–9; V. 1–2, pp. 248–50; Lasker 1989, pp. 120–1.

146 Graetz 1969, p. 534. Similarly, in a classic piece on Maimonides' attitude to Jewish mysticism Alexander Altmann writes, "Maimonides' system contains some formal elements

of mysticism . . . the question whether Maimonides should be classified as a mystic with respect to his teachings and attitudes will have to be answered all the more emphatically in the negative." See Altmann 1981, p. 201. Shlomo Pines similarly remarks that "Maimonides was no mystic." See Maimonides 1963, p. xcvi. Maimonides' negative attitude to mysticism seems to be reinforced by his famously harsh attack on *Shi'ur Qomah* about which he writes, "it is a great *mitzvah* to delete and eradicate mention of its subject matter." See Altmann 1969a, p. 187. According to Moshe Idel, Maimonides' negative attitude to mysticism is likewise apparent in his studied silence regarding Jewish mystical sources such as *Beraita de Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *ma'aseh merkavah* with which he was surely familiar. See Idel 1990, p. 34; idem 1988b, p. 22, n. 18; Guttmann 1955, pp. 96–7.

147 See E. Wolfson 1990a, pp. 181–3. But Steven Harvey suggests that Maimonides may have used terminology and symbolism from chariot mysticism in his nonkabbalistic account of the secrets of the divine chariot. See S. Harvey 1991, pp. 60–75.

148 See Blumenthal 1981; idem 1988; Faur 1999; Rawidowicz 1969; Lobel 2002. Note that in his later writings, Pines recanted his earlier view and writes about Maimonides' "intellectualist mysticism." See Pines 1986a, pp. 23–4; idem 1986b, p. 9. For discussion of the evolution of Pines' position, see W. Harvey 2001, pp. 388–91.

149 *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuva X.1, Maimonides 1989, p. 253.

150 *Commentary on the Mishneh,* Introduction to chapter Ḥeleq, Maimonides 1989, p. 115; *Mishneh Torah* Hilkhot Teshuva X.1, X.5, Maimonides 1989, pp. 253, 256; *Commentary on the Mishneh*, Avot I:3, Maimonides 1989, pp. 6–9. See Vajda 1957, pp. 125–30.

151 *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah II.2, Maimonides 1989, p. 9. Translation from Frank, Leaman, Manekin 2000, p. 226.

152 See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 29, Maimonides 1963, pp. 517, 521; III. 31, p. 523; III. 37, p. 542. Also, see *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot 'Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot II: 4, Maimonides 1989, pp. 131–2. Compare *Sifre* to Num. 15:23; *Babylonian Talmud*, *Horayot*, 8a; *Qiddushin*, 40a; *Ḥullin*, 5a.

153 Maimonides repeats this view at the end of the *Guide*. See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 51, Maimonides 1963, pp. 620–2.

154 These two types of love seem to be alluded to in Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah IV. 12 where Maimonides writes that "when a person contemplates these things and recognizes all of the creations from the angel and sphere to people and the like, and when a person sees the wisdom of God in all creation, he will *add love for God* and his soul will thirst for God and his flesh *will crave to love God*" (emphasis mine). See *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah IV.12, Maimonides 1989, p. 23.

155 See *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot I: 1-2, Maimonides 1989, pp.124–6; *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 36, Maimonides 1963, pp. 82–5.

156 See *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot I: 2, Maimonides 1989, pp. 125–6.

157 Ibid.

158 Ibid. See Halbertal and Margalit 1992, pp. 42–5; Kaplan 1998.

159 See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 30, Maimonides 1963, pp. 522–3; III. 37, pp. 540–50; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot I: 2, Maimonides 1989, pp. 125–6.

160 See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 37, Maimonides 1963, p. 548. Note that in his "Letter on Astrology" and in *Hilkhot Teshuva*, Maimonides links astrology with fatalism. It is unclear to me how this fatalism coheres with the account in the *Guide* and *Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim* in which astrology is connected with an attempt to *control* one's fate. See Lerner 2000, 184; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuva V.4, Maimonides 1989, pp. 233–4;

Eight Chapters, VIII, Maimonides 1975, p. 84. For a nice discussion of Maimonides' view of astrology, see Langermann 2000, pp. 148–52.

161 In his "Letter on Astrology," Maimonides casts idolatry as a futile way of trying to control the future. He explains the rabbinic claim that the first Temple was destroyed because of the sin of idolatry as referring to the fact that Israelites lost their state because they wasted their time seeking help from idols and stars instead of learning the art of war. See Lerner 2000, pp. 179–80.

162 See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 37, Maimonides 1963, pp. 540–50, especially, pp. 545–7. See Langermann 2000, p. 145.

163 See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 26, Maimonides 1963, pp. 56–7; I. 46, p. 98.

164 *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 1, Maimonides 1963, p. 21. Maimonides may be implicitly criticizing the imaginal view of God represented in *Shi'ur Qomah*. For discussion of *Shi'ur Qomah,* see E. Wolfson 1994a, pp. 90–1, 96; Martin Cohen 1983; idem 1985.

165 *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 29–30, Maimonides 1963, pp. 62–4; I. 36, pp. 84–5.

166 See *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot III: 6, Maimonides 1989, pp. 139–40.

167 Maimonides makes clear that the imagination is a bodily faculty, which when imperfect, is connected to intemperate desire. See *Guide of the Perplexed* II. 36, Maimonides 1963, p. 372; I. 2, pp. 23–6. Also see II. 12, p. 280 where Maimonides claims, "imagination is also in true reality the *evil impulse* [*yetzer har'a*]." Intemperate desire is one of the impediments to acquiring true knowledge of God. See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 34, Maimonides 1963, pp. 76–9; II. 39, pp. 380–1; III. 8, pp. 432–6; III. 9, pp. 436–7; *Eight Chapters*, VII, Maimonides 1975, pp. 80–3. Note that Maimonides thinks that imagination can be perfected and brought under the control of reason. See *Guide of the Perplexed* II. 36, Maimonides 1963, pp. 369–73.

168 See *Guide of the Perplexed* II. 39, Maimonides 1963, p. 381.

169 On the impediments to achieving metaphysical knowledge, see *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 31, Maimonides 1963, pp. 66–7; I. 34, pp. 72–9. On the power of the imagination, see *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 49, Maimonides 1963, p. 109.

170 See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 18, Maimonides 1963, p. 45; II. 36, p. 372; III. 51, pp. 618–21.

171 See *Guide of the Perplexed* II. 32, Maimonides 1963, p. 526.

172 For detailed discussion of Maimonides' theory of intellect, see Altmann 1987, pp. 60–91. Also see J. Stern 2005, pp. 107–15.

173 See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 73, Maimonides 1963, pp. 209–10.

174 *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 73, Maimonides 1963, p. 209.

175 *Eight Chapters*, I, Maimonides 1975, p. 63; *Guide of the Perplexed* II. 36, Maimonides 1963, p. 370. See H. Wolfson 1973d, p. 351.

176 *Eight Chapters*, I, Maimonides 1975, p. 63; *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 73, Maimonides 1963, p. 209.

177 See *Eight Chapters*, I, Maimonides 1975, p. 63; *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 53, Maimonides 1963, p. 121; I. 72, p. 191. Compare I. 2, pp. 24–26, where Maimonides seems to attribute ethical/political thinking to the imagination. On this apparent contradiction see W. Harvey 1978; Kaplan 1990, pp. 150–4.

178 See *Treatise on Logic* XIV, Maimonides 1938, p. 38; *Eight Chapters*, I, Maimonides 1975, pp. 63–4; *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 73, Maimonides 1963, p. 209.

179 *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 73, Maimonides 1963, p. 209.

180 *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 16, Maimonides 1963, p. 463; III. 21, pp. 484–5.

181 *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 73, Maimonides 1963, pp. 209–12. Maimonides deems logic and mathematics indispensable prerequisites for acquiring metaphysical knowledge. See "Epistle Dedicatory," p. 3; I. 34, p. 75; II. 23, p. 321.

182 See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 73, Maimonides 1963, pp. 209–11; Freudenthal 2005b, pp. 137–8. Note that Maimonides acknowledges that it is not always simple to differentiate between what is cognized according to the intellect and what is cognized according to the imagination. See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 15, Maimonides 1963, pp. 459–63.

183 See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 2, Maimonides 1963, pp. 23–6.

184 Ibid., I. 73, p. 210.

185 See ibid., I. 73, pp. 200–3.

186 See ibid., II. 10, pp. 269–73; II. 12, pp. 277–80. See the equation of natural acts with divine acts at I. 66, p. 160; III. 32, p. 525. For discussion, see Idel 2000, pp. 87–90; Goodman 2000.

187 Of course biblical miracles also seem to involve the violation of natural laws. For Maimonides' complex approach to miracles, see Langermann 2004; Nahorai, 1990; H. Kasher 1998.

188 See *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot XI: 15-16, Maimonides 1989, pp. 188–9; Langermann 2000.

189 See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 29 Maimonides 1963, pp. 517–8.

190 See ibid., III. 37, p. 548. On the prohibition of grafting two different species of fruit trees see *Mishnah Kil'ayim*, I: 7; Babylonian Talmud, *Kiddushin*, 39a; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Kil'ayim I: 5-6, Maimonides 1962, pp. 5–6.

191 See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 29 Maimonides 1963, pp. 522–3. Maimonides' own view concerning individual providence and reward and punishment is complex. See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 17-24, 51-54 Maimonides 1963, pp. 464–502, 618–38.

192 Ibid., I. 32, pp. 68–70; I. 5, p. 30.

193 See ibid., I. 5, p. 29; I. 54, pp. 123–9. I am indebted to Zeev Harvey for this insight. See W. Harvey 1990. Harvey notes that in a personal conversation with Pines, Pines told him that although he had translated *yistaḥiyyu* as "feel awe," a preferable translation would be "be abashed." See W. Harvey 1990, p. 13, note 8.

194 See *Guide of the Perplexed* Introduction, Maimonides 1963, p. 9: "because our capacity falls short of apprehending the greatest subjects as they really are, we are told about those profound matters – which divine wisdom has deemed necessary to convey to us- in parables [*al-mathal*], and in very obscure [*mubhama*] words." See Strauss 1987, p. 74; E. Wolfson 2000, pp. 48–9. Yair Lorberbaum suggests that Maimonides' use of the so-called "seventh cause" of contradictions in the *Guide* is likewise on account of the obscurity of cosmology and metaphysics. See Lorberbaum 2000, pp. 221–37.

195 See *Guide of the Perplexed* II. 36 Maimonides 1963, p. 369; II. 38, p. 377. Jeffrey Macy notes that in Maimonides' discussion of prophecy in the *Haqdama lePereq Ḥeleq* Maimonides does not speak of a role for the imagination in prophecy. Macy sees a "transitional view" in *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, chapter 7. See Macy 1986, pp. 192–4.

196 See *Guide of the Perplexed* II. 36, Maimonides 1963, p. 372; I. 2, pp. 23–6; II. 12, p. 280.

197 *Eight Chapters*, VII, Maimonides 1975, pp. 80–3; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah VII. 1, Maimonides 1989, pp. 34–5; *Guide of the Perplexed* II. 36 Maimonides 1963, p. 369.

198 See *Guide of the Perplexed* II. 32 Maimonides 1963, pp. 361–2. My interpretation follows Lawrence Kaplan. See Kaplan 1977. Kaplan notes that the medieval commentators Kaspi, Narboni, Shem Tov, Efodi, and Abravanel all anticipate this line of interpretation. More

recently Strauss espouses it. See Strauss 1987, p. 84. An alternative interpretation of Maimonides' view is that although only people who have perfected themselves can achieve prophecy, prophecy only occurs through a special act of divine will. The medieval commentators Crescas and Albo adumbrate this interpretation and more recently Zvi Diesendruck and Harry Wolfson defend it. See Diesendruck 1927; H. Wolfson 1977d.

199 See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 32 Maimonides 1963, p. 529; Kaplan 1977, pp. 254–6.

200 See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 36 Maimonides 1963, pp. 369–73; II. 37, pp. 373–5; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah VII. 3, Maimonides 1989, p. 36. This applies to all the prophets except for Moses who prophesied through the intellect alone. See *Guide of the Perplexed* II. 39 Maimonides 1963, pp. 378–81; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah VII. 6 Maimonides 1989, pp. 37–8. How does Maimonides' claim that Moses prophesied through the intellect alone fit with the fact that the Torah is filled with imaginative language? As Lawrence Kaplan points out, Maimonides' position seems to be that although Moses, the greatest prophet, apprehended God through the intellect alone without any admixture of imagination, he gave the intellectual truths that he apprehended imaginative clothing through his personal initiative rather than his intellectual knowledge "overflowing" to his imaginative faculty. See Kaplan 1990; Reines 1970, pp. 135–48, 353–8; Bland 1982b, pp. 61–6. Bland focuses on Moses' legislation alone, but the point is the same. Strauss offers a similar, but slightly different solution to this contradiction. See Strauss 1987, pp. 130–1.

201 See the impediments to achieving metaphysical knowledge discussed in *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 31–34 Maimonides 1963, pp. 65–79.

202 See *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim Umazalot I: 3, Maimonides 1989, pp. 126–9. In *Genesis Rabba*, 64: 4 there is a dispute between Rabbi Yohanan who says that Abraham recognized the Creator at age forty eight and Resh Laqish who says that Abraham recognized the Creator at age three. Resh Laqish's opinion is found in the Talmud at *Nedarim*, 32a. Maimonides apparently adopts the opinion of R. Yohanan although it is unclear why there is a discrepancy between Maimonides' account of Abraham being forty and R. Yohanan's opinion that Abraham was forty-eight. R. Meir ben Yuqutiel of Rothenberg author of the commentary *Hagahot Maimoniyot* thinks that there is a misprint in the extant version of the *Mishneh Torah*, which should read that Abraham was forty eight. R. Yosef Qaro author of the commentary *Kesef Mishneh* thinks that Maimonides had a different version of the *midrash*, which read that Abraham was forty. In the parallel passage in the *Guide*, Maimonides does not give an age for Abraham. See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 29 Maimonides 1963, pp. 514–5.

203 See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 27 Maimonides 1963, pp. 510–2.

204 Ibid., I. 26, pp. 56–7; I. 46, pp. 98–102; I. 47, pp. 104–6; I. 49, pp. 108–10; I. 60, p. 147.

205 See ibid, I. 46, pp. 98–9; I. 44, p. 95; I. 4, pp. 27–8.

206 Ibid., I. 47, pp. 104–6.

207 Ibid., I. 60, p. 145.

208 Ibid., I. 50, p. 111. For an excellent discussion of Maimonides' concept of belief, see Manekin 1990.

209 *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 60, Maimonides 1963, pp. 146–7.

210 Ibid., I. 35, p. 81.

211 Ibid., I. 35, p. 81; I. 4, pp. 27–8. Maimonides cites Psalms 11:4 as an example of '*ayin* being used for intellectual apprehension and Ecclesiastes 1:16 as an example of *ra'oh* being used for intellectual apprehension. Also, see ibid, I. 44, p. 95. Unlike Saadia and Halevi, Maimonides sees no difficulty in interpreting prophetic visions as elaborate metaphors

constructed by the imagination without any sensible correlate. Maimonides considers Saadia/Halevi's view that the prophets see a "created glory," which Maimonides attributes to *Onqelos* and to the *Kalām*. See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 27, Maimonides 1963, p. 57; I. 21, p. 51; I. 28, p. 60; I. 76, p. 229. In general, although Maimonides says that there is "no harm in this view," he does not seem to endorse this perspective. See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 5, Maimonides 1963, p. 31; I. 18, p. 44–5; I. 19, p. 46; I. 21, p. 51. But compare I. 10, p. 37; I. 25, p. 55; I. 64, p. 156; III. 7, p. 430 where Maimonides seems to admit the idea of created light as an explanation of Moses' ascent to God (Exodus 19:3) and of various descriptions of the "glory of God" (*kavod YHVH*) (e.g Exod. 24:16-17; Exod. 40:34-35; Ezek. 1:27-28). For discussion, see H. Wolfson 1929a, pp. 460–61 n. 93.

212 Ibid., I. 51, pp. 113–4. Maimonides' view that ascribing the attribute of knowledge to God compromises God's unity shows that Maimonides' ontology is neither nominalist nor Platonic universalist. Maimonides rejects the Platonic view that universals can exist separate from matter, but he also does not accept the nominalist view that universals are mere names that do not refer to real things in subjects. Rather, universals have both real and ideal existence. Although universals are known through the mind alone, they are not mental constructs, but rather are real things discovered in individuals. See *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah IV:7, Maimonides 1989, p. 21; H. Wolfson 1977c, pp. 257–9; J. Stern 2000, p. 210.

213 See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 53, Maimonides 1963, pp. 122–3; I. 57, pp. 132–3; *Eight Chapters*, VIII, Maimonides 1975, p. 94; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah II: 10, Maimonides 1989, pp. 12–3.

214 See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 53, Maimonides 1963, p. 132; III. 20, p. 482. See H. Wolfson 1977g, pp. 199–200.

215 See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 52, Maimonides 1963, pp. 114–6; I. 57, pp. 132–3; I. 58, pp. 134–5. Even if "knowing" is a description of God's essence, it still implies that God has causes anterior to his essence. See ibid, I. 52, pp. 114–5.

216 See ibid., I. 46, p. 102; III. 20, p. 480.

217 See ibid., 1.60, p. 144; III. 16, p. 463; III. 20, pp. 480–3.

218 Ibid., III. 20, p. 481.

219 Ibid., I. 68, p. 165; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah II: 10, Maimonides 1989, pp. 12–3.

220 See *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 16, Maimonides 1963, p. 463; III. 21, pp. 484–5; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah II: 10, Maimonides 1989, pp. 12–3.

221 *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 20, Maimonides 1963, p. 483; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuva V.5, Maimonides 1989, pp. 234–6.

222 *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 59, Maimonides 1963, p. 137; III. 20, pp. 482–4; III. 23, pp. 496–7; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuva V.5, Maimonides 1989, pp. 234–6; *Eight Chapters*, VIII, Maimonides 1975, p. 95.

223 *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 21, Maimonides 1963, p. 485.

224 Ibid., I. 56, pp. 30–131; III. 20, pp. 482–4.

225 See ibid., I. 58, pp. 135–7. The literature on Maimonides treatment of negative attributes is extensive. Among the most important discussions are: H. Wolfson 1977c; H. Wolfson 1977g; Buijs 1988; Benor 1995; Seeskin 2000; Lobel 2002.

226 See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 42, Maimonides 1963, pp. 92–3; I. 53, pp. 122–3; I. 58, p. 135; I. 68, p. 163. Note that strictly speaking "living" as predicated of God must be glossed negatively as "God is not dead" for God does not live according to our usual

understanding of the term. Similarly, the statement "God exists" is misleading because the term "existence" as applied to God and us is equivocal.

227 See ibid., I. 58, pp. 135, 137. See Harvey and Harvey 1989. Josef Stern offers a fascinating explanation of this claim. In Aristotelian and medieval logic there are different types of demonstration. A demonstration *propter quid* proceeds from causes to effects (analytically) and gives knowledge of the essence of the cause. In contrast, a demonstration *quia* proceeds from effects to possible causes (synthetically) without giving essential knowledge of the causes. Stern claims that Maimonides' demonstrations of God's existence only provide demonstrations *quia*, not *propter quid*. This distinction allows Stern to explain the apparent contradiction between Maimonides' proofs of God's existence and his negative theology. See J. Stern 2005, pp. 120–2; J. Stern 2001, pp. 55–64, 71–2; J. Stern 2004, pp. 165–7. Stern is a major player in the debate over whether Maimonides was a dogmatist or a skeptic. Shlomo Pines' skeptical interpretation of Maimonides triggered the debate. See Pines 1979a. Stern defends the skeptical interpretation of Maimonides as does Kenneth Seeskin. See Seeskin 2000. Major defenders of the dogmatic interpretation of Maimonides include Altmann 1987; Manekin 1990; H. Davidson 1992; Ivry 1998.

228 *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 46, Maimonides 1963, pp. 98–102; I. 49, pp. 108–110; I. 60, p. 147.

229 Compare Stern 2000, pp. 215–7.

230 *Guide of the Perplexed* II. 38, Maimonides 1963, p. 376.

231 Ibid., II. 38, p. 377.

232 This intellectual intuition appears to be alluded to in Maimonides' famous claim that although the divine secrets are never "fully and completely known," truth may "flash out to us." According to the intellectual hierarchy in the introduction to the *Guide*, the highest degree of intuitive knowledge was attained by Moses for whom "the lightening flashes time and time again, so that he is always, as it were, in unceasing light." See *Guide of the Perplexed* introduction, Maimonides 1963, pp. 7–8. The source of Maimonides' account of intuitive metaphysical knowledge seems to be Avicenna. For discussion, see Strauss 1987, pp. 85, 94–5; Reines 1970, pp. 338–43; Abrahamov forthcoming. On Maimonides' differences with Avicenna, see Eran 1994, pp. 121–9.

233 See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 50, Maimonides 1963, pp. 111–2; Manekin 1990.

234 *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 59, Maimonides 1963, p. 139. Compare III. 9, pp. 436–7; *Eight Chapters*, VIII, Maimonides 1975, pp., 94–5. See Lobel 2002, pp. 43–9. The image of the sun goes back, of course, to Plato's *Republic*, but Maimonides may have adopted it from Ibn Bajja. See Altmann 1969b, pp. 84–8.

235 *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuva X. 3, Maimonides 1989, p. 254; compare *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 51, Maimonides 1963, pp. 620–30. Steven Harvey has been pointed out that when speaking of love of God in the *Guide* Maimonides uses the term Arabic term *'ishq*, which implies bodily love. Although previous Jewish philosophers had refrained from using this term in reference to loving God, preferring the more staid term *mahabbah,* Islamic thinkers debated whether it was appropriate to apply this term to God, and Maimonides, perhaps following Avicenna's lead, boldly embraces its use. See S. Harvey 1997. Also see Blumenthal 1988, pp. 94–5; Pines 1986b, p. 9.

236 *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 51, Maimonides 1963, p. 623.

237 *Guide of the Perplexed* III. 51, Maimonides 1963, p. 628. Scholars have pointed to the similarities between Maimonides' notion of communion with God and the concept of *devequt* (literally "cleaving" to God) that later becomes a central idea in *Kabbalah*.

See Scholem 1971, p. 205; idem 1987, p. 413; Scholem 1995, pp. 138–9, 383 n. 76; Tishby 1989 vol. III, pp. 980–98; Idel 1988b, pp. 1–31; idem 1990, pp. 76–8; E. Wolfson 2004.

238 See Rawidowicz 1969, p. 330; Guttmann 1955, p. 96; Idel 1988b, p. 4; J. Stern 2001, p. 80. The one opening for an individual achieving union with God involves Maimonides' acceptance of the Aristotelian epistemological schema according to which the knower achieves union with the essence of the object known by acquiring demonstrative knowledge of the essence of the object. See *Guide of the Perplexed* I. 68, Maimonides 1963, pp. 164–5. For the reasons we have seen, Maimonides thinks that it is impossible for finite human beings to know God's essence; hence, union with God is impossible.

239 See the end of Spinoza's *Ethics*.

240 I thank Zeev Harvey and the editors of this volume Tamar Rudavsky and Steven Nadler for their helpful suggestions. I am especially indebted to Diana Lobel for her generosity in sharing her learning with me, supplying me with secondary literature, and helping me with the subtleties of philosophical Judeo–Arabic. I also thank Shari Lowin for her help with the Judeo–Arabic.

PART II

LOGIC AND LANGUAGE

6

PROPOSITIONS AND PROPOSITIONAL INFERENCE

CHARLES H. MANEKIN

The doctrines of the proposition familiar to medieval Jewish intellectuals were those of the Aristotelians (or the "Neoaristotelians," because the doctrines contained Stoic and Neoplatonic elements), as transmitted and transformed during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, in the Greek, Arabic, and, later, Latin traditions. The doctrines were so fundamental to the study of philosophy that elements of them are contained in some of the earliest philosophical writing among the Jews, even among thinkers who themselves did not write works in logic, or who are not considered by historians of philosophers as "Aristotelian."[1] Although traces of Aristotelian logical doctrines can be found in most of the literary genres of medieval Jewish culture, such as biblical exegesis, sermons, legal codes and commentaries, didactic poetry, and kabbalistic works, not to mention scientific, medical, and philosophical writings, the clearest and most thorough expositions appear in Jewish commentaries on logic proper.[2] For this reason we shall focus in this chapter on sources devoted to logic, with an occasional foray into other works that are relevant to our topic, such as encyclopedias or philosophical writings that discuss logical doctrines.

A few words about these sources must be said. Although there is evidence that many literate Jews of Arabic-speaking countries studied logic as part of their education, and although specific Jews are named in contemporary Arab historical accounts as having been proficient in logic, or as having written logical works, we have extant in Arabic only one text devoted to logic written by a Jew, and that is the *Treatise on the Art of Logic* attributed to Maimonides. The work, which amounts to little more than a dictionary of logical terms in fourteen short chapters, appears to have had little or no influence in its Arabic version, although it has continually enjoyed popularity in its Hebrew versions since it was first translated in 1254 by Moses ibn Tibbon. The corpus of extant writings on logic by Jews in the Middle Ages is essentially in Hebrew, and indeed, it is more accurate to speak of medieval Hebrew logic, a rubric that includes translations from the Arabic and the Latin traditions, than medieval Jewish logic.

The relatively large number of works on logic in Hebrew among the Jews of Christian Europe, and the relative paucity of such works in Arabic among their brethren in Islamic lands, is not difficult to explain. The acculturated Jews in those lands were able to read philosophy with commentaries in Arabic, and so, there was no need for them to transmit these works into Hebrew and to comment on them. By contrast, Jewish intellectuals in Christian Europe generally did not read Arabic or Latin and so had to appropriate the philosophical material through translation and commentary in Hebrew. Once this appropriation was completed, there was a corpus of "pure" philosophy in Hebrew that laid the foundations for a Hebraic logical tradition that lasted well into the modern period. Yet with certain notable exceptions, that tradition did not go much beyond the conventional doctrine found in the compendia and elementary texts.

DECLARATIVE STATEMENTS, SENTENCES, AND PROPOSITIONS

Hebrew logic begins with the translations of al-Fārābī's short treatises on the Aristotelian *Organon* into Hebrew in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[3] There we find discussion of a species of "complete phrases" called a "declarative statement" (*qawl jāzim/ma'amar ḥotekh*), which is "true or false, being composed of a predicate and a subject."[4] Elsewhere the term used is "sentence" (*qadiyya/gezerah* or *mishpat*) or "proposition" (*muqadim/hakdamah*), which also is used for "premise" (reflecting the ambiguity of the Greek *protasis*). The early-thirteenth-century Hebrew texts emphasize that these terms are to be taken as synonyms for declarative, truth-bearing sentences. Thus Samuel ibn Tibbon, in his *Explanation of the Foreign Terms in the Guide of the Perplexed*, states

> We have used *gezerah* for a sentence that has two notions called 'terms,' one the subject, the other its predicate, as in 'Reuven is wise,' 'Every man is living' and 'Everything generated is corrupted.' Each of these statements is called by the philosophers 'sentence' (*gezerah*) because each sentences [the predicate of the subject]; in the first, 'wisdom' of 'Reuven'; in the second, 'living' of 'every man'; in the third, 'corrupted' of 'everything generated.' In short, this is a 'sentencing statement' for everything . . . A *gezerah* is called elsewhere *haqdamah* [when it servers as a premise in an inference].[5]

And in the *Treatise on Logic* attributed to Maimonides, and translated by Moses ibn Tibbon (thirteenth century) into Hebrew as *Logical Terms*, we read

> The entire expression, composed of the information and of that about which the information is offered, whether in affirmation or negation, i.e., the subject and the predicate together, is

called a sentence (*qadiyya/mishpat*). It is also called a declarative statement (*al-qawl al-jāzim/ha-ma'amar ha-posek*).[6]

The ultimate source for these distinctions is Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* via the Arabic Aristotelian tradition, especially al-Fārābī, whose logical writings were warmly recommended by Maimonides. As in al-Fārābī, the declarative statement comprises not only straightforward predicative statements, but also conditional (If *P* then *Q*) and disjunctive statements (*P* or *Q*), but excludes non-truth-functional statements such as imperatives, entreaties, requests, and vocatives. So the mark of propositions for medieval Jewish logicians, at least in their theories of inferences, is the formal bearing of truth values. This feature also appears in three other works that in their Hebrew translation became popular for the study of the logic of propositions and propositional inference: Averroes' *Epitome* of Aristotle's *Organon* (translated in 1288–1289 by Jacob ben Machir and in 1329 by Samuel b. Judah of Marseilles), his *Paraphrase* or *Middle Commentary* on the *De Interpretatione* (translated in 1232 by Jacob Anatoli), and al-Ghazālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers*, translated into Hebrew several times in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[7] That is how proposition is used in the present chapter.

Less attention in the Hebrew logical texts is given to other aspects of the semantics of propositions, for example, their signification. It is commonplace in medieval Hebrew logic that words signify (lit. "indicate") notions (*'inyanim*), which in turn signify existing things. (Often, written words are said to signify spoken words.[8]) There are differences of opinions as to how words signify existing things, and there are slight differences in the understanding of notions, which may be mental ideas or contents, or in some instances are synonymous with things. Propositions, according to al-Fārābī, are compound expressions that signify compound notions; these notions, according to Averroes, are both mental and the same for all people. So although the propositions we are dealing with signify mental entities, they do not appear to be tokens of inner speech but rather contents or meanings that are universal. This is certainly the case with propositions that signify universal truths like, "Every man is living." In any event, the question of the ontological status of the *'inyanim* does not seem to be much discussed by medieval Jewish logicians, until scholastic logic began to influence Hebrew logic. Although Jewish logicians were aware that such a question existed, they considered it to belong to the realm of metaphysics rather than to logic.

Of greater interest is the question of the temporal aspect of propositions. As compound expressions, sentences are composed of simple expressions, that is, names, verbs, and occasionally particles. Verbs can be copulative, in which case they link

two names (as in ternary propositions, e.g., "Socrates exists wise") or not (as in binary ones, e.g., "Socrates exists"), but in either case they are tensed. Even sentences in which a pronoun does duty as a copula (*Sokrates hu ḥakham*, where *hu* is the pronoun) contain implicitly the verb.[9] So, following the Arabic tradition, which uses "exists" (*maujūd*) as an equivalent for the Greek copula *esti(n)*, the normal forms of propositions look like this:

(i) S exists (e.g., "Man is");
(ii) S exists P. (e.g., "Man is sentient"),

which suggests that affirmations of this form carry with them existential import. (Negations are a different story.) Because "exists" is taken verbally, and verbs are said by the Arab Aristotelians to signify both a notion and the time of that notion, this means that propositions are tensed, or temporal. How then, do they signify notions that are eternal, such as the essences of things, or eternal truths?

Gersonides addresses this issue tangentially in his commentary on *De Interpretatione*, according to Averroes' paraphrase, and directly in his *Wars of the Lord*. In the former, he suggests that true propositions whose subjects and predicates are species/natural kinds, signify a compound notion *at any arbitrary time* (lit. "any time that will be," *be-eizeh zeman she-yihyeh*), where the predication is temporally indesignate, and at a given time, where it is temporally designate. As an example of the first sentence he gives," "The angles of a triangle exist (are) equal to two right angles," "since that relationship to the triangle is not at a certain time, but at any time that will be." As an example of the second he gives, "Reuven will exist walking," "when we intend this in the future."[10] What distinguishes, then, the signification of true propositions from that of words is, at least in part, their assertion of existence: either the existence of the subject in an existential proposition, or the existence of the predicate in the subject. This existence is either temporally indesignate or designate, but temporal in either event.

This last point can be seen in Gersonides' treatment of the eternal objects of human knowledge, the "intelligibles," in the *Wars* I.10. Intelligibles are first identified with conception (*tziyyur*) and assent (*imut*), which are then identified with definition and proposition, respectively. Although Gersonides sometimes treats them equally, definitions take precedence over propositions, because a proposition's conceptual content is already contained within the definition. "Assent is nothing but a a judgment about what is conceived; hence, conception precedes assent."[11] What a universal proposition adds to the conceptual content inherent in a definition is the temporally grounded context of the assent, "A universal proposition . . . does signify some kind of plurality, in so far as it is a combination of the intellect and

of sensation."[12] What Gersonides appears to be saying is that we learn through our senses that men are living creatures, and at some point we grasp why this must be so; at this point we acquire the intelligible. Our subsequent application of the intelligible to the world of instantiated material particulars is through universal propositions such as "Every man is living." If this interpretation is correct, then, strictly speaking, only humans think propositions because propositions are inevitably temporal and sensible.

Although propositions are temporal, universal and necessary propositions do not signify *determinate* times. In the same chapter of the *Wars* Gersonides attempts to explain how propositions such as "Every man is living" apply to the external world of changing particulars. He goes to great lengths to show that neither does the term "man" signify the genus *man* collectively nor does the proposition imply the actual existence of all men that were, are, and will be; rather it implies that whenever an arbitrary individual of the genus exists (i.e., is temporally instantiated) the predicate exists in it. So the truth conditions of the proposition "Every *S* is *P*" (where "*S*" and "*P*" are replaced by species/genus terms) do not require all *S*'s to exist now, only that when they exist, they will be *P*. This interpretation of a universal statement with a general term for its subject has been interpreted as a medieval precursor of the standard modern interpretation of universally quantified propositions, that is, "For any *x*, if *x* is *S* then *x* is *P*." There is, however, a considerable difference: The modern interpretation is atemporal and conveys with it no existential import for the subject; "Every *S* is *P*" can be true even if no *S* exists. Gersonides' interpretation, by contrast, is temporal; "Every man is living" is true now, although there are men who do not *yet* exist and who no longer exist. Although "Every man is living" does not imply that all *S*'s exist, much less that they all exist simultaneously, it does imply that there are men. It is not clear whether he feels that this is implied because of the logical form "Every *S* is *P*" or simply because the subject terms in his examples signify species and genera, which are always existent.

The idea that propositions carry with them temporal import essentially is denied by Gersonides' slightly older contemporary, Joseph ibn Kaspi (ca. 1280–1340). In his commentary on Maimonides' *Logical Terms*, Ibn Kaspi disagrees with Maimonides' remark that the copula introduces a temporal consideration, "since there is nothing in the declarative sentence per se that defines time, but occasionally it is absolute." He notes that time is not mentioned in Averroes' definition of the proposition as "the attribution of one thing to another, or its removal," and it should not be, for any time that is associated with the proposition is accidental to it, as a result of the copula being a verb. For this reason, there can be necessary predications that are not in any particular time, such as "God is One," in which the copula *hu* indicates

unqualified existence.[13] Ibn Kaspi's insistence in this work and in his *Bundle of Silver*,[14] that propositions carry with them no temporal import may be a reaction to Gersonides' aforementioned treatment, but we have as yet no conclusive evidence of Ibn Kaspi's familiarity with Gersonides' logical writings.

Still, even if one wishes to say that for Ibn Kaspi propositions do not signify time per se, they still signify time by virtue of their containing verbs (or the copula *hu* instead of a verb.) This points to a feature of the medieval proposition that many have noted: They are often taken as occasion, rather than eternal, sentences; that is, they refer implicitly to the occasion on which they are put forth. This is certainly the case for a proposition such as "Socrates is sitting," whose truth value differs, depending upon when it is put forth. It is also arguably the case for propositions like the aforementioned, "Every man is living," which may be interpreted as, "For all times (or: for any time), every man is living."

THE DIVISION OF PROPOSITIONS

Short medieval works on logic often follow the definition of the proposition with different ways of dividing them. The immensely popular work by al-Ghazālī, *The Intentions of the Philosophers*, in its various translations, divides propositions according to (a) their simplicity/complexity (predicative, conditional, and disjunctive); (b) their quality ("from the standpoint of their predicate"); (c) their quantity ("from the standpoint of their subject") and (d) "their modality ("from the standpoint of the relation of its predicate to its subject").[15] This more or less sums up the way propositions are treated in the Hebrew logical tradition based on Arabic sources. By contrast, *The Perfection of Beauty* by the Italian rabbi Judah Messer Leon (ca. 1420-25–ca. 1498) gives seven types of divisions: (a) categorical and hypothetical; (b) simple and complex terms; (c) affirmative and negative; (d) true and false; (e) possible and impossible; (f) possible and necessary; and (g) quantity and no quantity. Although there is naturally an overlap of the subject matter, Judah's treatment draws mainly from the scholastic logical tradition, much of it following Paul of Venice's *Logica Parva*. In what follows I will consider briefly the treatments of the quantity, quality, and modality of propositions, from the perspectives of both Arabic–Hebrew and of Latin–Hebrew logic.

Quantity of Propositions

Aristotle divides predicative propositions into universal, particular, and indefinite (An. Pr. 1.1 234a 18–22), the latter usually understood by him as particular (e.g., "A man runs," "The living things there are hawks"), but occasionally as universal ("Man

is living"); either way, he does not include it within his system of inference. Singular propositions ("Socrates is living") are likewise not included because syllogistic is ancillary to scientific demonstration, and science does not treat of the singular case but of the universal or particular. Hebrew logic accepted this division, with some variations. Most Hebrew logical texts follow the tradition that the indefinite proposition has the force of a particular proposition and hence can be assimilated to that;[16] Gersonides recognizes correctly that the indefinite can have either the force of the particular or the universal, but either way, they are redundant in the system of inference.[17] At one point he also rejects singular propositions "because they are generated and destroyed," hence not true at all times and of no value for the art of demonstration. This explanation allows him to accept singular propositions in science when they refer to eternal objects, such as the heavenly bodies (strictly speaking, he may not consider these to be singular propositions because the heavenly bodies are considered to be species with unique members). He considers singular premises such as "Reuven is rational" within his syllogistic.[18]

Late-medieval scholastic logic divides propositions into those of some quantity and those of none; the former includes the four previous categories, whereas the latter includes exclusive propositions ("Only man runs") and exceptive ones (e.g., "Every man except Socrates runs"). Judah Messer Leon, following Paul of Venice, lists these two propositions, adding: "These are neither universal, nor particular, nor indefinite, nor singular, since each of them has the force of two propositions with differing quantities, as will be made manifest in the chapter on the proof of propositions, so that we cannot attribute a single quantity to each of them."[19]

We noted previously that al-Ghazālī views a proposition's quantity as pertaining to its subject; in traditional Aristotelian logic, predicates are not quantified, and the four standard forms of propositions used in inferences are the universal affirmative ("Every *A* is *B*"), the universal negative ("No *A* is *B*"), the particular affirmative ("Some *A* is *B*"), and the particular negative ("Not every *A* is *B*"). Aristotle apparently rules out the universal quantification of the predicate at *De Interpretatione* 17b12–16, and he dismisses forms such as "Every man is every animal" as "useless and impossible" in *Prior Analytics* 43b20, without explaining why, a task left for his commentators. According to al-Fārābī's interpretation in his *Long Commentary* on *De Interpretatione*, "every man is every animal" states that everything we describe as man is every single animal, which is false. By contrast, "Every man is some animal," although true, is unnecessarily prolix because the "some" is superfluous,[20] a claim repeated by Averroes.[21] To this Ibn Kaspi adds the consideration that, because the essence of the proposition is only to inform us that the predicate exists in some subject, there is no further requirement that all or some

of it exists in the subject, for that would be from the aspect of its converse.[22] He seems to be saying that to raise questions about the quantity of the predicate is to treat it as the subject of our inquiries, that is, to discuss the converse of the original proposition.

The only medieval Jewish logician who criticizes Averroes' discussion of the quantification of the predicate is Gersonides. In his commentary on *De Interpretatione* he dismisses the explanation that such predications are either "false" or "superfluous," by countering that there are quantified-predicate propositions that are true (e.g., "Everything human is everything rational") and quantified-subject propositions that are superfluous ("Some animal is rational," which could easily be expressed as "An animal is rational"). Gersonides suggests that the real reason for rejecting the quantification of the project is that it violates the linguistic convention of using a single proposition to express a simple judgment: "Everything human is everything rational" means "Everything human is a rational being and nothing else is a rational being." Moreover, in some cases the force of a proposition with a quantified predication would be that of its converse. For example, when someone says, "Bring me all the money changers (*shulḥaniyim*) and physicians in the city," to which one replies, "All the money changers are all the physicians," the latter proposition has the same force as "All the physicians are money changers."[23] Still, whereas Aristotle (according to Averroes) rejects the quantification of the predicate in toto because of "every man is every animal," Gersonides provides rules for the quantification of the predicate in cases that do not produce falsehoods. These rules enable him to transform sentences with quantified predicates into one of the four standard forms without them, thereby allowing a certain flexibility in manipulating, quantifying, and substituting subject and predicate terms in his rules of inference.

Gersonides' chief critic in this and many other matters was Judah Messer Leon, who devotes a long passage of his commentary on *De Interpretatione*, according to Averroes' paraphrase, to attacking Gersonides' criticisms of Aristotle: "When the 'wise in his own eyes' said that a proposition with convertible terms like, 'Every man is is every rational' or 'Every man is every risible' is true, he sank up to his neck in mud." Messer Leon claims that the correct interpretation of the proposition renders it always false. More important, he takes aim at Gersonides' claim that the real reason for rejecting such propositions is that they violate linguistic convention insofar as they are implicitly compound.

> The reason [Gersonides] gave is quite awful; there is no doubt that the logicians will find it defective, either because of what we mentioned concerning the interpretation of the sentence, or because language allows the combination of two investigations together [in one proposition]. What will he say of exceptive and exclusive propositions, both of

which combine more than one judgment . . . like the proposition, 'Only man is risible,' and likewise with respect to the proposition, 'Every animal except man is non-rational,' and other examples of propositions that contain more than one judgment.

Now I know that somebody like him will run away from responding to these propositions because he does not know their nature and their true signification. And if anyone says that these propositions are new, that they have 'come from nearby,' and that they are beyond the bounds of proper language, we shall respond to him, Look at the verses of the Holy Scripture, and see 'where they are pasturing.' Then you will know that you 'were made to possess months of vanity.' Did he forget what our father Jacob said, 'This is nothing but the house of God, and this the gate of heaven' (Gen. 28:17) . . . and likewise, 'This is nothing but sorrow of heart' (Neh. 2:2) . . . and many of the same sort in scattered places.

We have written about this at length in order to refute the words of this savant, who dared to speak with people who are greater and more wondrous than he. And I have established these predicates (*sippurim*)[24] on solid foundations, whether those of the Philosopher, or Averroes, without deviating from them a whit.[25]

Messer Leon knew full well that Gersonides was ignorant of the treatment of exceptive and exclusive propositions found in Christian logical textbooks that "come from nearby," that is, from Christian neighbors. He was certainly aware of the scriptural verses that exemplify these propositions. For Messer Leon, to suggest that these propositions violated linguistic usage was clearly wrong, and, perhaps, an affront to scripture. It is not likely that Gersonides, who rarely cites scriptural verses in his logical commentaries, would have been swayed by that argument.

Quality of Propositions

Aristotle divides propositions into affirmations and negations, but he also recognizes that both sorts can contain plain or indefinite names as subjects and/or predicates. An indefinite name, such as "not-seeing," is considered to be equivalent in most instances with privative terms, such as "blind." This leads him to work out the logical relations between propositions with definite, indefinite, and privative names in *De Interpretatione* 10. In the Arabic logic tradition a sentence with an indefinite name is called "deviated" or "retracted" (*maʿdūl*), and, when the predicate is indefinite, such statement is taken to be equivalent with a privative statement. The Arab peripatetics noted that, strictly speaking, indefinite names are not used in Arabic and so one has to construct an expression combining the particle "not" with the term to be retracted. Because this could lead to confusion between an affirmation with a retracted predicate ("Zayd is not-knowing") and a plain negation ("Zayd is not knowing"), both Arabic and Hebrew logicians had to figure out a way to distinguish the placement of the particle of negation from that of the particle of retraction. In fact, according to Averroes, the term "retracted name" was thought

up by the Arab logicians to cope with this problem; the particle of retraction is a term-forming operator on terms, whereas the particle of negation is a sentence-forming operator on sentences. So the particle of negation should be connected with the verb (including the copula), he argues, and the particle of retraction with the noun. In any event, Arab and Jewish logicians now had a threefold division of propositions into plain, retracted, and privative, each of which could be either affirmative or negative, and whose relations were analyzed and presented in tables.[26]

An important distinction between the plain negation and the predicate-retracted affirmation is that the latter's extension, and hence its truth-conditions, are more restricted than the former's. According to al-Fārābī, "A wall is not seeing" is true whereas "A wall is not-seeing" is not, because "not-seeing" is considered equivalent with "blind," which can only be affirmed of something whose way is to possess the corresponding property, namely, a living thing possessing sight.[27] Moreover, predicate-retracted affirmations imply the existence of their subject, whereas plain negations do not. Hence, a sentence such as, "The associate of God is not seeing" is true, even though the associate of God does not exist, whereas "The associate of God is not-seeing" is false.[28] This is why, according to al-Fārābī, one should describe God and the heavens by indefinite names rather than by plain negations, a point that appears to have influenced Maimonides, who writes in *Guide of the Perplexed* I.58: "For this reason we cannot describe [the heavens] except by indefinite names [*al-ismā al-ghayr muhassala*], rather than by definite affirmations."[29]

Most Hebrew logical texts give short shrift to the logical relations between plain, retracted, and privative propositions; at best one finds restatements of al-Fārābī and Averroes.[30] The most ambitious attempt to derive rules for the transformation of such propositions is found in Gersonides' *Book of the Correct Syllogism* (first edition, 1319). Gersonides first distinguishes between subject retraction and predicate retraction by claiming that the former has the force of privation, whereas the latter has the force of negation. This appears to be a divergence from al-Fārābī, who, as we just saw, claims that predicate-retracted affirmations imply the existence of their subject, and hence do not follow from negations. Gersonides' example, "A griffin is not-man" differs from the example in al-Fārābī in that the retracted term is an existing thing, rather than a property, and so one cannot say for certain whether in that case Gersonides would consider the predicate retraction to have the force of simple negation. (When Gersonides uses a property term in these contexts, it usually refers existents of a certain type, e.g., "rational" is taken to refer to the rational existing things.) In any event, because subject retraction has the force of privation, a retracted subject implies the existence of members of the subject's complement

class. Thus, in the sentence, "Nothing is not-man is rational" the term "not-man" refers to those existents that are not men and hence has existential import.

To display the logical relations among plain, retractive, and private propositions, Gersonides first derives what we may call rules that yield "consequences by virtue of the part and the whole" (*ḥiyyuvim asher mi-tzad ha ḥelek ve-ha-kol*). Some examples of these rules are: (a) "If something is affirmed of all of the universal, then it is affirmed of all of the particular," or (b) "If a proposition pertains to all of the particular, whether affirmatively or negatively, it does not follow that it pertains to the all of the universal." These rules are the engine that makes his system of propositional and syllogistic inference work; with their aid he deduces *inter alia* the laws of subalternation, conversion, obversion, contraposition, and so forth, with plain and modal premises. This is an original approach to propositional and syllogistic inference in medieval Hebrew logic, but it is not entirely without precedent. For example, already Averroes in his paraphrase of *De Interpretatione* had justified rules of inferences among plain, retractive, and privative propositions based on their relative extensions:

> The negative plain proposition is implied by the affirmative retracted proposition . . . because the negative simple proposition has a more universal application than the affirmative retracted proposition, since our sentence 'man is not just' is true of the unjust man, the man who is neither unjust nor just–namely, the non-citizen – and the child. And our sentence 'man is not-just' is only true of the unjust man.[31]

This extensional approach (one may perhaps call it "set-theoretical") to inference is greatly expanded by Gersonides.

Gersonides first formalizes his metalinguistic rules that yield consequences by virtue of the part and the whole, next, analyzes the whole–part relation between the various terms, and finally substitutes them in his rules. For example, consider a rule of subalternation: "Every *A* is *B*" implies "Some *A* is *B*." One transforms "Every *A* is *B*" to "*B* is predicated of every *A*" and since "Some *A*" is the "particular" (i.e., subset) of "*A*," one concludes, through an application of the first rule, that "Some *A* is *B*." This procedure is repeated throughout the *Correct Syllogism*.

Using this method, we arrive at a total of twenty valid patterns of inference between the four standard propositions with terms that are plain or retracted; two plain to plain (the laws of subalternation), four plain to retracted predicate, four retracted predicate to plain, four subject retracted to "unqualifiedly" retracted (i.e., both subject and predicate retracted), four unqualifiedly retracted to subject retracted, and two plain to subject retracted, when some existence conditions are placed on the subject and predicate. In addition, we are told why certain inference

patterns are invalid. In effect, these inference patterns replace the traditional square of opposition, expanded to include sentences with retracted terms. They are of particular interest because they show some sensitivity to the question of existential import required by the inferential relations of the traditional square of opposition.

For example, Gersonides' contemporary, Jean Buridan, argued that contraposition and obversion are invalid unless one places conditions on the existence of the terms.[32] For if no conditions are stipulated, one may have a case in which a falsehood is derived from a truth, for example, "Every non-being is a non-man" (which is false because there are no non-beings) from "Every man is a being" (which is true). Gersonides does not consider contraposition and obversion, but he does consider inferences with subject-retracted sentences (i.e., sentences with indefinite names as subject), and he stipulates that for them to yield simple and predicate-retracted sentences, neither term can be empty, for example, "Nothing not-corporeal is a vacuum is true" but "Something corporeal is a vacuum" is false.[33] By contrast, Judah Messer Leon considers and approves of contrapositional conversion (which he calls, a bit awkwardly, conversion of definite terms to indefinite terms), although he points out examples in which a true sentence produces a false sentence, such as, "A griffin is non-living" yields "Some non-living is not a non-griffin."[34]

As for the traditional square of opposition, the relations posited between the four standard forms are mentioned in most Hebrew logical texts, from *Logical Terms* onward, along with the Hebrew equivalents of their classic names (e.g., opposites, contraries, subcontraries, and contradictories), unless the names are unique to the scholastic tradition, for example, subaltern, inversion, and obversion, in which case one has to look for their equivalents in works that are either translations of scholastic writings or show their influence. Some texts reproduce the diagrams of a square, although it is not always easy to determine whether the diagrams are in the original or were added by later students and scribes.

Modality

In the Aristotelian tradition, treatments of the square of opposition with nonmodal propositions are generally followed by a discussion of the opposition of modal ones. Because this assumes some knowledge of modes and modality, the commentators often amplified the discussion with material borrowed from *Prior Analytics* and *Metaphysics*. So in the *Short Treatise on De Interpretatione*, al-Fārābī defines a mode (*jiha/tzad*) as "'an expression attached to the predicate of a statement to signify how the predicate holds of the subject, like, 'possible,' 'necessary,' 'admissible,' 'impossible,' 'bad,' 'good,' 'ought' 'must,' 'may,' and the like.'"[35] (A virtually identical description and list appears in the *Logical Terms* attributed to Maimonides.[36]). He then lists as the three primary modes the necessary, the possible, and the absolute,

which is the fundamental division of modal propositions in the *Prior Analytics*. A more apt tripartite division of propositions for the square of opposition would be into the possible, the impossible, and the necessary, with the possible being divided into what may or may not be (two-way possibility) or "what is not impossible" (one-way possibility); this is how Arisotle divides the modalities in *De Interpretatione*, a division found in al-Ghazālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers*. By contrast, al-Fārābī in the *Long Commentary on De Interpretatione*, speaks of two primary modalities, the necessary and the possible, which are then further subdivided.[37] What is common to all these divisions, however, is the conviction that the mode qualifies neither the subject nor the predicate, but rather the relation of predicate to subject.

Another way this is put by the medieval commentators is that the modality of a proposition relates to its form rather than to its content. Thus, Averroes writes:

> Since in propositions having no mode [i.e., modal term] the existential word [in ternary propositions] indicates the quality of the condition of the predicate with respect to the subject, the relation of the existential word to the predicate in these propositions becomes the relation of form to matter. And since this is the same as the relation of the mode to the existential word – because it indicates how the predicate exists with respect to the subject – its relation to the existential word is also that of form to matter.[38]

Because the particle of negation, concludes Averroes, is placed with the verb in the square of opposition with nonmodal propositions, it is placed with the modal term here.

Yet there are some difficulties with the view that in modal propositions the modal term qualifies the relationship of the predicate to the subject. For one thing, it assumes that modal propositions always contain modal terms, an assumption that is true, for much, but not all of Aristotle's treatment of modal propositions. Gersonides claims that Aristotle sometimes treats the modality of a proposition as a function of the mode of the subject's existence. By this criterion, a statement is necessary if the subject exists necessarily; possible, if the subject exists possibly; and assertoric, if it exists actually, but not necessarily.[39] Also, Aristotle adds modal operators like "necessarily" and "possibly" to his standard sentences with term-variables such as "*A* is necessarily predicate of all *B*" but generally omits them from sentences with concrete terms, such as "Living is predicated of every man." "Living" is predicated necessarily of "man" because man is essentially living. In the shorter treatments of modal inference in the Arabic and Hebrew traditions, one sometimes finds propositions serving as premises of the syllogisms in which no explicit modal term appears. For example, in his treatment of the modal syllogism in the *Epitome* Averroes lists the syllogistic rules for each figure and then illustrates

their validity with concrete statements of necessity and possibility. The latter are mostly empirical generalizations taken from the field of medicine, probabilities that Averroes allows to serve as Aristotle's examples of possible premises. Once a conclusion of such syllogism is drawn, one inspects the modality not by any formal procedure, but by examining the terms in questions. So even if one claims that the modality qualifies the relation of the predicate to the subject, it is not clear whether a proposition with concrete terms in which the modal qualifier is absent is to be treated as a nonmodal proposition or a modal proposition, and if the latter, what modality.

Second, even if the modal term pertains to the form rather than to the matter of the proposition, specifically, to the quality of the predication, it is not entirely clear what the mode qualifies. If it qualifies the predication *de re*, then a necessary proposition expresses the (necessary) predication of an essential property of a subject, for example, "Every walking thing is living," where "walking thing" signifies "living thing." Now, according to the laws of conversion, this converts to "Some living thing is walking," the first proposition is assumed to be necessary; the second, which does not express an essential predication, is not. Yet according to Aristotle, propositions retain their particular modality when they convert, which appears to rule out a *de re* reading. One could harmonize Aristotle's views on conversion with the view that the modal operator pertains to the quality of the predication, by taking the scope of the modal operator to be the entire proposition, that is, "Necessarily: Every A is B," converts to "Necessarily: Some B is A." This *de dicto* interpretation notoriously, however, renders much of the modal syllogistic invalid.

Actually, the *de dicto/de re* distinction does not appear, at least not explicitly, in Hebrew logical texts. Although the difference between the composite and divided senses of a proposition such as, "The sitting Socrates is possibly standing" was known, only Judah Messer Leon, following Paul of Venice, actually divides modal propositions according to the composite and modal sense, after he distinguishes between modal and nonmodal propositions.

> Thereafter follows another division of propositions . . . those that possess the mode in the divided sense, and those that possess the mode in the composite sense . . . [The former] . . . is when the mode is situated between the subject and the predicate; [the latter] is when the mode precedes or succeeds the proposition. An example of the former is: 'A man is possibly running.' An example of the latter when the mode precedes: '[It is] impossible [for] a man to be an ass'; when the mode succeeds: [For] Reuven [to be] white is possible.[40]

Like Paul, Judah proceeds to give diagrams of three squares of opposition: the first with nonmodal propositions; the second with modal propositions taken in the divided sense; and the third with modal propositions taken in the composite

sense. All these are followed by rules, but the mnemonic devices for the rules are lacking or are simply translated without equivalent Hebrew mnemonic devices. The same lack occurs with Peter's mnemonic for the rules of equipollent modal propositions.[41]

One Hebrew translator who took great care in rendering such a mnemonic was Judah Shalom, who lived in Italy in the mid-fifteenth century, and who translated into Hebrew Peter of Spain's *Tractatus*, a highly popular medieval textbook of logic. In this Peter's rendering of the mnemonic, the vowels *A*, *E*, *I*, and *U* refer to the four ways that the subject and predicate of modal propositions can be affirmed or negated: "Socrates' running is possible," "Socrates' not running is possible," "Socrates' running is not possible," "Socrates' not running is not possible," respectively. Because there are four modal qualifications (possible, possible, impossible, and necessary) there are four sets of four sentences arranged to form a square of opposition; each of the Latin names provides information about one of the sets. "*AMABIMUS*" (*A-A-I-U*), for example, signifies the set consisting of "Socrates' running is possible," "Socrates running is possible," "Socrates' running is not impossible," and "Socrates' not running is not necessary." This mnemonic is relatively easy to translate because Judah has only used Hebrew words or phrases that possess the same vowel patterns:

Tractatus	Judah Shalom's Hebrew Translation
PURPUREA	ʿUZU ʿEZAH ("Seek ye counsel")
AMABIMUS	TAʾAMINU ("Believe ye")
ILIACE	BIYDIʿAT ZEH ("In the knowledge of this")
EDENTULI	SHELEIMUTI ("My perfection").

In other words, the mnemonic reads in Hebrew, "Seek ye counsel [and] believe ye. [For] in the knowledge of this [mnemonic] is my perfection."[42]

The third difficulty that deterred many logicians from a sustained treatment of modal inference was the disagreement among Aristotle's commentators over the interpretation of the modalities themselves, and, as a result, modal propositions. These disagreements were discussed in al-Fārābī's *Long Commentaries* and Averroes' *Middle Commentaries*, especially on *Prior Analytics*. The Aristotelian model of modality that was most influential for Arabic and Hebrew philosophy was the temporal or "statistical" model, in which a thing is possible if it is sometimes the case, and necessary if it is always the case. Possible propositions would be understood on this model as propositions that are sometimes true and necessary propositions as those that are always true.[43] Aristotle complicates matters when he relates the necessary/possible distinction to other distinctions such as essence/accident, and to actual/potential, and when he uses concrete examples to illustrate modal premises.

Criticisms of Aristotle's system of modal inference by al-Fārābī and by Avicenna, who left his own rather elaborate system of temporalized modalities,[44] brought about several defenses of Aristotle by Averroes. The latter's works were commented on and criticized by Gersonides.

The interplay between time and modality in modal propositions can best be seen in the various interpretations of the assertoric or plain proposition, whose interpretation was hotly contested in antiquity. In his *Commentary on the Prior Analytics*, Gersonides lists six different interpretations of the assertoric proposition:

1) the *temporally restricted* assertoric proposition, in which an accident is predicated of an actually existing subject (e.g., 'All men in Jerusalem are now writing');
2) the *nontemporally restricted* assertoric proposition, which asserts (or denies) a nonnecessary predication at all times (no example is given, but it is rejected by Gersonides on the grounds that whatever holds at all time is necessary);
3) the *epistemological* assertoric, 'whose meaning leaves us in doubt as to whether it is necessary or not' (e.g., 'Every raven is black');
4) the *incidentally necessary* assertoric, in which the predicate applies necessarily of the subject *per accidens*, that is, under a certain attribute (e.g., 'Everything walking is moving');
5) the *mostly possible* assertoric proposition, in which the predicate applies to the subject for the most part, and hence it appears without a modality (e.g., 'Summers are hot' and 'Old men have gray hair');
6) the *nonmodal* assertoric proposition, in which no explicit mention of the sentence modality occurs (e.g., 'Every man is living')[45]

To these six, Gersonides adds a seventh in his *Book of the Correct Syllogism*:

the *rhetorical assertoric*, in which both terms apply actually and which is true for most of the times, though it is assumed for rhetorical purposes to be true at all times (e.g., 'He who honors his father will be honored by his children').

In the second edition of the *Correct Syllogism*, Gersonides accepts only (1) and (5) as bona fide examples of the assertoric premises. He considers (4) necessary along with essentially necessary sentences such as, "Every man is living." Possible premises are likewise divided into essential ("All wine is possibly vinegar") and incidental ("Every man is possibly a writer").

In the second edition of the *Correct Syllogism*, Gersonides interprets the modality of a proposition as a function of the modality of its subject and predicate terms. Gersonides adopted this interpretation after reading of it in Averroes' treatment in his *Logical Questions*. According to Averroes, a necessary term is (or denotes) an attribute that is one with its subject by virtue of itself. A possible term is

(or denotes) an attribute that is one with its subject incidentally. In essentially necessary propositions, both the subject and the predicate are required to be necessary terms. This further requirement strengthens the *de re* reading mentioned previously, because the predicate applies essentially to the subject, but the subject term is an essential name or attribute of the subject. On this reading, essentially necessary propositions convert, preserving their modalities. Similar treatments of possible and assertoric propositions are offered by Averroes and expanded on by Gersonides in his commentary.

Because Gersonides interprets modal sentences as sentences with modal terms, he does not have to justify a new set of inferences. Rather, he investigates how the modality of the premises affects the modality of the conclusion in the standard syllogistic and nonsyllogistic patterns of inference. His procedure is as follows. First, he catalogues modal sentences according to the modalities of their subject and predicate terms. He then manipulates the modal term of the premise(s) via the rules of inference with nonmodal premises to produce a conclusion whose modality is determined according to the aforementioned categorization. Perhaps it is more accurate to call Gersonides' system in the *Correct Syllogism* a system of inferences with modal terms rather than a system of modal inference.

In any event, there is nothing like this in other treatments of modal inference offered by the Jews. When Jewish writers did consider modal logic, they usually limited themselves to a preliminary discussion of the various modes, sometimes with an analysis of Aristotle's "square of opposition" with modal statements and a cursory restatement of the modal syllogism. Ibn Kaspi does summarize the more ambitious project of Averroes in the latter's *Middle Commentary*, but he leaves out most of Averroes' arguments and is content simply to give his conclusions. Only occasionally, such as in the question of the necessity of the conclusion in syllogisms whose major premise is necessary and whose minor premises are assertoric, does he refer (via Averroes) to the ancient dispute over this. He states, "There is no intention in this abridgement to elaborate, [as did Averroes did] in the commentary that he composed. I will simply mention one of the arguments and one of Averroes' replies."[46] This may seem surprising because Aristotle's demonstrative syllogisms require their premises to be necessary, and one might suppose that the proper interpretation of necessary and possible premises would be rather important for the theory of demonstration. Yet these summary logical texts generally do not devote that much attention to the theory of demonstration, with certain exceptions, such as al-Ghazālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers*, Judah ha-Kohen ibn Matka's *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah*, and Joseph ibn Kaspi's *Bundle of Silver*. Their treatments are relatively short and do not draw on any advanced problems in Aristotle's theory of modality.

One well-known question of modal propositions, however, is whether pairs of contradictory opposites (e.g., "P or –P") "distribute truth and falsity" among themselves, and if so, in what way. Aristotle had famously claimed in *De Interpretatione* 1.9 that such disjunctions are necessarily true, and in most cases, one of the disjuncts is true, whereas the other is false. The difficulty arises in propositions that describe future possible states of affairs, for example, "Reuven will go to the store tomorrow." Aristotle argued that if every affirmation or negation is true and false, then such propositions are either true or false before their states of affairs come to be, with the false implication that "everything that will be, therefore, happens of necessity." His solution (on the traditional interpretation) is to say that whereas it is necessary for "P or –P" to be true, even when the states of affairs described are future possibles, this does not mean that one is completely true, and the other completely false.

Aristotle's conclusion seems to conflict with the principle of bivalence, which is that every proposition is either true or false. This was actually noted by Gersonides, who comments that in the case of future possible statements such as "Reuven will go to a certain place" it is not proper to doubt the description of the declarative sentence as either true or false, "for in any event that statement will be true or false in the future, although it is neither true nor false at the time of its utterance."[47] So, at least according to Gersonides, the principle of bivalence requires that a proposition be either true or false *at some time* but not at all times. If the truth or falsity is completely distinguished from each other at the time of its utterance, it is determined to be true. If not, its truth is indeterminate then. The temporal reading assumes that the same proposition can lack a truth value at a certain time and receive one at a later time.

Gersonides follows the commentorial tradition that reads Aristotle as saying that although pairs of contradictories about future possibles divide truth and falsity, they do so incompletely at the time of their utterance. This is because they are undetermined by the states of affairs at that time; hence "contradictories about possibilities are unknown by nature" and not just unknown by us.[48] It should be pointed out that the unnecessitated nature of future possibles is taken for granted in this discussion, as is the causal efficacy of deliberation. Aristotle's arguments are not directed so much against causal determinism as they are against "logical fatalism," that is, the claim that no matter what we do, the outcome is determined because a proposition reporting it is considered to be determinately true. In fact, there is nothing in *De Interpretatione* 1.9 that could not be squared, at least, technically, with a strict causal determinism, and, indeed, Aristotle's doctrine is accepted by a determinist such as Avicenna.[49]

Even for those who reject strict causal determinism, like Gersonides, it is possible to limit possibility/indeterminism to those things that depend on human will

and choice. This appears to be how Gersonides reads Aristotle, who claims that if everything happens by necessity, then nothing will come about by chance. According to Gersonides, something that comes about by chance comes about without a complete cause; the example he gives is finding a treasure when digging a ditch, because finding the treasure was both unintended and rare, it happened by chance. All of Gersonides' examples of chance are connected in some way to human choice and will, and this is more restrictive than those given by Aristotle. Moreover, he writes that if finding the treasure had been necessitated beforehand (by virtue of "logical fatalism"), then "the causes that decree its coming about" (*ha-sibbot ha-gozerot ḥiddusho*)[50] would not be effective. This phrase suggests that Gersonides does not believe that the discovery of the treasure is without a "decreeing" cause.

The upshot of Aristotle's discussion, as understood by al-Fārābī and Averroes, is that future possibles cannot be known in advance because they are not determined now. In the *Long Commentary* al-Fārābī appears to polemicize against Muslim theologians who deny future possibilities, and he digresses to discuss how future possibles are known by God. The *Long Commentary* may have been known to Gersonides, but few echoes of the theological implications are found in the Jewish commentaries on *De Interpretatione* (they are indeed found in the theological writings). An exception, however, is Judah Messer Leon's commentary on *De Interpretatione*. Averroes had written that the implication that everything happens of necessity is both utterly absurd and the opposite of our natural disposition, that is, we are naturally disposed to believe that our actions are efficacious. Judah Messer Leon understands "natural disposition" as "what we were created for," "for we were not created to be compelled in our actions, for that would entail the abolition of [Divine] reward (*gemul*) and punishment." The argument is a familiar one, but its placement in a commentary on *De Interpretatione* is not. It is found, however, in al-Fārābī's *Long Commentary*.

A complete treatment of propositional inference in medieval Jewish logical texts would include scholastic doctrines unknown to earlier medieval Jewish logicians, such as consequences, obligations, and insolubles. Some of these are perhaps better described as metalinguistic rules of inferences than propositional inferences. With the editing and publishing of texts of Hebrew scholastic philosophy, especially logic, one will be able to study this material and see wherein it differs, at all, from its scholastic sources.

NOTES

1 See, for example, Bahya 1928, p. 368; Ibn Gabirol in Baeumker 1892–1895, pp. 104–5.
2 For an overview, see Manekin forthcoming.
3 Zonta 1996, pp. 189-93.
4 Zimmermann 1981, p. 226.

5 Even-Shemuel 1987, p. 39.
6 Maimonides 1938, p. 35.
7 Averroes 1559, p. 9b; Averroes *De Int.*, p. 39b; Averroes 1983, pp. 132–3. Chertoff 1952, p. 40.
8 Averroes *De Int.*, fol. 36a; Averroes 1983, p. 125.
9 Ibn Kaspi *Bundle*, fol. 231r.
10 Gersonides *C. De Int.*, fol. 64b–65b.
11 Gersonides 1866, p. 64; cf. Gersonides 1984, p. 188.
12 Gersonides 1866, p. 68; cf. Gersonides 1984, p. 194.
13 Ibn Kaspi *C. Logical Terms*, fol. 123a.
14 Ibn Kaspi *Bundle*, fols. 231a-b.
15 Chertoff 1952, p. 48.
16 Maimonides 1938, p. 46; Chertoff 1952, p. 46.
17 Manekin 1992, p. 55.
18 Ibid., p. 98
19 Messer Leon *Perfection*, fol. 12b. "Only man runs" is expounded to "Man runs" and "Nothing not-man runs"; "Every man excepts Socrates runs" is expounded to "Socrates does not run," and "Every man [who is] not-Socrates runs." Cf. Paul of Venice 1984, p. 200.
20 Zimmermann 1981, p. 64.
21 Averroes *De Int.*, fol. 41v; Averroes 1983, pp. 138.
22 Ibn Kaspi *Bundle*, fol. 232r.
23 *C. De Int.*, fol. 37a. (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana N 105 Sup. This passage is not in all the manuscripts.) For evidence that Gersonides himself served as a money-lender and physician, see Shatzmiller 1991.
24 Cf. Averroes 1559, p. 9b.
25 Husik 1906, pp. 98–100.
26 Zimmermann 1981, pp. 97–135, 234–40; Averroes *De Int.*, fols. 46–50; Averroes 1983, 149–61; Averroes 1559, p. 11; Chertoff 1952, pp. 44–6.
27 Zimmermann 1981, p. 234.
28 The example is found in Chertoff 1952, p. 44.
29 Maimonides 1964, p. 93. I plan to write about the interpretation of *al-ismā al-ghayr muhassala* in this passage as "indefinite names" elsewhere. None the *Guide*'s translators noticed that the Arabic phrase designates a technical term of logic.
30 See, for example, Ibn Kaspi *Bundle*, fol. 233.
31 Averroes *De Int.*, fol. 47b; Averroes 1983, 152–3 (translation slightly altered).
32 Buridan 1985, p. 226.
33 Manekin 1992, p. 75.
34 Messer Leon *Perfection*, fol. 20b.
35 Zimmermann 1981, p. 240.
36 Maimonides 1938, p. 9.
37 Zimmermann 1981, p. 158.
38 Averroes *De Int.*, fol. 55a; Averroes 1983, p. 170 (translation slightly altered).
39 Gersonides *C. Prior Analytics*, 119v–120r.
40 Messer Leon *Perfection*, fol. 18r.
41 Paul of Venice 1984, p. 120.
42 Judah Shalom *Tractatus*, fol. 177b. See Manekin 1997b.
43 Knuuttilla 1993.
44 Street 2002.

45 Gersonides *C. Prior Analytics*, 117bs–119b.
46 Ibn Kaspi *Bundle*, fol. 21b.
47 Gersonides *C. De Int.*, fol. 70b.
48 Zimmermann 1981, p. 245.
49 Marmura 1985.
50 *C. De Int.*, Vatican fol. 81b. I would like to thank Josef Stern for his valuable comments.

7

REASONING AND DEMONSTRATION

NORBERT M. SAMUELSON

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the distinctive role of argumentation in the writings of the rabbis who lived after the codification of the Hebrew scriptures and before the political emancipation of the Jewish people in Europe. The subject is not formal logic in rabbinic Judaism. Rather, it is an examination of the way that logical thinking of a variety of types shaped the thought of sophisticated medieval rabbis about philosophical topics. The topic is extremely broad, so no attempt is made to claim that this study is complete; rather, eight examples are given and analyzed. Each example highlights how in very different ways the logic of an argument in itself shapes the content discussed and how the forms of an argument used have their own special history within Jewish philosophy. Before I turn to the examples themselves, let me place the subject of logic in medieval Jewish philosophy in its historical setting.

THE STUDY OF LOGIC IN PREMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

The history of the development of the ancient schools of Hellenistic philosophy through the medieval schools of the Christians, the Muslims, and the Jews has been well documented, and our knowledge of that history continues to expand. This is especially true in the case of medieval Jewish philosophy in which new manuscripts are constantly being edited into critical editions and published with modern western language translations and commentaries. By at least the Roman periods there no longer were clear separations between schools of thought in the different academies in which philosophy was studied. Hence, although Stoicism may have become, by at the latest the third century C.E., the dominant school of Hellenistic philosophy, it had no monopoly on philosophy and it incorporated into its own teachings those of its competitors. Hence, from this time onward there can no longer be a clear separation of the doctrines of the Stoics from those of

the Platonists, the Aristotelians, and even the Epicureans (who were the dreaded opposition of the Stoics).[1]

Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that the early rabbis were influenced by Roman philosophy. That is one reason for beginning with a halachic example. I could have chosen a rabbinic text instead.[2] I chose, however, to use Maimonides because of the simple clarity of his language and his style. I do not believe that Maimonides was being creative in the way he presented the law. Rather, as he professed, he was merely exhibiting what was already in the texts themselves.

Given that the rabbis knew at least some Hellenistic philosophy, how did they learn logic and whose logic did they use? Let us consider sources first. Given the importance of Stoicism for these rabbis, the most likely source would have been Galen's *Introduction to Logic*, which, if they did not read it directly through Arabic translation, they knew it from more general texts on logic.[3] In any case, it is quite clear that the Jewish philosophers considered the study of logic to be a necessary step in their professional training as philosophers.[4] It is widely accepted that Maimonides even wrote a book on logic.[5] There may be as well other original works on logic yet to be discovered. It is quite clear that the topic of logic did not interest the Jewish philosophers as much as it interested their Christian medieval contemporaries.[6]

The question of sources is easier than the question of influence. For example, given the informal way that Maimonides presented his truth tables and his division of scientific assertions into simple and complex statements of univocal and equivocal meaning, the source could be Aristotle's works on logic and/or the Stoic distinctions in "sayables" (*lekta*) between "assertibles" and "nonassertibles" that can be "simple" or "nonsimple," that can be combined by any number of logical connections that include "conjunction," "condition," or "disjunction." Furthermore, Stoic logic, no less than Aristotelian, distinguished modal predicates such as "possible," "impossible," "necessary," and "nonnecessary."[7]

One might think, given our emphasis on the Saadia text discussed, that the rabbis were less interested in demonstrative logic (whose goal is discovery through inference) than in rhetoric (whose goal is defense against opposition). To the extent that the rabbis were influenced by Stoicism, no such clear-cut distinction can be drawn. First, since at least Zeno, the linguistic unit of meaning was the speech act (what we today would call the "sentence"), which intentionally was not distinguished from the "assertible" (what we today would call the "proposition").[8] Hence, the activity of demonstration was clearly seen (as it was for Plato) to be a function of dialectical speech. The centrality of dialectic in their thinking, however, did not mean that they were any less committed than was Aristotle to the use of reason to decide truth.

THE USE OF LOGIC IN PREMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

Together what the eight cases discussed in this chapter demonstrate is that Jewish philosophy is a distinctive form of philosophy over and above the generally accepted judgments that Jewish philosophy is solely philosophy about Judaism and/or by Jews. First, the earliest rabbis used the conceptual technique of truth table distinctions to deduce positions in Jewish law. Second, from the earliest Muslim theologians the rabbinic philosophers learned to judge assertions of the existence of a definite particular to involve two distinct claims, namely, that both at least and at most that kind of entity exists. Third, these Jewish philosophers recognized that polemics between rabbinic Jews and their opponents – Karaites, Muslims, and Christians – are based on a legal standard of witness reliability in which reliability is dependent on judgments of continuity and on witness integrity. Fourth, questions of the knowability of God are dependent on prior judgments about the nature of semantics and modality. Fifth, questions about creation rest on judgments in the physical sciences about the individuality of observed events. It is not the case that singularities prove creation; rather, what they do is confirm the contingency of the universe, which is a necessary condition for creation. Sixth, errors in understanding the past are no less important than wise insights into that past in tracing the history of that philosophy. Hence, a critical part of the history of Jewish philosophy is the way that subsequent Jewish philosophers misunderstood Maimonides. If their judgments about their history had been better, then the future of Jewish philosophy would have been significantly different (and possibly not better or more interesting). Seventh, what most distinguishes premodern Jewish philosophy from subsequent Jewish philosophy is the transition from a model of thinking based on what we today call the life sciences (especially psychology) to a model based on mathematics (especially physics). In premodern science there is an intentional fudging of the lines between clarity and unclarity precisely because reality was observed to be something organic that as such is inherently imprecise. Jewish philosophy reflects the modern move to emphasis on clarity in logic and language as a virtue precisely because the reality comes to be seen as something inherently precise. Finally, this demand that good thinking be precise thinking functions no less in Jewish law than it does in the philosophy of Jews.[9]

CASE STUDIES IN RABBINIC PHILOSOPHY

Eight cases are presented to exhibit something distinctive about the way that medieval rabbis practiced philosophy. The first and final cases deal with Jewish

law, and the seventh case is not about a rabbi. The first case exhibits the ambiguity of the term "philosophy," and the seventh example exhibits the ambiguity of the term "Jewish." These two ambiguities deserve separate essays. For here it is enough to say that the distinction between Jewish philosophy and Jewish law is a modern separation based on modern uses of the term "philosophy." This usage does not really fit premodern philosophy let alone premodern Jewish philosophy. In any case, certainly Maimonides drew no substantive separation (contrary to Leo Strauss) between what he was doing with so-called conceptual issues and with issues of action. Furthermore, all Jewish intellectual activity was a practice of rabbis because the society of rabbis was identical with the society of learned Jews. That identity changed in the modern period, and Spinoza in this respect (as in many others) is a transitional figure.

For the most part the progression of this essay is chronological. Saadia wrote before Ibn Daud, who wrote before Maimonides, who wrote before Gersonides, who wrote before Crescas, who wrote before Spinoza. This essay is not, however, in any sense intended to be systematic. With the exception of the last case, each example is discrete. One does not lead into the other; however, as the last example makes explicit, no author here discussed is an island unto himself. How he argues no less than what he argues is a reflection of his contemporary intellectual environment. That connection, where relevant, will be mentioned, but it will not be emphasized. Such connections are an important part of a full presentation of the history of the way that philosopher–rabbis reasoned. Nevertheless, this broader historical study lies beyond the parameter of this chapter. Here again the goal is simply to exhibit in the foreground what functions in the rabbinic texts implicitly as background. I begin with an example from Maimonides' discussion of law (*Halacha* [literally, "way"]) because it is the simplest and clearest example of using logic in a question of Jewish belief. I end with Spinoza and a final example from Maimonides' legal work. They are in themselves the most complex cases, which function to illustrate how discussion of a classical question of premodern rabbinic philosophy laid the foundation for Jewish thinking to move beyond the classical into the modern.

Case 1: Maimonides on Damages – Truth Tables

I begin with a simple direct use of formal logic to structure an argument. The use is obvious even though nothing explicitly is said in the text about logic as such.

> Thus, one can conclude: When an animal that is *mu'ad* kills intentionally, it should be stoned to death, and the owners must pay the atonement fine. If it killed unintentionally, it is not

liable to be executed, but the owners must pay the atonement fine. When [an animal that is] *tam* kills unintentionally, it is not liable to be executed, nor must the owners pay the atonement fine. If it intended to kill, it should be stoned to death. The owners, however, are not liable for the atonement fine or for the fine paid for killing a servant.[10]

The *Mishneh Torah* is Maimonides' comprehensive code of Jewish laws. First Maimonides presents a Book of Laws that constitutes an explication of the fundamental principle of rabbinic Judaism, that the Torah (the five books of Moses' prophecy) contains 613 positive and negative commandments. Maimonides lists all these commandments as positive commandments paired with negative commandments together with the Pentateuch texts in which they are asserted. Maimonides then presents in a systematic, topical form his summary of how the rabbis have determined the content of those laws. The first volume of the *Mishneh Torah*, entitled the *Book of Knowledge* (*Sefer Madah*), consists of four books that deal explicitly with conceptual matters. They are the laws of (1) the foundational doctrines of the Torah (*Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah),* (2) regulating the acquisition of moral virtues (*de'ot*), (3) regulating the study of 1 and 2 that emphasize the centrality of study (*talmud Torah*), (4) regulating the avoidance of all forms of idolatry (*avodat kokhavim*), and (5) repentance (*teshuvah*). These five books constitute Judaism as a system of purportedly true belief. It is belief professed to be certain, and hence is called *madah*, which means "knowledge" or, to use the term's modern meaning, "science."[11] All of the remaining multiple volumes of the *Mishneh Torah* consist of ways by which (a) the individual Jew may maximize his aptitude to learn this science, and (b) a society can create an environment that will maximize the opportunity of its citizens to learn. The issue of what constitutes justice in disputes over property and personal injuries is part of the context of creating the kind of just society required for moral and intellectual improvement. Hence, books like the Book of Damages belong to the category of what we would call political ethics.

Maimonides discussed in detail a number of specific contexts in which a domestic animal kills someone on the animal owner's land. In our text Maimonides states a single rule to govern each specific case. The law asserts almost explicitly a logical form that we today would recognize as a truth table. Put precisely into truth table form it reads as follows: If A [(p) the owner was warned that his animal is inclined to gore[12] and (q) the act of the animal was intentional], then B [(r) the owner must pay an "atonement" fine and (s) the animal is stoned to death]. The consequent B follows from the antecedent A by the following rules.

p	q	r	s
T	T	T	T
T	F	T	F
F	T	F	T
F	F	F	T

Maimonides uses this implicit truth table technique to organize his statement of the laws of the Torah throughout *Mishneh Torah*. As such the technique functions as a kind of logical demonstration for deducing general laws from individual cases in a manner that, in form, looks very much like the way that Isaac Newton deduced his laws of light and color from experiments in *The Optiks*. At least in their form of demonstration, Newton's laws of physics are very much like Maimonides' laws of the Torah, and Newton's "experiments" function in much (if not exactly) the same way as the particular legal decisions function for Maimonides.

Case 2: Saadia on God – Rhetoric and Testing Limits

Therefore, O you who seek the truth, may God be gracious to you, if our discussion yield to you any conclusion of such a nature as [for example] the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, do not hasten to reject it, since it is precisely something like this that you did look for from the beginning of your quest, and [since] whoever else goes out in search of the truth does likewise. Hear, rather, and realize that your proofs are stronger than those of the others and that you are in possession of arguments by means of which you can refute any faction of them. Furthermore you have over them the advantage of being in possession of miracles and marvels that have been established for you [as trustworthy]. Therefore hold on to the following three points in every chapter of this book: namely, (a) that your proofs are stronger than those of the others, (b) that you are able to refute anyone that disagrees with you, and (c) that the miracles of your prophets are part of your advantage.[13]

This book is one of two major works that Saadia wrote on Jewish philosophy. [The other is the *Book of Creation* (*Sefer Yetzirah*).] In at least this one the goal of the reasoning is polemical. It is intended to help rabbinic Jews defend their faith against two sets of contemporary opponents. One includes heretical Jews such as the Karaites who accept the authority of the Torah but reject the authority of the tradition of rabbis to interpret it. The other represents the spokesmen for other religions, Muslim and Christian.

The book begins with a lengthy introduction about epistemology in which Saadia defends a certain notion of argument from tradition as one of four mutually

dependent sources of knowledge and true opinion. The other three are sensation, intuitive insight into the sensation, and reasoning. The third source consists of valid logical inferences from any of the other three sources. In this context prophetic revelation is considered comparable to sensation (viz., both are direct means of gaining true views), and tradition has the same status as logical reasoning (viz., both are indirect means to truth for they are mental tools for extending the true judgments derived directly from [ordinary and prophetic] human experience). Note that the premise that underlines this entire discussion is the truth of the claims he intends to demonstrate in the book – that the Hebrew scriptures are a correct transmission of the law that God communicated to the prophet Moses on Sinai.

The form of Saadia's argument parallels the form by which early Muslim theologians defended their understanding of the true tradition of Islam transmitted through an appropriate line of Muslims from the words of the Koran that purportedly were given to the prophet Mohammed. As in the early works of Muslim philosophy, Saadia begins with a defense of the three-part theological claim – that God exists, is one, and is incorporeal. The first set of proofs are, more accurately, proofs that there is at least one God and there is at most one God, which together constitute a proof that the one and only God exists. Still more accurately, the first treatise deals with a collection of four "demonstrations"[14] that the world came into existence literally in the way that the Book of Genesis says that it did, which Saadia understands to mean that creation is a temporal event in which God brings the universe into existence "from nothing."

It is obvious that if God creates the world then God exists. Furthermore, Saadia's four proofs all use quotes from the Hebrew scriptures about creation as if they could function in an argument as premises. The question, therefore, is, why does Saadia begin with creation and with the epistemic reliability of the scriptures? Do not these assumptions beg the question? Those who come later in the tradition of Jewish philosophy will raise these issues.[15]

It seems clear from what Saadia says in our quoted text that Saadia's intent is not to present logical "proofs" in any formal (i.e., deductive) sense, but rather to perform an exercise in rhetoric whose intention is to strengthen the convictions of his reading audience, which is made up of fellow committed rabbinic Jews. That the text is not meant to be an argument is clear from the opening of our quote, which is written as a personal prayer by Saadia to God where his readers are permitted (so to say, on the side) to listen in.

The passage ends with three lessons to the readers, which clearly are emotional appeals to the faithful to remain firm in their faith. He tells the readers to remember that, unlike human beings like us and our opponents, God (who is the author of

the scriptures) knows creation in a way that we cannot – He was there and He performed the act. So, in effect, we have God's word for it that He created the world and that word is better than any argument. Furthermore, whatever we can or cannot succeed in doing, given our innate inadequacies as human beings, God can if He so chooses present arguments that will convince our opponents. So, do not let the responsibility to argue in defense of God overworry you readers. Success and failure are ultimately in God's hands and not in ours. Finally, with respect to both previous points, what we claim can be supported, beyond reasoning, by direct interventions into history by God. Hence, our advantages over our enemies are overwhelming. I think no Jewish philosopher ever again after Saadia will have this much (naive) confidence in his prospects for success in his (to paraphrase Gersonides) "wars for the Lord."

Case 3: Ibn Daud on Oral Law – Evidence and Testing Witnesses

Saadia's demonstrations of the truth of rabbinic Judaism presuppose the validity for premises of statements drawn from the Hebrew scriptures and from the rabbinic tradition of interpretation of those scriptures. In his world he could make this assumption about the scriptures themselves because the Muslims and Christians shared with the Jews a firm belief in the words of the Hebrew scriptures as direct communications from God. The same cannot be said for the rabbinic interpretations of those words. In fact different traditions of biblical interpretation are at the conceptual heart of the conflicts between the Abrahamic faiths. Hence, near the beginning of his defense of rabbinic orthodoxy in his *The Exalted Faith*, Ibn Daud presents a detailed defense of the epistemic authority of the rabbinic chain of tradition.

> Now the value of traditions has been explained. [That] people differ about [the veracity of] traditions does not necessitate [the judgment] that they are in themselves doubtful. On the contrary, sometimes in themselves they are true, even though the way by which they reach us may be faulty. There is doubt [about a tradition] mostly when it comes to us [as] the report of one individual. But when it comes to us from the multitude of the nation you should not say that [the traditions] reached [the multitude]. Rather, [you should say] that all of them heard the tradition, so that when there were six hundred thousand or more prophets on a single day, [then] the only doubt that could remain [about the veracity of the tradition] would be if someone would say that this report is a fiction composed by an author. I mention the solution to these and similar doubts in the second chapter.[16]

Ibn Daud assumes that rabbinic Judaism has what in Islam is defined as an authentic, reliable tradition of interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures, and this assumption enables him to use biblical and rabbinic texts as premises in philosophical demonstrations. No Jewish philosopher ever again argued that way. Gersonides,

for example, argues theological claims both on philosophical grounds and on theological grounds, but he always keeps the two separate. He will give a chapter whose intent is to prove a certain claim whose arguments refer back either to ordinary human experience or to recognized philosophical texts. In these chapters the arguments have no quotes from either the Hebrew scriptures or from rabbinic texts. Afterward he will often give arguments for the same position based on reading biblical texts and using rabbinic interpretations of these texts, but these arguments are always about interpreting revealed scripture and not about philosophical argument.

The source for this significant change in the form of Jewish philosophy lies, in my judgment, in our text. In this chapter Ibn Daud turns to his philosophical defense of Judaism against the claims and objections of Islam and Christianity. Before focusing specifically on their disagreements, however, he enumerates the areas of agreement among these three religious communities. First and foremost, they agree about the generally acknowledged or rational religious rules. In fact, all people must accept these. Ibn Daud states and develops an example that Judah Halevi used in the *Kuzari* (II.48) to make this same point (172b8–14). No society is less committed to moral rules than a society of thieves. Yet even this society presupposes a commitment to some form of justice without which it could not survive as a society, and if this is the case with thieves, how much more so are the fundamental, rational principles of civil morality accepted by all nations?

If the laws of reason unite all men so that they may live and do business together in a city such as Toledo, the traditions of nations divide them (172b15–173a6). Although some of the claims made in any tradition may in fact be undeniable, in general people distrust assertions based on the authority of tradition because many traditional claims lack certainty. Furthermore, specific claims made in certain traditions are mutually exclusive of the claims made by other traditions, so that both religious peoples cannot be correct in their faith. The issue that Ibn Daud specifically has in mind is the claim by both Christians and Muslims that the tradition that Jews affirm has been altered.

Ibn Daud considers whether it is possible for God himself to alter His law. In defense of this claim he presents an argument by some of the Jewish sages in which a number of scriptural texts are cited to show that God may reverse what He once wills (Gen 6:6, Ex 32:14, Num. 14:20, and 1 Sam 15:11), so that it is possible for God to choose to alter His law (173a15–173b3). He then raises two claims by the Christians. They are said to believe that the Torah that the Jewish people have now is truly the word of God given to Moses at Mount Sinai, but first, the Jews have misinterpreted it, and second, the original covenant has been replaced by a new covenant (176b9–11). Ibn Daud then presents the more radical charge of the Muslims who are said

to claim that, although the original Torah given to Moses at Mount Sinai is true and is not subject to change, the Law that the Jewish people now claim to possess is a distortion of the original covenant (178a2–4). Furthermore, the Muslims are said to claim that what the Jews call scripture presents an anthropomorphic view of God, the falsity of which shows that their Torah could not truly be the word of God. This claim is focused on the twelfth chapter of the Book of Exodus in which God tells the Israelites to place a sign on the door posts of their houses so that when God sends his messenger to kill the firstborn of the Egyptians he will spare the firstborn of the Hebrews (179a7–16). The charge is that this text assumes that God's knowledge is so limited that without such a sign he could not distinguish between a Hebrew and an Egyptian. In summary, whereas some rabbis argue that in principle the Torah is subject to change but in fact they make no such claim, the Christians assert that the Torah in fact has been changed; and whereas the Christians grant that the Torah possessed by the Jews is a true report of God's word, the Muslims claim that the Hebrew scriptures are a falsification of God's word.

In reply to the two arguments of the Christians, Ibn Daud reasons that the single, perfect, and unchanging God could not issue two different covenants and that neither logic nor scripture provide any convincing evidence for the claim that the covenant at Sinai is subject to change through a second covenant (176b11–178a2). Ibn Daud's response to the Muslim critics is more detailed.

The first Muslim argument challenges the authenticity of rabbinic tradition. The validity of a tradition can be questioned in terms of its origin or its transmission. Hence, there are two parts to Ibn Daud's reply. The first is an argument for the validity of the original report by Moses, and the second is an argument for the reliability of the rabbinic transmission of Moses' report.

In our text Ibn Daud lists two conditions under which no doubt can be raised about the veracity of a first-person account of an event. One, the individual making the report is a reliable witness – his honesty is beyond question, and he has sufficient intelligence to distinguish between false and veridical impressions as well as between justified and unjustified interpretations of experience. Two, the experience is public, so that what the individual reports can be corroborated by other witnesses. In this respect the more witnesses there are to corroborate a report the more certain is the truth of what is reported.

Ibn Daud repeats these two conditions in chapter two and adds the following four conditions (181a11–182a14). First, the individual's report is accompanied by acts performed by the reporter that confirm the report. Such acts are called *moftim*, a term that can be translated into English as "demonstrations," "wonders," or "miracles." Whether such acts must be contrary to the general laws of nature

need not concern us here. What primarily distinguishes them as *moftim* is that they are acts that are performed in conjunction with the religious report, which confirm what the report claims. Second, the wonders are publicly witnessed, that is, as the primary report itself can be corroborated, so the secondary report of the accompanying wonders can be corroborated. Third, what the report asserts has practical significance for the corroborating witnesses.

What Ibn Daud has in mind in this case is the following: The importance of the corroborating witnesses is that if the primary witness falsifies what he experienced, the secondary witnesses will object to his description. It could happen, however, that because the report in no way affects them, through indifference they might be willing to remain silent and let an error pass unnoticed. If what is reported is not indifferent to them, they will speak up. Hence, in a case in which the report is of vital importance to the witnesses and none of the witnesses objects to the primary account of the event, there can be no doubt about the reliability of the testimony. Fourth, the primary witness himself does not alter his account.

Having established the criteria by which a first-person report may be treated as incorrigible, Ibn Daud asserts that there can be no doubt about the veracity of Moses' report. The first chapter on prophecy attempted to establish the superiority of Moses both in moral and intellectual virtue so that there could be no question about his reliability as a witness. The claim is made that both Moses' report and the wonders that accompanied it were observed by 600,000 unimpeachable witnesses (164a12–13) whose lives were vitally affected by that report, and Moses' repetition of his first report at the end of the Pentateuch agrees with the first report.

Ibn Daud's argument is based on similar although less developed arguments by Saadia (*The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* 3.6) and Judah Halevi (*Kuzari* I.87). It is worth noting that Maimonides would deny the claim that the entire nation of Israel could have witnessed the actual report of the law of Moses (*Guide of the Perplexed* II.33–35). According to Maimonides, moral and intellectual perfection is a prerequisite for prophecy. Only someone at the level of a prophet could witness what Moses reported, and the children of Israel were not at this level. Ibn Daud would accept the first two parts of Maimonides' claim but deny the third; he would claim that at least at the moment of the theophany at Sinai the entire nation of Israel reached the level of prophets. Hence, he noted, as our text states, that at the time of the theophany "there were six hundred thousand or more prophets."[17]

Having settled to his own satisfaction that there can be no rational doubts about the veracity of what Moses reported, Ibn Daud turns to the doubt raised about the transmission of that report in rabbinic traditions. Ibn Daud's general claim is that the original report of Moses has been transmitted through an uninterrupted

chain of reliable reporters up to his own day, and the transmission of that report is beyond question. Hence, what the report contains – the religious rules of rabbinic Judaism – is beyond question.

During the period of the first commonwealth the Law was read in public every seven years by the kings. If the monarchs had falsified the Law there would have been some protest to that effect, but because there were no objections it can be assumed that during the period of the first Jewish state the Torah was not altered (179b4–13). Hence, if any falsification took place it would have had to happen either during the Babylonian Exile or immediately afterward.

In fact, Ibn Daud contends, this is the charge that the Muslims bring against rabbinic Judaism. They accept Moses as an unimpeachable witness and grant that the Law was correctly transmitted up until the time of the Exile, but they contend that at the end of the Exile the original Law was distorted by the high priest Ezra (178b14–180a3). The charge is based on Nehemiah (8.1–8), in which it is said that Ezra returned a copy of the Torah to Jerusalem and read it to all of the people of Israel. In this connection it is of interest to note that many modern scholars of the Hebrew scriptures claim that Ezra rather than Abraham is the "father of Judaism," or that the so-called legalism of Judaism has its source not in the Mosaic covenant itself but in Ezra's reading of that covenant. This nineteenth-century claim of Christian academic biblical criticism is an echo of the twelfth-century polemics against Judaism of which Ibn Daud is speaking.

Ibn Daud replies to this line of criticism as follows: The people of Israel went into exile at different times, and they were not subject to any particular oppression by the Babylonians in the Exile. Among the late exiles were such Jews of unimpeachable intelligence and character possessing great influence in the gentile government as Ezekiel, Mordecai, and Daniel. In the light of these data, the thesis that Ezra falsified the Law is highly improbable. It is unlikely that none of the exiles brought with them a copy of the Torah from Jerusalem. Certainly Daniel would have done so. Thus, it is unlikely that no one would have objected to Ezra's rendition of scripture because there existed no copies of the original Torah either to direct or control Ezra. That Israel was not oppressed in Babylonia argues against the hypothesis that copies were destroyed. That the Exile included men of character and political stature testifies in favor of the claim that not everyone would have quietly allowed falsifications of the text to pass unchallenged (180a14–180b13). Furthermore, at the time of Ezra the Jewish people were already dispersed throughout the civilized world. Even if Ezra had the power to suppress any protest by Persian Jews, he had no such power over Jews and Jewish communities outside of the Persian domain. Yet, Ibn Daud continues, there is no discrepancy among any of the scrolls of the

Torah anywhere. For example (181a4–11), there appear in the Pentateuch three instances of the letter nun being written smaller than the other letters in the verse (in Numbers 10:35, 10:36, and Exodus 34:7), and there appears to be no reason why this is the case. Ibn Daud argues, if no Torah scrolls differ even on so minute and trivial a detail as this, how much more unlikely it is that any other differences can be found between what Ezra said the Law is and what all of the people of Israel throughout the world agreed to be the content of Mosaic revelation. Hence, there is no more legitimate doubt about the authenticity of the transmission of the Torah than there is about the authenticity of Moses' original witness to God's word.

Next, Ibn Daud turns to defend the tradition against the interpretations that unnamed Muslims gave to multiple scriptural texts that are claimed to testify against rabbinic Judaism. Specifically in reply to the claim that the twelfth chapter of Exodus shows that the rabbis' scripture is anthropomorphic, Ibn Daud argues as follows: God did not give the commandment that the Israelites should mark their homes because God could not tell whether a given house was Israelite or Egyptian. Rather, He gave Israel this one commandment to test its loyalty and obedience. Those who obeyed this commandment, having demonstrated their faithfulness, were saved, freed, and formed into God's chosen people. All who have disobeyed this commandment would have been put to death, because they would have been disobedient and not because God could not have told the difference between the homes of Israelites and Egyptians (179a7–179b2). (Ibn Daud does not tell us if, in fact, any Israelites were disobedient and were put to death.)

In general Ibn Daud presents his replies to the rabbis (173a5–176b9) before he responds to his Christian and Muslim opponents; however, the response to the non-Jews is dealt with last here for a special reason, namely, that it raises the most serious form of the objection to Ibn Daud's thesis. Against the claim that scripture itself shows that God can change what He wills, Ibn Daud argues that in principle any law that is not qualified in scripture as being eternal in the sense of being endless, whether or not a time condition is stated, is subject to change (173b3–8). In all cases in which the law or act of divine volition is said to be eternal it is not subject to change, as is the case with the commandments to observe the Sabbath in Exodus 31:17 and to fast in Leviticus 16:20 (173b9–14).

Ibn Daud notes as an objection that the fact that a law is said to be eternal does not necessarily mean that it is eternal. For example, the House of Eli is said to be eternal (1 Samuel 2:30) but it comes to an end with Eli's death; and the reign of David is said to be eternal (1 Samuel 7:16) but it, too, comes to an end (Ps 89) with the Babylonian Exile (174b8–175a1). Saadia (in *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* III.9)

dealt with a similar argument by the Karaites who claimed that the term *olam* may mean only "fifty years" or the "lifetime of the thing referred to." Hence, even though the Torah is said to be eternal, that does not mean it cannot be changed.

Ibn Daud's responses to this objection are of particular interest because they are so obviously inadequate. His first response (175a4–175b10) is that the promises to David and Eli were conditional: If you and your descendants do such and such, then your house will last forever. Because they did not do such and such, God did not change his original judgment. Ibn Daud's defense is hardly adequate. He preserves the claim that God's will cannot alter, but in no way does he preserve the claim that the Torah cannot be altered. Just as God's promise to Eli contains the hidden conditional clause, "provided you and your descendents behave in a certain way," so God's gift of the Torah could contain the same hidden condition. Ibn Daud, like Saadia before him (in *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.7), asserts that in the case of the Torah there are no such hidden conditions, and he cites Leviticus 26:44 and Jeremiah 31:34–35 in support of his claim (175a11–175b10). The distinction however, appears to be ad hoc.

His second response (175b10–176b9) is equally problematic. Based on Deuteronomy 4:30–31, Daniel 12:1, and Zechariah 14:16, Ibn Daud argues that in cases in which, in fact, the Law is no longer applicable the change is due to the circumstances in which Israel is living, which have been altered because of Israel's sin, but the change is not due to an alteration in divine will. Hence, all those laws that can be carried out only within a Jewish state in the land Israel today are no longer applicable because Israel is in exile but that does not mean that God has altered His Law. With repentance Israel will some day return to its land and its state to reinstitute these laws, which in principle remain obligatory even in the exile. The obvious objection to this argument is that, whatever the reasons at this particular time and place certain religious rules are no longer valid, they remain nonetheless invalid.

The claim that eternal laws dictated by an unchanging God can nonetheless change due to changes in circumstances would become an important line of argument with the rise of liberal religious Judaism in the modern world. One would hardly expect Ibn Daud to be happy with such a development.

In light of the ultimate weakness of this line of defense by Ibn Daud, it is interesting to note that Ibn Daud is the last major Jewish philosopher to defend Jewish religious faith on the grounds that it is a product of an incorrigible chain of tradition. Maimonides and those who come after him noticeably omit this line of argument in spite of the fact that so much of what these later Jewish Aristotelians say parallels Ibn Daud's *The Exalted Faith*.

Case 4: Maimonides on God – Semantics and Equivocality

In general, from Maimonides on, the rabbis separated arguments based on inferences from empirical experience from arguments based on inferences from revealed and rabbinic texts. The latter forms of argument were restricted to questions of ethics and rabbinic law, whereas the former forms of argument were restricted to the discussion of what we would today call "natural theology," that is, defenses of religious claims based exclusively on what came to be called "natural philosophy" or "science."[18] The "science" in this case is Aristotelian, and the scientific topic considered is metaphysical, namely, what it can mean to make intelligible statements about God.

> The subject of investigation and speculation is the question whether there is . . . between Him, may He be exalted, and any of the substances created by Him a true relation of some kind so that this relation might be predicated of Him. It is clear at the first glance that there is no correlation between Him and the things created by Him. For one of the properties of two correlated things is the possibility of inverting the statement concerning them while preserving their respective relations.[19] Now He, may He be exalted, has a necessary existence while that which is other than He has a possible existence, as we shall make clear. There accordingly can be no correlation between them. As for the view that there is some relation between them, it is deemed correct, but this is not correct. For it is impossible to think that[20] a relation subsists between the intellect and color although, according to our school, both of them are comprised by the same "existence." How then can a relation be represented between Him and what is other than He when there is no notion comprising in any respect both of the two, inasmuch as existence is, in our opinion, affirmed of Him, may He be exalted, and of what is other than He merely by way of absolute equivocation.[21]

This discussion of the semantics of statements about God is the clearest example of Maimonides functioning as a religious philosopher, because it is his only philosophical text whose overt form is a discussion of recognized philosophical topics. His other philosophical writings are formally incased in discussions of Jewish Law (as in *Mishneh Torah*) or as biblical exegesis. Of all of his works, it is this one that most influenced non-Jews – notably Christian Europeans – for it is acknowledged by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* to be one of the two primary sources[22] for his application of Aristotelian science to interpreting Christian doctrine. For most rabbis in subsequent ages, the *Mishneh Torah* had more influence. For the segment of the rabbinate who was trained in western philosophy and science, however, *Guide* was at least equal in importance to Maimonides' other writings.

Maimonides dedicates the book to his student, Rabbi Joseph ben Rabbi Judah. Joseph was forced to break off his studies with Maimonides to assume a rabbinic position. The intent of the book is to complete the training through a very long

letter because it will no longer be possible to complete the training in the proper way of face-to-face discussions.

Rabbi Joseph's training with Maimonides focused on how a committed Jew who was knowledgeable about the Hebrew scriptures and the rabbinic texts used to interpret them (viz., a rabbi) can or should interpret the Bible when he has gained a knowledge about and a respect for the claims of contemporary science and philosophy, which in this case means Aristotelianism. The early chapters of the book deal with the meaning of specific biblical terms, most of which are statements involving God as the subject in linguistic contexts that usually involve human beings. Some of the terms express physical actions such as sitting and standing as well as coming and going, whereas other terms express body parts such as the foot, the back, and the face. In general, what these chapters do is present a philosophy of biblical semantics, in which the goal is to show the student how to interpret overtly anthropomorphic biblical texts.

After showing his student how to read the Hebrew scriptures, Maimonides makes explicit the philosophical assumptions underlying the exercises. That philosophy constitutes Maimonides' notorious negative theory of divine attributes. It is the single most creative (and therefore controversial) position Maimonides ever put forward, and it may very well be his single most significant contribution to the history of western philosophy.[23]

Maimonides' theory of negative attributes is stated in the *Guide* I.57–58.[24] The kinds of sentences that make truth claims are declarative. Such statements are simple or complex, and the complex statements are reducible to a conjunction of simple declaratives. Simple declaratives are in the form of either positive (as in "S is P") or negative (as in "S is not P"), and what they mean is either univocal (in which case there is one and only one thing that they can and do mean) or equivocal (in which case there are a variety of things that they can and do mean). Chapter fifty-seven deals with univocal God claims and chapter fifty-eight deals with equivocal ones. Now, in principle, no positive univocal statement about God can be true. Furthermore, all equivocal positive statements about God are on analysis reducible to a conjunction of simple statements. They have the following form: Let "Fg" be a sentence of the form "God is F" where F is an attribute whose opposite is "G" such that some subject is G if and only if it is not F. What the seemingly simple sentence Fg is is a complex statement that makes the following four univocal claims: God is not G, G is a human vice, F is a human virtue, and one ought to strive to become F. On this analysis, statements about God have both positive and negative content. Only the negative content is literally about God; the positive content is univocally about ethics. Furthermore, all statements about God are subject to the

biblical imperative to imitate God, so that every declarative affirmation of God should be understood as a generalized command that asserts how to imitate God, so that what initially seems to be a declarative statement subject to truth values turns out on final analysis to be an imperative that is subject to moral values.

Note that Maimonides is not unique in asserting that there is a fundamental difference between God and all of his creation. To my knowledge there is no medieval philosopher (Muslim, Jew, or Christian) who does not make this claim. What is unique is the radical way that Maimonides understood the difference, and the passage quoted goes to the heart of what the difference is. The issue turns out to revolve around semantics no less than around ontology. The ontology is not unique, but Maimonides' understanding of the use of language in theology is.

In the passage presented, Maimonides says the following. (1) Two different things can be compared if they share a common species. If they do not, then no comparison is possible. Even if they share a common genus but not a specific difference within the same genus, comparison is not possible. All the more so is comparison impossible when there is not even a common genus. Hence, for example, there is no way to compare intellect and color. (2) The broadest (meaning, the most universal) possible shared genus is existence, for everything, irrespective of how they differ, at least shares in common existence. Existence, however, never stands alone without modality. Anything about which existence can be claimed is either necessary (viz., something that exists simply in virtue of what it is so that the affirmation of its existence is logically and causally necessary) or contingent (viz., something that when it exists exists in virtue of a cause other than itself so that the affirmation of its existence is logically possible and causally contingent). (3) Only God, in consequence of being the Creator, is a necessary being, and everything else, in consequence of being a creature, is a contingent being. (4) Hence, God does not share a common genus with anything. Therefore there can be no valid comparison between God and anything else.

In an earlier chapter (*Guide* I.52), Maimonides offered an alternate version of what amounts to this same argument. There he argues as follows: Univocal positive simple declarative sentences are of five possible kinds. They (1) state what is the essence or definition of a thing, (2) state what is part of the definition, (3) affirm some attribute of a thing that does not define it, (4) express a relationship between the thing and something else, and (5) affirm some action that the thing performs. Of these five Maimonides only affirms the fifth in God talk. Hence, although we cannot say anything about who or what God is, we can say what God does. For example, it is legitimate to say that God created the world. Note, however, that within the restrictions that Maimonides imposes on action statements about God,

no human can really know in any positive sense what those affirmations mean. For example, if I make a table, it logically follows that I am something (viz., a craftsman) and, because of what I am, I have a certain relation to the table (viz., as craftsman to artifact). Although I know that God created the world, it does not follow from this claim that He is a Creator (which would exemplify the excluded first and second kinds of sentences) and that God is related to the world as Creators normally are to their creations (which would exemplify the fourth kind of sentence).

Everything that Maimonides says in this chapter parallels a similar discussion in Abraham ibn Daud's *The Exalted Faith* (Book 2, Principle 2 on divine oneness) with one notable difference. Whereas Maimonides admits only positive affirmations of actions to God, Ibn Daud admits both actions and relations, and in so doing avoids all of the problems about God talk that plagued the discussion of Maimonides' theology for the next 1000 years.[25]

We will not go into detail here about the reasons why Ibn Daud affirmed divine relations and Maimonides denied them. We shall turn instead to the (possibly) definitive way that Gersonides settled the issue in his *Wars of the Lord* (Book 3, chapter 3). At an even more general level than we have yet considered, the argument for Maimonides' theory of divine attributes has the following form: Positive statements about God that claim to have a truth value are univocal or equivocal; they are not univocal; therefore, they are equivocal. Maimonides does not seem to recognize that there is more than one kind of equivocality.[26] He seems to think, as the last sentence in our text highlights, that the only possibly relevant kind of equivocality is "absolute equivocation." Clearly Maimonides is wrong, and Gersonides grounds his critique of Maimonides' theory of divine attributes on this error.

Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* (V.11, 1018b9–1019a14)[27] lists a number of kinds of equivocal statements, of which the most radical is Maimonides' absolute equivocation or (as Aristotle alternatively refers to it) equivocation by chance. In this case two entirely different things are designated by the same term for no good reason. Consider, for example,[28] why an apple and a communist are both said to be "red." The apple is red because the adjective "red" names a certain color that the apple exemplifies; however, the term "red" with reference to communists has nothing to do with their color or with any other shared characteristics. Rather, it has to do with an accident of history. In the early twentieth century what distinguished the communists from all other revolutionary parties in Russia was that the communists insisted that, in principle, for the revolution to be truly a revolution it must be violent. A violent revolution requires the spilling of blood. As a symbol of this ideological commitment the communists adopted a red flag. Hence, the term "red" came to stand for communists.

Clearly Maimonides wants to use this most radical Aristotelian category of equivocality to describe how human language relates to statements about God; however, this is not the only way to understand equivocality. Furthermore, as Gersonides argues, it is not the most appropriate. The term of Greek philosophy that eventually became associated with physical talk about God was *ousia*, which means "being" or "entity." It is Aristotle's clearest example of an equivocal term. In fact he wrote an entire book about it. It is called the *Book of Theology* (i.e., the book about God) or the book that comes after the physics (i.e., the metaphysics). In essence it is a book that analyzes the following statement: Being (*ousia*) is said in many ways, which means that *ousia* is an equivocal term.

In this case a single term is used with reference to two very different kinds of things based not on shared properties but on a shared relationship in which one of the entities described is primary (*pros* in Greek) and the other participates in the relationship in a derivative (*hen* in Greek) way. Aristotle's own example has to do with the term "medical," which refers primarily to a "medical man" (i.e., a physician) and derivatively to a "medical instrument" (for example, a surgical knife). Now to call the man "medical" means that he has mastered a certain art, and to call a knife "medical" means that it is very hard and sharp. The adjective in this case describes two entirely different states of affairs; however, the relationship between the two is perfectly intelligible. The intelligibility has to do with how the two subjects to whom the single adjective is applied are related rather than how they share a common property.

Gersonides argues that statements about God are to be understood in the same way. Gersonides builds on what he sees to be the important part of Maimonides' analysis of divine predicates. What statements about God affirm is that God is perfect, we human beings are not, and we should strive to become like God. In every respect that God and human beings are comparable, the comparison is to be understood *pros hen* equivocally. For example, God is a knower par excellence. What God knows He creates. Hence, His knowledge is not (as it is for human beings) an effect of the thing known; it is what creates the thing. Similarly, we humans know an object through sense experience. What our senses report are a series of partial impressions from different perspectives from which we construct a sense picture, and ultimately a conception, of the thing perceived. Hence, our knowledge always begins as a partial knowledge striving to become complete. Conversely, because God knows His creation as its Creator, He knows it as its cause and not as an effect. Hence, God's knowledge of anything is always complete. In general, to call God a "knower" means that He as the Creator of what is He knows perfectly. What it means to say that humans are "knowers" is that they are striving to the best of their

ability to achieve through their effects what God knows in a single act of creation. Hence, God's knowledge is not absolutely equivocal; it is *pros hen* equivocal. As with knowledge, so with every other attribute affirmed by biblical and rabbinic tradition of God.

Philosophically Gersonides' interpretation of divine attributes was far more elegant than Maimonides'. Minimally it avoided all of Maimonides' problems. Furthermore, the source of Maimonides' conceptual difficulties in this case at least go back concretely to a specific place in the *Guide* where Maimonides (presumably consciously) decided to free himself from the precedence of Abraham ibn Daud. What it suggests is that, at least with respect to divine attributes as seen from a logical point of view, both Ibn Daud and Gersonides were better philosophers and better theologians than was Maimonides. It is Maimonides' position, however, that became more influential in the course of Jewish philosophy (as well as in philosophy in general).[29]

Case 5: Gersonides on Cosmology – Singularity and Sufficient Reason

No Jewish philosopher was a better natural philosopher or scientist than Levi ben Gershom, and no medieval natural philosopher was a better natural theologian. What follows is, I believe, a unique form of logical argument that the astronomer Gersonides constructs to demonstrate that God created the universe.

> It can be demonstrated that since the heavenly bodies have the same nature, their nature cannot account for the differences in color in the light of their rays; e.g., some of them emit a red illumination, whereas others emit a white or another color of light, as is evident from the facts of the matter. Now a difference [in the color of illumination] is easily explicable in the case of terrestrial bodies because of their differences with respect to heat, cold, moisture, and dryness, as has been pointed out in the natural sciences. But since the heavenly bodies exhibit no [internal] diversity at all by virtue of their uniform nature, this nature cannot account for the differences in the colors [of their illumination].
>
> Analogously, because they have this uniform nature, this nature cannot explain the fact that from one ray there emanates something different from what emanates from another ray. For example, the nature of the heavenly bodies cannot explain the well-known fact that the sun heats and dries terrestrial phenomena with a tempered dryness, whereas the moon cools and moistens.
>
> Similarly, although it is evident that because all the heavenly bodies have the same nature, this nature cannot explain why some of them emit light whereas others only reflect light from other heavenly bodies, as we see in the case of the sun and the moon, respectively. Moreover, because this nature is uniform, its nature cannot explain why one part of a heavenly body should be different from another part such that the moon, for example, receives light at one of its parts but not at other parts. This is obvious from the shadows that are observed on it, as we have explained in Book 5. Furthermore, because the heavenly domain is of one nature,

its nature cannot explain why some spheres have many bodies whereas others have only one or none. Finally, because these bodies have a uniform nature, this nature does not explain the fact that some parts of the heavenly domain preserve their shape whereas others do not. Such diversity one would expect in terrestrial bodies because of their differences in density and rarity, which stem from their differences with respect to heat and cold and dryness and moisture. This [kind of explanation], however, is impossible for the heavenly bodies because their nature is uniform.[30]

Gersonides' *Wars of the Lord* is, in all probability, the most rigorous example of philosophical and scientific thinking in the history of Jewish philosophy. In terms of philosophical knowledge, intellectual talent, and scientific creativity, no one prior to Spinoza is superior in any one of these respects, and no one at all is superior in all three. Gersonides' primary intellectual influences, based on the number of explicit references in his published works, were the Hebrew scriptures, Maimonides, and the Aristotelians, of whom the most important was Averroes (Ibn Rushd). In addition to linear commentaries on many books of the Hebrew scriptures, Gersonides wrote two topic-centered treatises. One was the *Wars*, and the other was a lengthy treatise on astronomy. The *Wars* is prima facie about six critical topics in medieval Jewish philosophy, but, at a slightly deeper level, it is a philosophical critique by a disciple of Maimonides' theology. The topics Gersonides chooses are all issues about which he disagrees with Maimonides; however, he does not discuss the many topics about which he agreed with Maimonides. In these cases Gersonides simply follows his teacher without commentary.

The six books of the *Wars* are the six general philosophical issues with which Gersonides significantly differed from Maimonides. Our text is from the sixth book, whose subject matter is creation. It is divided into two parts. The first part is a summary of Gersonides' other major work, which is a detailed discussion of astronomy, here understood as the geometry and the mechanics of space. The second part uses the scientific conclusions of the first part to draw some conclusions about the theological doctrine of creation.[31]

Our text is taken from the first part. It consists of a number of statements about empirical astronomy that play a critical role in Gersonides' most unique form of argument for the fundamental Jewish principle of creation. Gersonides notes the following characteristics of the heavens: Space is uniform in nature throughout the universe, and the objects that occupy all space above the sphere of the moon are made of the same kind of material. Hence, one would expect, based on what will come to be called "the principle of sufficient reason," that all objects in space would behave in precisely the same way, or (to be more precise) differences

in the behavior of different celestial objects can or should be accounted for by universal causal principles to which all celestial objects are subject. These principles should constitute sufficient as well as necessary conditions of the concrete celestial phenomena; however, that is not the case.

First, the rays of light emitted by different celestial objects have different colors. Some are red; others are white; others are other colors of the spectrum, and there is nothing about the objects that can account for these differences.[32] Second, the light emitted from some celestial objects (such as the sun) cause heat and they dry what they heat, whereas the light emitted from other celestial objects (such as the moon) cause coolness and they moisten what they touch. Third, some celestial objects (such as stars) emit their own light, whereas others merely reflect light (such as planets). Fourth, many celestial objects (such as the moon) exhibit phases of periodic change in the appearance of their surfaces whereas others do not.[33]

Fifth, between each of the spheres of the heavens there are regions devoid of entities, and these regions are not subject to the astral laws that govern the spheres. These voids, however, are not vacuums. Gersonides was, after all, a rigorous Aristotelian who, as such, believed that nothing cannot be real (or, in positive terms, whatever is real must be something). The space between and beyond the spheres is occupied by an ultimate material that Gersonides called "body that does not preserve its shape." "Shape" here means Aristotelian form. This formless matter, precisely because it has no definite nature, is unlike anything else in the universe because everything else has some definite form. Yet, all matter as matter is the same, that is, it is the stuff of reality that becomes something. Furthermore, again according to the principle of sufficient reason, there is no reason why some stuff in the heavens should be informed, whereas other stuff remains uninformed.

In general, Gersonides cites these events as what we would today call "singularities." They are phenomena that can only be known through experience, but they can never be conceptually understood because they are in no sense lawful events. Maimonides (in Guide II.19) called this kind of argument a use of "the method of particularization."[34] Maimonides himself uses this method of demonstration in his discussion of creation. The singularities that he lists are the following. (1) The celestial spheres rotate from east to west rather than from west to east. (2) Different spheres rotate at different rates of speed. (3) Each of the seven planets is the exclusive occupant of a single, separate sphere, whereas the vast number of fixed stars at the periphery of the cosmos occupies a single sphere. All three are examples of singular events in the universe for which there is no intelligible explanation precisely because they are singular. In following this "method," Gersonides is borrowing

from Maimonides. His use of the method is intended as a criticism of his teacher's pronouncements about creation.

Maimonides wants to argue, as he does in *Guide* II.24, that the nature of the universe in general lies beyond the limits of what can be known by a reason that is uninformed by revelation. He cites Ptolemy's use of epicycles and eccentric spheres to make sense geometrically out of observed periods of celestial motion that are in rational terms unintelligible. What reason would demand of these higher entities of a uniform nature is that they would all move in the purest (meaning here simplest and most excellent) way possible, which would be in a circle. Yet, sense observation shows that this is not the case. Hence, these ad hoc devices were introduced into the geometry of astronomy to save as much as is possible of the presumed claim that the heavens are intelligible. As Maimonides points out, however, an ad hoc explanation is not really an explanation. To explain something is to state the causes that necessitate it, which no ad hoc device can do. Hence we have no knowledge of cosmology. Furthermore, Maimonides claims, this is as it should be, because human knowledge is limited to what validly can be deduced by reason from sense experience; this domain is limited to creatures within the created world; but astronomy claims to speak about the universe as a whole, which is beyond the domain of science.

This limitation on the domain of human knowledge is the critical step in Maimonides' affirmation of the literal account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis. Following in the footsteps of Saadia, Maimonides agreed that in principle there can be no disagreement between true science and true religion.[35] True science consists of valid inferences from correctly described sense experience. Similarly, true religion consists of correct interpretations of genuine divinely revealed texts. The problem is, however, that in the case of the most reliable revealed texts (namely, the Torah), God speaks in a way that all human beings (regardless of their intellectual excellence) can understand at their appropriate pedagogical level, so that in principle each verse of the scriptures contains many levels of possible meaning. Hence, grammar and semantics alone are insufficient to determine which of the many literally valid interpretations of the scriptures is the "true" (better, the "truest") meaning.[36]

Philosophy as natural science plays a key role in interpreting the true meaning of Mosaic prophecy. Maimonides' stated rule (in *Guide* I.26) is that one should always affirm belief in the simplest meaning of the text unless you know that that meaning is false, in which case you must search for a deeper meaning. Now, concerning the creation of the universe, there is not in principle any human knowledge. Hence, in this case the true meaning of the text is its simple meaning. Maimonides took this meaning to be that God created everything out of absolutely nothing at some point in time.[37]

It is within the context of this strategy of demonstration that Maimonides invoked his method of particularization. Particularization in this case shows that astronomy is not a science, namely, a field of study capable of demonstrating the causes that necessitate its phenomena. Hence, because reason cannot yield knowledge of the general nature of the universe as a whole (cosmology), it can yield no knowledge of the origin of the cosmos (cosmogony). Thus, we must accept the simple meaning of the scriptures as opposed to any of the alternate theories of cosmogony, namely, that the universe exists eternally by chance, by necessity, or by purpose.

"By chance" is the view attributed to the Epicureans, which Maimonides considered to be too obviously false to merit discussion. "By necessity" is the view of the Aristotelians, which is the alternative to the proclaimed view of the Torah on which Maimonides focused his discussion. "By purpose" is the view presented in Plato's *Timaeus*. Maimonides did not discuss it other than to note that, if cosmology fell within the domain of human knowledge, and reason supported this view, it would be easy to interpret the scriptural account of creation in accord with the Platonic view of an eternal creation where a deity imposes purpose upon the mechanical necessity of space. In this connection Maimonides affirmed that eternal creation is still creation. It shares with the Aristotelian view the claim that the existence of the universe is beyond time. In the Aristotelian view the universe exists by necessity rather than with purpose.

Gersonides took Maimonides' method of reasoning about creation and turned it on its head against Maimonides. What Maimonides' concession to the legitimacy of the Platonic view means is that the critical point about the doctrine of creation is not whether it is a temporal act or whether the extent of cosmic time is finite with respect to origin. The critical claim about creation is that its product, the universe, exhibits purpose, and to have purpose it must be contingent rather than necessary. Hence, the doctrine of creation is an affirmation of the modal character of the universe and not a statement about time. Gersonides used the observational data of astronomy, far more extensive in fourteenth-century Europe than it was in the twelfth-century world of Maimonides, to prove just the opposite of what Maimonides sought to prove, that it is the cosmogony of Plato's *Timaeus* that is truest both to observational astronomy and to the meaning of the Torah.

Case 6: Crescas on Scholastic Philosophy

The only medieval Jewish philosopher whose mastery of both logic and natural philosophy was as rigorous as the rationalist philosophy of Gersonides was the antiphilosophical, seemingly antirationalist theologian, Hasdai Crescas. Crescas

used the logic of the Aristotelians to demonstrate on their terms the unreliability of Aristotelian science to exhibit why intelligent Jews should rely on the tradition of rabbinic teachings over the pronouncements of Greek and Roman pagan philosophers and their Jewish disciples. As Gersonides based his religious rationalism on an affirmation of Maimonides' Aristotelian philosophy, so Crescas rejected Gersonides' rationalist enterprise on the same Maimonidean literary foundation. Crescas argued for his radically different option.

> Inasmuch as Maimonides' proofs are all based upon twenty-six propositions[38] which he has placed at the beginning of the second part of his work, our investigation of the subject will have to deal with the following two questions: First, whether the propositions which he has made use of in proving the principles are themselves established by demonstrative reasoning,[39] for if the propositions necessary for the proof of the principles have not been established by demonstrative reasoning, the principles, too, will not have been conclusively established. Second, granting those propositions to be true and to have been established by demonstrative reasoning, whether the principles can be shown conclusively to follow therefrom. In this twofold kind of investigation we shall reason from the opinion of the affirmer.[40]
>
> In accordance with this plan it seems to us proper to divide Book I into three parts.
>
> Part I. A commentary wherein the propositions are proved in accordance with the arguments employed by the philosophers in their own writings, and also a restatement of the Master's (*ha-rav*) proofs [for the existence, unity and incorporeality of God], for intending as we do to subject both the propositions and the proofs to a critical examination we must first endeavor to understand them in a manner clear and thorough and free from any ambiguity, even as the Master himself would have wished them to be understood.
>
> Part II. Wherein we shall inquire into some of the propositions and also into the Master's proofs with a view to determining whether they have been conclusively demonstrated.
>
> Part III. An exposition of the same principles in accordance with the strict teachings of the Scriptures and also a statement of the method by which we arrive at them. Therein the main contention of Book I will be made clear, namely, that it is impossible[41] to arrive at a perfect understanding of these principles except by way of prophecy, in so far as the teachings of prophecy are directly testified of in the Scripture and indirectly corroborated in tradition, though it will also be shown that reason is not necessarily at variance with the teachings thus arrived at.[42]

Crescas discussed, generally and briefly, all twenty-six premises that Maimonides used to demonstrate that if the Aristotelian description of the physical universe is correct then God exists, is immaterial, and is One.[43] Maimonides had argued as follows: The early Muslim rhetoricians (the *Mutakallimūn*) had presented a series of demonstrations that God is the Creator (*Guide* I.74), is One (*Guide* I.75), and is incorporeal (*Guide* I.76) based on their atomist assumptions about the physical

nature of the universe. Similarly, the Aristotelians offered proofs of the same theological claims based on their significantly different claims in physics, astronomy, and cosmology (*Guide* II.1). The *Kalām* view presupposes a temporally created universe, whereas the Aristotelian view presupposes an eternally necessary universe, and reason cannot settle between these two options. Hence, neither the *Kalām* nor the Aristotelian arguments are valid proofs – inferences from premises that establish the necessity of their conclusion – of God's existence, oneness, and incorporeality. They fail because no certain conclusion can be derived from an uncertain premise, and the origin and most general nature of the cosmos cannot be demonstrated by reason. What can be shown to be true necessarily is that the universe is either created or eternal. Hence, Maimonides constructed an argument of the form that will become known as "disjunctive syllogism," namely, A or B; if A then C; if B then C; Therefore, C. Either the universe was created or it exists eternally (*Guide* I.71–72). If we assume that the universe was created, then it can be demonstrated (as it is in the proofs of *Kalām*) that God (*Guide* I.73–76). If we assume that the universe is eternal, then it can be demonstrated (as it is in the proofs of the Aristotelians) that God (*Guide* II.introduction and 1). Hence, God. In *Guide* I.73 Maimonides listed twelve premises from *Kalām* physics that he would use in constructing seven proofs of creation, five proofs of God's unity, and three proofs of God's incorporeality. Then, in the introduction to *Guide* II, Maimonides listed twenty-five premises that he would use to demonstrate God (in *Guide* I.1).

The twenty-five premises were intended by Maimonides to be simply what they were – claims made in Aristotelian physics that Maimonides assumed to use for his theological demonstrations. He made no claims about the logical status of these claims within physics itself. By the time of Crescas these "propositions" or "hypotheses" had come to be regarded as if they were axioms in an Aristotelian physics that was more and more conceived on a Euclidean geometric model. Hence it could be argued that if any one of these axioms was false, then (as in the denial of an axiom in geometry) the entire "system" of Aristotelian physical science was wrong. This is more or less the strategy of Crescas. He looked over the entire Maimonidean list of twenty-five hypotheses to see if any of them could not be demonstrated.

That any of them could not be demonstrated would not prove that they were false. It only proves that they were not knowable solely on the basis of reason, and that is precisely what Crescas wanted to show. He was not offering an alternative physics. On the contrary, insofar as human beings could know the cosmos, Crescas agreed with the entire Aristotelian Jewish tradition – from Ibn Daud to Gersonides – that

Aristotelianism gave the most reasonable interpretation of the universe. Human reason without the support of divine assistance (through the revelation of the Hebrew scriptures and the divinely guided interpretations of their words by the rabbis) was not capable of knowing metaphysical–theological topics such as the origin and end of the universe and the nature of God and His acts of creation, revelation, and redemption.

From Crescas' list of twenty-six premises, only fourteen of them are judged to be problematic: (1) the first, which explicitly denies the existence of an infinite magnitude, which also, as Crescas' discussion makes clear, presupposes the impossibility of a vacuum; (2) the second, which denies the existence of an infinite number of magnitudes; (3) the third, which denies the existence of an infinitely long causal chain; (4) the seventh, that asserts the ontologically mutual dependence of what is changeable, divisible, movable, and physical; (5) the eighth, that whatever moves by chance rather than by necessity must come to rest; (6) the ninth, that any body that moves another body must itself be moved by some other mover; (7) the tenth, that anything in a body either exists through a body or is itself something through which another body exists; (8) the twelfth, which states that if any force that is distributed through a body is finite then the host body itself is finite; (9) the thirteenth, that the only form of change that can be continuous is circular locomotion; (10) the fourteenth, that all forms of motion logically and causally presuppose locomotion (change of place) (furthermore, as locomotion precedes alteration, alteration precedes generation and corruption, which precedes growth and diminution); (11) the fifteenth, that time and motion are mutually dependent phenomena; (12) the sixteenth, that whatever is not a body is not innumerable; (13) the twenty-second, that every body is constituted by the elements form and matter and is subject to accidents, and all physical accidents relate to the categories of quantity, figure, and position; and (14) the twenty-third, that what contains potentiality need not exist actually.

In general, the conceptual issues of Aristotelian physics over which Crescas raises objections are the possibilities of infinity and empty space (propositions one–three, twelve), as well as the nature of motion (propositions seven–nine, fourteen), causation (propositions ten and thirteen), and time (proposition fifteen), as well as the form–matter dichotomy (propositions sixteen, twenty-two, and twenty-three). Briefly, Crescas' theological defense of traditional rabbinic claims about God and Torah are in content a specific discussion of the inherent problems in the way that Aristotelian natural philosophers describe the domain of physics. What that critique does is highlight in a fourteenth-century theological context the whole spectrum

of issues that will lead in seventeenth-century natural philosophy to the modern mechanical science of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Let us look here at just one example.

The fifteenth proposition states that (1) time is an accident of motion, (2) the existence of both is mutually dependent, (3) time is inconceivable without motion, and (4) "whatsoever is not in motion does not fall under the category of time."[44] Crescas rejects the demonstrability of all four claims. Concerning the first, Aristotle offers a different definition of time as "the measure of motion."[45] Now, what is only a measure is not in the Aristotelian sense of the term an "accident" – something whose existence is contingent. Hence the first proposition is wrong. Furthermore, as such, time has no existence at all, whereas motion does exist. Hence, their existence is not mutually dependent, and the second proposition is false.

Concerning the third proposition, Crescas argued that time is more accurately characterized as a measure (*shiur*) of duration (*hitdabqut*) and that duration can be of motion or of rest between two instants (*'itot*). Hence, the third proposition also is false, for time is conceivable without motion, that is, as a measure of the duration of rest between intervals.

Concerning the fourth proposition, Crescas said the following: If the Aristotelians were correct in claiming that the universe is eternal, then the spheres, their motions, and the intelligences that move them would all be eternal and therefore not subject to time. Hence, if the Aristotelians are correct about cosmogony, then this fourth proposition is false; however, they are not correct about cosmogony because the universe is created.

What Crescas said here, however, does not rule out the possibility that the fourth proposition on some interpretation is true. The more basic problem is that this proposition itself is not clearly stated. I think what it means is that because time and motion are claimed to be mutually dependent (proposition 2), something moves if and only if it is temporal; however, that is not literally what Crescas said. He only claimed that if it is not movable then it is not temporal, and not that if it is movable then it is temporal. The more limited claim is not affected by Crescas' argument, because although celestial intelligences are movers and therefore subject to motion (which seems to be an implicit, albeit deniable assumption of Crescas), they do not seem to be subject to time (which also could, arguably, be denied).

None of this touches what is most interesting about Crescas' critique of time. So we could drop this fourth, very unclear proposition and focus solely on the first three, of which the third is the most innovative, because it divorces the notion of time from its medieval context as a measure of motion, and, by introducing the

notions of duration and rest, opens the door to the modern Newtonian notion of physics in which time is itself objective and independent.

Case 7: Spinoza on Mathematical Philosophy

If Crescas did in fact open the door in the fourteenth century to the kind of physics that Newton would introduce in the seventeenth century, Newton's contemporary, Baruch Spinoza did not know it, and it was the Jewish philosopher Spinoza, not the Christian scientist Newton, who had read Crescas. That is not to say that Spinoza was not influenced by Crescas' form of argumentation. He was, and we will now look at an example of how he was. The subject matter of the reasoning is about substance, not time, and the authoritative influence critiqued is Christian, not Jewish. What Crescas did with Maimonides' *Guide*, Spinoza did with René Descartes' *Discourse on Method*.

> Hence, because he had laid bare this truth, he had at the same time also discovered the foundation of all the sciences, and also the measure and rule of all other truths: *Whatever is perceived as clearly and distinctly as that is true.*
>
> That there can be no other foundation of the sciences than this, is more than sufficiently evident from the preceding. For we can call all the rest in doubt with no difficulty, but we can not doubt this in any way.
>
> But what we must note here, above all else concerning this foundation, is that this formula, *I doubt, I think, therefore I am*, is not a syllogism in which the major premise is omitted. For if it were a syllogism, the premises would have to be clearer and better known than the conclusion itself, *therefore I am*. And so, *I am* would not be the first foundation of all knowledge. Moreover, it would not be a certain conclusion. For its truth would depend on universal premises which the Author had previously put in doubt. So *I think, therefore I am* is a single proposition which is equivalent to this, *I am thinking*.[46]

Descartes proposed that natural philosophy should be modeled on Euclidean geometry in the sense that it would begin by listing a set of indubitable axioms, proceed to define the key terms in those axioms in utterly clear terms, and deduce logically from those axioms a complete, coherent presentation of the entire content of the subject matter, be it human psychology or the physical cosmos. Aristotelian philosophy accepted as its foundational notion the concept of God as an ultimate substance. Given that God is a most perfect being – where to be was understood in accordance with Aristotelian, nonmathematical physics – the Aristotelians were able to ground both their epistemology and their physics. Briefly, everything in the physical universe is composed of form and matter, form is the principle that actualizes the matter: From its state of potency, what enables the form to so act is the movement of another form of another entity, which in turn is moved by

another form of another entity, in a causal chain (both horizontally in terms of mechanical causes and vertically in terms of teleological causes) that has its origin in the creative action of God. Similarly, what a human intellect knows when it knows something is the form of its object; the form known exists in the intellect as a mental conception, whose causes include both the form existing in matter as a physical substance, and a movement through a chain of cosmic intellects whose origin is in the revelatory action of God. Furthermore, the consequence of God's unity is that God has one and only one act with which He is identical. Hence, God's action of creation (through which all things and events have their ultimate cause) and God's action of revelation (through which all knowers come to know what they know) is a single act. Descartes rejected this Aristotelian view of the universe and proposed to construct in its place a conception of absolutely everything based solely on mechanical causes. As all mathematical truths are necessarily true and, in virtue of their necessity they require no teleological principle,[47] so all physical and psychological truths are necessarily true and therefore have no purpose.

To construct his intellectual model for his new conception of the universe Descartes had to find a starting point – an indubitable proposition that functions for Cartesian physics in the same logical way that the definition of a straight line functions for Euclidean geometry. What Descartes proposed was the Cogito, so the young Spinoza's revolution against Cartesianism in sympathy with a more Aristotelian conception of the cosmos focuses on a critique of the Cogito.

> Nor will it be less impossible for us to think that he is a deceiver, when we attend to the idea of God (which we now suppose ourselves to have discovered), than it is for us to think that the three angles of a Triangle do not equal two right angles, when we attend to the idea of a Triangle. And just as we can form such an idea of a Triangle, even though we do not know whether the author of our nature deceives us, so also we can make the idea of God clear to ourselves and put it before our eyes, even though we still doubt whether the author of our nature deceives us in all things. And provided we have it, however we have acquired it, it will suffice to remove all doubt, as has just now been shown.
>
> Therefore, from these premises we reply as follows to the difficulty raised. We can be certain of nothing – not, indeed, so long as we are ignorant of God's existence (for I have not spoken of this) – but as long as we do not have a clear and distinct idea of him.
>
> So if anyone wishes to argue against me, his objection will have to be this: *we can be certain of nothing before we have a clear and distinct idea of God; but we cannot have a clear and distinct idea of God so long as we do not know whether the author of our nature deceives us; therefore, we can be certain of nothing so long as we do not know whether the author of our nature deceives us, etc.*
>
> To this I reply by conceding the major and denying the minor. For we have a clear and distinct idea of a Triangle, although we do not know whether the author of our nature deceives us; and provided we have such an idea (as I have just shown abundantly), we will be able to doubt neither his existence, nor any Mathematical truth.[48]

Descartes objects to making the existence of God a starting point for rational thinking about reality because God, who purportedly is the Creator of our reasoning, may have endowed us with an unreliable tool. To do so would be to fool us, and to intentionally fool His creatures would be to behave in a way that logically is not good, which is inconsistent with the claim of divine perfection. This argument begs the question precisely because it is a rational, logical argument, and it is the reliability of such thinking for making truth judgments about reality that is in question. Descartes claims that the only way to break out of this skeptical bind is to base our reasoning on some kind of proposition whose truth would not be dependent on the moral integrity of the Creator, and Descartes claims that such an idea would have to be thoroughly clear and coherent. Any clear and coherent idea would be reliably true, irrespective of its origin, because its denial would be incoherent and any contrary claim would be too unclear to be judged true.

Spinoza accepted what is the most important aspect of Descartes' analysis – that the standard for truth judgments must be clarity and coherency (rather than correspondence), anything sufficiently clear and coherent to be called true would be necessarily true (rather than contingently true), and anything necessarily true has no purpose. What he rejects is that the Cogito can provide such a basis.

His critique consists of one fundamental claim – that the "therefore" does not mean that "I am" is a conclusion that can be logically inferred from either "I doubt" or "I think." Rather, it says that thinking must be done by a thinker. Hence, it is a claim about substance, and the claim is Aristotelian, namely, there necessarily exists one or more substances that are the source of all actions. Furthermore, as he goes on to argue beyond this origin to his reflections, the existence of any substance presupposes the existence of a pure substance who is (in the language of the medievals) one and incorporeal, that is, who can be called (in the language of the Jews and the Christians) "God."

In general, Spinoza's thought functions as a bridge between medieval and modern philosophy precisely because it shares major affinities with both, so much so that it is legitimate to view his writings both as an origin for all subsequent philosophy and as a conclusion to all medieval (especially Jewish) speculation. What Descartes' Cogito does is radically change the way of doing philosophy from cosmology to psychology. For medieval philosophy, including the Jewish, the foundation for all rational speculation was the deity revealed in the opening verses of the sacred scriptures as the Creator of the universe. Hence philosophy began with cosmology and cosmogony. In contrast, for those who accepted the validity of the Cogito, the new foundation for speculation became reflection on the epistemic authority of private reflective experience. Hence philosophy begins with psychology and

epistemology. At least that is how modern, western European Christian philosophy begins. That is not the case, however, with Jewish philosophy. Following in line with Spinoza's persistent preservation of the medieval Jewish way of thinking, the foundation of modern Jewish philosophy, like its medieval counterpart, continues into the twentieth century to focus on a conception of deity drawn from the words of the Hebrew scriptures.

Case 8: Gersonides on Rational Uncertainty

In conclusion I want to present one final case that demonstrates how considerations of logic can provide a dramatic thematic line that runs through the history of medieval Jewish philosophy, from at least Saadia to at least Spinoza. In this instance I want to focus on questions of logical form in connection with claims of epistemic certainty.

In general all of the Jewish medieval philosophers believed that philosophy is about knowledge and that to know something is to know that it is necessarily the case. There are, however, important exceptions to these generalizations, and the exceptions play an important logical role in determining the content of their philosophy.

Abraham ibn Daud and philosophical demonstration. Abraham ibn Daud's *The Exalted Faith* is the first work of Jewish philosophy to use a system of natural philosophy that is predominantly Aristotelian. The work is polemical in a number of respects, some of which are religious and others of which are philosophical. In terms of religions Ibn Daud was writing a defense of the superiority of Judaism in which the main opponents are supporters of Islam and Christianity. Similarly, in terms of philosophies Ibn Daud was writing a defense of Aristotelianism. Maimonides did the same thing in his *Guide* with certain significant differences, many of which are attributable to the fact that Maimonides composed his *Guide* in Egypt whereas Ibn Daud composed his major philosophical work in Andalusia. I think that this spatial difference contributes significantly to explain why Maimonides identified his primary philosophical opponents as atomists whereas Ibn Daud identified his primary philosophical opponents as the Neoplatonists.

Ibn Daud focuses his critique of Neoplatonism on Solomon ibn Gabirol's treatise, *Source of Life* (*Meqor Ḥayyim*). In the course of a general argument in the introduction to *The Exalted Faith* Ibn Daud argues for the need for a philosophical account of the central beliefs of rabbinic Judaism, deplores the philosophical ignorance of almost all his contemporaries in the rabbinate, cites Saadia's *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* as a model for how properly such a defense should be composed, and presents *The*

Source of Life as a paradigm example of how not to do it. In general he condemns Ibn Gabirol for simply being a poor philosopher. One major example of his ineptitude is his verbosity.

After praising Saadia's efforts, Ibn Daud continues:

> We understood the treatise of Rabbi Solomon ibn Gabirol, may he be remembered for a blessing, in which he aimed at bestowing benefit from philosophy for the same purpose (as Saadia). He did not single out the nation (Israel) alone for benefit. Rather, all kinds of people are associated together by him in this matter for benefit. But despite his (notable intention) he introduced many words about one subject, so that (with regard to) his treatise to which we alluded, which is called the *Source of Life*, perhaps if its content were refined, his words could be included in (a treatise that is) less than one tenth of that treatise.
>
> Furthermore, he made use of syllogisms without being meticulous (to discover whether it is the case) that their premises are true. Whereas according to his view imaginary premises in the forms of a true syllogism are satisfactory, certainly their content is doubtful.
>
> Since he imagined that he could introduce a demonstration when (demonstrations) could not be introduced, he multiplied demonstrations, thinking that many demonstrations that are not true can stand in the place of one true demonstration.
>
> Concerning what is like this, the sage (Kohelet) said, "Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of labor and striving after wind" (Eccles 4:6). And the sages, may they be remembered for a blessing, said, "Better is one corn of popper than a basket full of pumpkins" (B. Yoma 85b).[49]

Ibn Daud's judgment of Ibn Gabirol's philosophical incompetence contains three accusations. First, his writing is inexcusably verbose. Where one sentence would do he writes ten. Second, he presents formally correct syllogisms whose first premise is false. Worse, third, he does so intentionally. He knows that his arguments stand on uncertain principles and he recognizes that this weakens the strength of his claim; however, he thinks that he can compensate for this weakness of any one of his arguments by offering many of them, as if a multitude of bad arguments somehow can add up to a sound argument.

For our purposes there are two features of Ibn Daud's attack on Ibn Gabirol worth highlighting. First, identical charges could be raised against Maimonides' demonstrations of the existence, oneness, and incorporeality of God in his *Guide*. Second, in effect Ibn Daud condemns Ibn Gabirol for using rhetoric while he advocates the use of formal logic in rabbinic philosophical apologetics.

Maimonides' proofs of God. As discussed previously, Maimonides constructs an argument for "God"[50] that begins in the *Guide* I.71 and ends in II.1. In effect the argument is a *modus tollens*.

(P1) Either the world is created or it is eternal. Neither claim can be demonstrated, and there is no third rational claim that can be made about the origin of

the universe. Maimonides defends this premise in I:71–72. *Guide* I:71 is a survey of the history of philosophy in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism that establishes the asserted disjunction. *Guide* I:72 is a discussion of problems with proving creation that establishes his claim that neither view can be demonstrated.

(P2) If the world is created then "God." This claim is the standard thesis of the *Mutakallimūn*. Maimonides presents it and defends it in I:73–76. Chapter seventy-three lists the twelve creationist premises of the Kalām arguments. Chapter seventy-four presents seven arguments based on these premises for God's existence. Chapter seventy-five presents five arguments based on these premises for God's unity. Chapter seventy-six presents three arguments based on these premises for God's incorporeality. Note that if these six chapters were to be read in isolation they would constitute a clear example of Ibn Daud's charge against Ibn Gabirol that he constructed multiple bad arguments to compensate for the weakness of one good argument, and what is wrong with each argument is that it rests on an acknowledgedly false premise.

(P3) If the world is eternal then "God." This claim is the standard thesis of the Aristotelians. Maimonides presents it and defends it in II:Introduction and II:1. The introduction lists the twenty-five premises of the Aristotelian arguments. *Guide* II:1 presents four proofs that God exists, one proof for God's unity, and two proofs for God's incorporeality, all based on the twenty-five premises listed in the introduction. Once again, note that if these two chapters were to be read in isolation they would be subject to Ibn Daud's critique of Ibn Gabirol. When seen as components of a single, complex argument, however, then Maimonides escapes Ibn Daud's charge because for the argument as it stands is valid – either the universe is created or eternal. If it is created (as the *Mutakallimūn* claim) then God exists. If it is eternal (as the Aristotelians claim) then God exists. There are no other valid options about cosmogony. Therefore God exists.

Gersonides and scientific probability. It is interesting to note that, although Maimonides (who after all was not an expert logician) cannot be charged with any of Ibn Daud's logical claims against Ibn Gabirol, Gersonides (who was an expert) does seem to be guilty of multiplying "demonstrations, thinking that many demonstrations that are not true can stand in the place of one true demonstration." The charge can be raised against practically every set of arguments that Gersonides sets forth in his *Wars of the Lord*. Let one example suffice.

Book III deals with God's knowledge of contingent particulars. The problem it addresses is this: On one hand God's knowledge is, like everything else

about God, perfect. On the other hand human beings must exercise sufficient self-determination for it to be just for them to receive reward and punishment for their behavior. The latter claim presupposes that, when human beings make choices, what they choose is contingent. Otherwise, how they chose would also be determined, and it would be unjust of a perfect deity to punish people for choices they had to make or to reward them for choices they could not avoid making. Conversely, the former claim presupposes that in all significant respects what occurs is through causal (as opposed to mere logical) necessity, because if it occurred otherwise it could not be known.

There have been in the history of philosophy a number of solutions posed to this problem, which Gersonides lists in chapter one. Chapters two and three examine the arguments in support of each position. (Chapter three deals exclusively with the arguments of Maimonides.) Chapters four and five use the preceding analysis to present Gersonides' own solution, and chapter six considers how best to read the Hebrew scriptures in light of the preceding analysis. Basically, Gersonides follows this same procedure in every book of the *Wars*, each of which concentrates on a philosophical problem in Maimonides' *Guide*.

Gersonides begins his discussion of God's knowledge of contingent particulars with the position of Aristotle. Gersonides says the following:

> We say first of all that what the Philosopher thought – that God, may he be blessed, is without knowledge of these contingent particulars – is thought to have many aspects of plausibility.[51]

Basically Aristotle's claim is that, in consequence of God's perfection, what He knows cannot be subject to change. Hence, God can only know eternal truths, and what is eternal cannot in principle be contingent. What Aristotle argues is, for our purposes, unimportant. What does matter is that this argument, like all the others considered in the book, has an "aspect of plausibility." Literally it is one of the faces or aspects (*panim*) of what demonstrates or shows (*haheroat*) what is the truth.

What Gersonides does here is not unique. It is the logical theme of every one of his arguments, and as such, it is the opposite of what Ibn Daud thought constituted a good argument. According to Ibn Daud the philosopher, for an argument to be sound it must in itself prove what is the case. For Gersonides, the astronomer and natural philosopher, no argument by itself can do that. Rather, every argument examines some set of empirical data and from those data draws a conclusion. The totality of empirical data, much of which is relevant to any claim of natural philosophy, is far too great to be subsumed under any generalization in any single

argument. Rather, each argument generalizes from some of the present data to form a general thesis that will be part but not the whole of the truth. In the end the philosopher takes all of these partial conclusions, that is, aspects or faces of what is the truth, examines them, and from them concludes what is the nature of the whole picture.

In so reasoning it is Gersonides, the late-thirteenth-, early-fourteenth-century natural philosopher who is (at least in this respect) more modern than Spinoza, his seventeenth-century counterpart. Both were involved with empirical astronomy, both made instruments for (what we would call) "scientific" use,[52] and both had a strong sense of the role of logic even in the aesthetic of constructing a philosophical argument. They advocated very different kinds of science, however. Spinoza's science, reflective of the Enlightenment of the seventeenth century, modeled his thinking on algebra (even though his method is called "geometric") and constructed arguments, no less than Ibn Daud, whose intent was to demonstrate scientific necessity. In contrast, Gersonides, like Aristotle before him, assumed an empirical model in which of necessity individual conclusions are less than certain and always open to the possibility of refinement, in which the epistemic force of a thesis is built up gradually as one specific argument is added to another to complete or fill in a picture of the truth. In this respect Gersonides looks more like a contemporary scientist than do any of his peers, past and present, in Jewish philosophy.

Maimonides and legal uncertainty. Maimonides, no less than Ibn Daud, thought that he could establish necessity in the domain of natural philosophy. That was not the case, however, when he wore the hat of a scholar of Jewish Law. Whatever Maimonides actually thought about the degree of likelihood of his assertions in the *Guide,* he gives the impression that most of what he says is certainly true. That is not always the case with his rulings in the *Mishneh Torah*. For example, whether or not one individual, A, is culpable both morally and legally for killing another individual, B depends on a great number of factors including how A did the act and the context in which the act was committed. Hence, if A pushes B off of a rooftop and B dies, the height of the fall is critical in determining culpability. In this instance Maimonides tells us that:

> It seems to me that in any place whose height is not ten handbreadths (or more), (the fall) is insufficient to have caused the death, as (the sages explicitly) said concerning matters (of responsibility) when an animal (falls) into a well.[53]

The expression "it seems to me" (*vayera-eh li*) indicates that Maimonides believes but does not know that this is the case. He thinks that he is right, and his belief is sufficiently strong that based on it he can condemn someone to death, but he knows that he does not know that he is right. In at least legal judgments it is possible to make strong moral claims that have serious moral consequences even when the judgments are not certain.

How certain the law requires us to be in making judgments also depends on the persons involved not only in the criminal act itself but in legal judgments about the act. For example, if A has an object stolen from him, and B recovers it, whether or not there is an obligation for B to return the object to A depends, among other factors, on who or what A is. Maimonides tells us that if the thief was Jewish then B may keep the object, but if the thief was not Jewish then the object must be returned to A. The difference depends on A's hope for the object's recovery. If A has a reasonable hope that the object will be found, then if it is found it must be returned. If, however, A has given up all reasonable hope of its return (i.e., he "despairs" [*hitya-esh*] of it), then B may keep the object. In effect, A has declared what he owned to be ownerless. Hence, someone else is free to make it his own.

Maimonides feels a need to explain why the religious identity of the victim of the theft matters in this case. Why if A is a Jew then B can keep the object, but if A is a gentile, then B must return it? His answer is:

> Because gentile (law enforcement authorities)[54] immediately return the stolen object even though there are no witnesses (who can prove) that it was stolen. Rather, (gentile courts in these cases are willing to settle) for "bad proofs and conjectures."[55,56]

On one hand Maimonides is claiming that Jewish courts operate with a higher standard of evidence in criminal cases. A Jewish court will find someone guilty of a crime only if there are two reliable eyewitnesses to the act, and gentile courts will settle for a far lower standard. At least in this case the higher standard produces a less just result. Even when a person's stolen property has been recovered it is usually not possible to return it to the victim because of the extremely high standard for convictions in Jewish courts. Hence, from the sole perspective of equitable distribution of property, gentile courts can render decisions that are more just.

Our interest in this case, however, has nothing to do with comparing Jewish and gentile justice. Rather, it has to do with Maimonides' recognition that truth judgments are subject to a variety of degrees of certainty. In other words, informative statements are not to be judged merely true or false. Rather, they vary in their degree of likelihood. There are some claims that can be judged to be certain and others that can with equal certainty be judged to be false, but in between there is a wide

range of judgments that lack this certainty, which, in comparison to each other, are more or less likely to be true. Such judgments are claims that are based on proofs that do not strictly prove (what I translated as "bad proofs") and claims that lack no proof at all but are only reasonable guesses (what I translated as "conjectures"). At least with respect to law, statements can reasonably be judged to be true or false where the standard of evidence is significantly less than certainty.

CONCLUSION

The focus in this chapter has been on the use of reasoning in premodern Jewish philosophy. The subject has been discussed in terms of eight specific cases that highlight the role of argument by central Jewish philosophers in central philosophical texts that deal with critical premodern issues. What this chapter does is set in the foreground what is usually in the background (viz., the logic) and moves to the background what is usually in the foreground (viz., the conceptual content).

That these Jewish philosophers did not often explicitly quote categories of or even works on logic does not mean that they did not know or that they did not study logic. This essay minimally demonstrates that these claims are false. Maximally it shows that logic in itself provides a major theme that runs through the breadth of the history of medieval Jewish philosophy, and its contribution to logic is distinctive and often creative.

NOTES

1 On the history of the Stoics in particular see Sedley 2003, pp. 7–32.

2 For example, Rabbi Yishamel's list of thirteen rules for making legal inferences from the words of the Torah. This list of what amounts to thirteen forms of rhetorical argument by analogy is presented in the introduction to the *Sifra*, but every traditional Jew is familiar with them from the opening morning prayers in the traditional prayer book.

3 With respect to our earlier assertion about the nonpurity of the Hellenistic schools of philosophy, note the judgment of the Kneales that Galen mingled Aristotelianism with Stoicism. Kneale and Kneale 1962, pp. 129–99.

4 See Sirat 1985. Look especially at her references to Ibn Daud's contemporary Solomon Ibn Gabirol (p. 71), to Maimonides (pp. 182–3), and to Joseph Caspi (p. 276).

5 *The Treatise on Logic (Makālah Fi-Sinaʿat al-Māntiq),* which presumably Maimonides wrote when he was only twenty-three years old. (There is some scholarly skepticism about this tradition.) See Maimonides 1938.

6 For Jewish commentaries on works of logic in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Sirat 1985, pp. 276, 343, 351, and 397–8. With specific reference to Gersonides, see Manekin 1985.

7 See Bobzien 2003, pp. 85–123.

8 As William and Martha Kneale say, "what Stoics call 'dialectic' we call logic" (Kneale and Kneale 1962, p. 139).
9 The prime example is the thinking of Hermann Cohen. He is the greatest and possibly the last modern Jewish philosopher. What follows him is a consequence of general trends in intellectual history that arise after the First World War, when western philosophy (at least on the continent of Europe) and western art become more "romantic" in rebellion against the mechanical, mathematical modes of demonstration in modern science. Jewish philosophy after Cohen reflects this European move in philosophy. There is no comparable move in Jewish Law, however, in which the tendency continues (at least with traditionalist religious thinkers) to value ever-greater precision.
10 *Mishneh Torah,* Hilchot Nizkei Mammon (The Laws of Damage to Property) X.13, Maimonides 1989, p. 100.
11 "Modern" in two senses: (1) as "knowledge" as something that is as certain as any informative claim can be, and (2) as "science" as the set of disciplines that has exclusive authority to proclaim what is and is not knowledge.
12 This is what *mu'ad* means. Its opposite is *tam*. Literally the two terms (in order) mean "warned" and "innocent."
13 Saadia 1948, Introductory Treatise, Section VIII, p. 40.
14 Ibn Tibbon translates this term into Hebrew as *harayot*, which literally means to cause someone to see something.
15 In Maimonides' case – namely, in *Guide* I.71 – it is stated as a criticism of *gaonim* and their Muslim counterparts.
16 Ibn Daud 1986, Book 2, Basic Principle 5, Abstract, 164a8–164b2, pg. 186.
17 It is also worth noting that Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* can be read as a refutation of this general argument by ibn Daud. Ibn Daud claimed that, if an experience is shared by a multitude of reliable witnesses, then there can be no doubt of the validity of their testimony. Against this claim Freud argued that it is possible for a multitude of honest, intelligent people to be wrong about what they experienced if what they experienced was the result of a mass illusion and the theophany was such an illusion.
18 See note 31.
19 Pines notes that the Judeo–Arabic "more or less literally" means "inverting with equipoise." Ibn Tibbon translates the expression into Hebrew as *hahithapech beshavui* (viz., reversal with equality). It seems fairly clear to me that what Maimonides wants to assert is reciprocity. Hence, in our text he seems to be saying that only reciprocal relations qualify properly as relations. This judgment about the meaning of the term "relationship" plays a major role in our discussion of this text.
20 Ibn Tibbon translates this verb into Hebrew as *metsuyyar*, which means to picture, imagine, or portray. Clearly Maimonides intends the verb to describe an act of conceptual judgment and not an act of imagination. The Pines translation here says "to represent oneself," which clearly is a mistake of some kind. He probably intended "to present to oneself."
21 *Guide* I.52, Maimonides 1963, pp. 117–8.
22 The other was Averroes' commentaries on the works of Aristotle.
23 Of course there is no simple way to prove this claim, and undoubtedly other intellectual historians will put forward other candidates for this position. Let me here just mention one example of the centrality of Maimonides' theory of attributes in western (especially but not exclusively Jewish) philosophy. The opening of Franz Rosenzweig's major work of Jewish philosophy in the first quarter of the twentieth century, *Star of Redemption,* presents an abbreviated history of western philosophy, which, in his judgment, is now

complete. He organizes the history around three major topics, each of which reaches its highest moment when doubts are raised whose solutions require the transcendence of philosophy as mere philosophy. The topics are God, the world, and the human. On Rosenzweig's reading, the purely philosophical discussion of the human (which means "ethics") is completed by Kant with his Categorical Imperative. The topic of the world (which means "logic") is completed by Descartes with his Cogito. The topic of God (which means "physics") is completed by Maimonides with his negative theology.

24 To make what Maimonides says succinct, I have formalized his claims in ways that fit modern symbolic logic. This is not the way that Maimonides in fact makes these claims. Still, despite the difference in style of presentation, I would claim that my formalized summary captures what Maimonides does in fact say despite his logically nonformal style of presentation.

25 The length of Maimonides' discussion in *Guide* II.52 in justification of his exclusion of relations suggests that he was aware how unorthodox his claim was. Although Maimonides does not mention him by name, it would be most reasonable to conclude that Maimonides' argument in this section is with Ibn Daud in his *The Exalted Faith*.

26 That Maimonides does seem to recognize any form of equivocality other than absolute equivocality is in itself a problem. It is widely believed that Maimonides in his youth wrote a book on logic in which he discusses (chapter twelve) the very form of equivocality for which Gersonides opts in accounting for divine predication, namely, *pros hen* equivocality (as explained later). If he knew about this in his youth and discussed it in a book on logic, why in his maturity does he not know about it? Of course the easiest way out of seemingly unexplainable texts by Maimonides is to follow Leo Strauss' *deus ex machina* method where anything you cannot explain must be a hidden agenda. (I flirt with this temptation in Samuelson 1991.) A more appealing way out of the problem is to accept Herbert Davidson's suggestion that there is no good reason to believe that Maimonides really wrote his *Treatise on Logic*. See H. Davidson 2005, pp. 318–9.

27 For a more detailed discussion of the nature of what I call "*pros hen* equivocality," see Owens 1951, pp. 264–75.

28 The example is mine, not Aristotle's.

29 As the morally good do not necessarily succeed in the affairs of the world, so the philosophically astute do not necessarily succeed to have influence in the history of philosophy.

30 Gersonides 1987, VI.1.8.

31 For Gersonides, as for most of the medieval and early modern Jewish philosophers, the distinctions I am here drawing between intellectual disciplines are not given. I draw them solely as a pedagogical device to help the reader. Distinctions between "philosophy" and "science" are not clearly drawn until the end of the nineteenth century. Certainly Gersonides would not have recognized a need for different terminology. I use the terms in the modern sense in which a "science" is committed to thinking about empirical data in mechanical and/or mathematical ways and "philosophy" deals with very general questions about reality in technical, conceptual ways that still rely in a primary sense for communication on discursive language. Similarly the lines between topics in the physical sciences and topics in religious thought are not sharp. In the seventeenth century such a discussion as the one we will look at here was called "natural philosophy," in which questions of religious belief are discussed independent of professed revealed scriptures. To a large extent Gersonides' philosophy is natural philosophy. He does refer to statements in the Hebrew scriptures; however, such statements do not function within the logic of

his arguments, as they did for earlier Jewish philosophers, as premises. We have already discussed this issue in the case that deals with Abraham ibn Daud.

32 It is not clear just what are the experiential data to which Gersonides has referred. He could be actually observing something like a red shift in the motion of stars, which would be an amazing observation for someone who lacks an instrument such as a telescope to enhance his vision, or he may have in mind something closer to the kinds of experiments that Newton discusses in his *Optiks*, namely, careful observations of the shadows cast on earth from the light of celestial objects.

33 An alternate interpretation of what Gersonides is here claiming is that some parts of the surface of a celestial body reflect light whereas other parts of the surface are in the dark despite the "fact" that the shape and make-up of the heavenly object is perfectly spherical. It is also possible that Gersonides intended to make both claims.

34 The Judeo–Arabic term here is *alkatkhasis*, which Kapach translates into Hebrew as *ha-yichud*. Note that the standard medieval translation of the text by Judah ibn Tibbon misses the translation completely. What Ibn Tibbon says instead is "in order to introduce what is clear (*ha-biur*)."

35 As with the term "science," so with the term "religion." It is not a word that pre-Reformation thinkers, including Jewish philosophers, would have used in any recognizable technical way. It refers here specifically to any set of beliefs based on divine revelation.

36 In this case, as in many others, a philosophical text can be clear and ambiguous. It is clear in the sense that it asserts what it asserts in the best way possible. What it so asserts has many levels of meaning, some of which are "deeper" than others. Furthermore, because a scientific use of language ("science" here is my term for language that is most appropriate for making truth claims) accurately reflects reality (because all of these pre–seventeenth century philosophers were committed to a correspondence theory of truth), reality itself, and not just the language, must be comparably equivocal. Hence, there are many levels to reality, some higher than others. The higher the level of reality the deeper the meaning of the appropriately associated language. The simple meaning of the text (what the rabbis call the *peshat*) reflects a fairly low, fairly superficial level of reality.

37 Or, at least that is what Maimonides sometimes says, notably in *Guide* II.13–28. Maimonides, however, described some biblical texts whose literal meaning is that creation is an eternal act and not something that occurred at any single time, namely, in *Guide* II.25–26. Furthermore, Maimonides also asserted that the act of creation includes the creation of time. If time is an object of creation, however, then it does not make sense for Maimonides to claim that creation itself occurs in time. Note that Maimonides did not raise this question, and therefore he did not discuss it.

38 The Hebrew is *hakdamot*. The singular is *hakdamah*. *Hakdamah* literally means "preface," or "foreword," or, by extension, "premise" or even "hypothesis." Given the context I would think that the "hypothesis" would be a preferable translation to Wolfson's "proposition." (Note that Crescas' list of twenty-six premises does not correspond precisely to what Maimonides presents in the *Guide* as twenty-five propositions.)

39 The Hebrew is *biur mofti*. "Biur" literally means "explanation." The term *mofet* designates speech that functions in a logically formal demonstration whose intent is to show that some claim (the conclusion) is necessarily true.

40 The Hebrew is *ma'amar ha-omer*, which literally means the speech of the speaker. By this expression Crescas indicated that the argument from the Scriptures in the third part is rhetorical rather than (as it was in the first part) demonstrative. Wolfson called the argument "dialectic" as opposed to "didactic" (H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 326 n. 14). He cited

the specific form of argument used here as a example of *argumentum ad hominem* and noted that it was used by Aristotle, and later by Averroes against al-Ghāzālī.

41 The Hebrew is *she-ayn derekh*, which literally means that there is no way (to achieve perfect understanding).

42 Crescas, in H. Wolfson 1929a, Proposition 1.Introduction, pp. 133–5.

43 Henceforth referred to simply as "God."

44 Crescas, in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 285

45 H. Wolfson (1929a, p. 644) cites the *Intermediate Physics* IV, iii, 1. "Consequently time is the measure of motion." The citation is to the Hebrew translation by Kalonymus ben Kalonymus of Averroes' middle commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, which would have been Crescas' source for reading Aristotle's *Physics.*

46 Spinoza 1985, pp. 233–4.

47 For example, necessarily a triangle has three angles that are equal to 180 degrees, not for any purpose, but simply because this mathematical fact is part of what it means to be a triangle.

48 Spinoza 1985, pp. 237–8.

49 Ibn Daud 1986, Book 1, Abstract, 4b19–5b8, p. 40.

50 "God" here is a shorthand for three claims: that God exists, that God is one, and that God is incorporeal. This triad constitutes the conventional formulation in Islamic and consequently Jewish philosophy from at least the tenth century through at least the seventeenth century for fundamental religious affirmations of faith in God.

51 Samuelson 1977a, pp. 104ff.

52 Gersonides designed a device, called "Jacob's staff," for measuring the relative distance of visible stars, and Spinoza ground lenses to improve scientists' use of the telescope to see those objects.

53 *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Rotze'ach uSh'mirat*, III.7.

54 The Hebrew is *'ovdey kokhavim*, which literally means star worshippers, which was a standard term for idolaters. To call them non-Jews, that is "gentiles," agrees with the way all modern scholars interpret the term. Also, that the word means gentiles and not idolaters makes better sense of the way Maimonides uses the term in this context and in most contexts within the *Mishneh Torah*.

55 In Hebrew, *birayot re'u'ot uv-omed hada'at*, which literally means undermined proofs and an estimate of the view. Eliyahu Tougar translates the terms as "circumstantial evidence and probability." The translation is not literal and probably not correct because it makes the meaning more modern in terms of law than it probably was understood. It is still, however, a reasonable translation.

56 *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Gezelah va'Avedah*, VI.3.

8

MEANING AND LANGUAGE

JOSEF STERN

It may be anachronistic to speak of the philosophy of language before Frege, but philosophers have been concerned with questions of meaning and language since Plato, and medieval Jewish philosophers were no exception. Nonetheless these topics are part of the infrastructure of medieval Jewish philosophy rather than its primary subject matter. Where medieval Jewish philosophers discuss questions of language and the nature of meaning, it is generally piecemeal and subsidiary to larger projects: in introductions to grammars and lexicons; in exegetical contexts such as the interpretation of Gen. 2:20, "And the man gave names, and so on"; to explain why the rabbis call Hebrew *lashon ha-qodesh*, the holy language; while addressing metaphysical questions such as divine attributes; or, as translations are produced, in introductions to or commentaries on the logical treatises of the Organon, especially *De Interpretatione*. We do not find among the Jews the same rich literature on topics such as significance, supposition, and the semantics of terms and propositions that we find among the Latin scholastics.[1] To uncover and analyze the medieval Jewish philosophers' opinions on these issues, the scholar must extract them from other discussions and texts, beginning with the Bible.[2]

According to scripture, the very first words ever uttered – "Let there be light" – are God's, announcing the creation of light and thereby bringing it into existence. Each of the first three creations is also completed by an act of divine naming: light is called "Day," the firmaments "Heavens," and so on. Thus, an opening announcement by God and a final naming frame each of these acts of creation, perhaps to suggest that the way the world presents itself, divided into objects and structured according to kinds, is determined as well as represented by language. The rabbis expand this role of divine speech to encompass all of creation: "With ten utterances," R. Yohanan states, "the world was created" and God is "He who spoke and the world is created."[3] Divine language preexists the created world. For some it furnishes a blueprint for creation, for others the letters of the Hebrew alphabet have supernatural creative power.[4] Thus, according to both the scriptural text and one significant rabbinic tradition – a tradition which emerges full blown within medieval *Kabbalah* – language is divine by nature and origin, supernatural rather

than natural, and aligned with the Creator rather than with the created, and Hebrew, among all languages, is distinguished as the holy, perfect language.[5]

Some medieval Jewish thinkers share this divine conception of language, but by and large the philosophers adopt more naturalistic approaches informed by their contact first with the Greek, then Arabic, and finally Latin scholastic philosophical traditions. Consider the ancient philosophical controversy over whether languages, and names (or nouns) in particular, are *conventional* or *natural,* a question whose sides are debated throughout medieval philosophy.[6] Among classical authors, this controversy is understood in a variety of ways.[7] Depending on the school and thinker, the claim that language is conventional could mean either that it is contingent or arbitrary, that the significations of its names are locally or nationally fixed, or that it is artifactual, the product of deliberate, voluntary human choice. That language is natural means either that words signify by expressing the natures or essences of their referents or that the ability to use language is a natural (human) capacity, either the product of a natural evolution from unarticulated noises and gestures or an expression of the rational faculty. Given this classical dichotomy, how do the medieval thinkers reconcile its alternatives with the scriptural and rabbinic view that language is divine or divinely revealed?

One of the earliest reflections of this controversy among Jewish thinkers is found in Philo who, commenting on Gen. 2:20, writes "names proceed from agreement and not from nature for a natural nomenclature is with peculiar fitness assigned to each creature when a man of wisdom and preeminent wisdom appears."[8] Here Philo sides with the view that names are natural in that they signify their bearers because they express their nature but he also seems to hold that names are conventional insofar as they are instituted by a human name-giver, and reflect his wisdom, and are not the articulation of a natural capacity to make sounds. The only role of God in this story is that He enables Adam to give properly fitting names: Adam is "wise with wisdom self-learned and self-taught, having been created by the grace of God."[9] Although humanity is created by God, language is a human institution, albeit one that reflects an ideal condition in which the Adamic name-giver knows the natures of all beings, knowledge that rivals God's.[10]

Philo's own stance in the controversy over whether language is conventional or natural had no direct influence on medieval Jewish philosophy, but the ways he negotiates his stand parallel moves among later thinkers. The original question is divided into two, one concerning the origin or genesis of language (even while a language is sometimes conceptualized simply as a set of names), the other about the character of signification and especially that of names. These questions lead to further questions concerning the very nature of a language; how or with what kind

of a science or method should language and meaning be investigated; and the status of Hebrew: its superiority or (as the medieval reality more often testified) inferiority to other languages, especially Arabic and Latin, and the sense in which it is the "holy language (*lashon ha-qodesh*)." Part I of this chapter opens with the question of the origin and nature of language within medieval Jewish philosophy and leads to brief discussions of the singularity of Hebrew. In part II, we discuss models of signification and the meanings of names. In part III, I turn to accounts of polysemy – theories of ambiguity, amphiboly, equivocation, metaphor, extended or secondary meaning, and analogy – and their implications for the analysis of divine attributes and knowledge of God.[11]

I. LANGUAGE AND ITS ORIGIN

The Arabic–Islamic Context

The encounter with Arabic–Islamic culture gave rise to the earliest scientific and philosophical investigations of language and meaning among medieval Jews. This impact was due not only to the exposure to Greek philosophy in its Arabic recension but also to Islamic theology, the advanced study of Arabic grammar, and the realities of translation in the multilingual Islamic empire. Indeed these other forces sometimes conflicted with the philosophical study of language.

For example, already during the Geonic period in the east, the Muslim study of the Qur'an and its high veneration for Arabic inspired comparable interest among Jews in the Hebrew language. Just as this led to the emergence of scientific, systematic study of Arabic grammar and lexicography, so Jews were moved to study scientifically Hebrew grammar and language, leading to the first Hebrew grammars and lexicons and, in biblical exegesis, to the interpretive method known as *peshat*, which focuses on grammar and the contextual meaning of words. Within Islam, this also led to the entrenchment of an indigenous Arabic grammatical tradition, aligned with the *Kalām*, that took semantics to fall in its purview, given the fine nuances of meaning that turn on subtle differences of Arabic wording. This in turn led to an inevitable confrontation with the arrival of Aristotelian logic that was perceived to be a foreign, invasive heretical force opposed to the native Islamic science of language.[12] The question of which of the two should be regarded as the "true custodian of sound discourse"[13] quickly took on more than theoretical significance given Muslim religious–nationalistic resistance to the foreign threat of Hellenistic culture. The aspect of language most contested by the two sides was semantics: Should meaning be studied by a philosophical science or by an "Islamic"

or "Arabic" science? According to the philosophers, the division between these two classes of "sciences" is grounded in a substantial epistemological difference. Grammar is nation- or language-specific, and therefore conventional. The domain of the philosophical sciences, on the other hand, is the universal, or natural, what is knowable by unaided human reason. The question, then, is whether meaning, which is sensitive to nuances of superficial grammatical form, should be assigned to the Islamic sciences or to philosophical sciences (e.g., Aristotelian logic) that address universal, language-invariant aspects of thought that can be studied independently of the accidental features of particular languages. Although there was never the same degree of conflict between grammarians and philosophers among the Jews as there was among Muslims, we shall meet a similar tension in Maimonides' rejection of grammatical structures for logical ones in his *Logic*.

A second source of resistance to the philosophers' language-invariant conception of meaning was the reality of multilingual translation in the Arabic intellectual world. The many obstacles to translating the texts of one language or tradition into another made thinkers, Muslim and Jewish, suspicious of the very possibility of the philosophers' idea of a universal interlinguistically expressible meaning. As Judah ibn Tibbon, the scion of the family dynasty of translators, writes, "When the words are changed, the meaning changes, for every word carries [a specific meaning] and every meaning is carried [by a specific word]."[14]

Notwithstanding these sometimes conflicting nonphilosophical concerns, by the tenth-century Islamic thought about language was deeply influenced by the Aristotelian heritage. Three themes were particularly influential: (1) the dominating role of (Aristotelian) logic in understanding meaning and language; (2) the idea of an inner speech, or language of thought, in addition to external speech; and (3) various versions of the doctrine that language is conventional which was now taken to mean that terms signify conventionally *because* they originated in a convention or agreement within the linguistic community. Furthermore, the classical dichotomy between conventionalism and naturalism about language was supplemented by (divine) revelationism. Depending on what one means by "conventional" and "natural," revelationism is sometimes opposed to conventionalism – that is, language is revealed rather than humanly invented – and sometimes to naturalism – that is, language is revealed rather than having naturally developed out of unarticulated animal sounds. In this second case, revelationism replaces rather than competes with conventionalism.

In light of this background, I now turn to four Jewish thinkers: Saadia Gaon, Judah Halevi, Maimonides, and Profiat Duran (Efodi). Although each appropriates

the conventional–natural distinction and situates his discussion under the rubric of the origin of language, we shall see that their respective concerns with language are each rather different.

Saadia Gaon (882–942)

Among his many seminal accomplishments, Saadia Gaon al-Fayyumi was a pioneering grammarian and lexicographer. His *Book of the Roots of Hebrew Poesy* (*Ha-Egron)* was the first lexicography of the Hebrew language, and his *Book of Elegance of the Language of the Hebrews* was the first systematic Hebrew grammar.[15] In one of the earliest discussions of the conventional–natural controversy, he argues that we should not seek explanations for the *dagesh* (dot) in certain letters – a sign that marks off those consonants that are prolonged, double, or explosive – because, like simple nouns, this was simply laid down arbitrarily by the original language-giver whose ruling was accepted by the linguistic community. Here Saadia opts for the conventionalist hypothesis concerning the origin of language that he takes to entail two claims. First, that certain words signify certain essences, or that certain consonants are prolonged and others not, simply reflects a voluntary and arbitrary act of the language-founder. Therefore, there is no point for grammarians to seek an explanation for something that was fixed for no reason. Second, despite its voluntaristic and arbitrary genesis, once the linguistic convention is accepted by the community and acquires the authority of tradition, subsequent speakers are bound to adhere to it and not entitled to change it at *their* will. Confirmation by tradition and repeated usage according to the language-founder's decision, albeit originally arbitrary, constitutes a tacit agreement that confers normative status on the current language that contemporary speakers cannot autonomously override.[16]

How does Saadia know that the original language-giver arbitrarily willed names to things? If a name signifies its bearer by nature, then its meaning necessitates that it signify that thing, and if each nature or essence is also uniquely expressed by one name, there should be only one name in all languages for each thing. That different languages have different names for the same thing proves, Saadia argues, that names signify only in virtue of local conventions. But if speakers only happened to have so agreed to signify some thing by some name, then they could also have decided on some other name for that same thing. Hence, the conventional choice of any particular name is both socially determined and arbitrary.[17]

In arguing that the language-giver(s) was human, Saadia sides with the Mutazilites against more conservative *Mutakallimūn*, including Asharites, who endorse the view that the ur-language was divinely revealed.[18] In light of Genesis 2:20, it is striking that he does not explicitly identify the language-founder

with Adam and instead refers to an anonymous figure in a primordial past. In *Elegance* Saadia also does not explicitly identify the ur-language with Hebrew or with any particular language; he discusses language in general and a general giver of language. By obscuring the origins of language, Saadia shifts the burden of the normative authority of general linguistic conventions for *contemporary* speakers onto the authority of *tradition*: the fact that linguistic rules and meanings, however arbitrarily they were originally fixed, have become the accepted practice of the community confirmed by time and usage. Saadia's interest in the conventional–natural controversy is due as much to its implications for the present normative status of language as it is in the question of its origins.

Judah Halevi (ca. 1075–1141)

To defend the veracity of the Torah, Judah Halevi appeals to three human institutions whose universal practice cannot be explained unless we assume that the account in Genesis of the Adamic origin of humankind is true. One of the three institutions is language, by which he means not just the human ability to communicate but the articulated structure of language, the fact that all languages "are composed of nouns, verbs, and particles, while these are derived [originally] from letters which are taken from the articulated sounds of speech."[19] Halevi proposes the Adamic hypothesis as a preferred alternative to both "eternalist," or naturalistic, *and* conventionalist accounts, the first of which is, curiously, attributed to the Haver, the Jewish sage, the second to the Khazar king.[20] Against the hypothesis that "languages are eternal, having no beginning," Halevi simply cites the fact that language is structured, as if it were self-evident that design requires a designer.[21] On the other hand, Halevi objects to the hypothesis that languages "were created entirely new by convention" on the grounds that no one has "seen or heard [of anyone doing that]."[22] It is not clear whether this is simply the objection that no one has had experience of any such event – bearing in mind the decisive importance of experience in Halevi's thought – or whether the criticism is that the invention of language is conceptually impossible or implausible, either because it is unlikely that a whole people would arrive at an agreement (unless they were descendants of one parent like Adam, the issue in question) or because any agreement among individuals adopting an "entirely new" language would itself require a language in which the group arrived at their agreement. In any case, Halevi concludes that the universal features of language must be due to a common source: a "divine[ly] created language, which God taught Adam and placed [both] on his tongue and within his mind, and is undoubtedly the most perfect language and also the one that corresponds most closely to the things named by it [as stated in Gen. 2, 20], meaning

that [the creature] deserves [just] that name, while [the name] corresponds to it and tells about its nature."[23] This ur-language is Hebrew, which is perfect "[both] with regard to the essence of language and with regard to all that it embraces by way of meanings" in virtue of which it is called "the Holy Language."[24]

This Adamic hypothesis captures the best of the naturalist and conventionalist accounts of language. Language, in particular, Hebrew, is the creation of a purposeful language-giver, not the manifestation of a natural human capacity or a system that naturally evolved from brute sounds and noises. To avoid the problems that are raised by the idea of a *human* founder, Halevi turns to God who teaches language to humanity. Rather than name things arbitrarily, God assigns names "that correspond most closely to the things named," unlike the names of the post-Adamic languages (including medieval Hebrew) that widely vary in their degree of fit, "some of [whose] names correspond very closely to the things named by them, while some of them [correspond only] remotely."[25] Thus, language is both conventional as an expression of its divine founder's choice *and* natural inasmuch as its names reflect its founder's perfect knowledge of the natures of their bearers. Through this resolution, Halevi establishes the superiority of Hebrew as the language of the Jews, thereby serving the apologetic purpose of *Kuzari*.

Moses Maimonides (1138–1204)

Maimonides' interest in language and meaning is shaped by his epistemology. According to his *Guide*, "there is no belief except after a representation (*taṣawwur*);"[26] that is, all cognition requires a representation, and to identify the correct representation one is led to questions of language and meaning. Maimonides' discussion is also deeply influenced by Aristotle and al-Fārābī although, as with other subjects of natural and divine science, he does not provide "a summary and epitomized description"[27] of the Aristotelian and al-Farābian material he appropriates. Three al-Farābian themes in particular run through Maimonides' discussions: (1) the distinction between "external speech" and "inner speech," (2) the claim that language is conventional and not natural in specific senses taken from al-Fārābī, and (3) the methodological position that logic, as opposed to grammar and as conceived in specifically al-Farābian terms, is the proper method by which to investigate language and meaning.

Maimonides' one explicit statement in the *Guide* on the origin and nature of human language is found in his exposition of "the Account of the Beginning," which he identifies with natural science: "'And the man [*ha-adam*] gave names, and so on' [Genesis 2:20] informs us that languages are conventional and not natural, as has sometimes been thought."[28] Elsewhere Maimonides states that the biblical term

ha-adam refers equivocally to either the species humanity, the multitude or community, or the first human, Adam.[29] Hence, when he interprets the verse as saying that languages are conventional, Maimonides means that they are artifacts of the human species, or produced by "agreements" among the multitude or community, or by the legislation of a ruler like Adam, or by some combination of these. By the 'natural' Maimonides means all "material things, existing, not as products of human will, but in nature."[30] He does not tell us which particular natural account of the origin of language he rejects, but one account he is familiar with, and to which he himself ascribes in his *Medical Aphorisms*, is a climatological explanation, offered by al-Fārābī, of speech articulation and pronunciation as a function of the speaker's speech physiology, which itself is shaped by climate.[31] Admittedly, this is an explanation of speech articulation rather than of syntactic and semantic features of language, but others generalize the explanation to cover all linguistic aspects.[32] Maimonides distinguishes them, taking the faculty of speech, "speaking with the tongue," to be a species-specific property of a human being whereas particular languages are "laid down" (*wudi'at*), that is, conventionally introduced.[33]

Maimonides does not offer divine language, a language spoken by God which He in turn reveals to humanity, as a third candidate to explain the origin of human language although he was surely familiar with this idea from scriptural exegesis, rabbinic *Midrashim*, and earlier medieval thinkers such as Halevi. Maimonides does not mention this explanation because he absolutely rejects the very idea of speech or language (*Kalām*) attributed to God. Given his Avicennian conception of the deity as a necessarily existent, hence, absolutely simple, being who possesses no attributes, there can be no "word," in the Islamic sense of an uncreated word (like the Koran or Torah), that exists as a real attribute in God or any other manner of divine speech or language, either corporeal (presupposing a voice and sounds) or mental (presupposing a soul into which notions are impressed).[34] When scripture says that God "speaks," "says," or "commands," these speech acts are no different from any other attribute of action attributed to God; they can only mean that God "willed" (in a fully equivocal sense) a natural phenomenon for which He is the ultimate, or first, cause in a chain of intermediate natural causes. In sum, no linguistic content remains to "saying" or "speaking" when those terms are scripturally ascribed to God. It follows, if God has no language, that the origin of human language cannot be explained by a revelation of a divine language (as Halevi proposed), nor can Hebrew be the "holy language" because it is God's own tongue or because it is a perfect language (as Halevi also argued). According to Maimonides, Hebrew is "holy" only because it embodies a standard of moral perfection that expresses itself, for example, in the fact that none of its words explicitly refer to sexual organs or acts,

open mention of which would be shameful.[35] In a similar vein, Maimonides also rejects all popular religious and magical views, prevalent at his time, of the theurgic and supernatural power of words, for example, in amulets and the *mezuzah*. If his denial of language to God is driven by his radical conception of the deity as absolutely one and simple, these superstitious beliefs about words are no less than idolatry.[36]

Maimonides' claim that languages are conventional and not natural is bound up with two other distinctions he first discusses in his early work, *Treatise on the Art of Logic*: between what he calls, following al-Fārābī, "external" and "inner" speech and between the respective roles of grammar and logic. As background, recall the tenth-century controversy over the proper method to study semantics between the entrenched, indigenous Muslim grammatical tradition and the new, foreign Aristotelian logical–philosophical movement. The tension between the two schools can still be felt in the *Logic* where Maimonides repeatedly adopts the logicians' logical terminology and distinctions over the grammarians'.[37]

Although grammar and logic were in fact disjoint, competing disciplines, in chapter fourteen of *Logic* Maimonides describes their relation in more subtle terms. This chapter, which Maimonides largely "adapts" from al-Fārābī, opens by distinguishing three meanings or notions (*al-ma'ani)* meant by the equivocal term *māntiq* (which translates the Greek *logos* and is used for logic): (1) the rational (theoretical and practical) faculty; (2) the "intelligibles that one has already intellected and are called inner speech," and (3) the linguistic expression of the intelligibles "impressed upon the soul," which is called "external speech."[38] Putting aside the first sense of a faculty, Maimonides, following al-Fārābī, distinguishes here two kinds of "speech," external and inner. The second in turn is identified with intelligibles, although it is nowhere explained how the intellection, or presence in the soul, of an intelligible, or form, can constitute a kind of speech or language. The problem is that intelligibles, forms, or concepts, may be *of* the substances from which they are abstracted but, unlike significant speech, they do not *signify* or *represent* them. It may be unclear why the soul, or intellect, in which the intelligible is present does not become the substance whose form is identical to that intelligible, but it remains even more unclear why the intelligible should *represent* it. This difficulty remains unexplored in the *Logic*; however, Maimonides' discussion in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, as we shall see, may be sensitive to it.[39]

The range of Maimonides' conception of logic includes not just inner speech, or thought, but also external speech, the traditional domain of grammar. Logic, however, is not concerned with external speech in the same way as a grammar, namely, as well-formed strings of physical sounds that characterize a particular

human language. Instead logic analyzes external speech as the articulated expression in words of the intelligibles that constitute inner speech. Furthermore, it depends on external speech as its only access to inner speech. Thus logic, the proper philosophical study of language, studies both words in relation to the thoughts they express and thoughts as expressed in words.[40]

Inner and external speech are, then, two ontologically independent but epistemically interdependent representational systems. Maimonides' source for this idea of two kinds of speech, external and internal, is al-Fārābī's interpretation of the beginning of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione (Peri hermeneias)* 16a3–8, a passage that shaped almost all subsequent thinking about signification and meaning in the Middle Ages. Aristotle distinguishes three relations that hold among three relata: Written inscriptions are symbols of utterances, utterances are symbols of "traces in the soul" (*ton en te psyche pathematon*; Ackrill: "affections in the soul"), and the traces "are likenesses of" actual things, the extra mental beings about which we speak or think. In al-Fārābī's hands, the overall structure of Aristotle's picture remains the same, but several changes significantly alter its content.

First, al-Fārābī explains that what Aristotle means by the phrase "traces in the soul" are "thoughts, pictures, and representations," not just intelligibles but a full range of mental images, simple sensory ones as well as composites constructed by the imagination.[41] Although he does not explicitly use the term "inner speech" in the *Commentary* on *De Interpretatione*, al-Fārābī clearly thinks of Aristotle's mental traces as language – or – speechlike representational items. His source in turn may be Porphyry whom Boethius cites as his own source for an analogous distinction between "three discourses [*orationes*] – one written in letters, another uttered in speech, and a third put together in the mind."[42] For al-Fārābī and Maimonides as for Boethius, these three kinds of speech (written, spoken, and thought) are full linguistic systems with exactly the same corresponding "parts of discourse," nouns and verbs. In words strikingly reminiscent of al-Fārābī, Maimonides states that the scriptural terms "speaking" and "saying" mean equivocally "utterance by the tongue" and "notions represented by the intellect without being uttered."[43] Both are kinds of speech, one external, the other inner, even though, as Aristotle already says, they signify or represent in very different ways.

Al-Fārābī makes a second shift in his *Commentary* on *De Interpretatione* that is important for Maimonides. Where Aristotle writes that written inscriptions and spoken sounds, unlike "traces in the soul" and actual referents, "are not the same for all," al-Fārābī says that what he wished to say is that the former pair is "based on convention," and the latter pair "on nature."[44] Thus, the natural is the community – invariant and universal; the conventional is the community – relative. It follows

that external speech is the language that is conventional, and inner speech, or thought, is the natural language.

Taking off from an analogy first introduced by Plato in the *Cratylus* (389d), al-Fārābī sketches how external speech is conventionally introduced, comparing the "legislation" of speech for a community to the prescription of its conduct by laws.[45] Maimonides nowhere explicitly presents such an al-Fārābī-like account about the genesis of language, although it is openly adopted by later Maimonideans such as Shem Tov ibn Falaquera (thirteenth century).[46] These quasihistorical accounts depict how, beginning with gestures and idiosyncratic sounds, individuals come to repeat and reuse each other's sounds to designate the same intended object in intended conformity with each other. Under these circumstances of coordination, multiple speakers "form a convention" and "reach an agreement" about the signification of their words, sharing mutual beliefs and expectations about each other's regular use of the same sounds. In contemporary terminology, this is to say that two speakers X and Y participate in a conventional use of a sound S when X and Y use one sound S to signify one notion N, and X uses S because he believes that Y believes that it signifies N and because he believes that Y uses S because he (Y) believes that X believes that it signifies N.[47] Only after this coordination is in place, and a particular signification spreads through the whole community, does the word-giver come on stage who systematically, explicitly, and deliberately – that is, rationally – attempts to remedy gaps in the national vocabulary for practical and theoretical life. Because no explicit agreements or legislative meetings are deliberately convened at the first stage, this picture avoids the classic objection to conventionalist theories, met earlier in Halevi, that deliberate legislation or convention presupposes the existence of a language in which the conventions are stated. In sum, al-Fārābī's picture of contingent but nonarbitrary convention is less a speculative history and more of an analysis of what it is to be a language, that is, an account of how individual speakers' first- and second-order communicative intentions, by way of social coordination, are conventionally associated with words.

In light of this al-Farābian background, we can now sharpen Maimonides' exegesis of Genesis 2:20. The "languages" that he says are conventional are the languages of external speech specific to communities, and the reason why they are conventional, as the equivocal *ha-adam* suggests, is threefold: External speech is instituted by humans, initially by coordinated use within the community, and then by legislation by rulers. Not only do all three meanings of the biblical term *ha-adam* come into play; this explanation of language, its origin, and functioning is truly complex, involving at least three different factors.

We saw earlier that in his *Logic* Maimonides' states that logic is concerned with external speech insofar as it is an expression of inner speech, whereas grammar is concerned with external speech as distinct from inner speech. We are also now in a position to explain that difference. Logic is concerned with those rules that govern external speech that are "common to all languages" because all such universal rules will concern the notions "impressed on the soul," thought or inner speech; grammar proper concerns those idiosyncratic aspects of external speech that are specific to and vary with community. Which are the features of external speech that are "common to all languages" and, hence, reflective of inner speech? In a revealing statement borrowed from al-Fārābī, Maimonides states that, according to the ancients, "the relation of the art of logic with respect to the intellect is the same as that of the art of grammar with respect to language."[48] That is, logic, like grammar, is concerned with form or structure as opposed to content. Grammar is concerned with the syntax of external speech, and logic with the syntax of inner speech. It has been argued that al-Fārābī may have been the first in the Aristotelian tradition to articulate this conception of logic as the study of the form or structure [*ta'lif, tārkib*; lit: composition, combination] of a phrase as opposed to its content – the thing(s) or state of affairs it is about or, as al-Fārābī puts it, its matter [*madda*]. Given the further idea that logic is concerned with inner speech, it follows that logic is concerned with the syntax of inner speech, that is, the "logical form" of language insofar as it reveals the syntax of thought. It also follows on this al-Farābian–Maimonidean conception of logic that Aristotle's intelligibles are now endowed with the full status of a representational system articulated by its own syntax. Logic is a "grammar of the mind" indeed because its rules are "common to all languages," a universal grammar.[49]

In sum, there emerges, first in al-Fārābī and then in Maimonides, the idea of two full-blown representational systems, external speech and inner speech. The first is conventional, and the second natural and universal to humanity. Both, however, have the syntactic structure of a language, and logic is now primarily the study of the syntax of inner speech, the syntax relevant to correct reasoning and science. On all these points, Maimonides is, in the words of a recent scholar, the "faithful disciple of al-Fārābī." We now turn to three ways in which Maimonides goes beyond his teacher in the *Guide*.

First, Maimonides' al-Farābian terminology in the *Logic*, "inner speech," corresponding to Aristotle's "traces in the soul," is absent from the *Guide* where it is replaced by the Arabic logical-cognitive term *taṣawwur* that can be translated as (either the act or object of) "representation," "conception," or "conceptualization."[50] Although there is considerable scholarly debate about the

origin of this term, it refers in its basic case to the formation or grasp of simple concepts as wholes, typically essences, that is, what are given in definitions.[51] Its most distinctive feature arises from its contrast with a complementary term, *tāṣdiq* (the act or object of) judging-true or assenting to an opinion (moved by the force of demonstration, dialectic, or rhetoric). *Taṣawwur* is any cognitive act that does not involve the actual assignment of a truth value. In contemporary terms, it is closer to what we think of as simply grasping a meaning or entertaining a proposition. The notion is central to Maimonides' epistemology. Describing the actualization of the material intellect by abstraction of forms, or intelligibles, from sensible images, Maimonides distinguishes (1) "abstraction" (*tājrid*) of the (multiple) universal intelligible forms that can be "differentiated" in each composite particular sensible form; (2) "representation" (*taṣawwur*) of those same forms "with their causes," that is, articulation of the intelligible factors that show how they should be explained and understood; and (3) apprehension or thought of the abstracted and represented intelligible forms.[52] Maimonides does not make it clear in this description how the representations differ from the forms, or intelligibles, but the intelligible itself is now apprehended by way of its representation. What is believed and known with certainty is the "notion (*al-mʿani*) represented in the soul," not "the notion (*al-mʿani*) that is uttered"[53] – thus distinguishing the inner and external representations while underscoring their common representational status.

This change addresses one problem raised by Maimonides' earlier conception in the *Logic* of inner speech that he identified with intellected intelligibles. Recall that it was not clear how intellecting an intelligible, which simply consists in the intelligible being "in" or "present to" the intellect, could also furnish the representationality required of speech. It is not enough that the intelligible *be* the intellect, it must also *represent* the thing of which it is the form for the intellect. By explicitly shifting to the idea of *taṣawwur* and distinguishing the conception or representation itself from the intelligible, Maimonides can now distinguish between inner speech as the representational vehicle and the intelligible as its *content*. It is in virtue of its content that the representation signifies the external thing it is about, although in the course of apprehension the intellect ultimately becomes identical with the intelligible content of the representation.

Second, already in the *Logic*, chapter fourteen, Maimonides emphasizes the superiority of inner speech over external speech. Only when the rules of logic govern external speech is it "shown the way to what is correct and guarded from error" – implying that left to itself, or to the rules of grammar alone, "what is expressed by the tongue" would not "conform to what is in the mind."[54] To

acquire scientific knowledge of external reality, the external grammatical form of a sentence is a bad guide; instead one must uncover the logical form of the thought or of inner speech. So, to give one notable example, the *Guide* undertakes to translate systematically affirmative attributive statements about God in external speech, statements that wrongly presuppose the existence of attributes either as part of or in addition to the essence of the deity, into representations in inner speech that have the logical form of negations of privations, thereby avoiding the problematic presupposition.

This negative assessment of external speech becomes more pronounced in the *Guide*. The "summary fashion [*al-tājammul*]"[55] of the words of external speech is now said to "hide" the true reality represented by the inner intelligible. Because words are composed of matter as well as form, Maimonides argues that they are the objects of the faculty of imagination with which there "can be no critical examination."[56] The job of the logician is to translate the misleading constructions of external speech into the logically more perspicuous representations in inner speech. "Adamites" who seek the highest state of apprehension "only reflect on the mental representation of an intelligible," not on its embodiment in material words.[57]

In the *Guide* the mental representations of inner speech constitute the true language which, at least in one important case, functions independently of external speech. When the Psalmist writes: "The heavens tell of the glory of God" (Psalms 19:2), his scriptural descriptions of the celestial spheres as "speaking" and "telling" are not for Maimonides metaphorical figures, that is, projections onto the celestial spheres of "language appropriate to the state of the speaker." Instead they are to be interpreted literally as spheric (inner) "speech," for example, the spheric intellects' representations of their respective separate intellects. Maimonides claims that it is not just a contingent fact that the spheres, lacking the requisite organs, do not utter what they think. The spheres' "true praise," the real expression of their content, is expressed in the mental representation; "speech of lip and tongue" serves merely to "instruct someone else" (*Guide* II.5, p. 260; cf. I.65). That is, external speech is merely an externalization for communicative purposes of the true language, inner speech. Humans may not be able to grasp mental representations except through external language, but their existence and expressive power are independent of the latter and, for purposes of theoretical inquiry, inner speech is the more perspicuous and preferable system of representation than the words of external speech. As proof-text, Maimonides cites Psalms 4:5 to advocate the superiority of "silent" internal speech over "noisy" external speech.[58]

The third way in which the *Guide* departs from the al-Fārābī–shaped *Logic* is that its mental representations of inner speech, notwithstanding their superiority over

external speech, are also significantly limited with respect to the representation of the subject matter of divine science and especially of God, the absolutely simple being. As we have seen, inner speech, no less than external speech, is a full language, or system of representations, whose internal logical syntax may be different from the grammatical syntax of external speech, but it is no less of a syntax. Thus the representations of inner speech are also not just simple intelligibles but sentence-like propositions that involve structured relations between subjects and predicates, expressions that are subordinate to one another, and lexically and syntactically derived expressions. This kind of linguistic structure presupposes metaphysical distinctions (e.g., between essence, or substratum, and attribute) that in turn conflict with the kind of simplicity required for representations of absolutely simple beings (like God).[59] In sum, inner speech may be better than external speech, and perfectly adequate to guide correct reasoning in natural science, but even inner speech is not up to the representation of the deity and related topics in metaphysics.

The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

In Spain and Provence during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries philosophers continued to debate the question whether languages originated naturally or conventionally. Their discussions, however, often no more than citations of or brief comments on Maimonides' single statement in *Guide* II.30, in general do not go far to illuminate the nature of language itself. Joseph ibn Kaspi,[60] Gersonides,[61] Levi ben Abraham,[62] and Nissim b. Moses (Massilitani) of Marseilles[63] all advocate the conventional origins of language. Kaspi and Levi ben Abraham also acknowledge climatalogical effects on pronunciation and language formation in general, whereas Gersonides denies it, arguing that there can exist multiple languages within a single climate and that climate and geography fail to explain semantic relations. One exception to this rule is Hillel of Verona (ca. 1220–1295) who apparently holds that not only a specific capacity for language is innate in the human psyche but the Hebrew language itself.[64] His view is, however, thoroughly attacked by his contemporary Zerahiah ben Shealtiel Ḥen who argues, in a strikingly contemporary form, that neither the Hebrew language nor a language-specific capacity is innate. If Hebrew were innate, then "every man in the world, regardless of his actual language, would always carry the Holy Tongue in his nature and would be able to speak it . . . without hearing and learning," which is obviously absurd. More interesting, he argues, the capacity to speak a language is a function of no single in-borne faculty but many, including the extralinguistic powers of perception and imagination.

A more sustained discussion of language is found in the various writings of Joseph ibn Kaspi who shows, through repeated examples, how the language-giver

of Hebrew carefully chose words signifying beings on the basis of his complete scientific knowledge of their natures. Therefore, by close analysis of the philology of names and expressions in scripture, one can decode the essence, causes, or accidents of each being in virtue of which its name was chosen to signify it. Although languages, he nonetheless emphasizes, are conventional rather than natural, Hebrew in particular and the "holy books" composed in it, "contain every aspect of physics and metaphysics" and, thereby, constitute an encyclopedic source of natural (both physical and metaphysical) knowledge.[65] In a somewhat similar vein, Moses of Narbonne argues that there are deep parallels between the grammar of Hebrew and logic, from which he infers that at least that one language originated from reason and not by convention. Indeed its rationality is what makes Hebrew "the holy language," and close study of the meanings of Hebrew expressions can furnish one with natural knowledge.[66] In contrast to these explanations of the significance of the conventional words of Hebrew, it should be noted that others, for example, Judah ben Solomon ha-Kohen ibn Matqa (b. 1215 Toledo), author of the philosophical and scientific encyclopedia *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah*, turned to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet to decode the wisdom of the language and its compositions. Although the contents of the encoded wisdom turn out to be physics, mathematics, and astronomy, this method, focusing on the forms of the letters and their symbolic value, shows the strong influence of *Kabbalah* and the increasingly influential forces of Jewish mysticism on philosophical thinkers.[67]

Profiat Duran (Efodi; d. ca. 1414)

The most important, and original, post-Maimonidean philosophical work on language is the *Maʿaseh Efod,* a name based on Exodus 28:15, composed in 1403 by the Catalonian Profiat Duran, Isaac ben Moses Halevi, also known as Honorato the Bonafé and as Efodi.[68] It is not known at present whether Duran drew from indigenous Jewish sources (such as Joseph ibn Kaspi) or studied scholastic Latin works, but the *Maʿaseh Efod* is a speculative grammar in the style developed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by Latin Modist grammarians.[69] It is "speculative," meaning that its goal is not prescriptive – to teach correct use of the language – but explanatory. It is "in the style of" Modist grammars, meaning that, whether or not there was actual influence, Duran's approach to language is characterized by several Modistic themes. With the recovery of the full Aristotelian corpus and in particular *Posterior Analytics*, speculative grammarians were moved by Aristotle's desiderata for scientific theory to make the study of grammar into a science. In particular, they construct general grammars focused on universal features of language, they give causal explanations for linguistic universals like other subject matters of science,

and they show how linguistic notions can be derived from logic and metaphysical reality. Duran's conception of language as a *system* of significant and consignificant sounds, structured into word classes or categories; his semantic explanation of linguistic data by means of metaphysical distinctions and notions; and his conception of a universal grammar that is exemplified by Hebrew (in place of Latin) but applies to all languages – all these themes fall under the broad Modist rubric. In addition, reflecting his Jewish sources, Duran argues that language, although conventional, was originated by God.

According to Duran, a complete "science of language" (*ḥokhmat ha-lashon*) will cover grammar, rhetoric, and poetics, and "makes known general ways by which language is properly spoken according to the [accepted] convention (*hasqamat*) of that language."[70] This theory of language, however, is a "science" only in a loose sense because it is not based on true or verified first principles, intelligibles, or premises established by reason or experience. Instead, he uses "science" for any result of investigation and reasoning based on evidence, or proof drawn from prior principles, whether the premises be genuine first principles or just conventional truths, and this is the sense in which a theory of "proper speech" is a science or, as he sometimes calls it (*pace Guide* III.52), a "conventional science."[71]

How should one engage in the scientific study of language? Assuming the Aristotelian distinction between demonstrations *propter quid*, "from causes," which show both that and why a conclusion is true, and demonstrations *quia*, "from effects," which show only that, and not why, it is true, the ideal science of language should take the form of a demonstration *propter quid* in which one deduces the "proper speech" from first principles and conventions, inferences from causes that not only establish what constitutes proper speech, but also explain why it is proper. Duran argues that because we have lost knowledge of the first principles of the Hebrew language, that method is closed to us. We can therefore do no better than infer *quia* the principles of proper speech from the linguistic data we find in the scriptural corpus.[72]

With this conception of a science of language in hand, Duran opens the *Maʿaseh Efod*, on the standard scholastic model, with the definition of a language: "a collection of all the solely human sound units (*ʾaḥadei ha-qolot ha-ʾenoshiyim levad*) that, according to the convention of each nation, signify the existing things." Thus a language is, first and foremost, not just isolable nouns or words but a *system* of interrelated significant sounds. Duran then proceeds to explain each component of this definition. Sounds are *units* because they fall in the Aristotelian category of (discrete) quantity.[73] "*Human* sounds" are those produced by the five human vocal organs, i.e., the vocal sound specific to the faculty of hearing produced by

the striking of throat, tongue, jaw, teeth, and lips, together with air.[74] The qualification *solely* human sounds excludes human sounds produced with instruments such as horns and the shofar that also conventionally signify but do not count as "language." By adding the qualification "by convention" (or "agreement," Heb.: *hasqamah*), Duran announces that he endorses the view that language is conventional rather than natural – where "natural" means either that languages signify existing things according to their natures or that humans possess language as part their natural make-up. He immediately adds that the "convention" or "agreement" in question is that of "the giver (*meiniah*) or givers of language, not of current speakers; for convention/agreement presupposes a deliberate human choice and current speakers do not *choose* to speak their language but speak it by custom and habit (*hergel ve-minhag*)."[75] Thus "convention" for Duran necessarily involves voluntary choice, a meaning that will enable him to speak without contradiction of "divine convention." That the convention is "of each nation" allows for different languages for different peoples, with all their variations. Finally, by the "existing things" that the sounds signify, Duran says he means both things existing (only) in the soul and things existing outside it, including mental entities such as genuses and species as well as "false" and "deceptive" images that do not correspond to anything real.

Next, as a good Aristotelian, Duran proceeds to explain the existence and nature of language by means of the standard schema of four causes.[76] The material cause of language is sound; its formal cause, its significance. Thus the meaningful word – in Duran's Hebrew, *qol moreh*, corresponding to the Latin *vox significandi* – is a hylomorphic substance composed of matter (sound) and form (significance). The final cause of language is twofold: political and theoretical. Because humans, with all their physical weaknesses, cannot survive without a society, and a society cannot exist and its members cannot communicate without a language, language must exist. Furthermore, a language is necessary for intellectual perfection. The human requires a teacher to bring his intellect from potentiality to actuality, and no teacher, not even God, can teach without linguistic communication. In sum, the final cause of language is both communal welfare and individual human perfection, recalling Maimonides' two final ends for the Law in the *Guide* III.27.

Turning to the efficient cause of language, we have already seen that, in his opening definition, Duran states that languages are conventional and not natural. They are not natural because humans do not know their respective languages by a natural capacity and because words do not signify existent beings in virtue of their natures or essences. Duran suggests that those who hold this second view may have been misled by astrological theories according to which particular letters, and the sounds signified by them, are empowered by specific stars or planets to astrologically

influence existent beings. To be sure, this connection is not very clear and, in any case, it is no objection unless one rejects astrology.[77] It is also striking that Duran seems not to know the Platonic sources of this doctrine, and instead assumes that any such account of signification by nature falls under the talismanic, hermetic, magical conception of language attacked by Maimonides (*Guide* III.29).[78] Furthermore, it will turn out that Duran's own view, despite its conventionalism, is very close to the Platonic view. It should be noted, however, that Duran's conception of the natural includes the astrological because astrology locates the causal source of language in the celestial bodies and "everything that proceeds from the celestial forces is natural."[79] At the end of the day, however, Duran does not really argue seriously against naturalism about language; dismissingly he simply says, "everyone who knows the truth knows that language does not signify naturally but by convention and that we do not possess language by a natural capacity."[80]

Duran believes language originated conventionally, not because it is a human artifact, but because its significance is "imposed" (*hunaḥ*) on its material sound by the voluntary and deliberate choice of an agent, whoever that may be. This notion of the conventional opens up the possibility of an extrahuman efficient cause of language. Thus Duran begins the chapter on the efficient cause of language by professing "according to our belief, we who believe in the creation of the world, it necessarily follows that the efficient cause of the conventional language that we humans speak was either God . . . or Adam," evidently seeing nothing incompatible with an (efficient) *cause* being a *Creator.*[81] It is clearly the voluntaristic character of the causal agent that he wishes to single out. Against the view that the originator of language was Adam, based on Genesis 2: 20, Duran argues that this verse can hardly ground the conclusion that Adam thereby originated a *language*. For the animals are only a small subset of all the substances (*atzamim*) named by linguistic substantives, or nouns, and those terms are in any case only a small part of a language, which also includes words for accidents, or adjectives, verbs, and particles, none of which are said to have been named by Adam. Note that underlying Duran's argument is the (then not at all obvious) point that, despite the almost exclusive Aristotelian focus on the noun, a language is a whole system of interrelated categories of expressions.

Instead, Duran argues, it is God who is the efficient cause of language, who originated language as a providential act to enable human communal welfare and individual perfection, the dual final causes of language. In support of his thesis that language was originated by God through "absolute convention" (*hasqamah be-muḥlat*), Duran cites Halevi and the *Sefer ha-Yetzirah*.[82] The picture of language that emerges from Duran's explanation is very different from theirs, however. Although divinely originated, its purpose or final cause is the human good. God is the Creator

of language only in that He voluntarily (hence, conventionally) imposes significance on sounds. Because His act of imposition also reflects His knowledge of the natures of the things named, it is also the case that the names could not be other than they are (on pain of being false), hence, they are necessary. Names are, in Hebrew, *musqamim*, not only because they originated in a voluntaristic act, but because they agree with the natures of their referents. Indeed Duran argues that names are lexically derived from predicates that characterize the natures of the things signified. The reason God brought the animals to Adam was, not to give them names, but to test whether he would use *his* intellect to call them by their proper names, that is, the names God gave them that correspond to their natures. Genesis 2:20 is a trial of human reason.[83]

Duran concludes that the original divine language is (Adamic) Hebrew, but what distinguishes it is not, as it is for Halevi, a function of its spiritual character, its holiness, or its metaphysical or supernatural status. Instead, what is distinctive about it is that it is a "pure" – in that sense "one" – language not mixed with or corrupted by words from other languages. Because of its purity, Hebrew can transparently exemplify those of its features that are invariant features of *all* languages. Other languages, because of their idiosyncratic imperfections, do not openly manifest their universal features, at least in their present condition. Hebrew is *the* model or paradigm from which one can generalize to what holds universally in all languages, especially insofar as its linguistic structure and categories correspond to categories and distinctions in reality. So, although the *Maʿaseh Efod* is a grammar of Hebrew (and all of its examples are taken from Hebrew, ignoring other languages), and Duran explicitly tries to show the (relative) superiority of Hebrew (especially to its rivals Arabic, Greek, and Latin), he also makes it clear that "from what he says about Hebrew other languages will be understood and everything he says about Hebrew includes them."[84] What makes Hebrew special is not what differentiates it from all other languages but that it unequivocally shows what is universal to all languages. Duran's Hebrew grammar is meant to be nothing less than a universal grammar. This brings us to a final distinctive characteristic of Duran's *Maʿaseh Efod*, and one of its most interesting aspects.

If grammar is a science, it is concerned with reality or the world, not directly but as it is reflected in language. Not all features of a language reflect the world; those that are peculiar to one or another language and vary with community are not objects of scientific grammar. Building on the concern of traditional grammars with types or categories of words and of their constructions, scientific grammars focus on those meaning-components of individual words that are constitutive of their grammatical categories or of the word classes to which they belong, that is, their

meaning insofar as they belong to a grammatical category. In Latin terminology, these are called *modi significandi*, modes of significance, although Duran himself does not use a technical term for these features.[85] Nonetheless these general meaning-components are his concern in practice, and these are the linguistic features that he explains in terms of metaphysically real distinctions in the world. Two examples will suffice to show this.[86]

It is a linguistic universal, according to Duran, that there are exactly three parts of speech, all three of which are found in all languages: nouns (*shemot*), verbs (*po'alim*), and particles (*millot ha-ti'amim*, *ha-ta'am*, or *keilim*).[87] This linguistic universal is, he argues, in turn based on metaphysical reality. As for Aristotle, a noun is a word that (conventionally) signifies some notion (*'inyan*) abstracted from, or independent of, time, be it of a substance (*'etzem*) or an accident (*miqreh*). In contrast, a verb signifies some notion *with* its time of occurrence (*metziuto*; lit: existence), be it past, present, or future. Particles signify connections between substances (or names) and accidents (or verbs) and modes of those connections. Now, the reason why there must be particles to connect the two is, Duran argues, because substances exist independently of anything else and bear accidents, unlike accidents that have no independent existence and are borne by (or predicated of) substances. Therefore, some sound in the language was needed to signify their connection. Likewise, because accidents exist in a subject only at a time, it was necessary to posit some linguistic particle to mark this aspect, and a linguistic device was also necessary to express the mode (*'eikhut*) of predication of the accident in the substance. Unlike substances and accidents that have extralinguistic reality, what particles signify are objects of the intellect that have no extramental existence; in medieval Latin terminology, they are syncategoramatic. Thus, the universal division of language into three basic parts corresponds to a universal, and basic, metaphysical distinction between substance and accident and the modes by which accidents inhere in substances. Duran acknowledges that earlier Hebrew grammarians recognized these three basic parts of language, but he argues that because they did not have a metaphysical explanation for the three categories, and merely gave examples, they often erred, classifying pronouns with particles and failing to realize that privative terms also fall under the category of nouns (by a "second imposition" even though they do not signify a substance by the "first imposition"). Thus the metaphysics not only explains but also clarifies the linguistic facts.

This first explanation focuses on the metaphysics of sublunar substances and accidents. Duran also offers a second explanation for the three parts of language according to which they correspond to the totality of what exists.[88] There are three general kinds of beings: (1) the intelligible world that is completely independent of

matter and, hence, motion; (2) the world of unchanging substances and eternally moving spheres; and (3) the world of generated and corrupted substances (that lack all true existence). Just so, there are three parts of language. The name corresponds to the intelligible world that is independent of all motion (and, hence, time), the verb to the eternal spheres that are continually in motion (hence, connected to time), and the particles, which have no extralinguistic significance, to the world of generation and corruption that lacks all reality independently of the sphere and separate intellects. Furthermore, Duran argues that, corresponding to the order of this metaphysical hierarchy, there is an analogous order of dependence among the three parts of speech in Hebrew. The completely unchanging and unmodified name in Hebrew was laid down (*hunaḥ*) first, then the verb, and finally the particle. This is not the case, he argues, in Latin and Greek in which the name also undergoes modification depending on its use. Thus, although all languages have the three parts of speech, only the linguistic facts in Hebrew exemplify the full metaphysical reality that lies behind them.

Admittedly, there is a *midrashic* quality to this cosmic explanation of the parts of speech, and it also recalls kabbalistic explanations of language, although the concepts are all Aristotelian.[89] The measure of Duran's innovativeness emerges, however, when we compare him with al-Fārābī and Maimonides. For all three, what is universal in human language corresponds to what is natural. For the two earlier figures, what is natural is expressed perspicuously only in the thoughts or representations of inner speech as opposed to obscure and obfuscating external speech, which itself is conventional as opposed to natural. For al-Fārābī and Maimonides, it is also because the syntax of inner speech "resembles" or, like a picture, represents what is natural, namely, the extralinguistic world, that inner speech serves as a reliable guide to truth in the sciences. Duran draws no distinction between inner and external speech; hence, the universal features are simply features of external speech or language. Rather than picturing or resembling the extralinguistic world, they are *explained* by its general metaphysical features. Hence, for Duran, although grammar is still an instrument for the other sciences, it can also claim to be a science in its own right.

A second example of Duran's Modist–like approach to the explanation of linguistic data in terms of extralinguistic facts is his semantic account of four linguistic differences that Abraham ibn Ezra had drawn between the (particular) substantival noun (*shem 'etzem*), or what we would nowadays call a proper name, and the accident-word or adjective (*shem to'ar*), using the metaphysical distinction between substances and accidents.[90] Duran first explains ibn Ezra's linguistic differences and then corrects or qualifies them in light of the metaphysics. The linguistic

differences Ibn Ezra notes are that (1) a substantival name, unlike an adjective, cannot be made into a verb; (2) substantival nouns, unlike adjectives, cannot be pluralized (for example, we cannot make the plural "Abrahamim" ["Abrahams"] from "Abraham"); (3) grammatical constructs (*semikhah*) cannot be formed from substantival nouns (e.g, "Abraham of the peoples") unlike adjectives (e.g., "great of the peoples" [Psalms 47:7]); and (4) a definite description cannot be constructed from a substantival noun, unlike an adjective, by prefixing a determiner, for example, *Ha-Avraham* ("The Abraham").

In each case, Duran explains the linguistic fact by means of the metaphysical difference between a substance – whose existence is independent of all else – and an accident – whose existence is entirely dependent on the things of which it holds. For example, a substantival name cannot be pluralized because the nature in virtue of which it signifies is unique to it; an adjective has a plural because accidents can hold of multiple subjects. Similarly, substantival nouns do not take the determiner because they are already maximally determined, and they cannot enter into constructs because a substance is never predicated of anything else, unlike adjectives that signify accidents that must be predicated of substances.

After explaining Ibn Ezra's linguistic observations using this metaphysics, Duran next refines, or corrects them, by drawing a further distinction among nouns between those that signify "first(-order)" substances (e.g., "man" in "Jack is a man") and those that signify "second(-order)" substances such as genuses and species (e.g., "man" in "Man is a rational animal"), a distinction that corresponds to the scholastic distinction between first and second "impositions" of names.[91] For example, Duran reformulates ibn Ezra's claim that substantival nouns cannot be pluralized so that it holds only for primary substantival names; secondary names of second-order substances (e.g., species and genuses) do have plural forms because their specific and generic forms can be shared. Similarly, like adjectives, definite descriptions can be constructed from secondary substantival nouns because genera and species, like accidents, admit further determination.[92]

Duran's metaphysical explanation of these linguistic features is remarkable on several counts. First, it is not the specific meanings of individual words but the general meaning, or significance, of a word class or syntactic category that does the explanatory work, for example, the semantic fact that substantival nouns or names signify substances: adjectives and verbs, accidents. Second, by examining the interaction among syntactic features of one word or the features of different categories, Duran focuses on the semantics of consignification, the semantics that determines which words can grammatically co-occur and which changes of meaning are induced by different grammatical features. Although he does not make this

explicit, Duran's analysis comes close, like the Modists, to viewing words as bundles or complexes of features that determine which words can combine with others and establish dependencies among co-occurring elements. Finally, Duran focuses, not on what *must* be or in fact *is* meant by words, but on what *cannot* be meant by them, that is, on configurations or word complexes that cannot occur significantly in language. That rules of language constrain what cannot be said, rather than determine what is said, is a very modern understanding of semantics.

II. SIGNIFICATION

The mechanism of signification, the question how names and descriptions refer to objects in the external world, was of special importance for medieval Jewish thinkers because of its implications for names and descriptions of God. With respect to this issue as well, some hold that signification is natural, others that it is conventional. With one exception, the dominant model of singular signification was Aristotle's, sketched in the opening passage of *De Interpretatione* 16a 3–8. This section will discuss Maimonides' appropriation of the Aristotelian conception that, again, was strongly influenced by al-Fārābī. At the end of our discussion, we turn to an alternative account found in Halevi.

Recall that Aristotle distinguishes three simple relations among four relata: (1) written inscriptions "symbolize" spoken utterances, (2) spoken utterances "symbolize" and are also "in the first place signs of" "traces in the soul," and (3) the traces are "likenesses" of extramental entities in the external world. Yet, although utterances signify thoughts and thoughts signify objects, Aristotle does not infer that utterances thereby signify objects. Now, Aristotle's own intention in this passage is a subject of debate, but al-Fārābī shaped its interpretation in three ways.[93] First, he takes the "traces in the soul" to be "thoughts, pictures, and representations."[94] Second, Aristotle uses different Greek words for "symbols" (*symbola*) and "signs" (*semeia*), but Ishāq ibn Hunāyn translated both by one active participle *dallun ʿala* – "is indicative of," "refers to," or "is an indication of."[95] As a result of this translation, the single term *dāll* suggests the possibility of compound signification relations (assuming transitivity) in addition to the three simple relations enumerated by Aristotle. In this vein, al-Fārābī interprets Aristotle's phrase that X signifies Y "in the first place" to mean "without anything in between" X and Y, implying that there can also be signification relations *in the second place*, that is indirectly, through the mediation of an intervening representation Z.[96] Thus, he concludes that utterances signify (in the second place) the objects signified (in the first place) by their intervening thoughts – a relation like the contemporary semantic notion of reference.

Notwithstanding the common term *dāll*, al-Fārābī emphasizes that the various signification mechanisms are entirely different. On the one hand, the thoughts "convey the sense-object's essence or some other aspect that can be conveyed"; hence, their signification is by nature. On the other hand, inscriptions and utterances signify their respective mental representations "by virtue of being common signs," signals that, as a result of psychological conditioning and association, "remind" or "bring to mind" the signified thought. This counts for al-Fārābī as signification by convention.[97] His idea that the thought signifies by "conveying" the essence or some other aspect of the external object is evidently meant to capture Aristotle's talk of "likeness." Aristotle himself never explains how "likeness" can explain or underwrite a thought's representational status.[98] Al-Fārābī seems to hold that, if the thought "conveys the sense-object's essence" or some other uniquely identifying feature, then the object is signified in virtue of being the unique bearer of that essence or because it is uniquely identified by the aspect.[99] In Maimonides' terminology, Aristotle's traces and al-Fārābī's thoughts are mental representations whose *content* expresses the essence or a uniquely identifying aspect of the extramental referent that is signified in virtue of satisfying that content. It should be emphasized that, for both al-Fārābī and Maimonides, what signifies the object by expressing its essence or nature (or by "imitating" it, as in onomatopoeia) is always the mental notion, never the written inscription or spoken utterance.[100] For Maimonides the view that words themselves express or bear essences may be what lies behind the magical, superstitious, even idolatrous conceptions of words and letters that he repeatedly attacks.

This last point contrasts with the third al-Farābian theme about signification that is important for Maimonides. Although simple words do not resemble their extralinguistic significanda, "the composition (*tā'lif*) of sentences follows the composition of affairs, and what is imitated by sentences is compound affairs."[101] That is, the composition, or structure, of the worldly state of affairs signified by a sentence, or at least that there is some such composition, can somehow be read off the composition, or syntax, of the sentence. What about the logical syntax of thoughts? Recall that al-Fārābī is concerned with external speech (only) insofar as it is an expression of inner speech: that "expressions are considered as imitating thoughts, as though they were put in their place, and substituted for them." At the same time, al-Fārābī also states that sentence/affairs imitation is asymmetrical and conventional, unlike the thought/affairs imitation that he says is symmetrical and natural.[102] These claims are not jointly consistent. The important moral for Maimonides, however, is that there is some imitation, or correspondence, between the composition, or syntax, of our external and inner representations and the composition, or structure,

of extralinguistic states of affairs. If a representation is composite, then so is the state of affairs. This is enough, we shall see, to make trouble for our representations of and about the deity.

That Maimonides assumes this Aristotelian–al-Farābian conception of signification emerges very clearly in one passage in the *Guide* that describes a failure of linguistic signification. He argues that one who affirms that God has positive attributes does not have a false belief about God; rather "he has abolished his belief in the existence of the deity without being aware of it."[103] He knows nothing about God "except the mere term 'God'," and applies the affirmative attribute, not to God (despite his use of the name "God"), but to some other nonexistent object, "an invention that is false; for he has, as it were, applied this term to a notion (*maʿna*) lacking existence, as nothing in existence is like that notion."[104] Like al-Fārābī, Maimonides assumes that what determines the referent of a speaker's use of a linguistic expression is the notion, or mental representation "applied to," or signified by, the external expression. These notions or representations are composed of attributes – essential or identifying – that determine the referent, namely, the thing, whatever it is, existent or imaginary, that possesses the attributes – regardless of the speaker's referential intention. Suppose, for example, a speaker uses a given name intending to designate a particular object. If the representation associated with the name and *imagined* by the speaker to designate the object, in reality does not – because the intended referent does not possess the attributes expressed in the representation or, in general, is not "like" the way it is so represented – the name fails to designate the referent.

What does the name designate? Maimonides distinguishes two cases. In one, in which the speaker "apprehends part of the [true reality of some matter] and is ignorant of another part," his apprehension "is different from what *that thing* really is," that is, his apprehension "falls short" of being true, but he nonetheless signifies the intended referent.[105] In the second case, in which the individual has either a false categorial belief about the intended referent – he believes taste is a quantity – or a set of radically incoherent beliefs with which he represents the purported referent – an elephant "possessing one leg and three wings, inhabiting the depths of the sea, having a transparent body and a broad face like that of man in its form and shape, talking like a man, and sometimes flying in the air, while at other times swimming like a fish" – then Maimonides writes: "I will not say that this representation of the elephant differs from what the latter really is, nor that the man in question falls short in his apprehension of the elephant . . . [the term designates] a thing lacking existence to which a term signifying an existent thing has been applied."[106] The individual does not have a false belief about taste or

elephants but no belief about them, period. The mental representation, despite its associated name, signifies something else, which, at least in this case, also happens to be an "invention."

Similarly, Maimonides argues, if we believe that the deity – the necessary existent and absolutely simple being – possesses affirmative attributes. Despite our use of the name "God," "we apply this term 'God' to absolute nonexistence."[107] We do not have a false belief about God but no belief, true or false, about God, period. For the entity signified by the name is that which possesses the properties expressed by the mental representation associated with the name, and because the properties in question are demonstrably false of God, the signified entity cannot be God but must be some other imagined being.

This argument assumes the Aristotelian–al-Farābian account that a name signifies its external referent only by way of an intermediate mental representation or notion that it directly signifies. Rather than speak of "likeness," Maimonides takes the attributes to be the descriptive content of the representation that determines the referent. This account raises two difficulties. The first problem, which is analogous to an objection raised against contemporary description theories of names, is that if a speaker's use of a name signifies the object that possesses the essence or uniquely identifying features expressed in the notion or representation the speaker associates with the name, then he must be close to omniscient to signify as many objects as he does. As we saw in part I, many medieval Jewish thinkers assume that Adam or the name-giver (or God) is in fact omniscient. Whether or not one finds this plausible, signification of God raises the opposite problem. For it is, to say the least, controversial whether *any* human being possesses knowledge of His essence or identifying attributes. Lacking that knowledge, however, how can humans signify God?

The problem is exacerbated for Maimonides by his Avicennian conception of God as the being who is necessarily existent in virtue of itself, absolutely one, incomposite, incomparable, and uncaused. Among the names of God, Maimonides distinguishes the Tetragrammaton (*YHVH*) from all other terms that signify Him, such as "Elohim" or "The Merciful." The Tetragrammaton is "the name that has been originated without derivation" and "gives a clear unequivocal indication of His essence," which Maimonides, hesitatingly, proposes is, "perhaps . . . the notion of a necessary existence, according to the [Hebrew] language of which we today know only a very scant portion."[108] This last remark suggests that, if we only knew more about the Hebrew language, we would have a better understanding of the Tetragrammaton. The real problem is not our deficient knowledge of Hebrew but our incomplete understanding of necessary existence. When Maimonides says that this name is "underived" and "unequivocally indicates" God's essence, he

is claiming that two features of the name resist human understanding. First, that the term "is unequivocal" means that it applies exclusively to God (via His essence) and, being unequivocal, is also not lexically derived from any other term as a secondary use or by transfer – unlike "merciful" that signifies God by way of His analogically understood divine actions. Maimonides emphasizes that even "existence" as it occurs in "necessary existence" (applied to God) is not an attribute, hence, not the same expression as the apparent homonym that applies to other beings.[109] Second, the Tetragrammaton, as opposed to the other names, is "underived" in a logical syntactic sense.[110] Following al-Fārābī, Maimonides holds that the logical forms of terms such as "The merciful" are "derivative," or paronyms (derived from names of properties such as "mercy"), and thereby "indicate a notion and a substratum that is not clearly stated and with which the notion in question is connected."[111] In contemporary logical terms, "The merciful" has the logical form of a definite description: "The (unique thing) x such that x is merciful," in which the paronymic predicate 'is merciful' "indicates" an "unstated substratum" in the position marked by the variable x. The Tetragrammaton, on the other hand, is underived; its *logical syntax* indicates no attribute and unstated substratum. Absent all internal structure, it is a pure and logically simple name.

Furthermore, recall that according to al-Fārābī, syntactically composite expressions, and their corresponding mental representations, "imitate" their referents, implying that they are metaphysically composite (even if their exact structure is different). In the case of the deity, such internal structure implied by the logical syntactic structure of a singular term would conflict with His simplicity. Thus, all descriptions of God such as "The merciful," given their internal syntax, are strictly speaking falsely of God inasmuch as they make the presupposition that He is composite, "not an essence alone, but an essence possessing attributes" and thereby "produce in one's fantasy the conception of multiplicity."[112] Although we may not know what the unequivocal and lexically underived Tetragrammaton signifies, unlike descriptions of God, at least its simple form does not misrepresent the deity as something composite.

In sum, Maimonides' theory of signification leaves him with a name for God for which it is unclear how, on its own terms, it signifies the deity and with other descriptions that cannot signify without misrepresenting Him. The ultimate source of these problems is the Aristotelian–al-Farābian framework in which he is working. An alternative to that conception of signification, or naming, is alluded to by Halevi in *Kuzari*. Although Halevi also holds something like the Aristotelian theory for names of created beings – whose names were divinely bestowed by God in light of His knowledge of the natures of their bearers – he proposes a different account

for the name of God, the Tetragrammaton "YHVH," which he contrasts with the name "Elohim," the general term for a ruler and authority. According to the Sage, the Tetragrammaton is "particular," a proper name like "Reuben" or "Simeon" whose "respective personalities" one can understand from "what is meant by their names."[113] The Khazar then appropriately asks: "how do [we] identify someone [that is, God] as a distinct individual who cannot even be referred to?"[114] The Sage replies:

> But surely one can refer to Him by means of prophetic vision and [spiritual] insight . . . Someone who has heard His direct address, His order, and His prohibition, [and experienced] His reward for obedience and His punishment for disobedience, designates Him by means of a proper name, which stands for that [Being] who directly addressed him.[115]

Here Halevi proposes that, even lacking all descriptive knowledge of something, one can refer to it in virtue of one's perceptual, causal, and contextual relations. What grounds signification or, more correctly, reference to God is not some intermediate representation that expresses the essence or distinguishing properties of a being, knowledge of which enables the speaker to signify that being. Rather, Halevi distinguishes two cases. First, what directly fixes the reference is an individual's – paradigmatically, a prophet's – experience of God, be it perceptual or causal, for example, as the patient or beneficiary of His acts. Halevi describes all these relations as instances of being "being addressed," that is, as standing in a second-person relation to the addresser, here God. In virtue of being "directly addressed," the human addressee is able to refer back directly to God, the one who addresses him. Second, those humans who are not directly addressed are in turn able to refer to God "after [first] accepting on faith the tradition of their father [who received it] by means of prophetic vision."[116] According to Halevi, Adam was the first to be so addressed by God and, in virtue of his second-person relation, directly referred to Him. Next Cain, Abel, Noah, and the Patriarchs, accepting that tradition, "called Him YHVH in their visions as well." Finally, "the people who accepted their authority by accepting [their] tradition on faith also called Him YHVH."[117] Halevi does not explain what it means to "accept a tradition on faith," but it is clear enough that a speaker who is not himself directly addressed by God can refer to Him with the Tetragrammaton because he takes himself to be so authorized by the speaker from whom he acquired the name in virtue of accepting his authority and belonging to one tradition. If one is not directly addressed by God, he can nonetheless refer to Him, with the Tetragrammaton, in virtue of belonging to the same community, and sharing beliefs and presuppositions that ground shared

references. For Halevi, experience – the second-person experience of address – is primary but, where it is not available, the social picks up the slack.

III. VARIETIES OF POLYSEMY

According to the author of the thirteenth-century Provençal popular encyclopedia, *Ruah Ḥen* (*Spirit of Grace*), "One who does not know to distinguish among different kinds of words will never completely understand the books of wisdom with their many hidden meanings, because behind these words in general are the secret truths of wisdom."[118] The different kinds of words to which he is referring are those Maimonides enumerates in the Introduction to the *Guide* whose first purpose, he says, is to explain the multiple meanings of scriptural terms that are either equivocal (Ar: *mushtarika*, Heb: *meshuttafim*, lit: shared), metaphorical (Ar: *musta'ara*, Heb: *mush'alim*; lit: borrowed), or amphibolous (Ar. *mushakkika*, Heb: *mesuppaqim*). Ordinary readers, Maimonides says, assume that corporeal or anthropomorphic terms in scripture applied to God have only that one – demonstrably – false sense, leaving them in a state of anxious, confused perplexity. To relieve that tension, Maimonides "ambiguates" each such term, showing that it has multiple meanings, and then *dis*ambiguates the term by selecting at least one meaning that is unproblematically applicable to the deity. Even if one cannot always identify the unique intended meaning, it is enough for Maimonides' purposes to know that there is some noncorporeal nonanthropomorphic sense in which the word can be meaningfully applied to God.[119]

Maimonides' method led to a cottage industry among medieval Jewish philosophers engaged in explicating the varieties of polysemy and multiple meanings of words, often in the context of scriptural exegesis and with particular reference to accounts of divine attributes.[120] Maimonides' source for his division of polysemous terms is *Categories*, chap. 1, 1a 1–15 where Aristotle distinguishes homonyms, synonyms, and paronyms.[121] Putting aside paronymy, Aristotle takes the first two to mark a distinction between things, not words. Things that have only a name in common but different "definitions of being" (or meaning) are homonyms; for example, a river-side and money-depository are homonymously banks. Things that share a name *and* definition are synonyms, e.g., humans and oxen are synonymously animals. Already, however, in al-Fārābī's *Short Treatise*, an important influence on Maimonides as well as later scholastic figures, these distinctions shift from things to words.[122] In his *Logic*, chapter 13, Maimonides undertakes a systematization of polysemy, beginning with a threefold distinction between words that are (1) distinct (*nivdalim*; that is, different words each with a different meaning);

(2) synonyms (*nirdafim*, that is, different words with the same meaning); and (3) equivocals (*meshutafim*, that is, one word with different meanings), which he then follows with a second sixfold classification:[123]

1. Purely equivocal terms (*meshutafim shittuf gamur*), or homonyms, that is, words that "have only the name in common and nothing else."[124]
2. Univocal terms (*muskamim*), that is, words that apply to multiple things with one meaning, such as, 'living' as it applies to cows, humans, and snakes.
3. Amphibolous terms (*mesuppaqim*). These words seem to have been originally intended to be intermediate between univocal and equivocal terms. In his *Logic*, Maimonides takes the amphibolous to be terms that apply to things that differ essentially and share an accidental similarity, for example, 'human' applied to a live person and to a statue. Al-Ghazālī gives as an example 'exists' applied to substances and accidents. Others (e.g., Narbonne) focus on applications, one of which is logically prior to the other, or applications to multiple things related to one cause or end, or analogies based on resemblance. Over time this category comes closest to the class of terms that share a focal meaning.[125]
4. Metaphorical terms (*mush'alim*), that is, terms transferred on an occasion of use from a home domain to a foreign domain of application, based on some resemblance between the two domains.
5. Frozen-metaphorical terms or terms with a secondary sense (Ar. *al-ism al-manqul*; Heb. *ha-shem ha-ne'etaq*; lit: a transferred term), that is, terms transferred like metaphor but whose transferred application over time has become fixed, dead, or literalized or terms that were introduced as specialized extensions of ordinary uses, especially in science in which a term from ordinary discourse is appropriated for a technical use, for example, 'binding' in its ordinary and chemical senses.[126]
6. Terms used with wider and narrower senses, such as 'kleenex' applied to the name brand and to all tissues.

Maimonides' distinctions and terminology were refined and developed by later thirteenth- and fourteenth-century thinkers. One question of controversy concerned whether amphibolous and metaphorical meanings are grounded on linguistic or ontological factors. Samuel ibn Tibbon explains Maimonides' distinctions in linguistic terms, arguing, for example, that the direction of metaphorical transfer always goes from the human to nonhuman, from the higher to the lower species, and from the natural to artificial, because it is the human who conventionally gives names – and, he seems to assume, humans are anthropocentric by nature.[127] To cite another example, the primary meaning of the word "foot" was the human limb, which is in the lower part of the body and bears the weight of the torso and was borrowed to refer to the lower part of a table that also bears the weight of the object. With words like "foot," Ibn Tibbon also notes that transfer is forced in one direction: We can transfer a term from a primary application to an independently

distinguishable element (the human limb) to something not independently differentiated (the foot of a mountain) but not vice versa. Likewise, the term *hashgahah*, or "providence," must have originally applied to the human activity of oversight – literally, watching over (with one's eyes) and saving from danger – and only afterwards was transferred to the divine application. Had the original application been to God, there is no respect in which the human activity resembles it. If the human attribution was primary, however, there is a sense in which God, who does not literally see, nonetheless watches over things. In short, Ibn Tibbon's explanations of metaphorical transfer rest entirely on linguistic grounds.

Ontological issues are at the heart of Gersonides' explanation of meaning extension and modulation. Although he does not use the term *mesupak*, he is clearly in search of an analogous intermediate category that avoids the problematic consequences of univocality and equivocality for terms that apply both to God and creatures. If the applications are univocal, one violates the incomparability of God. If the applications are purely equivocal, then all inferences from creatures to the deity are fallacious. Gersonides therefore proposes that terms that apply both to God and creatures are "equivocal in the sense of prior and posterior predication," for example, "knowledge" is predicated of God primarily and of all other things secondarily.[128] Gersonides argues that the predication to God is the prior one because His knowledge is identical to His essence; it is the cause of creatures' knowledge, and it is the most perfect knowledge. That is, what is ontologically prior determines what is linguistically prior.

All of these thinkers beginning from Maimonides take polysemy to be a virtue of language that enables humans to express more meanings than there are word forms. Only in Duran's *Ma'aseh Efod* do we find a dissenting view.[129] Recall that Duran argues that God was the efficient cause, or originator, of language. He begins by arguing that metaphor and secondary extensions of meaning must have been created by humans after the divine origination of language because God surely would not have provided insufficient words for all the meanings humanity needs to express. Dissatisfied with their given lot of words, humans were driven by their desires to express more meanings, and to meet the inexhaustible needs of the sciences, to invent metaphors and amphibolous, and equivocal terms. Thus polysemy is a symptom of a human moral failure to contain one's semantic desires. Duran also entertains the rabbinic idea that the Torah, and therefore scriptural Hebrew, preexisted creation and humanity, in which case its metaphors and secondary meanings must have been originated by God Himself. Duran objects, saying that surely such a divine language would have been more "proper" (*na'ut*) and perfect if it furnished a distinct word type (*gezerah*) for each meaning (*kavvanah*)! Therefore, he replies, "the

most important of grammarians" argue that what *appear* to be multiple meanings are in reality only *one* meaning, or at the very least they minimize the degree of polysemy. Like some contemporary philosophers, Duran takes polysemy, or ambiguity, to be a defect of natural languages to be eliminated from a perfect and divine language.[130]

NOTES

1 With the exception of Judah Messer Leon's unpublished *Sefer Mikhlal Yofi* (*The Book of the Perfection of Beauty*), there is no work of scholastic logic (including topics in the philosophy of language such as supposition) by a Jew in Hebrew. As Manekin 1999 observes, medieval Jewish philosophers almost entirely focused on the topics of the *logica antiqua* rather than *modernorum*.
2 The only monograph-length studies of language in medieval Jewish philosophy are Zwiep 1997 and, as part of the history of medieval Jewish logic, Rosenberg 1975. See also Schreiner 1983, p. 224; L. Goodman 1992a; J. Stern 1986.
3 *Babylonian Talmud*, Rosh Hashanah 32a; Sanhedrin 19a.
4 See Zwiep 1997, pp. 113–114, *Midrash Tehillim ha-mevoʿar* 762/2001–2002, chap. 90, 391; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 1970, p. 3; Scholem 1972.
5 Scholem 1972.
6 The Arabic term *ism* for name and likewise the Hebrew *shem* are used to refer to both nouns and verbs, loosely to all words, not only names in the narrow sense.
7 H. Wolfson 1961.
8 Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis* I, 20, cited in H. Wolfson 1961, p. 226; cf. Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 52, 149, cited ibid.
9 Philo, ibid. 52, 148, cited ibid.
10 On the similarity of Philo's view to rabbinic and Stoic views, see Zwiep 1997, pp. 118–19.
11 For reasons of space, I will not discuss allegorical interpretation, the meanings of parables in biblical exegesis, or rhetorical issues of meaning.
12 Margoulioth 1905; Mahdi 1970, 1975; al-Fārābī 1981, p. cxxiiff.; Kraemer 1986a, pp. 104–16; Kraemer 1986b, pp. 14–165; Gyekye 1989.
13 Sabra 1980, p. 747.
14 Introduction to his Hebrew translation *Sefer Ha-riqmah* of ibn Ganah's *Kitab al-Lumaʿ*, cited in Ziep 1997, p. 73.
15 Saadia 1969c; cf. Brody 2006, p. 98.
16 Ibid., chap. 4, 20b:28–21a:53, pp. 396–99.
17 Ibid., chap. 7, 42b:275–43a:295, pp. 508–511.
18 Similarly, Saadia argues, against the *Kalām* view of the uncreated and preexistent Koran, that the Torah is created, albeit before the creation of the world. See Saadia 1970–1971, II.5, pp. 103–7; H. Wolfson 1979, pp. 87–93. Cf. Saadia 1969, 156, 1. pp. 1–6; Menahem ben Saruq 1986, fol. 1.
19 Halevi forthcoming, I: 54.
20 On Halevi's argument, see Jospe 1989, p. 128; Zwiep 1997, pp. 138–42; Stern 1986.
21 Halevi forthcoming, I: 53
22 Ibid., I: 53, I: 56; cf. I: 55.
23 Ibid., IV 25. Cf. Nahmanides 1959–1963, *Comm.* on Gen. 2, 20.
24 Ibid., II: 68.

25 Ibid., IV: 25.
26 *Guide* I.50, Maimonides 1963, p. 111.
27 *Guide* II: 2, Maimonides 1963, p. 253.
28 *Guide* II.30, Maimonides 1963, pp. 357–8.
29 *Guide* I.14, Maimonides 1963, p. 40.
30 Maimonides 1938, p. 107. Cf. al-Fārābī 1957.
31 Al-Fārābī 1970–2005: 2005, p. 6, II: xxi, par. 122; Maimonides 1987, chap. 25, par. 56–8, pp. 360–2.
32 See Zwiep 1997, pp. 192–212 on Kaspi.
33 *Guide* III.8, Maimonides 1963, p. 435.
34 *Guide* I.65, Maimonides 1963, p. 158.
35 *Guide* II.8, Maimonides 1963, p. 435.
36 On amulets, see Guide I.61, Maimonides 1963, p. 149; on the *mezuzah*, see *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of the Mezuzah," 5.4; Kellner 2004; J. Stern 1998, pp. 122–7.
37 See, e.g., Maimonides 1938, pp. 34–5.
38 Ibid., pp. 61–2; for al-Fārābī, see al-Fārābī 1957. The term *al-nutq* translated as "speech" can also mean "reason."
39 Cf. King 2007 on the theory of mental representation in Latin scholasticism.
40 See al-Fārābī 1931, pp. 17–18; Sabra 1980, p. 762; al-Fārābī 1981, p. 10, ll. 24.5–7.
41 al-Fārābī 1981, p. 10, ll. 24.4,17–21.
42 See Boethius' second commentary on *De Inter.* in Boethius 1877–1980, vol. 2, pp. 29, 30, 36, 42; cited in Kretzmann 1974, p. 21, n. 26 and in Kretzmann 1967, p. 367; cf. Nuchelmans 1973.
43 *Guide* I.65, Maimonides 1963, p. 158.
44 al-Fārābī 1981, p. 11, ll. 25.10.
45 al-Fārābī 1981, p. 12, ll. 27.12–15. On al-Fārābī's Arabic text of the *Cratylus*, see ibid. p. 42, n. 1.
46 See al-Fārābī 1970/2005, 2005, pp. 4–15; Ibn Falaquera 1902, II.2 p. 21ff. Cf. Zwiep 1997, pp. 125–30; Rosenberg and Manekin 1989.
47 Cf. Lewis 1969.
48 Maimonides 1938, p. 62; al-Fārābī 1931, 54.2, p. 23; Dunlop 1937, p. 226, n. 3, al-Fārābī 1981, pp. xxxiv–xlviii, esp. xliii; Black 1992; Elamrani-Jamal 1983, pp. 98–101. It is not entirely clear that al-Fārābī takes logic to *be* syntax or takes syntax to be *part* of logic.
49 al-Fārābī 1981, p. xliii; Sabra 1980, p. 748.
50 See Rosenberg 1975, p. 172 on Judah Messer Leon's identification of the traces in the soul (Heb: *inyan*) with *taṣawwur* (*tziur*) in his *Com. on De Inter* 130b.
51 On the origins of the distinction, see H. Wolfson 1973a, pp. 478–92; Sabra 1980; and Black 1990. On possible sources in Averroes and ibn Bajja for the representational character of *taṣawwur*, see Blaustein 1984, 1986. On Maimonides' use of the distinction in his epistemology, see Manekin 1990; J. Stern 1989, 2000, 2005.
52 *Guide* I.68, Maimonides 1963, pp. 163–4; *Guide* I.73, Maimonides 1963, p. 209; on this passage, see Altmann 1987, p. 73.
53 *Guide* I: 50, Maimonides 1963, p. 111.
54 Maimonides 1938, p. 62.
55 *Guide* I.57, Maimonides 1963, p. 133
56 *Guide* I.73, Maimonides 1963, pp. 209–10.
57 *Guide* III.8, Maimonides 1963, p. 432; cf. II.29, p. 347.
58 *Guide* I.59, Maimonides 1963, pp. 139–40.

59 On the skeptical implications of this argument, see J. Stern 1989, 2000, 2005. Note that this problem arises only with respect to representations of God and other topics of metaphysics, not natural science or sublunar physics.
60 Ibn Kaspi 1905–1906, p. 70.
61 *Wars of the Lord* III.6.1, Gersonides 1987, pp. 314–7.
62 Levi ben Avraham 2004, pp. 89–90.
63 Nissim of Marseilles 2000, p. 257.
64 "Apparently" because Hillel's view is preserved only in the correspondence written by Zeraḥiah attacking him. The latter is preserved in Kirchheim 1857, cited and translated in Zwiep 1997, pp. 171–6; the following quotation is on pp. 173–4.
65 Ibn Kaspi 1905–1906, p. 4, Comment on *ha-aretz*. Cf. Ibn Kaspi 1907, pp. 656–7, entry on "egoz," where he writes: "We have forgotten our language and do not know the significance of this root, but it is absolutely necessary that the convention [governing] every composition of letters was [made] in order to signify something." See also Mesch 1975; Rosenberg 1981; Zwiep 1997, pp. 90–4. Note (contra Zwiep 1997, p. 93) that, contra Aristotle in *De Inter.* and Maimonides, Kaspi here locates the "encoded" knowledge in language, that is, external speech, not in inner speech.
66 Moses of Narbonne, *Comm. on Averroes' Middle Commentary on De Inter.*, cited in Rosenberg 1975, p. 169.
67 See Scholem 1972.
68 Duran 1865.
69 On Modist logic and grammar, see Pinborg 1967, 1982; Bursill-Hall 1972. On Duran's biography, see now Kozodoy 2006 and on his grammar, Gronemann 1869. On Modist parallels with Duran, see Zwiep 1997, pp. 3ff., 12f., 49–52 (but see n. 112 for qualifications), and 97–101. For criticism, Freudenthal 2001. See also Aslanoff 1996, p. 8, who is skeptical of Modist influence on Duran, although he finds such influence on Abraham de Balmes' *Miqneh Avram* (*Peculium Abrae*) (1522). Cf. also Steiner 2000. Duran does not mention any Latin Christian scholastics, although he cites Avicenna and many Hebrew grammarians by name (e.g., ibn Ezra, David Kimhi, Menahem b. Saruq, Dunash ibn Labrat, Hayyuj, David Benveneste, and Jonah ibn Janah), Maimonides, Nachmanides, and Rashi, as well as *higayoniyim* (logicians), *baalei ha-meḥqar* (lit: those who engage in inquiry; philosophers), *tiviyiim* (natural philosophers or scientists) and *medakdaqim* (grammarians), but not, interestingly, Joseph ibn Kaspi with whom it is known he had contact.
70 Duran 1865, p. 42.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., pp. 42–4.
73 On Duran's divergence here from Aristotle and Saadianic influence, see Zwiep 1997, pp. 54–8.
74 On Duran's Avicennean sources, see Zwiep 1997, p. 60.
75 Duran 1865, p. 28
76 Ibid., pp. 28–9. As Freudenthal 2001, p. 234 points out, this is standard Aristotelianism, widespread among earlier medieval Jewish philosophers, but this may be the earliest attempt to apply the model of explanation to language, that is, to treat language no different from the subject of any science.
77 Duran's negative comments here about astrology, or at least its role in language, are surprising given his service as court astrologer in Perpignon from roughly 1391–1403 (during which he presumably worked on *Ma'aseh Efod*).

78 Cf. J. Stern 1998; Kellner 2004.
79 Duran 1865, p. 28; Zwiep 1997 pp. 77–84.
80 Duran 1865, p. 28.
81 Ibid., pp. 229–30.
82 Ibid., p. 30.
83 Ibid., p. 30.
84 Ibid., p. 32, 60.
85 Pinborg 1967, 1982; Bursill-Hall 1972.
86 Cf. also Duran 1865, pp. 54, 60.
87 Ibid., pp. 31–3.
88 Ibid., p. 33.
89 See Aslanoff 1996 on the possible influence on Duran here by Joseph Giqatilla, *Ginnat Egoz*.
90 Duran 1865, pp. 47–8.
91 Ibid., p. 47f.
92 Ibid., p. 48.
93 See Kretzmann 1974.
94 al-Fārābī 1981, pp. 10, ll. 24.4.
95 Kretzmann 1974, p. 5, n. 6, who notes that Boethius' Latin translation also uses '*notae*' for both Greek words, thus [mis]guiding almost all subsequent interpretation of the passage.
96 al-Fārābī 1981, p. 10, ll. 24.15–25.
97 Ibid., p. 11, ll. 25.5–11.
98 On this question in scholastic philosophy, see King 2007.
99 al-Fārābī 1981, pp. 42, ll. 28.6–9.
100 Ibid., ll. 50.1–15.
101 Ibid., p. 43, ll: 50, pp. 16–22.
102 Ibid., p. 13, ll. 28. 21-3; J. Stern 2000, pp. 195–7 and n. 61.
103 *Guide* I:60, Maimonides 1963, p. 145.
104 Ibid., p. 146.
105 Ibid., my emphasis.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., p. 145.
108 *Guide* I: 61, Maimonides 1963, pp. 147–8.
109 On the association with the Hebrew word HYH (generally translated as "to be" or "to exist") and the Tetragrammaton, see Halevi forthcoming IV, 3; Ibn Ezra 2002, pp. 50–5, 161–2. 178–83, 198–9; W. Harvey 2007.
110 *Guide* I:61, Maimonides 1963, p. 148.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid. Cf. Duran's comment in his commentary (Efodi) ad. loc., in Maimonides 1904–1960, p. 92. On Maimonides' explanation of the "name" "'Ehyeh 'asher 'Ehyeh" ("I shall be that I shall be"), see J. Stern 1989, 2000. On the epistemological implications, see J. Stern 2005.
113 Halevi forthcoming, 4:1.
114 Ibid., 4:2.
115 Ibid., 4:3.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.

118 Rosenberg 1976–1977, p. 105.
119 See, e.g., *Guide*: I: 21, Maimonides 1963 p. 31; ibid., I: 5, p. 31; ibid., I: 19, p. 46.
120 Classic studies of this topic are H. Wolfson 1938, 1953; Rosenberg 1976–1977, and now M. Cohen 2003. In the Introduction to *Guide*, Maimonides also contrasts the varieties of *word*-meaning with the allegorical or parabolic interpretation of texts.
121 Cf. Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations* 169a22 and *Metaphysics* for many examples; Hintikka 1959, 1971, 1973.
122 Al-Fārābī 1981, pp. 227–31, ll. 48.3–54.2.
123 Maimonides 1938, pp. 59–61.
124 Guide I: 56, Maimonides 1963 p. 131.
125 On focal meaning, see Owen 1965. Cf. Aquinas 1964, vol. 3 Q13, A5-7, pp. 61–70. On al-Ghazālī and Narbonne, see Rosenberg 1976–1977, pp. 116–9.
126 M. Cohen 2003, p. 110f. argues that Maimonides' examples of metaphors in *Guide* are all instances of (5) frozen metaphors rather than (6) live metaphors.
127 Ibn Tibbon 1987, entry for *shem*.
128 Gersonides 1987, pp. 107–15, pp. 107–8; cf. Crescas 1990, p. 83b.
129 Duran 1865, p. 140.
130 I wish to thank C. Aslanoff and C. Manekin for helpful discussions of this material and the American Council of Learned Societies for fellowship support during 2007–2008 while this chapter was completed.

PART III

NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

9

MATTER, FORM, AND THE CORPOREAL WORLD

SARAH PESSIN

I. INTRODUCTION

Following variously on Pythagorean, Platonic, and Aristotelian traditions, together with biblical, rabbinic, and mystical insights, Jewish philosophies have envisioned matter and form as the necessary play of opposites, at once comprising the very fabric of reality, and signifying a deep cosmic struggle between corporeality and spirit. In Jewish as in Greek philosophical sources, matter marks a kind of not-yet-being moment in the metaphysical analysis of things,[1] and in this sense, inspires three very different kinds of discourses.

In the first place, as mark of not-yet-being, matter emerges in various contexts in a decidedly negative light – as secondary and inferior to form (the mark of being), it is the mark of privation and failure and even the source of evil itself. We will address this kind of discourse with examples from Maimonides, Gersonides, and Philo.

In the second place, matter, as mark of not-yet-being, is addressed in a neutral light, without any negative (or positive) connotations, in various cosmogonic, metaphysical, and scientific contexts. Two good examples are discussions of creation on the one hand, and discussions of Aristotelian matter and prime matter, on the other. Seen by some Jewish theorists alternatively as the something first created by God or as the something (itself eternal and uncreated) out of which God creates all else, matter emerges in a neutral light when it signals the mysteries of [pre-]creation, standing as a cosmic building block in need of description. We find that matter emerges in neutral terms too in analyses of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics, and in particular, in discussions that are part of larger Greek-into-Islamic philosophical interpretations of Aristotle's notion of prime matter. We will sample these "neutral" matter discourses in the respective creation accounts of Nahmanides, Gersonides, and Abraham ibn Ezra, and in hylomorphic and prime matter analyses found in Maimonides and Crescas.

In the third place, matter is discussed in a range of positive lights within Jewish thought. We will address a range of positive treatments, including the notion of

celestial (vs. terrestrial) matter, Ibn Gabirol's identification and exaltation of a supernal grade of matter (with a decided sense of not-yet-being's superiority to being), Simha of Troyes' Stoic-inspired divinization of matter, and Spinoza's pantheistic vision of God-as-nature.

II. NEGATIVE MATTER DISCOURSES: THEMES OF FALLING, FAILING, AND DESICCATION IN MAIMONIDES, GERSONIDES, AND PHILO

> [And God cast upon Adam a deep sleep, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and he enclosed it with flesh from below (Gen. 2:21)]. The essence and meaning of this remark is that *one of his ribs* tends towards matter. There are two aspects to the soul: an aspect that tends towards matter, and another that tends towards form. The aspect that tends towards matter is that of which it was said, *and He enclosed it with flesh from below*. That is to say, it acts only by means of the bodily devices. Understand this very well.
>
> – *Midrash ha-Ḥefetz*[2]

The association of materiality with ontological, epistemological, and moral shortcoming is commonplace in the history of philosophy, and Jewish tradition is here no exception. We may root this negative idea about matter loosely in Plato, more loosely still in Aristotle, and rather firmly in Plotinus and the Neoplatonic tradition that he inspires. Turning to Plato's *Timaues* we uncover a chaotic nothingness reigned in finally by the principles of reason. Although not talking of matter per se, the *Timaeus*' description of a recalcitrant, unreasonable chaos marks a not-yet-being that stands in decided contrast to the order of true being.[3] In this way, the Timaean chaos may be conceptually aligned with the Platonic transitory (because steeped in this not-yet-being) Realm of Becoming, a realm markedly opposed to the true Realm of Being – a Realm of Forms that is a reality more real than the sensory, corporeal world in which we live. For Plato, only the Forms – the Ideas or intelligible essences of things – are real, with things in this world emerging as mere shadows: where the formal stands in for the true, the bright, the original, and the real; the objects in our everyday world emerge as the mere shadow images of the real. On this picture, the only truly real substances are pure forms, the markers of intellect standing in contrast to the chaotic not-yet-being of the Timaean receptacle-of-becoming.

Turning to Jewish philosophical sources, we find this sort of Platonic privileging of formal reality as early as Philo. Where Plato speaks of a Realm of Forms (or, as in the *Timaeus*, of an intelligible paradigm external to the Creator Demiurge), Philo substitutes a Divine Mind containing within itself the eternal and unchanging

intelligibles. Manifesting themselves from within God's mind in the form of divine speech (*Logos*), these intelligibles make their way into the world, enforming all of reality with divine order. So focused is Philo on the intelligible realm that he interprets the entire seven days of creation in Genesis as referring to the unfolding of the archetypal ideas within God's mind:[4] Clearly the corporeal realm is, as for Plato, secondary. This devaluation of corporeality and sensory existence is further seen in Philo's epistemological focus on intellect as the human's crowning perfection (in fact, that in virtue of which humans mirror God's own *Logos*):[5] Knowing intelligible truths is the hallmark of perfected human being, superior in every way to sensory and passional human endeavors.[6] Although passions and sensation are necessary on our path toward knowledge, it is ultimately knowledge – an entry into the realm of forms – that defines our truest being.

Although Aristotle rejects the Platonic other-worldly privileging of forms over regular everyday substances, there remains in his metaphysics a privileging of form over matter. Officially introducing us to a principle of matter in contrast to a principle of form, Aristotle weaves a complex hylomorphic ontology (an account that describes all substances – except minds – as matter (*hyle*)+form (*morphe*) composites), treating form and matter as mutually necessary and interdependent philosophical principles. In this way, Aristotle is able in turn to treat the matter+form objects in this world as real (and, as in fact, the most real) substances. Even with this metaphysical turn, Aristotle's philosophical vocabulary still privileges – albeit with different implications than in Plato – form over matter. In addition to championing matter+form composites as examples of true substances, Aristotle speaks too in his *Metaphysics* of form (or essence) as the best candidate for substance. After speaking of each of matter, matter+form, and form alone as candidates for substance (see *Metaphysics* VII.3 and XII.3), Aristotle concludes that matter alone cannot be substance (*Metaphysics* VII.3, 1029a26-30), and that we ought to focus our attentions on form alone; as Aristotle notes,

> [T]he substance, then, which consists of both – I mean of matter and form – may be dismissed, since it is posterior and obvious . . . We must consider the third type [i.e. form], for this is the most perplexing.[7]

To be sure, the precise meaning of the analysis in *Metaphysics* VII that follows this remark is extremely difficult to pin down; suffice it to say that, in spite of Aristotle's hylomorphic and non-Platonic sensitivities, one can certainly imagine later interpreters finding (rightly or wrongly) textual support for anti-matter sentiments in Aristotle's above claims, and in such additional seemingly form-centric reminders

as, "a particular thing is considered to be nothing other than its own substance, and the essence [*to ti ein einai*] is called the substance [*ousia*] of the thing."[8]

We have thus seen how both Platonic and Aristotelian theory – in spite of their important differences, in spite of Plato's not actually speaking of matter per se, and even in spite of Aristotle's hylomorphism – may be seen as encouraging anti-matter sentiments on the part of later interpreters. In thinking in this way of sources, we must not, of course, leave out the influence of Plotinus. At the heart of a trajectory of Neoplatonic ideas that influence many centuries of medieval Jewish thinkers, Plotinus treats matter as the source of evil in the cosmos.[9] Reflecting on the not-yet-being of matter as the mark of privation, Plotinus denigrates matter – the ultimate receiver – as in itself a nothing that lacks all form, and that, as such, in itself lacks both being and goodness. Of the nature of this lack, we learn that,

> That which has nothing because it is in want, or rather is want, must necessarily be evil. For this thing is not want of wealth but want of thought, want of virtue, of beauty, of strength, shape, form, quality. Must it not then be ugly? Must it not be utterly vile, utterly evil?[10]

Although this set of reflections on matter–evil is not part of the Arabic Plotinian materials that we know to have directly influenced medieval Islamic and Jewish thinkers,[11] we can certainly speak in general of a Neoplatonic influence on the Jewish philosophical denigration of matter. Looking to some of the actual Arabic Plotinian materials, we can, for example, see a theological alignment of God with principles of form and intellect, an at least indirect way of supporting (in line with Timaean sentiments addressed previously) the further denigration of the material and corporeal.[12]

Rehearsing the sorts of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic impulses we have outlined previously, we can understand the decidedly negative outlook on matter and corporeality in such Jewish sources as the Yemenite quote from the *Midrash ha-Ḥefetz* with which we started this section and the Maimonidean tradition in which that quote is itself directly rooted. Reading the *Midrash ha-Ḥefetz* quote in conversation with Maimonides' own treatment of Genesis in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, what we are being asked to "understand well" is that the fall of Adam (itself a symbolic expression of the fall of all humankind) is rooted in the materiality of body, itself coded as the weakness of human flesh. As Maimonides makes clear at the very outset of the *Guide*, it is the gift of intellect that is our human proprium, marking our unique essence and that in virtue of which we are said (at Genesis 1:27) to have been created "in the image" of God.[13] Intellect links us to God in an essential way, as God too is an intellect (albeit of a much purer grade). On this picture, the fall of human beings – allegorically captured in the Genesis account of

the fall of Adam – is found in neglecting this gift of intellect and instead turning toward "desires of the imagination and the pleasures of the corporeal senses."[14]

In his laments over the victory of desire, imagination, and corporeal sensuality over intellect, Maimonides identifies matter as the culprit. Ontologically inferior, matter exerts negative epistemological and moral impacts, contributing to human ignorance and, as such, to unfulfilled human lives. Maimonides sees the threat: Drawn into matter's web and pulled away from the paths of intellectual perfection, humans will on their own fail to perfect their souls and will, as such, need a great deal of help if they are to have even a shot at their own human potential for true human happiness. So filthy is the role of materiality in this picture of human struggle that Maimonides likens it to the sexual temptress about whom we are warned at Proverbs 6:25, "Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, and do not let her take you captive with her eyelids." It is in this spirit that we can appreciate Maimonides' description of matter as a married harlot:

> She never ceases to seek for another man to substitute for her husband, and she deceives and draws him on in every way until he obtains from her what her husband used to obtain. This is the state of matter.[15]

Through the image of sexual exploits that defile the sacred bond of marriage, Maimonides highlights – and casts aspersion on – matter's ontological role as the taker-on of many and changing forms. As we will see later, this fact about matter (viz. that it is a taker-on of changing forms) is actually treated by Maimonides elsewhere in fairly neutral terms: After all, matter in this role enables the world to properly function – it is the principle that accounts for the natural course of generation and corruption in our sublunar world, including such basic natural processes as elemental change. In the philosophical trajectory with which we are currently concerned, though, Maimonides maligns matter's complicity in the flux of change to which this world is subject, seeing, as he does, the extent to which it is the fleeting nature of sensory reality that wreaks havoc on the human soul's capacity to attain true happiness. To fully appreciate the nature of Maimonides' concern with matter in this regard, we are well served to pause and consider Maimonides' decision to treat matter not simply as a harlot, but as a married harlot. The key to understanding Maimonides' concern with matter is found when we follow his lead and think of matter as a "marriage-breaker" in particular – namely, a force that stands in the way of the proper union between two sacredly joined partners.[16] For the careful reader, this image of matter as the breaker of sacred union is alive with special resonance; for, within Maimonides' Neoplatonized Aristotelian epistemology – itself following on an Arabic philosophical tradition in al-Fārābī

and Avicenna – the goal of the human being is understood as the attainment of truths, a state described in particular in that tradition as the "conjunction" (*ittisal*) or "union" with the Active Intellect, a cosmic source of illumination with which the human intellect must join to reach ultimate perfection.[17] Here, the image of a marriage-breaker is poignantly apt, pointing us to the real problem with matter: As the site of privation and change, matter threatens to block our access to that which does not change, namely, the eternal, unchanging truths – the forms that are housed in the Active Intellect. It is in this sense that matter threatens to stand in the way of the human intellect's final nuptial, its union with its one true mate, namely, the Active Intellect (and in this sense, its union with forms). It is certainly in this very same regard that Maimonides likens matter to an epistemological veil:

> Matter is a strong veil preventing the apprehension of that which is separate from matter as it truly is.[18]

This Maimonidean denigration of materiality – on the epistemological and moral grounds that it keeps the human soul from actualizing her truest nature and coming best to live "in the image" of God – is indeed the underpinning for the *midrash ha-Ḥefetz* remarks above, and can be seen at the root of many later texts in the history of Jewish thought.

It is precisely in this spirit that we may approach Gersonides' allegorical rendering of the Song of Songs. Along with the idea of matter as an epistemological stumbling block, Gersonides' philosophical commentary reflects on the shortcomings of the material intellect, that as-of-yet unenlightened, pre-knowledge stage of the human which is part of the Greek-into-Islamic tradition of Aristotelian psychology. Treating the Song of Songs as an allegory, Gersonides interprets this biblical poem between a lover and his beloved as, on the one hand, a dialogue between the parts of the human soul, and on the other, a dialogue in particular between the human material intellect and that cosmic principle of enlightenment that we have already seen at play in Maimonides, namely, the Active Intellect. Commenting on verse 2:2 of Song of Songs ("As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters"), Gersonides turns to Genesis 8:21's claim about the evil inclination of man's heart and explains:

> One who wishes to progress toward the intelligibles must subordinate all the faculties of his soul to the service of his intellect. This will happen when he discards and abandons his material desires and takes from them only what he needs for the maintenance of his body.[19]

Here Gersonides allegorically interprets the biblical Song of Songs narrative as subtly laying bare the truths of a Neoplatonized Aristotelian universe in which the

not-yet of materiality – here in the dynamics of the material intellect – is always a mark of failure, a mark of potency whose fruition is seen only and always in the attainment of knowledge – itself seen in the attainment of intelligible forms. Here, deeply subordinate to the fruits of formal being, the not-yet of materiality waits for the perfections of form.

In fact, describing formal being as a kind of fruition is a helpful image to bear in mind. In the contexts we have been examining, we may think of form as the moist, verdant, ripened life force – the waters of life that manifest in lush foliage and fruit, with matter, on the contrary, as the withered site of desiccation in desperate need of watering. On this score, consider Gersonides' description of the joining of soul's lower faculties with the material intellect, itself as the first step toward soul's connecting to Active Intellect. Focusing on themes of foliage, Gersonides comments on Song of Songs 1:14 "My beloved is unto me as a cluster of henna in the vineyards of Ein-Gedi":

> The material intellect is similar to a cluster of henna, which is an imperfect existent, that is, it is the beginning stage of the making of the fruit.[20]

Playing explicitly with a "desiccation versus moisture" theme, he goes on, in expositing the Song of Songs 1:16 verse "Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant; also our couch is fresh":

> [The lower faculty of soul, such as imagination, which is like the matter to the material intellect] desires the intellect and yearns to unite with it and provide it with what it needs to progress toward perfection. She [i.e., imagination and/or any other lower faculty of soul] said that her beloved, along with being fair and handsome, is also good and pleasant and that the couch on which they will be joined together *is fresh* and their pleasure will be enhanced upon it. By saying *is fresh* he [i.e., the author of Song of Songs] also referred to the fact that their joining together is fruitful, because freshness and moistness are together the cause of the tree's giving fruit, whereas dryness is the cause of its not giving fruit; this is true of both plants and animals. Thus, her [i.e., the lower part of the soul's] desire for him [i.e. material intellect] grows because of his handsomeness and pleasantness and because of the good end achieved through her being joined together with him.[21]

Although to be sure, here it is the material intellect that marks the watery spring of life, there is here nonetheless a decided link between matter and desiccation; for, as Gersonides makes clear, imagination (or any other lower part of soul) is desiccated in relation to material intellect precisely in its being a "faculty of soul which stands in relation to it [i.e., material intellect] in the relation of matter."[22] Here, the lower part of soul is coded as "matter" in relation to the material intellect, and as such, the lower

part of soul is the mark of desiccation, the not-yet that waits for its fruition – here literally on the image of getting greater ontological–epistemological perfection as the process of growing a juicy fruit. Once again, matter is the dry hope (here, we may imagine a seed) that is perfected in the vibrant fruits of knowledge brought to pass through the moist and fresh waters of form.

In fact, Gersonides uses this 'matter-as-desiccation versus form-as-water-of-life' theme not only to explore the relation of the lower part of soul (as matter) to soul's intellectual capacity (the home of form), but also to describe explicitly the ontologically desiccated status of prime matter in relation to the perfections of intellect (found, of course, in its intelligible forms). Commenting on Song of Songs 2:3 "As an apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons," Gersonides, again focusing on foliage and fruit, notes that:

> In truth, fruit is ascribed to the intellect alone . . . because it alone can achieve the condition of eternity in an individual. This is the entire fruit of these sublunary existents and the final perfection with respect to which the first matter exists in potential.[23]

Once again, the metaphysical principle of matter-as-potency is seen as a not-yet state of desiccation that waits for fruition through the intelligibility of form.

Although in no way textually linked, this "desiccation versus verdant foliage" theme in Gersonides finds an interesting parallel in Philo's own allegorical rendering of a tree-themed verse in Genesis. In his allegorical analysis of Genesis, commenting on what he takes to be the true meaning of the rivalry between Jacob and Laban, Philo speaks of "hiding from God," and adverts to the Genesis 3:8 passage in which Adam and Eve – mindful of having inspired God's wrath – hide "amidst the tree of the garden." The word for tree here is the Hebrew *etz*, and this term appears in Philo as the Greek *ksulon*, a word that, like *hyle* (Arisotle's term for matter), can mean "cut down wood, firewood, timber." Philo takes note of Adam's and Eve's hiding "amidst the tree" of the garden – a hiding that, according to the rendering of the Hebrew *etz* (tree) with the Greek *ksulon* (timber), is arguably better translated as a hiding "amidst the desiccated, lifeless timberwood" of the garden (Whittaker and Colson translate "amidst the wood"). Reflecting on timber – and precisely struck, it would seem, by this image of timber as dead and dried, hollow, and lifeless – Philo allegorically correlates their hiding "amidst the desiccated, lifeless timberwood" with the human tendency to stray from God, taking refuge in one's own mind devoid of God instead of taking refuge in the Mind of God:

> "In the midst," it says, "of the wood (*ksulon*) of the garden" (Gen. iii.8), that is in the centre of the mind, which in its turn is the centre of what we may call the garden of the whole soul: for he that runs away from God takes refuge in himself. There are two minds, that of

the universe, which is God, and the individual mind. He that flees from his own mind flees for refuge to the Mind of all things. For he that abandons his own mind acknowledges all that makes the human mind its standard to be naught, and he refers all things to God. On the other hand he that runs away from God declares Him to be the cause of nothing, and himself to be the cause of all things that come into being. But thou perceivest, O my soul, the difference of the two opinions; for the one turns its back on the particular being, created and mortal mind, and whole-heartedly puts itself under the patronage of the universal Mind, uncreated and immortal; the other opinion on the contrary, rejects God, and by a grievous error calls in to share its warfare the mind that is insufficient even to help itself.[24]

Here, timber represents the empty shell of the human being when absent a connection to the life force of the Divine source. Interestingly paralleling the matter-versus-form discourse we have seen in Gersonides, Philo's timber-themed distinction between the dried-out state of the godless mind versus the flowing, vibrant state of mind in its divine sojourn contrasts the image of a lifeless-desiccated-receiver, on the one hand, and a life-giving-flow-which-must-be-received, on the other. The resonance with matter-versus-form discourse is especially strong given the particular imagery of the receiver compared with the received, a common description of matter and form in a host of trajectories in the history of philosophy.

In closing, we might note that although Aristotle nowhere develops so poetic a rendering of the contrast between matter and form, he does choose to inaugurate the word "hyle," the ordinary Greek word for "firewood" or "timber," to serve as his new technical philosophical term for "matter." In setting out to understand the negative implications of materiality in Jewish philosophical theory, it is worth pausing to think about the imagery of "*hyle*-as-timber" at play in this Aristotelian terminology. Although one can imagine the idea of "matter-as-timber" as emphasizing a kind of "stuff out of which things are made" (and so, just as wooden boards are used to make a ship, so too matter is that which makes up things), it is more useful for our purposes to focus on timber less in its relationship to things that it makes and more in its relationship to the thing of which it is made, namely, a living tree. What is important in Aristotle's imagery of timber for our purposes is that it is dead wood; what was once filled with life is now dead and dry – completely drained of its living essence. It is this image that helps draw out the contrast between matter – as a kind of drained and lifeless stuff – and form – as a kind of living essence that must permeate the matter to yield a viable substance (a living tree branch, or any other substance). This imagery of matter as the hollowed out, "drained-of-life" stuff helps foster an image of form as the water of life that flows throughout all substance.

Regardless of Aristotle's own metaphysical intentions (we have already stressed his own anti-Platonic hylomorphic vision of reality), thinking through this image of

a hollowed-out stick in contrast to the vital force that flows through it helps clarify the conceptual denigration of materiality at play in many Jewish philosophers. Although Philo himself is not a direct textual source for most later Jewish thinkers, and, as we have seen, his own account about godlessness versus mindfulness arises from his commentary on a different Greek word for timber (i.e., *ksulon*, not *hyle*), we might nonetheless return to Philo's conclusions about desiccation versus life to help us appreciate the treatment of matter and form in a host of Jewish philosophical texts. Reflecting on this image of matter as a dried-out hollow also helps emphasize why one might be tempted to conceptually correlate Aristotle's idea of matter with Plato's *Timaeus* idea of a Receptacle, a hollowed-out empty bowl that waits to be filled with the Demiurge's gifts of order – its downpourings of reason, as it were. This imagery of the dry hollow links well too with the Neoplatonic likening of form not only to light, but to water, a move that can be found in Ibn Gabirol's description of God's enforming relationship to the world as the "Fountain of Life" (an image rooted in Psalms 36:10). In this spirit, one might additionally speculate on the Hebrew term *geshem*; this technical Hebrew metaphysical term for "substance" is the Hebrew word for "rain," a terminological turn that itself conjures up images of the real as suffused with waters.

III. NEUTRAL MATTER DISCOURSES: CREATION CONTEXTS

In the first part of our study, we have seen matter emerge in negative ontological, epistemological, and moral lights. In addition to these decidedly negative trajectories, though, we also find a variety of neutral discussions of matter in Jewish sources as well, as for example in analyses of creation and in treatments of Aristotelian prime matter. We turn first to creation accounts.

Reflecting on *b'reishit*, the opening word of Genesis meaning "in the beginning," Jewish philosophical insights on the biblical Genesis have tended to fall into one of four groups of interpretation: (1) creation *ex nihilo* (lit. creation from nothing) – on this view, God creates reality out of a complete state of nothingness; (2) creation *ex aliquo* (lit. creation from something, a view that is associated with Plato's *Timaeus* account) – on this view, God creates reality out of some already existent bit of "stuff," usually identified as matter; (3) eternity (a view associated with Aristotle's cosmology) – on this view God is either denied the activity of creation, or, alternatively, God's "act of creation" is taken to refer to an ontologically eternal fact about God's being, namely, the fact that He has eternally sustained an eternally existing world; and (4) emanation (a view associated with the Neoplatonism

of Plotinus, and, in a somewhat different way, with Jewish *Kabbalah*) – on this view, God's "act of creation" is, as in the eternity scenario, an act of eternal sustenance, but one described in particular as an eternal overflowing of sorts.

The first thing to note after delineating these categories is that they are not necessarily discrete: A brief consideration of these ideas in various textual traditions reveals significant (sometimes overt, sometimes tacit) overlap between these categories of creation accounts. Consider the case of creation *ex aliquo*. Drawing upon the *Timaeus* image of a Craftsman God molding the universe by imposing order onto an already existing, chaotic Receptacle, Jewish readings of "in the beginning" through the creation *ex aliquo* lens speak of the Creator's ultimate creative act as His imposition of forms upon a primal first matter. First, it ought to be noted that this is not necessarily faithful to Plato's account; as we have tried to be sensitive to in our earlier treatment of the *Timaeus*, it is not obvious that it is best to understand Plato's Receptacle in the *Timaeus* as "matter." More importantly, the creation *ex aliquo* account in our sources is a multiply ambiguous doctrine, easily blending, for example, into a creation *ex nihilo* account: Although a creation *ex aliquo* view might posit a material substrate that is coeternal with God, it may claim instead that even this material substrate is itself created by God *ex nihilo*. Here we might add that even the explicit language of "creation *ex nihilo*" can be read on its surface as referring to "creation out of matter," in that the *nihil* ("nothing") of creation *ex nihilo* – referring as it does to "nothingness" – might easily be understood as referring to "matter" – itself commonly identified as the cosmological "nothingness." Although eternity and emanation might seem far removed from creation *ex nihilo*, it is certainly conceptually plausible to blend the notions by envisioning a divine creative act that is an eternal emanation of "something" from "nothing," where "nothing" is now taken either as referring to an eternal material substrate that overflows, or as referring – as it does, as for example in the *Kabbalah* and other mystical traditions – to God Himself as the creative outflowing cipher.[25]

The possibilities of conceptual overlap in these discussions make it very difficult to know for certain what view a given thinker is putting forth. For example, just because thinker X talks about his belief in "creation," we still know nothing about which, if any, of the previous four views (or combinations thereof) he holds. Scholars move too quickly when, for example, they take (as they frequently have in the case of Ibn Gabirol)[26] the language of "divine will" and "creation" to rule out obviously and clearly ideas of eternity and emanation in a given doctrine. Pinning down a particular thinker's view on the topic of cosmogeny is tricky. With that in mind, we will consider as best we can a variety of Jewish voices on the Genesis event, with a particular focus on the role of matter in their cosmogenic theories.

Ex Nihilo Creation via Matter: Nahmanides

Commenting on the first three words of Genesis, *b'reishit bara elohim* ("In the beginning God created"), Nahmanides (1194–1270) notes:

> God created (*bara*) all the creations from absolute void (*afisah muḥletet*). There is no Hebrew term for "drawing out something from nothing" other than the term "created" (*bara*) [or: there is no meaning in Hebrew to "created" if not "drawing out something from nothing"]. Note that the things below or above the sun were not themselves created out of nothing (*ha-ayin*); rather, He drew out of the absolute complete nothing (*ha-efes ha-gamur ha-muḥlat*) a foundation (*yesod*), very thin without any actuality to it (*ayn bo mamash*), but itself a generating potency (*koaḥ mamtzi*) ready to receive form and to go from potency to act. And this is the Prime Matter (*ha-ḥomer ha-rishon*) called "*hyle*" by the Greeks. And after the creation of "*hyle*," God did not create anything else [from nothing]; rather, He formed (*yatzar*) and made [things] from it. For from it, He brought forth everything, and dressed [it with?] the forms, and fixed them. And know that the heavens and all that is in them is one matter (*ḥomer*), and the earth and all that is in it is another matter. God created these two [matters] from nothing; these are the only two "creations [from nothing]" – everything else is made up of them.[27]

Here, creation *ex nihilo* yields only two products: a prime celestial matter and a prime terrestrial matter (undoubtedly Nahmanides' gloss on the dual-creation Genesis 1:1 claim that "In the beginning, God created *heaven and earth* . . . "). All else is then forged by God in and through these two initial creations. Interesting further in this regard is that Nahmanides does not identify matter with "nothingness." "Nothingness" is rather the primordial state before matter from which God creates the two matters (or "out from which" God pulls forth the first two creations):

> In the beginning God created the heavens, in that He brought forth their matter from nothingness (*ayin*), and the earth, in that He brought forth its matter from nothingness (*ayin*).[28]

Nahmanides, in this same commentary on Genesis 1:1, also exposits the Genesis 1:2 terms *tohu* and *bohu* (generally translated as "void and nothingness"), as follows: *Tohu*, he says, refers to the created matter in its pristine, preformed state, whereas *bohu* refers to the matter once it has been adorned with forms. This is reminiscent of what we see later to be the Simplicius-inspired medieval Arabic idea (found in Avicenna, Averroes, et al.) of an Aristotelian prime matter coupled with corporeal form to yield a "second matter," itself the seat for other forms.

Ex Aliquo Creation from Matter

In contrast to Nahmanides, Gersonides (1288–1344) and Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164) both envision God's creation as His molding of an eternally coexistent material substrate. Gersonides speaks of God's enforming an already existent substrate – a "[primordial] body from which the world was created,"[29] itself formless (and without definite shape), some of which goes into making the heavens, and some of which goes into making the earth – by way, that is, of God's formation of prime matter, which Gersonides understands as the primordial body once it has been bestowed with a God-given capacity to receive all forms.[30]

In his Bible commentary, Abraham ibn Ezra, although not laying out his ideas in the philosophical style used by Gersonides, also supports the notion of substrates coexistent with God:

> Most of the commentaries have said that "creation" entails bringing forth something from nothing (*ayin*) . . . But alas, they seem to have forgotten about the verse "And God created (*bara*) the *taninim* (sea creatures)" (1:21) and three [uses of the term *bara*] in one verse:[31] "And God created (*bara*) man" (1:27; the verb occurs three times there in reference to creating human life) . . . There are two meanings to the verb "*bara*"; this is the first, and the second is [as it occurs in the verse] "he did not divide (*bara*) bread with them" [II Samuel 12:17]. In this second case, the word is spelled with the letter *heh* [as the final letter] instead of the letter *aleph* [as the final letter] . . . And its meaning is "to divide," "to put up a dividing boundary." The enlightened reader will understand.[32]

Urging a retranslation of the Genesis 1:1 *bara* from "[God] created [from nothing]" to "[God] divided [already existing stuff]," Ibn Ezra has no problem making of God's primary act of creation a kind of demiurgic creation *ex aliquo*. Reading Ibn Ezra's Biblical commentaries alongside his *Foundation of Awe and the Secret of the Torah*,[33] we learn further of God's existing coeternally with the intellects, the eternal spheres, and the four elements. On this picture, God cuts up the world of generation and corruption out of the already existing elements and does so through the activity of the cosmic spheres moved by the cosmic intellects. Although not committing himself to a prime material substrate existing on its own, Ibn Ezra's vision of a divine act of division entails the coeternity with God not only of other intellects but also of various bits of enformed matter. We might suggest reading Ibn Ezra's notion of the "divine division" as God's imbuing elemental substances – bits of already enformed matters – with more and more limits, that is to say, with more and more forms, thus resulting in all the thises and thats of the world as we know it.

IV. NEUTRAL MATTER DISCOURSES

Aristotelian hylomorphism

In addition to the neutral valence given to matter in various accounts of creation, we find that matter is treated in neutral terms too where thinkers are simply rehearing the Aristotelian hylomorphic idea that substances (other than intellects) are made up of matter and form. So, we find in Maimonides' enumeration of twenty-five premises "needed for establishing the existence of the deity,"[34] the neutral treatment of matter in his hylomorphic reminder (in his twenty-second proposition) that,

> Every body is necessarily composed of two things . . . The two things constituting it are its matter and its form.[35]

Neutral matter discourses: Aristotelian prime matter and corporeal form

Another neutral set of matter claims can be found in discussions of Aristotelian prime matter. Following on a Greek commentary tradition – seen, for example, in Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*[36] – many medieval Islamic and Jewish Aristotelians read in Aristotle's science[37] a commitment not simply to matter, but to a "prime matter" – a material substrate underlying any particular material this or that. On this picture, prime matter is seen as itself coupled with a form called "corporeal form" (or "corporeity," and sometimes even "quantity") to yield "second matter," or "[absolute] body," and it is this body that is itself seen to serve as the common matter for the elements. Leaving aside whether Aristotle himself had this sort of "prime matter/second matter" idea in mind (the details of which were themselves subject to debate, as for example, between the schools of Avicenna and Averroes),[38] two underlying material substrates emerge for various interpreters of Aristotle: The second matter, or body, serves as the solution to the phenomenon of elemental change, accounting for how one element can change into another, and the prime matter serves as the solution to how matter can both be continuous and divided, as it is seen as the substrate for continuity, on the one hand, and for division, on the other. Even those committed to the reality of prime and second matter, though, are not necessarily committed to their per se existence, removed from any forms. For example, although neither Maimonides nor Crescas envision any sort of matter existing on its own without form (both see the four elements as the most basic ontological units of actually existing substance in the sublunar realm), Maimonides, here in accordance with both Avicenna and Averroes, theorizes a prime matter (and so an element is seen as a tripart constitution of prime matter+corporeal form+a specific elemental form), whereas Crescas argues against

the very notion of a prime matter. Referencing Averroes' argument against the existence of a "first matter" material substrate for celestial bodies, Crescas writes:

> As the [eternal] celestial sphere does not come under the law of generation and corruption, there is no reason why we should conceive it to be composed of matter [*ḥomer*] and form [*tzurah*].[39]

Then, drawing on Averroes' conclusion about celestial bodies, Crescas concludes:

> In view of Averroes' theory, however, would that I knew what prevents us from maintaining the same with regard to the elements that are subject to generation and corruption, namely, that their matter be corporeality, and their form be the proper form of every one of the elements.[40]

For Crescas, there is no need to posit a prime material substrate for celestial or for terrestrial bodies.[41]

On the contrary, Maimonides' own commitment to a prime matter can be seen, for example, in his reflections on the Ezekiel 1:1-28 "Account of the Chariot," a challenging and central Jewish text that, generally read in quite mystical terms, is naturalistically treated by Maimonides as merely adverting to Aristotelian philosophical truths about the cosmos.

> Ezekiel 1:4 And I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud, with a fire flashing up, so that a brightness was round about it; and out of the midst thereof as the colour of electrum, out of the midst of the fire.
>
> 1:5 And out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man.
>
> 1:6 And every one had four faces, and every one of them had four wings.
>
> 1:26 And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above.
>
> 1:28 This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face.[42]

Fighting against esoteric readings of biblical texts – including various esoteric renderings of this Ezekiel text in particular, Maimonides stresses that the real teaching of the "Account of the Chariot" (in Hebrew referred to as the *Maʿaseh ha-Merkavah*) has to do not with mystical theosophies, but with truths of Aristotelian natural science, namely, that there is a prime matter underlying all corporeal forms. Expositing the Ezekiel Throne image alongside the Exodus 24:10 account of "the whiteness of sapphire stone" beneath God's feet, and including in his analysis consideration of

The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer[43] (ca. seventh – ninth century C.E.), as well as Onqelos' Aramaic commentary translation of the Bible (second century C.E.), Maimonides equates the Throne with the heaven that divides sublunar from supralunar existence, and goes on to equate (a) the underside of the Throne, (b) the underside of God's feet, (c) references to snow and whiteness beneath the Throne, and (d) references to "the whiteness of sapphire stone" beneath God's feet, seeing in all of these images an allegorical reference to Aristotelian prime matter, "the true reality of first matter"[44] that is "the first among the things He has created that necessitates generation and corruption."[45]

V. POSITIVE MATTER DISCOURSES

Having seen various shades of negative and neutral discourses on matter, we turn in our final section to four contexts in which matter emerges in a positive light: (1) celestial matter in Aristotelian tradition; (2) spiritual matter in Israeli, Ibn Gabirol, and the "Empedoclean" tradition; (3) God-as-matter in the Stoic-inspired writings of Rabbi Simha of Troyes; and (4) the very different God-as-matter sensibility in Spinoza.

Celestial matter in the Jewish Aristotelian tradition

In the tradition of Aristotelian metaphysics and cosmology, we have already seen the role of prime matter in accounts of physical generation and corruption, and elemental change. In these senses, Aristotelian prime matter emerges as the hallmark of sublunar, terrestrial being, together, of course, with myriad forms. In addition to terrestrial matter and outside of the four sublunar elements (earth, air, fire, and water), there is a celestial material substrate (conceived by Maimonides in an Avicennian tradition as itself further composed of a more primal matter together with a corresponding form but by Crescas in an Averroean fashion as devoid of any further material substrate)[46] that houses the separate intellects of the supralunar realms. Spoken of as a "quintessence" (literally, a fifth reality over and above the ordinary four elements of the terrestrial sphere), and theorized in various ways throughout the ages as a completely new element or as an exalted variety of fire,[47] the celestial matter is completely different from and superior to terrestrial matter. Theorized in contrast to the "rectilinear" motions of the terrestrial matter, the celestial quintessence is described in terms of pure circular motions, not subject to change. Compared to terrestrial matter, this grade of celestial matter is pure and exalted and is in this sense described in very positive terms.

Turning back to Maimonides' treatment of the Ezekiel account, addressed primarily at *Guide* III.1-8, as well as at *Guide* I.28 and II.26, Maimonides sees in the elaborate Ezekiel account of a celestial throne an allegory about the crucial ontological division between sublunar corporeality and the celestial realm of the separate intellects – intellects that are, in his al-Farābian Aristotelian (that is to say, Neoplatonized Aristotelian) system, the intellectual realities that move each of the respective celestial spheres (with the lowest of these separate intellects the "Active Intellect," governing the motion of the sublunar realm in which we live, as well as playing a crucial role in such wide-ranging human phenomena as epistemology, prophecy, providence, and immortality). Naturalizing ultra-esoteric treatments of the Throne image in the Ezekiel account, Maimonides sees in the drama of a throne nothing more than an image designed to divide what is above from what is below, and this simply toward the end of teaching that "the matter of the heavens is other than that of the earth and that they are two altogether distinct matters."[48] Here, esoteric theosophical readings are replaced with Aristotelian insights about terrestrial matter being different from celestial matter (with the latter being the home, as it were, of the separate intellects). Yet, although Maimonides' Aristotelian rendering of the great Ezekiel Throne vision is certainly a naturalized reading, he views that rendering as introducing deep, and even mysterious themes:

> The fact that there are two matters, a high and an inferior one, and that the matter of the universe is not one. This is a great mystery.[49]

Leaving the nature of this mystery aside (although it seems the mystery might refer us to the [Avicennian] reality of a prime matter underlying both of these other material realities), it is clear that Maimonides speaks of celestial matter as the "high matter," a matter that clearly is not the subject of his negative tirades against the vicissitudes of ordinary (i.e., terrestrial) matter.

It is here, though, that we must guard against confusion: This positive grade of celestial materiality ought not be confused with another positive grade of matter in the so-called Empedoclean tradition (in Ibn Gabirol) to which we will turn later. In such thinkers as Ibn Gabirol, we find a spiritual matter that is higher and purer than celestial matter in any Aristotelian context, and it differs from other notions of matter and prime matter that we have seen before. One major point of difference, and a point that must be kept in mind, is that whereas Ibn Gabirol's spiritual matter is part and parcel of the angelic intellects, Aristotelian celestial matter (or the matter of which it is comprised in Maimonides' Avicennian context)[50] is, for the host of Jewish Aristotelians who speak of it, the celestial accompaniment to (or resting place of) the separate angelic intellects, not part and parcel of those intellects. For

Jewish Aristotelians including Maimonides, the cosmic separate intellects are pure forms that reside in celestial material spheres; for Ibn Gabirol, on the other hand, the cosmic separate intellects are form+[spiritual] matter composites that reside in (or over) the celestial material spheres. No such notion (of a matter composing even intellects) is implied by even the most exalted descriptions of celestial matter in Maimonides, or other Aristotelian Jewish thinkers.

We turn now to the very different positive descriptions of a pure spiritual matter in the Empedoclean tradition at play in Ibn Gabirol and some others.

Positive Matter in the Empedoclean Tradition: Solomon ibn Gabirol, Isaac Israeli, and Ibn Ḥasdai

More positive than even the most exalted description of the celestial matter is the especially positive strain of matter metaphysics that emerges in Solomon ibn Gabirol's eleventh-century *Fons Vitae* (*The Fountain of Life, Yanbū al-Ḥayāt* in Arabic,[51] translated as the *Meqor Ḥayyim* in Hebrew).[52]

Envisioning the divine source through the imagery of Psalms 36:10 ("For with You is the *fountain of life* (*Meqōr ḥayyīm*)"), Solomon ibn Gabirol presents a deeply Neoplatonic vision of an unfolding cosmos with a few unexpected twists. With Plotinus and other Greek Neoplatonists, Ibn Gabirol speaks of a cosmic flow from Universal Intellect, down through World Soul and Nature. Unlike Plotinus, though, Ibn Gabirol envisions not one but three cosmic souls (correponding to the Platonic tripart human soul), and more importantly, uses creation and divine Will language throughout his work, focusing too on various levels of forms and matters that make up reality.

ajzāʾ al-ʿilm bil-kull jīm, wa-hiya: ʿilm al-ʿunsur wal-sūra, wal-ʿilm bil-irāda, wal-ʿilm bil-dhāt al-ʿūlā; wa-laysa fil-mawjūd ghayr hādhihi al-jīm. fal-ʿilla al-ʿūlā, al-dhāt; wal-maʿalūl, al-ʿunsur wal-sura; wal-irāda mutawassita bayna at-tarafayn . . .

In the All of existence,[53] there are three parts of knowledge: (1) the knowledge of matter (*al-ʿunsur*) and form (*al-sūra*), (2) the knowledge of Will (*al-irāda*),[54] and (3) the knowledge of the First Essence. In existence, there is nothing other than these three. Essence is the first cause; matter and form, effect; and Will is the intermediary between the two extremes.[55]

In this, his tripart breakdown of existence, Ibn Gabirol reveals the groundwork for the three most central theses of his *Fons Vitae*: (1) the description of God's utter unity in terms of a divine Essence, (2) the further description of God in terms of a divine Will (*al-irāda*) (or, we might say instead, a Divine Desire),[56] and (3) the doctrine to which later Latin scholastics give the name "universal hylomorphism," namely, the view that all things, including intellects, are form+matter composites,

a doctrine that contrasts with Aristotelian hylomorphism according to which only corporeal substances – but not intellects themselves – are described as form+matter composites.

From this latter thesis there arises a decidedly positive notion of matter in the *Fons Vitae*. In his somewhat nonstandard Neoplatonic (and, as we will see, Empedoclean-inspired) comology, Ibn Gabirol envisions a series of levels of matters and forms making up reality, starting with a first material principle that sits above even the Neoplatonic Universal Intellect. Whereas Plotinus-inspired Neoplatonism generally focuses on Intellect as the first reality outside of the divine One, Ibn Gabirol's cosmology inserts a level of exalted, spiritual matter prior even to Intellect, an idea that we may diagram as follows:

(1) God

(2) Pure Matter, or First Matter
(or, as I prefer to call it – in stricter accordance with the original
Arabic notion of *al-unsur al-awwal* – "Grounding Element")

(3) Intellect

Although somewhat unexpected in light of the more standard Neoplatonic idea of Intellect as the first reality outside God, and although somewhat unexpected too in light of the more standard Neoplatonic idea of matter as that most lowly cosmic privation, we may chart the occurrence of a cosmic pure materiality above Intellect in various guises in the Islamic mystical tradition of Ibn Masarra, in various Arabic Neoplatonic documents (including the longer version of the *The Theology of Aristotle*, and works by Shahrastani, Sharazuri, al-Qifti, and Ps. Ammonius), in the writings of Isaac Israeli, Ibn Ḥasdai, and in some kabbalistic works.[57] In fact, we can even find this sort of pre-Intellect materiality in Plotinus' own limited concern with the existence of an "intelligible matter," although we have no evidence of this part of Plotinus' work having been known to Ibn Gabirol (see Plotinus' *Enneads* II.4.1-5, V.4.2, and V.5.4 – that highlight the first "moment" out of the Godhead in terms of an exalted, intelligible materiality).[58]

In trying to uncover a historical trajectory for this idea in various Arabic and Hebrew traditions, scholars speak of a possible Empedoclean – labeled by scholars as pseudo-Empedoclean – strain of matter+form discourses at play in the late ancient world that in some way (and, actually, in different ways across the relevant Islamic and Jewish texts) seem to follow upon – and sometimes expressly refer to – Empedoclean notions of love and strife. The precise nature of this tradition (or traditions) remains unclear, but deals in various ways with either a pure material

reality – or a matter+form coupling – at the very root of the cosmos. In this vein, Shahrastani speaks of the Empedoclean idea of God's creation of

> The First Matter (*al-ʿunsur al-ʾawwal*, literally "First Element" – which I elsewhere translate as "Grounding Element"), which is a simple thing (*al-shay al-basīt*) and the principle of the intelligible simple (*hūwa ʾawwal al-basīt al-maʿaqūl*) and the first single simple kind (*nawʿ*) from which the Creator compounds (*kaththara*) extended things (*al-ashyāʿ al-mabsūta*).[59]

In Isaac Israeli, this theme of a First Matter may be seen in the *Mantua Text* account of the root of all in two simple substances:

> The beginning of all roots is two simple substances: one of them is first matter, which receives form and is known to the philosophers as the root of roots. It is the first substance which subsists in itself and is the substratum of diversity. The other is substantial form, which is ready to impregnate matter. It is perfect wisdom, pure radiance, and clear splendour, by the conjunction of which with first matter the nature and form of intellect came into being, because it [intellect] is composed of them [matter and form].[60]

We find this very same strain too in Ibn Ḥasdai's *The Prince and the Ascetic*, in which we read:

> The first of created things were two simple substances: the first matter which is the substratum for everything, i.e., the first hylic matter which is the substratum for all forms, and is called by the philosophers the genus of genera; and the form which precedes that which is found with it, i.e., the perfect wisdom, by the conjunction of which with matter the nature of the intellect came into being, so that the intellect, being composed of it and matter, is a species of it.[61]

Differences between various pseudo-Empedoclean materials aside, what is clearly highlighted is the idea of a first pure grade of matter (sometimes coupled with form) at the root of the great chain of being and present in all things – a sublime matter that Ibn Gabirol himself likens to the Divine Throne.[62] For Ibn Gabirol, the pure grade of first matter is indeed coupled with a first form, but in a variety of seemingly contradictory ways throughout his work.[63] As in the Arabic tradition of Ps. Empedocles, Ibn Gabirol's pure material pre-being is called *al-unsur al-awwal*, literally "the first element," a phrase that gets translated into the Latin as "*materia prima*" ("prime matter") but which is not to be confused with Aristotelian prime matter. In my own efforts to ward off any undue Aristotelian resonances, I prefer to translate "First Matter," and even "Grounding Element," avoiding the terminology of "prime matter" altogether so as to highlight the non-Aristotelian, pseudo-Empedoclean space of Ibn Gabirol's cosmology.

One especially unique feature of Ibn Gabirol's work is the way in which the presence of a cosmic first matter comes along with a way of privileging materiality over form (a move that is not clearly at play in the Israeli and Ibn Ḥasdai materials). To be sure, there are plenty of passages in Ibn Gabirol in which form is privileged over matter,[64] but there are some key passages that, on the contrary, highlight the priority of pure matter. First, as we have already touched on, Ibn Gabirol at one point likens pure matter to the Divine Throne:

> Matter is as if the throne [*cathedra*] of unity, and Will, the giver of form sits in it and reposes above it.[65]

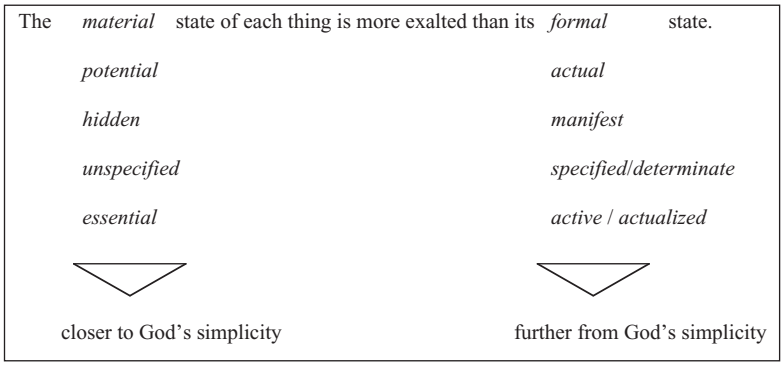
Here, the pureness of first universal matter is the seat on which the divine Glory rests. This clearly seems to give materiality – at least the precorporeal materiality just beyond the divine – an exalted role. Further emphasizing the idea of matter as an exalted principle, we may additionally note Ibn Gabirol's claim about the origin of this grounding matter:

> *Materia est creata ab essentia, et forma est a prorprietate essentiae, id est sapientia et unitate*.[66]
>
> Matter is created from Essence, and form is from the property of Essence, that is to say, from Wisdom and unity.

Where God's unity is expressed in "two moments," one essential and one active, it is to the more essential "moment" of the divine that matter is here linked. Although in no way suggesting that God is matter or that God is composed of matter, and in spite of many competing claims in his overall oeuvre, there is – in his comparison of matter to a divine throne, in his linking of matter to the divine Essence, and in a host of related descriptions of both matter and God's innermost Essence both in terms of hiddenness[67] – a perhaps unexpected ontological privileging of the material over the formal. Of course, the supremacy of a material principle becomes less unexpected when we recall our Ps. Empedoclean context – a context in which a material reality serves as the point of God's creative entry into the cosmos. As I have argued elsewhere, this spiritual matter can even be seen as demarcating the presence of Love in Ibn Gabirol's Empedoclean universe.[68]

To further understand the primacy of the pure material over the formal in Ibn Gabirol, it helps to stress his association of form with manifest limit and pure matter, on the other hand, with a kind of hidden, not-yet-manifest, limitlessness – all of which are decidedly positive traits that typify not only the pureness of matter, but the pureness of God's own infinitely unspecified essence as well.

We can summarize this set of matter-over-form intuitions with the following diagram:



Following on pseudo-Empedoclean sensibilities, Ibn Gabirol's vision of a grade of pure materiality allows him to embark on various positive matter discourses: Pure matter is linked to the Divine Essence, pure matter is the highest reality outside of God, pure matter is like God's own throne, pure matter is hidden and infinite (as is true too of God), and pure matter comprises all things, including intellects (this latter point being the hallmark of "universal hylomorphism"). These sorts of positive descriptions of a pure grade of matter are unheard of in any thinker who, like Maimonides, lacks a notion of this sort of matter, and for whom, on the contrary, the "purest" grade of matter is never anything more than either (a) a celestial grade of matter that is secondary to the intellectual principles (themselves not comprised of matter) that occupy Maimonides' Neoplatonized Aristotelian heavens, or (b) Aristotelian prime matter, itself a part of the mundane corporeal realm and very clearly ontologically secondary to form as well as secondary to intellect that is itself, on ordinary Aristotelian hylomorphic criteria, not composed of matter.

Although pure, first, universal matter certainly has a positive set of associations in Ibn Gabirol, there are plenty of passages in which it is form – as we would expect in standard Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic traditions alike – that emerges as the source of unity and light. In the final account, it is best to see Ibn Gabirol as uniquely sensitive to the equal importance of both matter and form, their intimate interdependence one on the other, and, essentially, their unity as a single whole – a dynamic arguably mirroring his vision of God's own reality in terms of essential and active "moments" that are ultimately one inseparable unity.

In way of further appreciating the subtleties of Ibn Gabirol's thought, it is worth additionally taking note of two especially poetic ways in which he describes matter

and form. First, in his famous Hebrew poem, the *Keter Malkhut* (variously translated as *The Kingly Crown*, *The Royal Crown*, *Kingdom's Crown*, et al.),[69] Ibn Gabirol uses the suggestive – and poetically resonant – language of *ha-sod ve-ha-yesod* ("the Secret (*sod*) and the Foundation (*yesod*)") to reference "form and matter." It might also be noted that in his description of God's act of enforming the material with manifest form, Ibn Gabirol sometimes uses the Hebrew term *rīqēm* (the emphatic form of the Hebrew verb *raqam*) with the meanings of "to form," "to shape," "to create," but also "to embroider."[70] In its Hebrew root (RQM), the very idea of formation is brought into immediate play with the notion of embroidery (*riqmah*). In his vision of the thundering opening of divine creativity, Ibn Gabirol is helped through the contours of Hebrew morphology to an act of divine embroidering.

Positive Matter in the Stoic Theology of Rabbi Simha of Troyes

Where Ibn Gabirol envisions a pure material reality at the root of the cosmos and first-removed from God (a spiritual grade of materiality that is not to be confused with any already enformed matter that is part of the material world), we can find an even more robust championing of the material – here arguably of ordinary worldly matter – in the Stoic theology of Rabbi Simha of Troyes for whom God is literally present to the world in the material reality of air. In his work on Rabbi Simha of Troyes, Gad Freudenthal gives us a detailed analysis of strains of Stoic thought in various talmudic and *midrashic* sources, as well as in Saadia Gaon, Shabetai Donnolo and the Hasidei Ashkanaz, and focuses in particular on how the work of the thirteenth-century Rabbi Simha reveals an especially deep connection with Stoic cosmo-theology, revealing an immanentist theology in which God is equated with the air, as well as the light, of the cosmos.[71] In Simha's cosmology, God, the foundational principle, is identified with the uncreated, eternal, and blessed cosmic air that fills the upper and lower realms, an all-pervasive air that is one and completely unified, and that is, furthermore, the source of all creation. This air is seen as an illuminating light, vestiges of which pass into our lower world through the radiance of the sun – a window between the upper and lower world, and the aperture through which a small portion of the cosmic air reaches earth:

> The entirety of upper air is somewhat like the lesser air which comes by way of that window, the sun, just that it is larger as the entire heavens are larger and wider than that window; but it is of a single core.[72]

Commenting on the first two days of creation in the Genesis account, Simha envisions God as a cosmic air (the "spirit of God" hovering over the face of the waters described at Genesis 1:2) coupled with an eternal cosmic water and fire from which He creates the rest of the universe[73] (elsewhere suggesting that the divine air

is a fire).[74] This divine cosmic illuminating air, itself the Divine Glory (*Kavod*) and Indwelling (*Shekhinah*),[75] is the source of the heavens and the earth on the second day of creation,[76] and is the source of – but also identical at its core with – all the air and light in our sensory realm.

As it relates to matter, it might be noted that Simha also describes this air as a tenth cosmic shell within which the Throne of Glory and the other cosmic spheres reside; in this role, the divine air is a "single endless, infinite foundation (*yesod*)"[77] upon which all things are grounded. Whereas Freudenthal has drawn a connection between between Simha and Ibn Gabirol's own account of ten cosmic layers (including a divine throne residing in the tenth sphere, the sphere of Intellect) in his *Keter Malkhut*, I would add an additional point of note. We have already seen Ibn Gabirol's own notion of a material Grounding Element (or, First Matter) at the core of reality, at the heart of all things – even intellects – likened to the Divine Throne, and itself called "Foundation." I have argued elsewhere that Ibn Gabirol's material Grounding Element is conceptually akin to Saadia's own notion of a cosmic air (a notion that Freudenthal here clearly identifies as a source of influence on Rabbi Simha's thought). Here, it seems clear that Simha's own analysis of divine air rests in part on his own familiarity with Ibn Gabirol's *Keter Malkhut* (as Freudenthal himself notes);[78] if we can additionally posit a familiarity on Simha's part with Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae*, then we can suggest further support for a link between Ibn Gabirol's material Grounding Element and Jewish philosophical notions – borrowed in part from Saadia – of a cosmic air. The upshot would be not simply an identification between air and light in the context of this cosmology, but a further identification of this air/light with the primal matter, or Grounding Element, from the pages of Ibn Gabirol's pseudo-Empedoclean thought. Of course, unlike Saadia's cosmic air and Ibn Gabirol's Grounding Element that are one step removed from God, the air/light[/primal matter?] of Simha's system is, in more clearly Stoic style, identified with God.[79]

In his magisterial study, Freudenthal has presented us with wide-ranging in-depth treatments of Stoic strains of thought in a host of Jewish sources, offering us in particular an especially thorough-going example of Stoicism in the pages of a frequently overlooked work of thirteenth-century Jewish philosophy. Yet, even in Rabbi Simha's Stoic-inspired identification of God and air, there seems to remain a hint of God's utter transcendence above the cosmos. Even in his claim that "the concealed, manifest, hidden air . . . it is the creator . . . it is in all things and all things are in it," Rabbi Simha goes on to add that "it is the foundation of all, and *above all*."[80] Even this particular quote aside, there seems to be a touch of transcendent

theology in Simha's immanentism, as seen in the uncomfortable balance between his claims that God is air on the one hand, and, on the other hand, his claims that – at least in the world as we currently live in it – the air and light is but a small and diminished vestige of the fullness of the divine light/air.

It is perhaps only in the secular theology of Spinoza that God is completely and unabashedly grounded. Although Spinoza's immanent God may be said to have a transcendence of a sort too, as it is more than the sum of the parts of the known universe,[81] there is, however, no sense, as in Simha, of this world being a weakened vestige of God; whereas for Spinoza, God has an infinite number of attributes that are not known to us, this world, for Spinoza, is God in his full and complete (and not weakened) manifestation through his attributes of extension and thought.

Positive Matter in Spinoza

The virtue and power of Nature is the very virtue and power of God.[82]

The obvious later figure in Jewish history to make identifications between God and matter, of course, is Spinoza. Moving away entirely from anything like a commentary approach (where, for example, Rabbi Simha sets out in his divine immanentist direction in light of his reading of certain biblical and rabbinic claims about God's presence in the air and light), Spinoza launches his philosophical thesis from what he takes to be firmly reasoned starting principles about the nature of substance. Arguing against various popular accounts of creation, God, eternity, and substance in the history of philosophy, Spinoza – although greatly influenced by the thought of such predecessors as Maimonides – replaces a medieval metaphysics with a new worldview. For Spinoza, a "substance monist," the only substance is God; everything else that we know and *think of as* substances in their own right – from tables and chairs, to animals and humans, to the perfect triangle and everything in between – is simply some manifestation *of* God – or, in Spinoza's lexicon, is simply some mode of God. From humans to pebbles to mathematical truths, we are all modes (the *natura naturata*, or "nature created") of the one infinite substance, God (the *natura naturans*, or "nature creating").

On this view, God and Nature are one.[83] For, although God is possessed of an infinite number of attributes, our limited human minds can only conceive Him through two of those attributes, namely, thought and extension. The implication of this is that anything we know is simply a [finite] manifestation of [the infinite] God through one of these two attributes. When we encounter ideas, we are seeing God finitely, under his aspect of thought. When we encounter physical bodies, we are seeing God finitely, under his aspect of extension. Because what we are ultimately

encountering in both cases [albeit finitely] is the single substance, God, it follows that "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things."[84] It also follows from this picture that the entirety of the extended physical universe is simply the reality of God manifest to us through one of His attributes.

> [S]ince nothing can be or be conceived without God, it is clear that everything in Nature involves and expresses the conception of God in proportion to its essence and perfection; and therefore we acquire a greater and more perfect knowledge of God as we gain more knowledge of natural phenomena. To put it another way, since the knowledge of an effect through its cause is nothing other than the knowledge of a property of that cause, the greater our knowledge of natural phenomena, the more perfect is our knowledge of God's essence, which is the cause of all things. So the whole of our knowledge, that is, our supreme good, not merely depends on the knowledge of God but consists entirely therein.[85]

From the Aristotelian idea that there are many substances, and that those substances are composed of matter and form, we here enter a new world in which the only substance is God, and every table and chair and human being and mind and idea that Aristotle would have pointed to as a substance in its own right is understood now rather as a finite mode of God – either (as is the case for our apprehension of what we think of as "physical entities") a mode of God under his attribute of extension, or (as is the case for our apprehension of what we think of as "mental entities") a mode of God under his attribute of thought. Again, because the reality of God, the single substance, singly underlies all of these modes, it follows that every mode of extension is identical with a corresponding mode of thought. The material reality of things? This is the one God manifest to us in an extended way. The formal reality of things? This is that same God manifest to us in a thought way.

As it relates to minds and bodies, it follows, for Spinoza – from the fact that God is the single substance inherent in everything – that the human mind is identical with the human body;[86] the mind is simply the idea of the body,[87] and the two are simply different modes of a single substance in perfect one-to-one correspondence – two different ways that we conceive a single reality:

> Thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that. So, too, a mode of Extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing expressed in two ways.[88]

With these features in place, it is clear that the anti-matter and/or anti-body rhetoric of past philosophical systems can no longer hold sway in Spinoza's court. Here, it is God who is manifest in material, corporeal stuff. Marking a decided departure from the history of philosophy, Spinoza's system is uniquely sensitive to the significance not only of the pristine human mind (as is the case for most ancient, medieval, and

modern thinkers – with Descartes as a hallmark – before him), but of the human body in all of its messy physical and emotional fullness. For both the mind and the body are God manifest. Here, a balanced focus on the human emotional and cognitive landscape emerges: It is only through human emotions (the messy domain of fear and pleasure) that the human being can meet her most essential human goal, namely, the fulfillment of her desire and drive (*conatus*) for self-preservation[89] – not by being a slave to passions, but by coming to understand and rationally "acquiesce" to the true way that things are and to act accordingly. This is true freedom, a state of well-directed (i.e., cognitive) desire, resulting ultimately in *amor Dei intellectualis* (the intellectual love of God) – a love that

> Is an action, not a passion: the action of a rational finite being whose essence is a *conatus* to persevere in being, and who adequately cognizes that, since God is the substance of which he is a finite mode, his own existence would be unthinkable unless God were exactly as he is . . . To love God intellectually is to be intellectually at peace (*quies*) with how things are: ourselves, and the absolutely infinite substance of which we are finite modes. The highest blessedness (*beatitudo*) is true acquiescence of spirit (*vera animi acquiescentia*).[90]

Spinoza's immanentist valuation of materiality ought to be firmly separated from the immanentist and positive sensibilities about matter in Ibn Gabirol or even Rabbi Simha of Troyes. As we have said, although Simha does equate God with the air and light of the world (and does see all of creation as rooted in that air/light), there remains a sense of God's true essence as removed and hidden from us in this world in a way that it will one day not be removed and hidden from us. In *Sefer ha-Maskil*, he says "God will open up the heavens in the future to come and we will no longer need the light of the sun."[91]

Simha goes on in this regard to speak of this future as a return to the prelapsarian state of Adam, a state in which – surrounded now fully by the fullness of divine air/light – the human is able to see from one end of the world to the other.[92] Although we may speak of a sense in which Spinoza's immanent God is transcendent,[93] here, in Simha's theology, the sense of transcendence is quite different: Whereas Spinoza's God is only finitely manifest to us in Nature in the sense that He is manifest too in infinite other ways that we do not apprehend, this "transcendence" for Spinoza is an eternal and necessary feature of what it means for God to be immanent in modes able to be apprehended by humans. For Simha, the transcendence of the immanent God is only temporary, suggesting that the current nature of God's immanence is not all that it could be: God could be more present than He currently is. For Spinoza, God's immanence now – and always – is all that it could be: God is present

now as He was then as He will be always in the single and unchanging sense that God is all that there is. This seems to suggest a much more robust sense of divine transcendence in Simha's theology than in Spinoza's.

As for Ibn Gabirol, yes, he does indeed have an exalted kind of matter in his system, and as such, some decidedly positive conceptions of materiality in his text. In fact, it is the nature of matter – more so than that of form – that, in his system, has more in common with (and is more intimately linked to) the Divine Essence. This in no way suggests an affinity between Ibn Gabirol and Spinoza. For Ibn Gabirol, God is still completely transcendent in the style of good, old-fashioned Neoplatonism. Ibn Gabirol's God is not at all identified with the pure materiality of the Grounding Element (or, First Matter), and is certainly not identified with the enformed materiality of corporeal bodies in nature that are many levels removed from that pure Grounding Element. Even if Ibn Gabirol were to identify God and the pure material Grounding Element (that, to stress again, he does not!), his God would still not be in any way identical with the materiality of the corporeal world, because the corporeal world is itself matter beset upon by layers and layers of dividing and differentiating forms. To suggest hints of – or even a groundwork for – Spinozism in Ibn Gabirol seems at best confusing, and at worst confused.

NOTES

1 For a series of studies on the history of matter in Greek and medieval contexts, see McMullin 1965. For an overview of seven different Arabic philosophical terms for "matter" at play in early Jewish medieval philosophy and mysticism contexts, see Vajda 1980, pp. 31–5. On the use and background of the Greek-into-Arabic *hayūlā*, see entry for this term in the *Encylopaedia of Islam*, second edition.

2 See Langermann 1996, p. 70.

3 For an elaboration on Plato's Receptacle see Cornford 1935–1997, pp. 177–88, and for a cautionary reminder that Plato nowhere calls the Receptacle "matter," see Cornford 1935–1997, p. 181. Nonetheless, one can imagine how the chaos of the receptacle in contrast to the order of the reasoning principle might have played itself out in later negative discourses on matter versus form.

4 "He first fully formed the intelligible world, in order that He might have the use of a pattern wholly God-like and incorporeal in producing the material world, as a later creation . . . " (Philo 1960a, p. 15). For step-by-step detail of how Philo reads this into the Genesis account of seven days worth of creation, see Philo 1960a, p. 23 ff.

5 For Philo, the entire universe is made in God's image, with intellect illustrating a special divine kinship in particular (Philo 1960a, p. 21). At the very start of his *De Opificio Mundi* (X), Philo sets out by stressing the importance of mind and its subordination to a higher source: "We shall fetch nothing from our own store, but, with a great array of points before us, we shall mention only a few, such as we may believe to be within reach of the human mind when possessed by love and longing for wisdom. The minutest seal takes in under the engraver's hand the contours of colossal figures" (Philo 1960a, p. 9), and goes on to stress that the human mind is "life principle of the life principle itself," the

mark of God's crowning creation (see Philo 1960a, p. 51). Philo speaks of "that invisible light perceptible only by mind [which] has come into being as an image of the Divine Word Who brought it within our ken" (Philo 1960a, p. 25), and describes the human as "partaker of kinship with [God] Himself in mind and reason best of all gifts" (Philo 1960a, p. 61) – at once the mark of God's immortal Mind in human being, and that through which man renders himself immortal (Philo 1960a, pp. 61, 63, 107).

6 See, for example, Philo's *De Opificio Mundi* (LIX) in which he warns against reason's capacity to become ensnared in the pleasures of corporeal reality through the senses. Philo 1960a, p. 131.

7 *Metaphysics* VII.3, 1029a30–34.

8 *Metaphysics* VII.6, 1031a15–18.

9 For some of Plotinus' views on matter, see *Ennead* 2 "On Matter," volume 441 in Loeb Classical Library (Plotinus 1966). For an extensive treatment of Plotinus' views on this topic across the *Enneads* and within a broader historical trajectory, see Corrigan 1996.

10 Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.4.16 (Plotinus 1966, pp. 148–9).

11 One main Plotinian influence is found in the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, a text that circulated in Arabic under the name of Aristotle but that turns out to have been an edited version of books 4–6 of Plotinus' *Enneads*. The selection I have quoted from previously is from Plotinus' second *Ennead*, and as such a part of Plotinus that is not in the *The Theology of Aristotle* and that, as such, we cannot be sure exerted any influence (or at least any direct influence) on later Jewish thinkers. For a detailed overview of the Arabic Plotinian materials that impacted on medieval Jewish and Islamic thought – including *The Theology of Aristotle* and other texts – see Adamson 2002.

12 On the tendency to describe God in terms of form and intellect in the *The Theology of Aristotle* (an editorial departure from Plotinus' more staunchly apophatic philosophy in the actual *Enneads*), see Adamson 2002, chap. 5 (cf. p. 116).

13 "It was because of . . . the divine intellect conjoined with man, that it is said of the latter that he is in the image of God and in His likeness . . . " (*Guide* I.1); Maimonides 1963, p. 23.

14 *Guide* I.2, Maimonides 1963, p. 25.

15 *Guide* III.8, Maimonides 1963, p. 431.

16 See also Pessin 2002; there, I also go on to treat Maimonides' further – and competing – description of matter as the Proverbs 31:10 "woman of valor." For a treatment of this metaphor, see also Diamond 2002.

17 For a treatment of the Active Intellect principle as it is understood in this period (as a cosmic principle separate from the human or divine intellect), H. Davidson 1972a, 1972b, 1987. For an overview treatment of this principle at play in Maimonides and his Islamic sources, see my Pessin 2005b.

18 *Guide* III.9, Maimonides 1963, p. 436.

19 Gersonides, *Commentary on Song of Songs*, Part Two, 2:2; see Gersonides 1998, p. 39.

20 Gersonides, *Commentary on Song of Songs*, Part Two, 1:14; see Gersonides 1998, p. 36.

21 Gersonides, *Commentary on Song of Songs*, Part Two, 1:16; see Gersonides 1998, p. 37.

22 Gersonides, *Commentary on Song of Songs*, Part Two, 1:12; see Gersonides 1998, p. 34.

23 Gersonides, *Commentary on Song of Songs*, Part Two, 2:3; Gersonides 1998, p. 39.

24 Philo, *Allegorical Interpretations* III.28–31; see Philo 1960a, p. 321.

25 In kabbalistic contexts, the God-as-Nothing theme can be seen in the divine sefirotic aspect of Keter, or, even more fully, in the presefirotic suprareality of *eyn sof* (the unlimited aspect of God). In this regard, one might consider the zoharic reading of

Genesis 1:1 in terms of God's nothingness giving way to yield the divine pleroma itself (and with it, the rest of being); cf. see Matt 2002, especially the text with his notes to the zoharic reading of Genesis 1:1 on pp. 10–13.

26 In my forthcoming *Embroidering the Hidden*, I criticize Weisheipl for reading Ibn Gabirol's "Will" as inconsistent with emanationism (see his Weisheipl 1979), and see Pessin 2003 for Wolfson's critique of Altmann on this theme.

27 Nahmanides commentary on Genesis 1:1, *Miqraot Gedolot*, my translation. *Miqraot Gedolot*, p. 6, column 1, lines 19–30, my translation. See too Nahmanides 1971–1976, volume 1, page 23.

28 *Miqraot Gedolot*, p. 6, column 2, lines 4–6, my translation. Ibid., p. 23.

29 Gersonides, *Wars of the Lord*, VI.17; Gersonides 1984, p. 330.

30 Gersonides, *Wars of the Lord*, VI.17; Gersonides 1984, pp. 330–1. For more on this primordial body and the first moments of creation, see V.2 (Gersonides 1984, pp. 36–8) and VI.18 (Gersonides 1984, pp. 332–44).

31 In this translation, I differ from Sirat who translates "and a third verse"; see Sirat 1985, p. 105.

32 *Miqraot Gedolot*, p. 2, lines 10–4; p. 4, lines 3–4. Ibn Ezra 1988–2004, volume 1, pp. 22–4.

33 See Ibn Ezra 1995.

34 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Introduction to Second Part; Maimonides 1963, p. 235.

35 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, Introduction to Second Part; Maimonides 1963, p. 238.

36 Simplicius 1882, pp. 229ff.

37 See Aristotle's discussions at *De Caelo* III.3, III.4, III.6, as well as *De Gen. et Corr.* II.2–4.

38 For detailed discussion of the Greek and Arabic commentary traditions and debates surrounding Aristotle's prime matter notion, see H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 99ff. pp. 579–90, as well as Hyman 1977.

39 Crescas' *Or Adonai*, Proposition X, Part II; see H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 261.

40 Ibid.

41 See also Crescas' *Or Adonai*, Prop. X, Part 1 (H. Wolfson 1929a, pp. 257–9), and Wolfson's comments at H. Wolfson 1929a, pp. 99–113 (cf. p. 102 for the particular relationship between prime matter and corporeal form), as well as Wolfson's notes to Crescas' Proposition X at H. Wolfson 1929a, pp. 569-602 (see n. 16 on page 577ff. for analysis of relevant philosophical terms in Crescas and Maimonides). For an account of Crescas' critique of prime matter, see H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 104, and Crescas' Prop. X, Part II, at H. Wolfson 1929a, pp. 260–3.

42 This translation is from the *Jewish Publication Society Bible*; for full text online, see http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/jps/eze001.

43 Although Maimonides talks as if this text agrees with his philosophical point of view, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer* is generally seen as a highly esoteric Jewish text, and in no obvious way in line with Maimonides on the issue of the divine Throne or otherwise. The text can be found as *Sefer Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer* (Warsaw 1852). For a translation with notes, bibliographies, and historical context, see Friedlander 1970.

44 *Guide* I.28, Maimonides 1963, p. 61.

45 Ibid.

46 For further discussion of this point, see H. Wolfson 1929a, pp. 103–4.

47 See discussion of the uppermost element in Freudenthal 1999.

48 *Guide* II.26; Maimonides 1963, p. 331.

49 *Guide* II.26; Maimonides 1963, p. 331.
50 See H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 103.
51 An extant Arabic fragment for the Latin text (Ibn Gabirol 1895) at 5.43, p. 338, lines 21–5 reveals this Arabic phrase (translated in the Latin, although, not as *fons vitae* but as *origo vitae*). For Arabic, see Pines 1977, p. 59.
52 Originally written in Arabic, this text, composed in the form of a dialogue between a student and teacher, survives in a twelfth-century Latin translation (by the translation team, John of Spain and Gundissalinus), as well as in a thirteenth-century Hebrew summary (by Shem Tov ibn Falaquera).
53 I choose to translate *bil-kull* dramatically as "in the All" (as opposed to "among existing things") to draw attention to "the All," a term for the Universe as a whole in Jewish Neoplatonic–inspired traditions. In this regard, consider E. Wolfson 1990b; Schlanger 1965.
54 In my longer study of Ibn Gabirol, I prefer to translate "Divine Desire" for Will. For a fuller discussion of this, my forthcoming manuscript, *Embroidering the Hidden*. For a related treatment, see the Ibn Gabirol sections of Pessin 2004 and Pessin 2005a, as well as my forthcoming piece on Ibn Gabirol for the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
55 Arabic text as cited in Moses ibn Ezra's *al-Hadīqa fī Ma'na al-Majāz wal- Haqīqa* (or, *Arūgat ha-Bōsem*); cf. Pines 1977, p. 71 (translation is my own); see corresponding Latin text at *Fons Vitae* 1.7, p. 9, line 25 – p. 10, line 4 (Ibn Gabirol 1895). For a French translation, see Schlanger 1968; for a partial French translation and commentary, see Ibn Gabirol 1950. For a partial English translation, see Wedeck 1962. For a complete English translation, see Ibn Gabirol 1987. For a contemporary Hebrew translation of the Latin text, as well as the Hebrew text of Falaquera's thirteenth-century abridged translation from the Arabic, see Ibn Gabirol 1964 or Munk 1859 for Falaquera's Hebrew text with Munk's French translation and commentary. For the Arabic fragments of the original text as found in Moses ibn Ezra, see Pines 1977; see also Fenton 1976.
56 See note 54.
57 For more information on the trajectory of this idea in some Arabic and Jewish sources, see "Anbaduklis" entry in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, and "Empedocles" entry in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, and regarding the Israeli and Ibn Hasday materials, see Altmann/Stern 1958, and Stern 1983. On this theme in Ibn Masarra, see Asín-Palacios 1978. On the vestige of these ideas in kabbalistic texts, see Kaufmann 1899, and on the arguably related notion of a "first created being" in *Kabbalah* with resonances in Ismā'ili sources, see Heller Wilensky 1994. On other uses of the relevant Arabic notion of *al-unsur* in Jewish texts, see Vajda 1980. On this Ps. Empedoclean idea, see also my forthcoming *Embroidering the Hidden*, and Pessin 2004.
58 For fuller discussion, see Dillon 1992.
59 Al-Shahrastānī 1923, pp. 260ff.
60 Isaac Israeli, *Mantua Text*, § I; cited in Stern 1983, p. 66.
61 Ibn Ḥasdai, *The Prince and the Ascetic*, chap. XXXIII, lines 9–15; Stern 1983, p. 104. For fuller text, see Ibn Ḥasdai 1950. It might be noted that it is the occurrence of this sort of thematic in Ibn Ḥasdai that leads S.M. Stern to use the name "Ibn Ḥasdai's Neoplatonist" to demarcate what he posited to be an unknown common source on this cosmic matter theme for Israeli, Ibn Ḥasdai, and the longer version of the *Theology of Aristotle*.
62 On the notion of pure matter in Ibn Gabirol as a "Divine Throne," see *Fons Vitae* V.42, p. 335, lines 23–4 (Ibn Gabirol 1895), and the useful diagram by Loewe; Loewe 1989, p. 114.

63 On the confusing nature of Ibn Gabirol's treatment of matter's relationship to form, see Rudavsky 1978. For a longer treatment of Ibn Gabirol, see Schlanger 1968, and my forthcoming *Embroidering the Hidden*.
64 See Rudavsky 1978.
65 *Fons Vitae* V.42, p. 335, lines 23–4 (Ibn Gabirol 1895).
66 *Fons Vitae* V.42, p. 333, lines 4–5 (Ibn Gabirol 1895).
67 In Pessin 2004, I argue for how this thematic of "hiddenness" – linked to a discourse of "receptivity" – can be seen as opening a feminist voice in the work of Ibn Gabirol's metaphysics.
68 See my forthcoming *Embroidering the Hidden*, and Pessin 2004.
69 For translations and useful commentaries, see Cole 2001 and the fuller length treatment in Gluck 2003.
70 For example, he uses the language of *rīqēm* to describe God's relation to the human countenance (Schirmann 1954, p. 236, poem 96). Scheindlin translates *riqēm* there as "weaves," and discusses the RQM root in rabbinic sources at Yoma 72b and *Mishna Hulin* 9:6, citing too Maimonides' own reference to Psalms 139:15. See Scheindlin 1991, p. 263, note 8 (in his commentary to poem 27 from pp. 208–9). We might here additionally note the occurrence of this verbal root RQM in the Qumran description of the *roqemet ruaḥ qodesh qedashim* – the variegated – or "embroidered" – spirit of the Holy of Holies. I am thankful to Elliot Wolfson for drawing this to my attention (and see his own discussion of this in E. Wolfson 2004b, p. 204, fn. 93).
71 In this section, I am indebted to and am drawing expressly upon Gad Freudenthal's illuminating study (in Hebrew); see Freudenthal 1994–1995. See also Freudenthal 1996b.
72 *Sefer ha-Maskil*, Section 7, p. 15a, lines 23–5; as cited in Freudenthal 1994, p. 190; my translation. As Freudenthal's work is in Hebrew, all English citations from *Sefer ha-Maskil* in this paper are my own translations.
73 See *Sefer ha-Maskil*, section 59, p. 44a, lines 6–7; as cited in Freudenthal 1994, p. 189, fn. 5.
74 See *Sefer ha-Maskil*, section 6, p. 13b, line 32; as cited in Freudenthal 1994, p. 190.
75 For this association, I am drawing on *Sefer ha-Maskil*, section 4, p. 10a, lines 42–4; as cited in Freudenthal 1994, p. 191.
76 See *Sefer ha-Maskil*, section 76, p. 59a, lines 46–8; as cited in Freudenthal 1994, p. 189.
77 *Sefer ha-Maskil*, Section 59, p. 43a, lines 43–4; as cited in Freudenthal 1994, p. 190.
78 Freudenthal 1994, p. 205.
79 Leaving the details for a separate study, it ought be noted here that in drawing a link between Simha's air and Ibn Gabirol's Grounding Element, we must also be mindful of the former phenomenon being described as the cosmic sphere that holds the Divine Throne, whereas Ibn Gabirol likens the Grounding Element to the Divine Throne (with the Sphere of Intellect, rather, being described as that which holds the Divine Throne). In addition to the possibility that Simha was in no way familiar with the details of Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* account, this point (in addition, of course, to what we have already pointed to, viz. that Simha's air IS God, whereas Ibn Gabirol's primal matter is not) might suggest a dissimilarity between Simha's principle of air and Ibn Gabirol's principle of a material Grounding Element. More study is needed on unpacking the precise relation (which I have begun to explore elsewhere) between Saadia's notion of air and Ibn Gabirol's notion of the material root of all; here, the similarity seems strong, suggesting to me the possibility of a Stoic undertone to Ibn Gabirol's own talk of the Grounding Element: Even though he does not call it air, it seems plausible that he might have – in light of

his own reading of Saadia's analysis of a cosmic air, coupled with the many similarities between the two accounts – understood it to be a kind of cosmic air.

80 *Sefer ha-Maskil*, section 6, p. 13b, lines 19–21; as cited in Freudenthal 1994, p. 190.

81 See H. Wolfson 1934, pp. 74–5: "the immanence of Spinoza's substance is a transcendent immanence. Spinoza's substance is thus a whole transcending the universe, the latter being the sum of the modes, and the relation of substance to the universe is conceived by him after the manner of the relation of the whole to the part." See also Lloyd's reminder that Spinoza is not a pantheist: "Spinoza [does not think] that God and the world are identical. To claim that would be to leave out account the infinity of other attributes under which God is expressed. It would also be to overlook that even God-under-the-attribute-of-extension cannot be identified strictly with the material world. That world is of course 'divisible'; it has parts. But Spinoza insists that 'no attribute of a substance can be truly conceived from which it follows that the substance can be divided', and that a substance that is absolutely infinite is indivisible (IP12 and P13). It would seem then that his God cannot be identified with the world" (Lloyd 1996, p. 38, referring to *Ethics* IP12-13; see Spinoza 2002, pp. 223–4).

82 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, VI.9; Spinoza 2002, p. 446.

83 See note 81.

84 Spinoza, *Ethics* IIP7; Spinoza 2002, p. 247.

85 *Theological-Political Treatise*, IV.11; Spinoza 2002, p. 428.

86 See Garrett 1996, p. 4.

87 As Donagan puts it, "Each human being is both a human body, a finite mode of God constituted by the attribute Extension, and a human mind, the finite mode of God as thinking that is primarily constituted by an idea of that body *and of nothing else*"; Donagan 1996, p. 354.

88 Spinoza, *Ethics* IIP7s; see Spinoza 2002, p. 247.

89 As Lloyd puts it, in his conception of this drive to self-preservation, Spinoza "develops the notion of *conatus* into a radically new ethical concept" – as she puts it, "[a] thing's endeavor to persist in being becomes its very essence," and "[t]he continuation of existence, rather than being a formal prerequisite for virtue, becomes what we desire in desiring virtue – the good itself." See G. Lloyd 1996, p. 9.

90 *Ethics* VP42s. For this point, see Donagan 1996, p. 377, and the notion of "true spiritual contentment." See Spinoza 2002, p. 382.

91 *Sefer ha-Maskil*, Section 6, p. 14b, lines 12ff; as cited in Freudenthal 1994, p. 191; my translation.

92 *Sefer ha-Maskil*, Section 7; see Freudenthal 1994, p. 191.

93 See n. 81.

10

COSMOLOGY: THE HEAVENLY BODIES

GAD FREUDENTHAL

INTRODUCTION

In medieval thought, the heavenly bodies held the highest status among all the material bodies. Whatever the specific philosophical or religious orientation of a person, he (or, much more rarely, she) believed that the stars and the planets (as well as the spheres to which they are affixed) were made of a noble "fifth matter," distinct from the four sublunar elements with which it did not interact. The heavenly bodies were therefore excluded from the cycles of generation and corruption: They were usually taken to be eternal, and as such they were regarded as the most noble existents. It was furthermore held that they had souls and intellects with which they cognized. All authors agreed that physical influences emanated from them on the material sublunar world: These heavenly influences were usually construed as the deity's instruments through which He exercises His Providence over the sublunar world, including humankind. The fact that this lower world was not a chaos but followed some order was thus seen as due to the wholesome influences of the celestial bodies. The latter, however, were not taken to act on their own, but rather as God's instruments.

The medieval study of the heavenly bodies straddled at least four disciplines: astronomy, natural philosophy, metaphysics, and astrology (including medical astrology), each of which reasoned from its own premises and *problématiques*. Medieval thinkers stood, as it were, at the crossroads of all these disciplinary traditions, and integrated the information they provided into their views of the cosmos. In what follows, it will be necessary therefore to begin with brief sketches – no more is possible – of the contributions of the different traditions to the bodies of knowledge available for the medieval Jewish thinkers: Greek astronomy and its development in Arabic; Aristotelian natural philosophy and metaphysics, and their subsequent evolution; and astrology.

These traditions agreed on many fundamentals but also made conflicting statements. Moreover, even within a given discipline, there existed traditions that differed on basic issues. Therefore, although a kernel of almost universally shared beliefs about the nature and roles of the heavenly bodies in the economy of the natural world can be identified, no global consensus was shared by all medieval authors. It goes without saying that the present short overview makes no pretense to being comprehensive. For detailed treatment I selected a small number of writers, whose views seemed to me to be of particular interest. Yet, although these ideas were interwoven with views in many other domains, they depended on that thinker's global philosophy and were therefore often personal. The reader is requested to bear in mind that the few examples discussed herein are not a representative sample.

Another, rather far-reaching disclaimer is in order. In what follows I am concerned only with the views on the heavenly bodies in a single intellectual tradition, namely, that of Greco–Arabic science and philosophy. For lack of space and competence, I do not consider the views of the heavenly region entertained by Jewish mystics of different sorts (kabbalists and others), nor those held – and put into practice – by the numerous adherents to the technique of manipulating celestial *pneumata*, nor those held by traditionalists (who rejected the study of philosophy as illegitimate but nonetheless have assimilated some of its doctrines), nor, lastly, by nonscholars, ordinary men and women who constructed their views of the heavens out of lore picked up from different sources.[1] My focus is limited to a small, albeit significant segment of the large spectrum of existing views: the rationalist culture, whose heroic figures were Aristotle, Ptolemy, Alexander of Aphrodisias, al-Fārābī, Averroes (Ibn Rushd), and so forth.

To get a picture of how medieval Jewish thinkers construed the heavenly bodies, we have to separate the discussion of those thinkers who lived in Islamic lands and, knowing Arabic, had access to the enormous body of literature available in that language, from those who lived under Christendom and usually had access only to works in Hebrew. (Access to work in Latin was quite rare.) The difference is huge, for only a fraction of the literature available in Arabic (or for that matter Latin) was translated into Hebrew. I therefore proceed in three steps. I first (Part One) describe in general terms different disciplinary traditions of thinking about the heavenly bodies. Next, I describe how, drawing on this stock of available knowledge, some Jewish thinkers writing in Arabic and in Hebrew constructed their own views of the heavenly bodies (Part 2, II and III, respectively).

PART 1: PREMISES: DISCIPLINARY TRADITIONS CONCERNING THE HEAVENLY BODIES

I. GREEK

As so often, the roots of the medieval view of our topic hark back to ancient Greece, which saw the emergence of three disciplinary traditions that concern us immediately: astronomy, natural philosophy, and metaphysics. A related discipline, astrology, was systematized and "codified" only later, under the Roman Empire, in Egypt, and is described later.

Although Greek astronomy partly depended on its Babylonian predecessor, for our purposes it will be sufficient that we begin our account of Greek astronomy with Eudoxus of Cnidos (ca. 409–356 B.C.E.), the (presumed) inventor of the so-called two-sphere model. The major observable astronomical phenomena for which Eudoxus sought to account are: (1) that the so-called fixed stars keep their relative positions to one another while they all move together from east to west in a motion that repeats itself daily (more precisely: every 23 hours and 56 minutes); and (2) that some heavenly bodies, called "planets" (the moon, Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn), share this daily motion of the fixed stars, but in addition move with respect to the latter's unchanging pattern – these motions are different for each planet, but regular too, repeating themselves after a duration varying from ca. 29 1/2 days (the moon) to 30 years (Saturn). According to Aristotle's presentation, Eudoxus postulated that the fixed stars are all attached to a single sphere that revolves about the earth at its center. This provided a simple rational explanation both for the fact that the fixed stars do not change their relative positions and for the fact that they all move from east to west. Eudoxus further posited that each planet is moved relative to the fixed stars by a system of three or four earth-centered rotating spheres. This was an ingenious theory that afforded for the first time a mathematical (geometrical) representation of the cosmos. Basically, this view was to remain with the Mediterranean scientific tradition[2] for about two millennia, both in astronomy and in natural philosophy, into which it was integrated by Aristotle.

Aristotle (380–320 B.C.E.) put forward an innovative global world picture that included the following two closely related radically new ideas (among many others): the division of the cosmos into two regions, a supra- and a sublunar, in which fundamentally different physical laws obtain; and the idea that the cosmos in its present structure is eternal. Let us briefly consider this cosmology, which (in slightly differing interpretations) will remain the obligatory frame of reference during the entire medieval period. The idea that the material world around us consists of four elements had already been entrenched in Aristotle's time, but the Stagirite

elaborated it into a full physics. In Aristotle's view, two of the sublunar elements (air and fire) are light and have a natural rectilinear upward motion; the two others (water and earth) are heavy and have a natural rectilinear motion downward. Now the celestial bodies were traditionally held to consist of the element fire, but astronomical discoveries, which showed that the universe was significantly greater than previously assumed, made this notion untenable for Aristotle. A fundamental tenet of the theory of the four elements stated that in any substance as also in the entire universe the elements hold one another in check, forming a precarious equilibrium. The discovery that the dimensions of the heavenly region were by far greater than those of the lower world implied that it could not consist of fire: Had this been the case, the element fire, owing to its overwhelming quantity, would have overpowered the other three elements, transforming the universe into a ball of fire. Because this was not the case (and, Aristotle believed, there were no reasons to think that it was under way or would ever occur), the heavenly region could not possibly consist of fire. Aristotle framed the idea that the upper region – from the moon and upward, therefore called "supralunar"– entirely consists of a distinct matter, unlike the four we know in the lower ("sublunar") world. This fifth substance (later called "ether") he affirmed to have two main characteristics.[3] First, unlike the four sublunar elements, it has none of the four qualities of sublunar matter and therefore does not change; not being contrary to any of the other elements, it does not partake in the unsteady equilibrium that the sublunar elements maintain in the world. This assumption obviously accounted for the fact that the matter of the supralunar world, its great quantity notwithstanding, did not overcome the elements of the sublunar world. The second characteristic of the fifth element was that it has a permanent natural circular local motion. This postulate obviously accounts for the motion of the heavenly spheres and bodies. Together, the two postulates grounded another, rather innovative, fundamental idea adduced by Aristotle, namely, that the universe is eternal: Because the impassive, unchangeable celestial element could not overpower the other elements nor be overpowered by them, Aristotle argued, it is eternal, and so is its circular motion. Therefore, the entire world, sub- and supralunar, is eternal: Although the individuals in the sublunar world undergo constant generation and corruption, the species of plants and animals are eternal too, and so the sublunar world remains essentially unchanged (in Aristotelian parlance, it has a share in the eternal and the divine). The thesis that the entire world is eternal is one of the most characteristic Aristotelian theses. It is also the one that created the sharpest antagonism among traditional circles of the three Abrahamic religions, most of whom saw it as contradicting the biblical account of creation.

Aristotle's detailed reasoning, to which of course I cannot do justice here, is truly ingenious. From the viewpoint of modern scientific method it strikes us as odd that Aristotle made no attempt to substantiate the existence of the posited ether by any empirical method. Such a perspective is, however, anachronistic. Rather, from an Aristotelian perspective, the fact that the existence of the fifth element was established by logical reasoning from (as Aristotle believed) indubitable premises conferred on the theory a particularly strong epistemological status. Put differently, for anyone accepting the premises of Aristotelian scientific methodology, the theory positing the supralunar substance appeared as *demonstrated* once and for all (rather than as simply "confirmed," as we say today). Very few were the medieval thinkers in the Aristotelian tradition who doubted its existence and its properties as Aristotle has posited them, a point to be borne in mind in the sequel.

Aristotle attends to the celestial bodies also in his *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. Here he proceeds on the assumption that each motion must have a mover. This holds, first, of the observable motions down here, which, Aristotle affirms, must be caused by other motions, ultimately going back to the celestial motions (a point to be discussed later). How do the celestial motions themselves originate? In the *Physics*, Aristotle does not account for the circular motions of the heavenly bodies by referring to the ether's natural circular motion. Rather, he argues that every motion needs a mover and that to avoid infinite regression one must suppose that the chain of movers terminates in a mover that is itself unmoved and that is absolutely incorporeal (it is pure form). This is the so-called Unmoved (or First) Mover, that medieval philosophy, in its attempt to accommodate traditional monotheistic religion with philosophy and science, was to identify with God as known from revelation. The question of how the immaterial Unmoved Mover moves the celestial spheres and thereby the heavenly bodies, Aristotle answers by arguing that, in the absence of physical contact, what can move a body is only a *desire*. (We see a beloved object and move toward him/her/it, without being moved by physical contact.) A desire can be harbored only by a living being, and Aristotle indeed holds that the celestial spheres are living beings, indeed the most noble ones. *Qua* living beings, the spheres have souls, in which the desire is formed. These souls of course have nothing to do with a vegetative and an animal soul, as is the case in sublunar living beings, for the celestial spheres do not change; hence, the soul of a celestial sphere is a rational soul only, also called "intellect." All this amounts to saying that the celestial spheres are moved by their intellects, namely, by virtue of a desire formed in them, directed to the Unmoved Mover. This is (simplified) Aristotle's metaphysical account of the motion of the celestial spheres and bodies. Note that there is no incompatibility between the notion that the celestial matter has a natural circular motion and

the idea that the spheres are moved by the Unmoved Mover *via* the incorporeal intellects.

Although Aristotle strictly separated the natural world into the sublunar and the supralunar realm in which different natural laws obtain, the two are not entirely disconnected in his thought. In point of fact, the celestial bodies assume an important role in the economy of the sublunar world as described by Aristotle, and his ideas on this subject were the fountainhead for many of the medieval discussions to be considered later. The postulates of Aristotelian physics imply that the sublunar elements should, by virtue of their natural motions upward and downward, eventually separate from one another, and arrive at a stable state: We should have an earthy globe at the center, encircled by "shells" of the elements water, air, and fire. Put differently, the surface of the globe would be entirely covered by water, the surface of the water by air, and that of the air by fire, itself enclosed by the ether. To account for the fact that this is not the case, Aristotle argues that by virtue of their motions, the celestial spheres continually "mix" the sublunar elements, thereby hindering them from settling at their natural places. The sun, moreover, heats the surface of the earth and the sea, thus producing the so-called dry and moist exhalations which, when they rise, mix earth and water together with the elements air and fire. Furthermore, because the sun moves along the ecliptic and thus at a changing inclination with respect to the surface of the earth, it produces now summer (reinforcement of "dry" and fire), now winter (its retreat diminishes heat and thus reinforces the quality "cold" and of the element water), thereby avoiding a stable state of the sublunar region. (The locus classicus of this argument is *De Generatione et Corruptione* II:10–11.) The fact that the celestial motions continually mix the elements allows quantities of the four elements to combine and form material substances. In Aristotle's scheme, then, without those celestial motions and the blending of the elements there would have been no generation and corruption. Note that Aristotle does not view this felicitous state of affairs as an indication of divine providence of any sort, although this is precisely what later followers of his made of this idea.

This doctrine obviously presupposes that the sun warms, which should cause the reader to raise an eyebrow: Did not the introduction of the impassive "ether," which is neither warm nor cold, neither moist nor dry, imply that the celestial bodies, not having qualities, cannot act on the four sublunar elements? In Aristotelian physics (as also in common sense) as a rule only a body that is itself hot can heat, so that if the sun is not hot, it should not be able to heat. Aristotle was of course aware of the problem. How, then, can the sun, composed as it is of the quality-less fifth element, heat the sublunar world? Aristotle replies that the sun heats by virtue of its motion

through the air (just as an arrow warms through friction).[4] Already Aristotle's early students soon recognized that this was a rather unsatisfactory account (for one thing, does not the sphere of the moon lie between the sun and the sublunar air?) and replaced it by others.[5]

The introduction of the fifth body confronted Aristotle with yet another problem. It has its origin in the four-element theory of matter. Take a heap of matter: What makes it into, say, a plant that not only is beautifully structured, but also has the remarkable capacity to structure additional matter (viz. foodstuffs that are ingested) so that they have the very same form? (This capacity to grow by absorbing and informing matter Aristotle called the "vegetative soul" of the substance in question.) The elements have no inner propensity to "organize" themselves into structured substances, let alone such that are endowed with the capacity to grow. Nay, the postulates of Aristotle's theory of matter imply that the material world should rather be totally disorganized: Given that any substance has contrary qualities, the theory implies that sooner or later one of them becomes predominant and overpowers the others, so that the substance ceases to exist as such (e.g., when in a living body the quality "cold" overpowers its contrary, that body becomes a corpse). Similarly, given that a substance is constituted of elements having opposed natural movements, we would expect them to fly off in opposite directions. However we look at it, Aristotle's matter theory implies that any substance should disintegrate rapidly into its components. True: All substances ultimately do – this is why corrosion always ends by having the upper hand and why death is inevitable in living beings, but for different spans of time they resist corruption. In short, the four-element theory of matter required an account of the origin of forms in matter and an explanation of how forms persist in it.

Now many early Greek thinkers had believed that the celestial matter was divine and attributed to it, notably to the sun's heat, vivifying effects. This account was obviously incompatible with Aristotle's novel notion of the fifth body, and so Aristotle could not uphold it. Moreover, Aristotle had to fight on another front as well: Plato, Aristotle's teacher, maintained the powerful theory according to which each form in our world is produced by a transcendent Form. Aristotle, however, rejected Forms too. Aristotle thus had to frame new accounts for the coming-to-be of informed (structured) substances and for their (longer or shorter) persistence once they have come to be.

For Aristotle, the form in a given clump of matter originates not in a transcendent Form, or in the celestial matter, but rather in the sire's seed. Each plant or animal goes back to a seed that originated in a parent of the same species. What about the first seed?, one may be tempted to ask. Because for Aristotle the world is eternal, his

theory amounts to stating that the same forms have existed in the world and have been transmitted from parent to offspring since all eternity; thus there is no "first" seed. What about the persistence of forms in already constituted substances? Why do substances not disintegrate? Aristotle was aware of the problem and grappled toward a solution in terms of an inborn *pneuma* supposedly holding matter together, although he seems not to have worked out this theory in detail.[6] Thus, and in the present context this is the salient point: Aristotle accounts for the origin of forms in matter in purely *immanent* terms, without invoking (as did his predecessors) informing, vivifying, celestial influences. In a famous phrase Aristotle exclaims more than once: "human generates human, and the sun as well." This carries a double message. (1) Each individual man is generated from another individual man, without the intervention of any transcendent Platonic Ideas.[7] (2) The sun, too, plays a role, albeit a modest one, namely, that of continually mixing up the four sublunar elements – were it not for the sun's motion along the ecliptic, there would be absolutely no composite material substances and hence no men. The phrase "and the sun as well" has nothing to do with the old ideas on the vivifying effect of the celestial bodies, but rather alludes to the ideas exposed in *De Gen. et Corr.* II.10.

Aristotle's theory of matter will remain with us throughout this essay. Later philosophers, both Aristotelians and others, accepted it, but not Aristotle's immanentist account of the origin or persistence of forms. This implies that they accepted an account that affirmed that the sublunar world could not exist on its own: Were the sublunar world a closed system, consisting only of the four elements, any order that might exist in it would dissolve rapidly. Aristotle's theory of matter thus called for a complement to it. Philosophers supplied this complement in the form of different accounts, which more often than not involved influences from the heavenly bodies. We must therefore remember that the latter were not introduced by mere whim or with a theological ax to grind, but rather because the very premises of Aristotle's theory of matter required an informing power acting from without the sublunar world.

The fact that the quality-less sun acts on the element fire and the quality-less moon on the element water[8] is an "anomaly" in the Aristotelian "paradigm" (I use these two concepts in the sense they were given by Thomas S. Kuhn). Now it is truly remarkable (but in line with Kuhn's analysis) that very few medieval thinkers in the Aristotelian tradition pondered the possibility that the very notion of a fifth element that is a "stranger" to the lower world of generation and corruption should be abandoned. As noted earlier, medieval scholars mostly regarded the existence of this fifth element and of the theory attached to it to have been *demonstrated* by

reason itself. How firmly this notion was entrenched in even the most original and creative medieval minds can be illustrated by a quotation from Levi ben Gershom, or Gersonides. Gersonides rehearses a well-known *topos* of medieval thought when he declares that "Experience is the point of departure for inquiry, not inquiry the point of departure for experience. . . . If we find in it [i.e., in experience] something that is incompatible with reason [= here: physical theory], we should not reject experience on this account." The reader who may be tempted to applaud this statement as an early expression of the credo of the empirical method in science will be quickly disenchanted by the immediately following lines:

> Indeed, the Philosopher [Aristotle] did just this when he found through experience that the sun heats the things [down] here, although it was evident from inquiry [= physical theory] (i) that the sun is not warm, and (ii) that anything that brings something from potentiality to actuality must somehow possess in actuality what the other has in potentiality. Now the Philosopher did not discard this experience because of these premises, but rather inquired how this [empirical fact, viz. that the sun warms] is possible without contradicting the theoretical premises.[9]

Gersonides, we see, is of the opinion that Aristotle should be commended because he did not let his theory mislead him into denying that the sun heats sublunar objects! As odd as this may seem to us, it palpably shows how strong was the grip on men's minds of the Aristotelian idea that the sun is not warm. (Much the same holds of all other ideas that were considered as demonstrated by reason.)

The world picture of the celestial bodies that Aristotle left to posterity thus includes the following ideas. The celestial spheres posited in astronomy, just as the stars and the planets themselves, are constituted of a special, impassive, quality-less "fifth" element, endowed with a natural circular motion: (1) Although the sun is not warm, it can still heat owing to its motion; (2) the celestial spheres have rational souls and are moved by their intelligences owing to the latter's desire for the Unmoved Mover; and (3) the sun and the moon, by virtue of their motions, influence the sublunar world, thereby maintaining the continuity of generation and corruption in the lower world.

The next major landmark in the evolution of Greek ideas about the celestial bodies took place with the publication in Alexandria of two works by Claudius Ptolemy (ca. 150 C.E.), one on astronomy and the other on astrology. The first, usually known as the *Almagest* (the mixed Arabic–Greek form of the title testifies to the strong impact the book had in Arabic), became the standard work of astronomy for some fifteen centuries. It systematized the geometrical devices then used to represent the astronomical motions as resulting from simple circular motions,

whose centers, however, were not identical with the center of the earth. The basic geometrical device is the so-called epicycle: The planet is assumed to move uniformly along a small circle (called "epicycle") whose center in turn moves along a large circle (called the "deferent"), the center of which is the center of the earth. Thus, in the simple model, the planet's motion resulted from a combination of two motions: a uniform angular speed around the center of the epicycle, which in its turn moved with uniform angular speed around the center of the earth. In Ptolemy's planetary models, however, in addition to the epicycle, there is an eccentric circle (the deferent), but mean motion takes place about a different point called "the equant" (the center of rotation), such that the distance from the center of the earth to the equant is twice the distance from the center of the earth to the center of the deferent (on the same side with respect to the center of the earth). The planet is located on the epicycle, and the center of the epicycle moves along the deferent circle.[10]

One of the main purposes for which these additional geometrical devices were introduced is to account for the so-called retrograde motion of the planets: A planet is observed to move from west to east, then to slow down until it gradually comes to a halt (technically called a "stationary point"), to move backward with a slowly accelerating motion, then again to slow down, until it comes to a halt before gradually resuming its motion from west to east. Ptolemy showed that by choosing a proper combination of geometrical devices and parameters for each planet, the motions of the planets could be calculated with satisfactory precision.

From the perspective of our topic, we should note that Ptolemy's astronomical textbook presented the observed heavenly phenomena as resulting from motions (revolutions of orbs) that were incompatible with Aristotelian physics.[11] The latter posited that the celestial motions are naturally circular and all have one and the same the center, namely, the center of the earth (which is identical with the center of the world). Yet the geometrical devices of Ptolemaic astronomy posited various motions about centers other than this single center. The apparent incompatibility of the geometrical devices (or "models," to use a modern, anachronistic, but useful term) posited by astronomers and the fundamentals of Aristotelian physics exercised many talents in the Middle Ages, as will be mentioned later on. Indeed Ptolemy tried to bridge the gap between astronomy and physics, notably in his lesser-known work, *Planetary Hypotheses*, which described physical models that were intended to be construed as representing reality.

The second major landmark, Ptolemy's astrological treatise *Tetrabiblos*, must be viewed in the context of cultural traditions of the Hellenistic/Roman period. The last centuries before the beginning of the common era and the two centuries

following it witnessed the emergence of a cultural ambiance that accorded the heavenly bodies an essential role in the workings of nature and especially in the governance of the lower world by the supernal one.[12] There was, first, the emergence of Greek astrology.[13] Astrology hailed from Babylonia, where however it was a mere craft, based on purportedly empirical know-how.[14] It entered Greek culture in or just after the third century B.C.E., and under the Hellenistic Empire astrology was almost universally accepted.[15] In 274 C.E. a sideral theology that combined oriental religions with astrology and star worship was made into the official religion of the Roman Empire.[16] Astrology was also associated with "popular" doctrines that made material processes in the sublunar world depend on the heavenly bodies, such as, notably, astrological botany and medicine and occasionally alchemy as well.[17]

The absorption of astrology within Greek culture eventually led to its systematized exposition, in Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos.* This work consists almost exclusively of mere rules unconnected to any causal physical theory, but Ptolemy was aware of, and concerned by, the fact that the very assumption that the planets affect (or even determine) aspects of human life is difficult to reconcile with Aristotelian celestial physics. "Difficult," but not impossible, for Ptolemy devotes one chapter of his treatise (1:2) to a scientific rationale of astrology. Ptolemy argues that the empirical facts corroborate astrology's main assumption, namely, that the natural phenomena down here are determined by the heavenly bodies:

> The sun, together with the ambient, is always in some way affecting everything on the earth, not only by the changes that accompany the seasons of the year to bring about the generation of animals, the productiveness of plants, the flowing of waters, and the changes of bodies, but also by its daily revolutions furnishing heat, moisture, dryness, and cold in regular order and in correspondence with its positions relative to the zenith. The moon, too, as the heavenly body nearest the earth, bestows her effluence most abundantly upon mundane things, for most of them, animate and inanimate, are sympathetic to her and change in company with her: the rivers increase and diminish their streams with her light, the sea turn their own tides with her rising and setting, and plants and animals in whole or some part wax and wane with her. Moreover, the passages of the fixed stars and the planets through the sky often signify hot, windy, and snowy conditions of the air, and mundane things are affected accordingly.[18]

This passage clearly echoes Aristotle's discussion in *De Gen. et Corr.* II:10, but it goes beyond it in positing the effects on the sublunar realm not only of the sun and the moon, but also of the fixed stars and the planets. Ptolemy moves still farther away from Aristotle by espousing, in the next step of his argument, the distinctively astrological thesis that the relative positions of the planets to one another (their so-called aspects) also play an important role:

Then, too, their [the planets'] aspects to one another, by meeting and mingling of their dispensations, bring about many complicated changes. For though the sun's power prevails in the general ordering of quality, the other heavenly bodies aid or oppose it in particular details, the moon more obviously and continuously (as for example when it is new, at quarter, or full), and the stars [i.e., planets] in greater intervals and more obscurely, as in their appearances, occultations, and approaches.[19]

This tenet marks a principled departure from Aristotle's natural philosophy. Whereas Aristotle posited a single-variable influence on the elements ("fortifying" or "weakening") as the result of the variation along a single dimension (the sun's and the moon's approaching or receding from the earth), Ptolemy postulates not only influences emanating from all stars and planets, but also an infinity of possible variables concerning their relationships, which participate in determining the resultant influences. We will often encounter this idea in the sequel and will have to bear in mind its astrological pedigree, especially when stated by thinkers who rejected astrology.

Ptolemy argues that a number of natural phenomena, known even to unlearned people (such as farmers and sailors), corroborate these affirmations. The conclusion is that if one has all the information pertaining to the movements and positions of all planets, as well as to their natures (e.g., the sun's heating and the moon's moistening), he will be able to predict the resulting distinctive natural qualities in the sublunar realm, specifically those of the air. In a further move, not really justified by the preceding arguments, Ptolemy suggests that the physical and psychical constitution of a man can be similarly predicted if the stellar configuration at the time of his birth is known: This, to be sure, is the central tenet of horoscopic (or genethialogical) astrology. All erroneous prognostications, Ptolemy urges, are due either to insufficient data or to errors in inferences.[20]

This justification of astrology on the basis of what is presented as natural science has two important implications. The first is epistemological: Following Ptolemy, astrologers argued consistently that their discipline was not opposed to the claims of science and that, indeed, science itself recognizes the existence of celestial influences on the sublunar world, the alleged impassivity of the fifth element notwithstanding. The second has to do with the body of knowledge itself: Henceforth the idea that *all* the planets, and not only the sun and the moon, exert influences on the sublunar world, and that these influences depend on their relative positions, was universally accepted. Although most thinkers in the Aristotelian tradition rejected astrology, still (as will be seen) it had an impact on their natural science, entrenching a notion of celestial influences that was much broader than Aristotle's. In their respective natural philosophies, supporters and critics of astrology thus both recognized the existence

of celestial influences. They differed, however, in their characterization. Astrologers ascribed to the planets *inherent natures* of two kinds: (1) the physical qualities moist and dry, hot and cold, like those of sublunar matter; and (2) "beneficent" or "malevolent" natures (gauged according to the presumed effects on human affairs). These two types of "natures" were, moreover, held to vary according to the planets' positions with respect to the zodiacal signs, times of the day or the year, and so forth. The latter set of ideas could not in any way be reconciled with the tenets of Aristotelian natural science. Still, the fact that the notion of celestial influences was shared by philosophers and astrologers presumably made it difficult for laymen to see what was wrong with astrology.

The accommodation of astrology in Greek culture led to its interaction with philosophical thought, notably within the school of Stoicism and Neoplatonism, both of which accorded the celestial bodies a paramount role in their cosmologies.[21] The Stoic philosopher Posidonius (ca. 135–50/51 B.C.E.), notably, posited a coherent explanation of the world that integrated astrology, making it "acceptable to the most enlightened intellects."[22] Also proponents of Platonism and Neoplatonism ascribed to the stars a central role in their cosmologies.[23] Furthermore, beginning in the second half of the second century C.E., astral mysticism was accommodated by some philosophers, as for example the idea that human souls preexist in the zodiac, from where they gradually descend into their terrestrial sojourn, and to which they return after death, an idea that was to be adopted in Neoplatonism.[24] We encounter some of these ideas in medieval writings.

Particularly germane to our topic are contemporary developments within the Aristotelian school, inasmuch as it was to inform the thought of many medieval Jewish thinkers, including that of the most prestigious among them, Moses Maimonides. Alexander of Aphrodisias, Aristotle's faithful commentator, who wrote in the closing years of the second century CE, is the main figure here.[25] To defend the Aristotelian doctrine in the face of critiques by competing systems of thought, Alexander put forward creative interpretations of Aristotle's thought, thereby elaborating new solutions *more aristotelico* to scientific and philosophical problems that were on a contemporary agenda.[26] This holds specifically for the problem that, as we will see, is of particular significance to our topic, namely that of divine providence. Until Alexander, this was a rather marginal theme in Aristotelian philosophy,[27] but subsequent to challenges posed notably by Stoicism (specifically by the idea that God, identified with the pervasive material *pneuma*, governs the universe down to the most minute details), it became a major issue.

Alexander elaborated a theory describing how the sublunar world is governed by the Unmoved Mover posited by Aristotle. What makes his theory significant in

the present context is the fact that he accorded the heavenly bodies a central role in exercising the Unmoved Mover's governance of the sublunar world. Alexander did not himself accept astrology (and probably had not seen Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*), but his theoretical move was a decisive step toward what can be labeled "the astrologization of the Aristotelian worldview."[28] Skipping many details, it will be enough to note that Alexander ascribed the regular daily motion of the sphere of the fixed stars and of the planets to the Unmoved Mover; the retrograde, individual motions of the planets he ascribed to the souls of the spheres of each planet, which act by virtue of their "desire" toward the Unmoved Mover. This scheme implied that all sublunar motions and changes *in fine* go back to the Unmoved Mover: "The divine body [the celestial sphere] and its circular motion," Aristotle wrote, "are the first cause of the coming-to-be of the existents and of their natural motions." Alexander further argued that, owing to the diversity of the planetary motions, and because the planets' "relationships" to the sublunar material bodies (i.e., their distances, angles) constantly change, the planets produce in the sublunar bodies the multifarious forms of their generation and corruption.[29] The gist of Alexander's argument is thus a radicalization of Aristotle's account in *De Gen. et Corr.* II:10: Not only the sun, but all the planets affect the sublunar world; the infinite variety of their positions with respect to the earth and one another all participate in determining generation and corruption. The stamp of astrology is clearly recognizable.

A remarkable feature of Alexander's doctrine is that it introduces the idea, which was to remain with medieval thought for many centuries, that the heavenly bodies exercise providence over the sublunar world. In Alexander's view, because the celestial motions all follow an eternal order, the resulting processes of generation and corruption in the sublunar world are all *orderly* too. For Alexander, indeed, sublunar *nature* is identical with the effects produced by the Unmoved Mover via the heavenly bodies.[30] This nature Alexander in turn construes as "a *divine power*,"[31] "penetrat[ing] all parts of the world and hold[ing] its parts together," which is thus "the cause of the unity and order of the world."[32] This notion (Alexander's counterpart to the Stoic *pneuma*) allows him to bridge the gap between the celestial and the sublunar realms, and explain how the (eternal) order up there brings about the (transient) order down here. Alexander puts forward the view that the "divine power" that brings about providence gushes forth from "the sun, the moon, and the other planets."[33] The divine power, Alexander says, "endows with existence and forms the substances in which it inheres, according to a certain proportion and a certain order."[34] Both the generation of forms in matter and the persistence of informed sublunar substances are thus due to the divine power outpouring from the heavenly bodies, which thus is the cause of the order in the sublunar world.

The gist of Alexander's view is that matter can be informed (and, notably, be ensouled) and persist in its form and soul by virtue of the divine power infused in it, which endows it with a share in the divine. It should be observed that inasmuch as Alexander assumes providence to be exerted through motions that are eternal and unchanging, he takes it to extend only to entities that are eternal and unchanging too, that is, to species, and not to individuals (this topic was often debated in medieval literature).[35]

In Alexander's chain of causalities extending from God down to sublunar material reality, the celestial bodies become the indispensable intermediaries bridging the gap between pure form on the one hand (the Unmoved Mover) and matter on the other, thereby maintaining the sublunar world and the existents in it. This scheme reestablishes the unity of the entire cosmos: Particularly significant is the idea that the divine power issuing from the heavenly bodies reconnects the supralunar and sublunar realms, which had been dissociated by Aristotle.

Because in Alexander's scheme the natural order derives directly from the Unmoved Mover, it is the best possible one.[36] Specifically, the arrangement of the celestial realm is so perfect that even the slightest change would bring the sublunar world to naught.

> If the distance of the sun to the earth were different from what it is, or if its motion and displacement were not along the inclined ecliptic, or if it moved along the ecliptic but without following the rotation of the fixed stars, moving in its own [annual] motion alone, then we would be deprived of all things other [than the sun] that exist for our sake in our abode and, furthermore, the generation of animals and plants would not be possible. . . . Indeed, if the sun's distance to us were smaller than it is now, and not the one it actually is, then, owing to the proximity of the motion, the region around the earth [i.e., its surface] would be heated beyond the temperate, and beyond what is proper for that region. And if, inversely, its distance were greater than it is, its heating would be less [than appropriate]. In both cases, there would be no generation of animal or plant species. Those who hold this opinion have sufficient evidence from the existence of regions on the earth which are called "uninhabitable," [and which are so] on account of the overcoming of one or the other of these qualities [heat or cold].[37]

Alexander elaborates this thesis *a propos* of the sun, and continues:

> Were [the moon] closer [to us] than it is now, then it would prevent the constitution and the existence of the clouds, and the constitution and existence of waters [i.e., seas], because it would disperse and subtilize the rising exhalations . . . Further, if its motion were not in an inclined plane but along a circle parallel [to the equator], then it would afford neither the moderation of the cold nor the succor from the heat, which it provides at present in our abode . . . Nor would it provide succor in coloring [variant reading: coming-to-be] and ripening of fruits, as it does now, being the foremost cause of these two processes.[38]

We will again meet this thought in what follows, quoted almost verbatim by Averroes and echoed by his follower, Gersonides.

By introducing into the Aristotelian paradigm the notion of a "divine power" produced by the heavenly bodies through their motions, we conclude that Alexander bridged the gap between the supra- and the sublunar realms. This notion grounded the claim that the heavenly bodies bring about, and preserve, form and order in the sublunar realm, that is, that they exert providence over it. We will encounter this notion again later, notably in the writings of Averroes and Gersonides.

II. ARABIC

The spectacular flourishing of Arabic scientific culture from the eighth to ninth centuries onward led to the elaboration of new theories in philosophy and in science, which eventually provided (directly or indirectly) the points of departure for the thinking of virtually all medieval Jewish scholars. Let me state in a nutshell the developments in the areas most directly relevant to the discussion of the heavenly bodies.

Astronomy

Building on Ptolemy's *Almagest* and continuing to use essentially its geometrical devices, Arabic astronomy made significant progress.[39] At the same time, some astronomers and natural philosophers also sought to remedy the gap separating the mathematical description of the motions of the heavenly bodies and the physical theory of motion.[40] These efforts had a considerable impact on the thinking of some of the Jewish authors that will be examined later.

Astrology

Integrating a multifarious legacy derived from Greek, Sanskrit, and Persian sources, this discipline was one of the first to be accommodated within Islamic culture. Particularly important is the fact that astrology was regarded as valid and afforded a theoretical–philosophical grounding in the writings of "the philosopher of the Arabs," al-Kindī (d. ca. 870), which exerted influence both in the direction of astrology and that of natural philosophy.

Indeed, al-Kindī argued in detail that the basic tenets of astrology are compatible with Aristotelian philosophy, apparently responding to contemporary critiques. Thus he writes, "The philosophers are in agreement that the substance of the heavens is one, and its nature is one, unlike that of the four natures enclosed by it.

It must not be said that the substance of this planet is warm, nor cold, or moist, or dry. Nor do [the heavens] undergo generation and corruption, nor any change of substance, [even] in part. [The only change is in] their motions with respect to the body at the center [i.e. the earth], which are now direct now retrograde motions, now ascending now descending, now approaching it, now moving away from it."[41] Al-Kindī next reports Aristotle's view that the quality-less sun warms by virtue of its friction with the air, and remarks: "know that all seven planets warm the air" – and not, as Aristotle affirmed, the sun alone.[42] He further notes that the effects of the sun vary according to its position, both by virtue of its changing inclination and owing to its moving along its epicycle. Moreover, the effects of the sun depend on the planets as well: If the weather and the climate depended only on the sun, they would have repeated themselves identically every year. The effects of the planets, which also vary greatly according to their positions with respect to the earth, thus contribute to determining the heavenly influences on generation and corruption in the sublunar world.[43] The main thrust of al-Kindī's argumentation is to show that, although the planets do not have qualities, they still can affect the sublunar substances, namely, by virtue of their changing positions. Al-Kindī goes into great length in describing the details of each planet's effects.

The first astrologers writing in Arabic, too, notably Māshā'allāh and Abū Maʿshar, presented astrology as grounded in natural science.[44] Thus, although the major philosophers of the next generations (notably al-Fārābī, Avicenna [Ibn Sīnā], and Averroes) did not build on al-Kindī's theories and rejected astrology, the idea that the heavenly bodies influence the events in the sublunar world gained acceptance and respectability. In various formulations, this idea was henceforth a pillar of all systems of natural philosophy (see Natural Philosophy), taken for granted even by those who denied astrology any value.

Natural Philosophy

Two issues need to be briefly discussed here: (1) the nature of the celestial substance; and (2) the kinds of influences the heavenly bodies exerted on the sublunar realm.

(1) Although in most scholarly quarters there was a consensus on the idea that the substances of the sublunar realm are all constituted of a fifth element unlike the four sublunar elements, some authors introduced the (non-Aristotelian) idea that the fifth element may not be uniform, and that in particular the bodies of the planets and the orbs carrying them may be of different "kinds" of the fifth matter. We will come back to this in our discussion of Maimonides.

(2) The idea that the sublunar world is not a closed system – that its good functioning depends on the influences exerted on it by the planets – has become

universally accepted. A typical illustration of how an Aristotelian thinker could construe these influences is offered by al-Fārābī (870–950). In his *al-Siyāsah al-madaniyya* (*Political Regime*; also known as *Kitāb mabādī al-maujūdāt* [*Principles of Existing Things*]),[45] al-Fārābī is intent on showing how the observable variety between nations and individuals can be produced by the First Cause, which is entirely unitary. He argues that even though the celestial bodies have no qualities, they nonetheless produce contrary qualities in the sublunar world.[46] The reason is that the celestial realm is not homogeneous: The distribution of the stars in the eighth sphere is not uniform; and the planets change their inclinations with respect to the earth and their relative positions with respect to one another. Hence, although the nature of each heavenly body is unchanging, the combined influences of the entire heavenly region on different zones of the sublunar world vary. This is manifest, for example, in the existence of zones that are hot and arid, whereas others are cold and humid. The important point here is that Aristotelian philosophers like al-Fārābī found a way to reconcile the idea that the heavenly bodies are quality-less with the idea that they produce qualities in the sublunar region.

The implications of this theory are far reaching. The physical geography, determined by the heavenly bodies, in turn determines the human geography: Owing to the celestial influences, the airs, the waters, and the fauna and flora in different regions of the earth will be different. Al-Fārābī next relies heavily on the climatological theory as it had long been laid down in the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, and Places*,[47] available in Arabic,[48] together with Galen's commentary on it.[49] People dwelling in different places, he reasons, will inhale air of different qualities and absorb different kinds of foodstuffs. The latter in turn determine the qualities of the semen and the menstrual blood of the people in each region. (According to the prevailing Aristotelian embryology, semen and menses are the ultimate outcome of the concoction of nutriment in men and women, respectively.) Semen and menses in turn provide the form and matter of the embryo, and thereby determine its degree of perfection, including its intellectual qualities.[50] According to al-Fārābī, then, the capacity of groups and individuals to attain "the most noble thing," namely, intellectual perfection, is *in fine* determined by the heavenly bodies. (To be sure, an excellent inborn potentiality is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for attaining intellectual excellence effectively; its realization depends on the individual's free will.)

The significance of al-Fārābī's theory for our purpose lies mainly in showing that, by drawing on widely accepted theories, an Aristotelian philosopher could make a significant step in the direction of the astrologers: Al-Fārābī takes the physical and intellectual capacities of a group, perhaps also of the individual, to depend on the

celestial influences they receive according to their geographical locations. We saw Ptolemy drawing on much the same idea to argue that this allows the prediction of an individual's course of life. Yet al-Fārābī rejected astrology in two treatises devoted to this subject.[51]

We next look at Averroes (Abū'l-Walīd Muhammad ibn Rushd, 1126–1198), who, through the translation of most of his writings into Hebrew, became the most influential writer in matters of science on post-twelfth-century Jewish philosophy. Averroes discusses the heavenly influences in a very different context from al-Fārābī, namely, that of an account of divine providence. In his Epitome (freely abridged summary) of Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* Averroes, known as the Commentator, writes:

[74] We should now examine the subject of the providence exerted over things down here, i.e. below the sphere of the moon. We proceed from the previously [established] principles. We say that the existence of terrestrial things, and their persistence, are the object of providence with respect to their species. This indeed is so by necessity and cannot be due to chance, as many of the Ancients had claimed. It becomes evident if one considers how the motions of the heavenly bodies suit the existence and the preservation of each and every thing coming to be in this [lower] world. This can be observed first and foremost with respect to the sun and also with respect to the moon. Concerning the sun it has been established that if its body were greater than it is, or if it were closer [to us], then it would have destroyed the species of plants and animals through an excess of heat. Again, if it were smaller than it is or farther away, then [the plants and animals] would have perished through cold. This is attested by the fact that the sun produces the heat through its motion and the reflection of its rays and the fact that there are places that are uninhabited because of excessive heat or excessive cold.

[75] Similarly, providence is clearly manifest also in the sun's inclined sphere [i.e. the ecliptic]. For if the sun did not have an inclined sphere, then there would be no summer, no winter, no spring, no autumn. Yet it is evident that these seasons are necessary for the existence of the species of plants and animals. Providence is also very clearly observable in the [sun's] daily motion, for without it there would have been no night or day, but rather there would have been half a year day and half a year night, and the existents would have perished, either by day due to an excess of heat, and at night for an excess of cold.

[76] Similarly, the effect [produced by] the moon is evident in the production of rain and the ripening of fruits. And it is clear that if the moon were larger than it is or smaller or farther away or closer, or if its light were not borrowed from the sun, it would not have produced that effect. Again, if it [did not have] an inclined sphere, it would not accomplish different operations at different moments in time.

[77] Clearly, what we have said with respect to the sun and the moon holds also of the other planets, their spheres and their motions, which are in harmony and at well-defined distances from the sun . . . Now although owing to insufficient empirical evidence we are unable to assign many effects to [specific] motions [of the planets], to their centers being eccentric, or

to their forward or backward [retrograde] motions, still we can affirm confidently that all this is for the sake of [exerting] providence over what is down here. However, it is difficult for us to acquire this [knowledge], for it requires long experience, for which man's life is not sufficiently [long].[52]

In his Epitome of Aristotle's account in *De Generatione et Corruptione* II:10–11 discussed previously, Averroes further develops this idea:

The movement of the sun in the inclined circle is the foremost [efficient] cause of the generation of what comes to be and of the corruption of what passes away. For when the sun approaches, it is the cause of the existence of most of the things that come to be and when it retreats, it is the cause of corruption of most existing things. Furthermore, the efficient cause of the four seasons, namely spring, summer, autumn and winter, is this motion. The efficient cause of the continuity of generation and corruption, according to Aristotle, is the first, continuous, motion, while the efficient cause of generation and corruption is the motion of the sun in the inclined circle. This latter movement is not limited to the sun alone, but is also that of the moon and of all of the planets, although the effect of that of the sun is more apparent. For the affect of the sun (in its course along its inclined circle) on the alteration of the four seasons is precisely that of each planet in its course along its specific circle. In fact, although we know not the specific effects produced by each and every planet on the existents down here, still, through a generalization it becomes clear that all of them are involved in generation and corruption. So much so that if we were to imagine the disappearance of a single movement or planet among them, then either no coming-to-be whatsoever, or that of some beings, would take place. It is indeed clear that some of the existents are specifically affected by a specific planet. This is why we find that those who have observed the stars in the past [viz. the astrologers] have divided the existents in accordance with them, and posited that an existent A is of the nature of a star X and existent B of the nature of a star Y. Generally speaking it is clear that these planets appear to be affected by the motion of the sun, for the differences in their effects are mostly dependent on their proximity or distance from the sun.[53]

Although Averroes is justly considered the champion of Aristotelian orthodoxy, the ideas expounded by him in Aristotle's name are in fact quite far removed from what the Stagirite himself had believed. For one thing, the idea that the good in this lower world depends on the heavenly bodies, which is (almost) entirely absent from Aristotle's thought, is here the centerpiece of the entire discussion. For another, the sun's effect on the sublunar world, which for Aristotle was an embarrassing anomaly, is here "generalized" into the idea that not only the sun, but the other planets, too, act on the sublunar existents: "What Aristotle has affirmed with respect to the sphere of the sun should be understood as applying to the other oblique spheres too," Averroes writes.[54] Averroes' expanded notion of providence is clearly indebted to Alexander.

Averroes, we see, even though he of course upholds Aristotle's fifth, impassive, element of which supposedly all heavenly bodies consist, still takes the planets to act each in a specific way, depending, moreover, on their relative positions with respect to one another. How does he explain these celestial influences by substances consisting of the fifth, impassive element? Alexander again plays a crucial role in Averroes' move away from Aristotle. Take the simplest form of celestial influence: the sun's heating of the earth. Given that the sun is not itself warm, how can it possibly heat? Averroes of course knows Aristotle's explanation, and its shortcomings did not escape him. The gist of his own explanation is formulated thusly:

> The light *qua* light, when its luminosity is reflected, warms the bodies down here by virtue of a *divine force*. This holds *a fortiori* when the rays fall on the warmed body in a right angle [i.e. perpendicularly], for then the reflection is greater, as is the case when the sun is over our heads. In fact, when the reflection is stronger, the heating is stronger, as we can see in the cases of the burning mirrors and the glass flasks which burn wool.[55]

The crucial point in this account is the claim that the warming is produced by the reflected light by virtue of a *divine force*. Because the heavenly bodies are not themselves warm, and because (contrary to what Aristotle had half-heartedly suggested) motion per se cannot account for heating, there must be something particular about the heavenly bodies that causes them to warm. This must be their light; however, in Aristotelian physics there is no connection between light and heat! How then can one connect the celestial substances to the earthly recipients of their influences? The way out of the quandary was to posit a *divine force*, owing to which the heat is generated when the light is reflected. It stands to reason that Averroes borrowed the crucial concept of divine force from Alexander.[56] As in Alexander's system, the notion of divine force provided Averroes with a theoretical foundation for the claim that the celestial bodies can influence the natural process in the sublunar realm. It thus bears the entire onus of (re-)establishing the physical connectedness of the celestial and the earthly realms. (In later works, Averroes abandoned that notion in his move back to Aristotelian orthodoxy.)

Our previous discussion makes clear that Averroes' deviations from Aristotle can be traced back to Alexander of Aphrodisias. We saw that Alexander introduced the discussion of divine providence to defend Aristotelianism against Stoicism and that in so doing he had to integrate into his scheme notions derived from astrology. It is precisely these notions that we encounter again here, in the very citadel of Aristotelianism. We will meet some of them again under the pen of Maimonides, whose intellectual background was very similar to that of Averroes.

Metaphysics

Al-Fārābī (ca. 870–950), Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, 980–1037), and Averroes, notably, constructed complex metaphysical systems whose origin can be traced back to Aristotle, but that differed from their distant ancestor in many crucial points. From the perspective of our topic, the main feature to be taken into account is the synthesis created between celestial physics on the one hand and metaphysics on the other. In what follows I can only schematically sketch the ideas involved, without making allowances for the differences between the thinkers, and even less to evolutions within their thought.[57]

The Arabic philosophical synthesis posited at the top of the ontological hierarchy a Supreme Being, consisting (as in Aristotle) in pure thought, identified with the God of the scriptures. From this First Being emanate other entities, also consisting of pure thought. Each of the entirely immaterial entities of this kind (whose number is usually given as ten) is known as an "intellect" (Ar. *ʿaql*; Heb. *sekhel* or, although more rarely, *daʿat*). Note that the idea of emanation was unknown to Aristotle: It was introduced into philosophy by the Neoplatonist school, especially by Plotinus (204/5–270), and was integrated into the Aristotelian system notably within Arabic philosophy. Now each intellect is associated with one of the celestial spheres: As such, and especially inasmuch as it is construed as the mover of the sphere (as we shall see), it is usually referred to as "intelligence."[58] In addition, each celestial sphere also has a form (as every material body), which is a rational soul. The sphere's circular motion is produced conjointly by the soul and the intelligence: The soul conceives a "conception" of, accompanied by a "desire" for, the intelligence of that sphere. It is the soul's desire to imitate the intelligence's perfection that induces it to produce the eternal circular motion of its sphere, and so the intelligence is viewed as the sphere's mover. (The state of motion is more perfect than that of rest, and circular motion is the most perfect motion.) Philosophers writing in one of the three Abrahamic religions conveniently identified the intellects with the "angels" of the scriptures.

The last intellect in the sequence of emanations is associated with the last celestial sphere, that of the moon. Although it is the lowest in the hierarchy of the emanated intellects, this intellect, called the "active (at times: agent) intellect," is particularly important in the economy of the world. It is a key concept on a number of levels.

Sublunar physics. We noted above that Aristotelian matter is passive – it needs to be informed from outside; once substances have come into existence, their forms

need to be actively protected against matter's inherent tendency toward corruption. Medieval philosophers, at least since al-Fārābī, ascribe this role to the active intellect. The active intellect is thus held to emanate forms unto sublunar matter, thereby informing it into substances, which it thereafter sustains; it was accordingly called "the giver of forms" (Avicenna's term).[59] To be sure, the active intellect cannot give any form to just any lump of matter. For instance, the form of man, the noblest sublunar existent, can be imprinted only unto matter that is perfectly well balanced (the qualities are of equal powers). The account therefore runs as follows: The active intellect emanates forms continually; at the same time, the heavenly bodies continually mix sublunar matter. When the resultant mixture of a given clump of matter conforms to a given form, then the form emanating from the active intellect will inform it with that form.

Psychology. Just as matter cannot endow itself with forms, so also the human intellect cannot acquire knowledge on its own. The intellect with which a human being is born is passive and cannot organize whatever information it may receive from the senses into true knowledge (in medieval jargon: intelligibles), a process that supposes the recognition of forms. The analogy between the un-informed intellect and un-informed matter is expressed by the former being called "material intellect." Medieval authors hold that all cognition presupposes the "help" of the active intellect, which imprints forms upon the material intellect. The highest level of cognition an individual can attain is that of "conjunction" with the active intellect, which also plays a role in prophecy. These subjects however do not concern us here. The active intellect is thus a sort of storehouse of forms: It imprints forms unto matter, and thereafter helps the human intellect to apprehend them; it is precisely because it first does the former that in a second move it can accomplish the latter.

From the point of view of our topic, the introduction of the active intellect into philosophy was a momentous revolution. Although the active intellect is pure form and as such devoid of any spatial reference, it is still associated with a celestial body (the sphere of the moon), as are all the other intellects. From the tenth century onward, therefore, the idea of "celestial influences" on the sublunar world comprises two different components: the mixing activity of the celestial bodies, which "prepares" matter to receive forms; and the activity of the active intellect which endows the suitably prepared matter with forms. Together, the celestial influences are thus construed as the source of order and forms in the sublunar world. Because, moreover, all the intellects, including the active intellect, cognize God, the order that results from their combined actions *in fine* derives

from God and therefore cannot but be the best possible one (a similar idea we already encountered in Alexander). Henceforth, the heavenly bodies will assume a primordial place in any philosophical theology, especially in accounts of providence, a move facilitated by the identification of the intellects with the traditional "angels."

Such, then, were the fundamentals of the various disciplines bearing on the celestial bodies that were elaborated within medieval Greco–Arabic science and philosophy. These basics of astronomy, astrology, natural philosophy, and metaphysics were the indispensable points of departure for any discussion conducted within this tradition. When Jewish scholars gradually began to accommodate this body of knowledge, they familiarized themselves with, and appropriated, these ideas: They were part and parcel of the intellectual baggage of any Jewish scholar interested in philosophy. The discussions within the Jewish philosophical tradition, whether in Arabic or in Hebrew, assumed all or most of the ideas of Aristotle, Alexander, and Ptolemy, as known, and proceeded from there, even when they challenged parts of specific doctrines. This is why a relatively detailed presentation of these developments was a necessary prolegomenon to an account of the views of the heavenly bodies held by Jewish scholars, to which we now turn.

PART 2: THE HEAVENLY BODIES IN THE THOUGHT OF JEWISH SCHOLARS

I. A NOTE ON ASTRONOMY IN JEWISH INTELLECTUAL LIFE

The astronomers are the group of scholars who devoted to the heavenly bodies the greatest and most constant attention. In medieval Jewish intellectual life, astronomy enjoyed a special status: Whereas the legitimacy of the study of philosophy and other "external" sciences was under constant pressure, astronomy (together with medicine) was regularly excluded from the various bans on these studies. Indeed, astronomy was also the scientific discipline to which medieval Jewish scholars made the greatest contributions, often comparable to those of their gentile homologues.[60] The practice of medieval astronomers included a variety of highly technical activities such as: calculations (on the basis of geometrical models) of astronomical tables, invention and improvement of astronomical instruments, calendrical matters, trigonometry, determination of the parameters for the geometrical models, mathematical methods for reducing the geometrical models to tables, determination of the conditions for eclipses, discussion of the colors of eclipses, preparing star

catalogues, establishing geographical lists of coordinates, discussion and improvement of planetary models, and disposition of the orbs in three-dimensional space.

Astronomers and their employers were naturally aware of the practical usefulness of these activities. In addition, astronomers prided themselves on the nobility of their discipline and of its epistemological solidity. These probably widely shared feelings are formulated by the astronomer Jacob ben David Yom Tov Bonjorn, court astronomer to King Pedro IV of Aragon (reigned 1336–1387). In the introduction to his tables he writes:

> Mathematical science is unique by the strength of the verification of its statements, namely because most of its demonstrations are apodictic. Within it, the part bearing on astronomy is the one that, more than any other, can lead toward human perfection, because it involves matter, and is visible in it [i.e. in matter]. Further, the object which it studies [viz. the heavenly bodies] is nobler and more worthy than [any other]. Moreover, it [astronomy] also provides direction and help for the other sciences and for some arts, as this is well known and as it has been explained by the Ancients in their works. It is thus established that the astronomical part of mathematical science is the best and noblest knowledge.
>
> Since the foundation and the beginning of the knowledge attainable in the astronomical part is the knowledge of the motion of the sun and the moon, as Ptolemy has explained in books I and III of the *Almagest*, it follows that their knowledge is infinitely noble. [This hold] in particular of the calculation of the real oppositions and conjunctions, for, of all the motions, this [calculation] is the one whose truth is fully known to us. This knowledge has a bearing on certain laws of the Torah, as the Master, R. Moses of blessed memory [Maimonides] has explained in *Rules of the Sanctification of the [New] Moon*.
>
> Owing to the advantage of knowing this [mathematical] part of the science of astronomy and to its worthiness, its knowledge is desired by the community of men [*'adat ha-'anashim*]. It is therefore appropriate that it be desired by everyone, for everyone desires what is good. This is why the early and later [authorities] did not forbid the inquiry into astronomy and the composition of tables, long or short.[61]

Jacob ben David Yom Tov Bonjorn, we see, invokes a number of reasons justifying the study of astronomy. They probably convey his own motivations to devote himself to it, and at the same time they legitimize his activity in the eyes of the larger society.

Although most medieval Jewish astronomers did not write about the physical and metaphysical questions that will occupy us in what follows, but devoted their lives to calculations, it should therefore be remembered that they constituted the group of scholars who specialized in the study of the heavenly bodies.

II. THE HEAVENLY BODIES IN THE THOUGHT OF SCHOLARS HAVING ACCESS TO WRITINGS IN ARABIC

In the eighth and ninth centuries, Jews living under Islam underwent a process of acculturation in the course of which Arabic replaced Aramaic as their cultural tongue. This process took place roughly at the same time both in the east – in Baghdad and Egypt – and in the west – in Qayrouan and the Iberian Peninsula.[62] Concomitantly, Jewish scholars began to accommodate the legacy of Greco–Arabic culture in science and philosophy: Daud al-Muqammaṣ, Saadia Gaon, and Isaac Israeli are the most outstanding names that mark the beginning of this process. As a discipline that was both useful and religiously neutral, astronomy was accommodated by Jewish scholars in the lands of Islam particularly easily.[63] My purpose in this section is to survey the views of the heavenly bodies of a few scholars who drew on Arabic sources. Some of these authors wrote in Arabic, whereas others addressed Jewish readers whose cultural tongue was Hebrew and wrote in that language. Of the former I discuss only the two thinkers whose work became influential both in Arabic and in Hebrew translation: Saadia and Maimonides. Of the latter, I limit myself to Solomon ibn Gabirol, Abraham bar Ḥiyya, and Abraham ibn Ezra. I had to leave out two notable authors of the second half of the thirteenth century who were also well versed in the sciences and who, as authors of Hebrew encyclopedias, contributed much to the dissemination of knowledge, namely, Judah ben Salomon ibn Matqa and, even more regrettably, Shem-Tov ibn Falaqera.[64] I discuss the works by chronological order of their composition.[65]

Saadia Gaon (882–942), a contemporary of al-Fārābī, who drew on astronomy in his treatment of calendrical matters,[66] was not yet under the preponderant influence of Aristotelianism, and his views on the nature of the heavens stand out in Jewish thought: They were not widely shared. Saadia attended to the issue in his major philosophical composition, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*. To refute the Aristotelian theory of the eternity of the world, Saadia seeks to undermine the very notion of a fifth element. He argues that the world is made up of four elements only, and maintains that the celestial bodies consist of fire. The entrenched Aristotelian argument according to which only the fifth element has a circular natural motion, whereas fire has a rectilinear upward motion, he discards as erroneous.

> The cause of his [Aristotle's] mistake lies in his argument that, if the heavens had been [composed of the element of] fire, its motion would have been upward like that of fire. We declare, however, that the natural motion of fire itself is circular. The proof thereof is

[provided by] the motion of the heaven, which is pure fire, as is clearly proved to us by the perceptible heat of the sun. Indeed, the observed upward motion of fire is merely accidental, in order that it may exit the sphere of air; but once fire has exited the sphere of air and reached its origin, its motion changes into circular. This is analogous to the stone: when it is at its origin [i.e. in its natural place] it has no motion; when it is thrown upward it moves downward until it exits the sphere of air, but then, when it has exited it and come to rest at the bottom [i.e. at its natural place], it is seen that its [proper] nature is not to move. Considering the stone that has no [proper] motion and which moves [only] by a forced motion until it reaches its origin facilitates the understanding of the [case of] fire: [when in its natural place], fire has a [natural] circular motion; [but when out of its natural place] it moves with a different motion [viz. rectilinear upward] until it reaches its origin [where it moves circularly]. You thus see how, on account of this slight mistake, this man [Aristotle] has compelled himself to affirm the existence of a fifth element which cannot be [rationally] apprehended and had to explain the perceptible heat of the sun by ascribing it not to its own substance, but to air. It is startling that he made what is clear into something doubtful and what is doubtful into something evident.[67]

It would seem that Saadia's views on the substance of the heavenly bodies and on its motion ultimately go back to Stoicism although his immediate sources are yet to be determined.[68]

Saadia acknowledged a variety of celestial influences affecting the sublunar realm, and accounted for their diversity by assuming that the power of each planet depends on its position in relation to other planets and the zodiacal signs.[69] Thus, although the planets do not in any way change, the influences emanating from them vary continuously. Yet Saadia nonetheless rejected astrology and denied it a scientific basis.[70]

Saadia's works became influential not only in Arabic, but also in a variety of Hebrew versions, which have been read through centuries.

Solomon ibn Gabirol (ca. 1022–1070) wrote a strictly philosophical, Neoplatonic work in Arabic, that was all but forgotten by later Jewish writers. By contrast, his Hebrew poetry has been read and loved by generations of readers. It is here, where one hardly expects it, that we have a detailed and easily accessible description of the medieval cosmos: Ibn Gabirol's *Kingdom's Crown* (other translations of the title are also used), a magnificent poem recited on Yom Kippur in many Jewish congregations, offers what probably is the most widely read medieval account of the heavenly bodies. Ibn Gabirol's subject is the Creator's glory, which he seeks to apprehend through His works: Addressing Him directly, he describes His world in detail, relying on up-to-date scientific data. The supralunar realm receives most of the

attention: Ibn Gabirol describes both the arrangement of the spheres, cosmology, and their supposed effects on the sublunar realm, as posited in astrology. Consider, by way of illustration, two stanzas. The first (XII) describes the moon and the lesson it teaches. The stance is purely astronomical, with no hint of astrology, and the purpose is to drive home that the celestial bodies depend on God.[71]

Who could evoke your merit
  in making the moon
  the measure of month and seasons
of the feasts and divisions of days and years?

For its light derives from the sun

and two weeks into its cycle,
  if the two of them stand in conjunction,
in the line of the dragon with the earth in between,
  the sun's light can't be cast
  and the moon's lamp soon goes dim –

so all of the creatures on earth might know
that heaven's creatures, though powerful,
  are governed in their rise and decline,
  though after its fall the moon lives on, lit in the wake of its darkness.

And then, again, in its cleaving
at the end of the month to the sun,
if the dragon's mouth is between them
  and there be a line along them,

  then the moon as well will pass,
  dark before the sun like a cloud,
  blocking its light from our eyes

so all who see them will know the kingdom
is not of the heavens' host and its legions –
  that a lord exists above them
  to darken the light they're given.

From height upon height and higher he watches
and those who think of the sun as their lord
  will surely be brought to shame,
  as their words will soon be tested;
and they'll know what his hand has done:
  that the sun has no dominion,
  and that he who lessens its light
    rules on his own.

The descriptions of the other planets all provide astronomical data relating to the planet, followed by an account of its astrological powers. Consider Jupiter (XIX), whose Hebrew name (*tzedeq*, justice) fits well its astrological qualities.[72]

> Who could decipher the awe you inspire
> in surrounding the sphere of Mars
> with a sixth of tremendous size
> within which Jupiter hovers,
> greater than earth
> by five and seventy times?
>
> In twelve months it travels its circle,
> the star of will and desire,
> arousing fear of The Name,
> uprightness, and also repentance,
> and traits of excellent temper.
> It yields the harvest of fields –
> brings war and contention and strife to an end:
> under its aspect all breaches are sealed
> and the world is judged by the Lord.

As could be expected, Ibn Gabirol drew his quantitative data from current astronomical literature available in Arabic, such as al-Farghānī and the *Brethren of Purity*.[73] This scientific information was efficiently circulated by Ibn Gabirol's poem.

Abraham bar Ḥiyya (ca. 1065–1140), a high-ranking official in Barcelona and an accomplished astronomer who assisted Plato of Tivoli in translating from Arabic into Latin, was the first scholar to engage in a dedicated effort of writing works exposing in Hebrew elementary and advanced scientific knowledge to the intention of his coreligionists not reading Arabic. Not a few of his compositions bear on the topic of this chapter. In his work *Sefer Tzurat ha-Aretz* (*The Form of the Earth*) he draws on a popular motif to endow the study of the heavenly bodies with religious value; he opens his work by a blessing to the God of Israel who

> placed in the heavens of the heavens luminary bodies and wandering stars [planets] which move in their orbs, now approaching the earth, now receding from it, now approaching again. Through them He covered the habitants of the world with the radiance of His Glory and with His Light, and shewed to every understanding person the power of His Glory and Radiance . . . I say that the one who observes the makeup of the heavens and the courses of the planets, which the deity has set up in order to display His wonders, will know the praise of His great Name . . . The one who contemplates the make-up of heavens and earth and their structures, and who inquires into the motions of the planets and into the science of their

configuration, will perceive the Power of His creator and His Glory, and will comprehend the Wisdom of Him who created him.[74]

Bar Ḥiyya was intent on alerting his readers to the distinction between astronomy and astrology, and in the preface to *Sefer Tzurat ha-Aretz* he explains it in detail. The global discipline bearing on matters celestial (called *ḥokhmat ha-kokhavim*), he says, has two parts. One part describes the form of the heavens and of the earth, the motions of the orbs, and their measures and periods. This discipline – Bar Ḥiyya named it *ḥokhmat ha-ḥizzayon*, a term he coined but which was not widely accepted – belongs to mathematical science, and its proofs give rise to secure, indubitable knowledge. The second part of *ḥokhmat ha-kokhavim*, which depends on the first, describes "the events which come to pass on earth and which had been indicated [beforehand] and caused by the motions of the planets. [It also describes] how a man can know these [events] before they occur, on the basis of the observations handed down by the tradition of this part of that discipline bearing on events that came to pass and [on the basis of] experience which the ancients had transmitted." Bar Ḥiyya prudently adds that this part of the study of the heavens – astrology – is not reckoned as a true science – it is not part of mathematical astronomy (*ḥokhmat ha-ḥizzayon*) – and that it is appropriate to refer to it as an "empirical art" [*mele'khet ha-nissayon*]. Yet "most men and the masses" appreciate astrology, because they "think that this empirical art is a consequence of mathematical astronomy and see that men benefit from it in this world." By contrast, "true scholars, who comprehend the method of this discipline, do not give it all that dignity, because its proofs are not true; rather, they are all based on conjectures and [mere] experience."[75] Bar Ḥiyya planned to write a sequel volume to *Sefer Tzurat ha-Aretz*, in which he intended to present astrology, but apparently never did it.

The recognition of astrology's epistemological limitations notwithstanding, that is, despite the awareness that it is not a science in the Aristotelian sense, Abraham Bar Ḥiyya had no doubts whatsoever concerning the trustworthiness of astrology in planning one's life.[76] It is clearly expressed in an epistle he addressed to R. Judah ben Barzilai of Barcelona, triggered by an event in "real life." Bar Ḥiyya, who attended a wedding, gave his advice on the propitious hour for the ceremony according to astrological considerations. He was vehemently taken to task by another guest, who contended that the reliance on astrology runs against Jewish Law (*Halakhah*). In his epistle to R. Judah ben Barzilai, he sets out to defend both the usefulness and the *halakhic* legitimacy of astrology. He explains that the celestial configuration makes certain hours auspicious for certain actions (e.g., a wedding) and others inauspicious. This being the case, he stresses, the savant who is conversant with

astrology is *obligated* by Jewish Law to warn his fellow men of any behavior that on astrological considerations is ill advised, even if not asked for his advice. Does this determinism not undermine the practice of religion and imply that repentance and prayers are pointless? This presumably widespread worry is a subtext in the epistle, as is apparent from Bar Ḥiyya's repeated assurance that absolute determinism holds with respect to the nations, but not with respect to Israel or individual Israelites: Where they are concerned, God can annul, and in the past did annul, the decree of the stars, such as in response to prayers. The determinism implied by astrology remained a constant theological problem in medieval Jewish thought, both for those who opposed it and for those who upheld it. Bar Ḥiyya's epistle shows that, in early-twelfth-century Spain, relying on astrology was an accepted practice in certain erudite and high-ranging circles, although its religious legitimacy was questioned by others. Bar Ḥiyya, it should be pointed out, goes some length in distinguishing astrology from other, forbidden practices that also involve powers supposedly emanating from the planets, such as the use of talismans or of *pneumata*.

Another type of astrology is central in Bar Ḥiyya's *Megillat ha-Megalleh* (*The Revealer's Scroll*), a work whose purpose was to determine the date of Redemption through exegetical and astrological enquiries. In the fifth gate, devoted to an astrological determination of the Redemption, Bar Ḥiyya draws on a theory of astrological history according to which conjunctions of the superior planets Jupiter and Saturn bring about events in the lives of nations (rather than individuals).[77] According to this widely held theory, whose origin is in Sasanian Persia and that was propagated in Arabic notably by Māshā'allāh and that reached Bar Ḥiyya in Arabic, there are three types of conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter: small conjunctions, which recur at intervals of about twenty years; medium conjunctions, which recur after 240 years (when the position of the conjunction in the zodiac has shifted to an adjacent triplicity[78]); and major conjunctions, which recur every 1000 years approximately (the conjunction has completed a cycle of four triplicities). All these conjunctions produce macroevents: Small conjunctions bring about a change of a ruler within a single dynasty, draught, famine, and so forth; medium conjunctions indicate major upheavals such as the change of dynasty or the rise of a new nation; whereas a major conjunction indicates the appearance of a major prophet.[79] Bar Ḥiyya reviews the entire history of the Jewish people in the light of this theory, showing how the significant events correlate with the successive conjunctions. "You see that each time that the conjunction [of Jupiter and Saturn] occurred in Pisces, which is the triplicity of the first conjunction, a hardship befell Israel, as the experts in this art found by experience," Bar Ḥiyya says for example.[80] On the basis of this theory, Bar Ḥiyya predicts (among other things) that the conjunction

that will take place in 4966 A.M. (i.e., 1206) will see the beginning of the downfall of Ishmael,[81] followed by a great conjunction in 5164 A.M. (i.e., 1404) in which the same astrological conditions will hold as those that saw the rise of Israel as a nation.[82] He also associates a prediction based on the book of Daniel with an astrological conjunction that was to take place in 1345 (later taken to "predict" the Black Death).[83] Bar Ḥiyya emphasizes, however, that although from an astrological perspective all preconditions for the instauration of peace and justice in the world will be in existence then, yet, because the stars have no rule over Israel, the actual realization of the Redemption depends on God's Will.

Other Jewish authors too subscribed to this influential astrological theory of history and relied on it: for example, Solomon ibn Gabirol,[84] Abraham ibn Ezra,[85] the anonymous Jewish author of a very widely read (and feared) astrological prediction of various momentous events in 1186,[86] Abraham ibn Daud,[87] Levi ben Abraham ben Ḥayyim,[88] Gersonides,[89] and certainly many more. By contrast, Saadia Gaon rejected it[90]; similarly, Maimonides, who said of himself that he had read all books in astrology available in Arabic,[91] was naturally also aware of this theory, but ridiculed it in his *Epistle to Yemen*.[92]

Abraham ibn Ezra (1089?–1165) was a polymath. During the first fifty years of his life spent in Spain he seems to have written only poetry, but after he left Spain in 1140 (he wandered successively through Italy, the Midi, northern France, and England) he composed treatises in prose in a variety of disciplines: biblical exegesis, grammar, theology, mathematics and, last but not least, astrology. He repeatedly composed "astrological encyclopedias" that put at the disposal of an apparently avid readership detailed exposés of the main branches of Arabic astrology: nativities (genethialogy), general astrology, interrogations, elections, and medical astrology. No less important, Ibn Ezra drew on astrology in his biblical exegesis, thereby conferring on it legitimacy as a key to understanding Revelation itself. Abraham ibn Ezra was thus the man through whom Greco–Arabic astrology entered European Judaism whose literary language was Hebrew. Ibn Ezra's works fulfilled the role of astrological textbooks for many centuries, and they were popular in Latin and French translations as well. From Abraham ibn Ezra's time onward, astrology remained a presence in the intellectual Jewish landscape that had to be reckoned with.[93]

When we consider the astrological thought of a medieval scholar like Abraham ibn Ezra, we should not judge him by our own standards of reasonableness or rationality. This is too facile and does not do them justice. We should realize that, given the premises of contemporary science, adherents of medieval astrology (at least

the more erudite among them) could make a fairly plausible claim for the solidity of their discipline. Indeed, as already noted, the astrologers themselves did not claim for their discipline the epistemological status of a science based on rational inquiry according to Aristotelian epistemological norms. They willingly admitted that it is not grounded in demonstrations and that its predictions are less precise than those of astronomy. They also claimed that the same holds of medicine: Many drugs are known by experience to be efficacious, although the theory of the four elements and four qualities does not allow understanding of why this is the case. They therefore claimed for their discipline the status of trustworthy empirical knowledge, based on experience allegedly accumulated throughout the ages.[94] This is nicely formulated by the Aristotelian Abraham ibn Daud (ca. 1110–1180), Ibn Ezra's countryman and younger contemporary: "For me there is no difference between the one who says that Saturn emanates a narcotic and deadly power and the one who affirms this of opium . . . However, [one must admit] that the heavenly bodies received their nobility from their Creator, be He be blessed and exalted."[95] This is also Ibn Ezra's understanding.

Drawing on a vast body of astrological literature in Arabic, Abraham ibn Ezra expounds the discipline's views of the celestial bodies, which are considered above all from the perspective of their effects on the sublunar world, specifically on humans. Thus, in his introduction to astrology, *Reshit Ḥokhmah* (*The Beginning of Wisdom*), Ibn Ezra writes that considering the motions of the planets, one realizes that "although they move equably and regularly," still their effects at any moment vary according to the heavenly sections in which they are then.[96] The division of the zodiac into the twelve signs (Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricornus, Aquarius, Pisces) was universally accepted, of course, but whereas opponents of astrology insisted that this division was merely conventional and that the "signs" had no real existence, Ibn Ezra, as did all other astrologers, saw in them "real" things with physical essences of their own:

> The signs are divided into four groups [i.e., triplicities], corresponding to the four natures. Thus three signs that are of one nature are Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius, which are hot and dry, as is the nature of fire. [Similarly,] Taurus, Virgo, and Capricornus are cold and dry, as is the nature of earth. Gemini, Libra and Aquarius are hot and moist, as is the nature of air. Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces are cold and moist, as is the nature of water.[97]

The planets, too, have physical natures: Saturn is cold and dry, Jupiter hot and moist, Mars hot and scorching dry, the sun is hot and dry, Venus and the moon are cold and moist, whereas Mercury is variable.[98] These natures are not fixed, however, but vary with the distance from the sun.[99] In continuity with the Arabic

astrological tradition, Ibn Ezra ascribes to the planets additional qualities: being diurnal or nocturnal, benefic or malefic, male or female, but these qualities, too, vary according to circumstances (e.g., being in conjunction with, or in opposition to other planets). The powers of a planet depend also on other variables, such as its distance from the earth and its position in a zodiacal sign. These very numerous variables can obviously combine in a very great number of ways, and thus lead to a multitude of possible predictions. The astrological books thus offer (among other things) detailed listings of the effects (on nations, regions, individuals, etc.) of the zodiacal signs and the planets according to different conditions.

It goes without saying that ascribing qualities to the planets, and *a fortiori* qualities that are said to change, conflicts with the entrenched Aristotelian postulate that the celestial matter is quality-less and unchanging. Even more so does the ascription of qualities to the zodiacal signs – groupings of celestial bodies whose very reality is disputable – run against the most basic premises of Aristotelian science. Ibn Ezra was certainly aware of this problem, and here and there voices a very different stance concerning the physics of the supralunar world. Having mentioned the different trigons, he urges the reader:

> You should not countenance [the idea] that the four natures [*toladot*, i.e., the elements or the qualities] are in the heaven, and that there is heat in the sun, and cold in the moon and in Saturn. No and no! For the upper beings [the heavenly bodies] are noble. Of them it was said: 'For He commanded and they were created. He hath established them for ever and ever. He hath made a decree [for them] which shall not be transgressed' (Ps. 148:5-6). They were created this way only with respect to what is affected by them [i.e., they were created so as to affect the sublunar world with heat and cold, without being so themselves].[100]

In his commentary on Psalms, Ibn Ezra explains the verse just quoted: "'established'– [this means that] they will never change, for they are not composed of the four elements." Thus Ibn Ezra seems to affirm that the planets are devoid of qualities in themselves, but are still productive of qualities in the sublunar world, although this stance is not elaborated. How then was the tension between the postulates of Aristotelian science and astrology resolved? Probably, Ibn Ezra thought along the same lines as al-Kindī: Although the heavenly bodies are unchanging, their changing positions with respect to the earth cause their effects (i.e., the qualities they produce in sublunar substances), which are produced through their motions, to be different. Perhaps the answer has also a sociological component. Astrologers were above all practitioners, professionals who followed certain rules passed on in a centuries-long tradition, and who did not care much about whether philosophers endorsed their practice. Ibn Ezra may have regarded

his astrological encyclopedias as reflecting the discipline's understanding, without feeling that it must be reconciled with the truths established by physical science. We will encounter a similar stance in response to the tension between astronomy and Aristotelian celestial science.

Particularly important is the fact that Ibn Ezra not only expounded astrology in special treatises, but massively drew on astrology throughout his biblical commentaries. Ibn Ezra's very popular exegetical works thereby taught their wide readership that astrology was a key to the correct understanding of the scripture. Thus, not only are the Ten Commandments put in parallel with the principles of astrology (commentary on Ex. 20:14), but specific biblical verses are decoded on the basis of astrological knowledge. For example, according to Ibn Ezra, when God is referred to as the "One Who rideth upon the heaven" (Deut. 33:26) and as the One who is "enthroned in the heaven" (Ps. 123:1) this teaches us that "whatever occurs to things below is dependent upon the powers of upper beings."[101] Again, Ibn Ezra surmises that Laban "was competent in astrology" and that when Rachel fled she stole the *teraphim* – according to Ibn Ezra, what she stole was an astrolabe – she did so because "she feared that her father would gaze at the stars [using the astrolabe] to find out by which way they fled."[102] Thus, the astrological understanding of the world permeates Ibn Ezra's understanding of Scripture itself.

Like most writers on astrology, Abraham ibn Ezra often sought to diffuse its deterministic character. Although he held that man's soul receives its "powers" from the supernal world and that the latter depends on "the astrological configuration," he also argued that because man's soul has its origin in the "superior world" of the pure forms (angels), the individual can, if he so chooses, disentangle himself from the "decrees" of the stars. This holds in particular of Israel: "The Lord, blessed be He, elected Israel and taught them His Torah. If they observe it, He will [through it] endow them with wisdom and will guide them in the right path, so that nothing may harm them. The rule is that their body must obey the soul, and not inversely, i.e. that the soul obey the body."[103] He also repeatedly warned that the planets do not bring about effects in the sublunar world on their own account, but rather follow the "law" imposed on them by God.[104]

Abraham ibn Ezra was a master of the art of terse and crisp writing. In a beautiful passage in his *Commentary on Exodus* he concisely explains the rationale of the theory according to which the forms of the sublunar substances have their origin in the planets.

> The middle [celestial] world [contains entities] that are of many different ranks. Thus, the five planets are of an elevated rank, for they persist in their essences: they neither perish

nor diminish, nor does their motion change – it neither increases nor decreases – nor do they ascend or descend.[105] Rather, it is only by virtue of their [changing] configuration [*ma'arekhet*] that they effect many changes [on earth]. For a given planet is now on the ecliptic, now north of it, now south of it, to a greater or lesser extent. At times [the planet] ascends on its epicycle or on its eccentric orb, i.e., [an orb] whose center lies at some distance from the center of the earth; at times its epicycle ascends, and at times it descends. Now [the planet] is swift, now it is slow; now it is stationary, now it is retrograde – although all this is so [only] with respect to the earth. At times it is visible, at times invisible; at times it is in the east, at times in the west. Its relationships to [a star or another planet with which it is in] conjunction . . . are always changing in countless ways. For it can be in one of the seven kinds of aspect.[106] As for conjunctions [of the planets] properly speaking, in a single [degree] out of the 360 degrees [on the ecliptic] there are 120 [possible] conjunctions.[107] As a result of these variations [in the configurations of the planets], all the things [lit. created beings] in the sublunar world vary, both in their essences and a fortiori in their accidents. [This is so] although they [the planets] do not at all change – neither in their essences, nor in their light.[108]

It can easily be seen why this theory would appeal to a contemporary. True, the most visible effects of the heavenly bodies, those of the sun and the moon, are large-scale phenomena. We see, however, that they vary with the astronomical positions of these bodies. If we extrapolate from these facts and assume that all planets have effects and that these effects depend on their astronomical positions with respect to the earth and also with respect to one another, is it not plausible to assume that all the variety down here is brought about by the changes in the heavenly sphere? Thus Judah Halevi acknowledges that if man knew with precision the proportions in which the elements must be mixed in order that a substance can be informed into, say, a palm tree, and also the exact positions of the planets necessary to imprint unto matter that specific form, then man could artificially produce any living being (except man).[109]

In a further move, can we not assume that human affairs, too, are similarly determined by the heavenly bodies? We will see that Maimonides was aware of precisely this argument and saw with apprehension that it opened the gate to astrology.

About forty years after Abraham ibn Ezra's sojourn in Provence, a group of laypersons wrote to Maimonides to request his opinion about astrology. Their epistle quotes extensively from astrological writings by Ibn Ezra (who remains unmentioned, however), thus confirming that they have entered the Hebrew bookshelf of the period.[110] The epistle reveals the concerns that astrology aroused in certain minds. Referring to the idea that a person's fortune is determined by the decree of the stars, so that "nothing can be added or subtracted," the authors are alarmed that

this makes all prayers futile. They are clearly disturbed by astrology's determinism: "these scholars [astrologers] destroy the foundations of faith by positing astrology as an immovable peg. According to their views, the prayers of certain people are like [those of which] our Rabbis, their memory for a blessing, said: 'This is a futile prayer.'"[111] Concerning the human misfortunes, that allegedly are predictable by means of astrology, the authors implore Maimonides: "We solicit our Rabbi, our Gaon, the light of our eyes, to inform us whether, in everything mentioned above, there is utility and succor if a person asks the advice of some scholar [knowledgeable in astrology], inasmuch as his astrological fate [*mazzal*] will be known [to him in advance]?" If he or she prays to avoid the foretold events, will this be a futile prayer (which is forbidden)?[112] For the medieval mind, the question of the nature of the influences of the heavenly bodies on the sublunar world was an existential question, not a purely theoretical issue.

Moses Maimonides (1137/8–1204) is certainly the most influential writer in the Jewish philosophical tradition, and his views were known to and discussed by countless readers in both Arabic and Hebrew. Maimonides discussed the heavenly bodies notably in two works: the *Book of Knowledge* (the first of fourteen books of *Mishneh Torah*), written in Hebrew, and in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, composed in Arabic but rapidly translated into Hebrew. We discuss them separately.

The Heavenly Bodies in the Book of Knowledge

"The pillar of the pillars and the underpinning of all sciences is to know that there is a First Being which endows with existence each existent: All existents, celestial, terrestrial, and such that are in between [the heaven and the earth] exist only by virtue of His existence."[113] It is with this statement that Maimonides famously opens the *Book of Knowledge*. Because all things depend for their existence on God – "If one could countenance that He did not exist, it would follow that no single thing would exist"[114] – Maimonides holds that it is incumbent upon man to seek to know Him through His creation: "This God, honored and revered, it is incumbent upon us to love Him and fear Him . . . What is the way to love and to fear Him? When a man contemplates His wondrous, great works and creations, and gauges from them His wisdom which is incomparable and boundless, he instantly loves Him, praises Him, and glorifies Him, and he perceives a great longing to know His great Name."[115] Maimonides consequently describes the physical world in some detail: Chapter three of the "Rules of the Fundamentals of the Torah" is mostly

devoted to a summary account of the celestial realm, followed by a description of the world of generation and corruption.

The brief account Maimonides offers in the *Book of Knowledge* is mostly qualitative and quite elementary.[116] He explains, for example, why the planets are seen as if they were all on a single sphere, although in truth they are at different distances from the observer. He remarks that the constellations of the fixed stars believed to be seen from the earth do not exist in reality, but are conventional groupings introduced by the early astronomers; this is an implicit aside against astrology, which is grounded on the premise that the zodiacal signs (which are 30-degree sections of the ecliptic), named after the twelfth zodiacal constellations, are "real" entities, which as such exercise influences on natural and human events in the sublunar world. He also offers some figures: There are nine spheres (seven for the planets, one for the fixed stars, and one is devoid of stars), to which should be added the epicycles and their like. The earth is about forty times greater than the moon, whereas the sun is about 170 times greater than the earth (as in Ptolemy's *Planetary Hypotheses*). Maimonides also states the conventional idea that the "the planets and the spheres all have souls and intellects and knowledge, and they are living beings who cognize Him who spoke and the world was."[117]

Mishneh Torah has been studied for centuries by scholars in all Jewish cultures, including those who shunned the study of "secular studies." The schematic account of cosmology in the *Book of Knowledge* was therefore the almost unique source of information on these matters that came to the attention of many Jewish readers.

The Heavenly Bodies in Guide of the Perplexed

In *Guide of the Perplexed* Maimonides discusses the heavenly bodies in a variety of contexts, and often expresses personal ideas. His views on the following themes need to be discussed. (a) What can man know of the heavenly bodies and of their arrangement? (b) the substance of the celestial bodies; and (c) the influences of the heavenly bodies on the sublunar world and the configuration of the orbs.

(a) The question of Maimonides' view on the knowability of the celestial bodies and the supralunar realm in general has been debated intensely in recent decades among scholars. The reason for this disproportionate attention to what prima facie is an arcane topic is that Maimonides' inquiry into the epistemology of celestial science is intimately bound up with his discussion of the question whether the world is eternal (as affirmed by the Aristotelians) or "newly created" (as held in the religious tradition). Maimonides discusses features of the heavenly region in considerable detail in a declared effort to show that they are the work of a

purposefully acting agent (viz. God), rather than the product of natural necessity (as implied by the eternity thesis). The question that fuels the scholarly debate is whether the statements Maimonides makes in this context reflect his true opinion or whether they are a sort of camouflage, behind which he sought to hide his (esoteric) belief that the world was eternal. The eternity/creation divide is indeed the cardinal issue on which hinges the view one takes of the meaning and purpose of all of Maimonides' religious philosophy. The question how to interpret the statements concerning the heavenly bodies thus goes straight into the – very controversial – heart of Maimonides' thought. It goes without saying that here we cannot go into this controversy, and in what follows I limit myself to a short presentation of the arguments overtly adduced by Maimonides, without asking whether he believed them to be true.

The very structure of the heavens, Maimonides argues, refutes Aristotle's thesis that the world is eternal, following only natural necessity. For example, Aristotle's necessitarianism implies that the planets should always move uniformly; however, we know them to have also retrograde motions, which thus refute the eternity thesis.[118] Similarly, the necessitarianism of the eternity thesis implies that the fixed stars should be evenly distributed in the eighth sphere. This is not the case, however, for in some zones this sphere is empty, whereas in others the stars are densely distributed. Maimonides concludes that the movements of the planets and the distribution of the fixed stars are "particular" phenomena, that is, irregular phenomena that cannot be the result of necessity, but must go back to God as a Particularizer. The argument that many celestial phenomena are "particular" and that this indicates that the heavens were created by God as He saw fit is an argument that is original with Maimonides.[119] We should note that the celestial "particularities," that is, the irregular phenomena not resulting from natural necessity, are not subsumable under a scientific explanation (which would logically deduce them from the primary principles). This means that, according to Maimonides, some aspects of the supralunar reality are by their very nature unknowable and will forever remain so.[120]

This skeptical position has a further aspect. Drawing on a long tradition, Maimonides notes that Ptolemaic mathematical astronomy is incompatible with Aristotelian natural science: Aristotle had demonstrated that the celestial bodies necessarily revolve about the center of the world (identical with that of the earth), but astronomers posit rotational motions around various other centers (epicycles, eccentrics, and equants). For Maimonides (as for all other medieval thinkers in the philosophical tradition), these are therefore impossible motions, motions that cannot really exist in nature. Still, astronomy is clearly a valid discipline: "What is

calculated" by astronomers "is not at fault even by a minute."[121] The difficulty to reconcile the claims to truth of these two disciplines Maimonides perceived as the "true perplexity."[122] Indeed, he remarks, had Aristotle been acquainted with the achievements of mathematical astronomy, he would have regarded them as "established as true" and he, too, "would have become most perplexed."[123]

Maimonides found a way out of this quandary, and his statement of it has become classic in philosophical discussions of the epistemological status of astronomy, and even of science in general. Maimonides' view is captured in two well-known passages concerning the respective roles of the astronomer and the philosopher of nature.

> All this [i.e., the demonstrations of natural science] does not obligate the master of astronomy. For his purpose is not to tell us in which way the spheres truly are, but to posit an astronomical system [or configuration; *hay'a*[124]] in which it would be possible for the motions to be circular and uniform and to correspond to what is apprehended through sight, regardless of whether or not things are thus in fact.[125]

And similarly,

> Know with regard to astronomical matters mentioned that if an exclusively mathematically-minded man reads and understands them, he will [or may] think that they form a cogent [i.e., decisive] demonstration that the form and number of the spheres is as stated. Now things are not like this, and this is not what is sought in the science of astronomy. Some of these matters are indeed founded on the demonstration that they are that way. Thus it has been demonstrated that the path of the sun is inclined against the equator. About this there is no doubt. But there has been no demonstration whether the sun has an eccentric sphere or an epicycle. Now the master of astronomy does not mind this, for the object of that science is to suppose an astronomical system [or configuration; *hay'a*] that renders it possible for the motion of the star to be uniform and circular . . . and have the inferences necessarily following from the assumption of that motion agree with what is observed.[126]

For our topic, these statements imply that Maimonides acknowledges the existence of two irreconcilable accounts of the heavenly realm: One is mathematical and "is not at fault even by a minute"; this account is however incompatible with the demonstrated principles of physics and as such cannot be true, that is, it cannot depict reality as it really is. The other account is demonstrated and is thus in conformity with reality, but it is of no practical use because it does not allow any predictions. The medieval thinker, Maimonides urges, simply has to put up with the uneasy coexistence of these two accounts, or rather disciplines, at least until such time that a theory is found that conforms to the principles of physics and also allows predictions (such a synthesis was actively sought by many astronomers and philosophers in the Arabic tradition).[127] As far as Maimonides is concerned,

it would seem that he recognized both disciplines as legitimate enterprises and that he ascribed to both a religious value: "matters pertaining to the astronomical system [or configuration; *hay'a*] of the spheres," he writes, just as those pertaining to natural science, are "necessary for the apprehension of the relation of the world to God's governance as this relation in truth is and not according to imaginings,"[128] a conception to which we shall presently return. Maimonides, it should be realized, did not discuss the epistemology of astronomical science issues in *Guide* because of its intrinsic intellectual appeal. *Guide* after all is a treatise of religious philosophy, and Maimonides' purpose was to make a point in his argumentation against the eternity thesis: He sought to make his readers skeptical with respect to the Aristotelian affirmations concerning the heavenly region, and thereby undermine the thesis of the eternity of the world.

(b) Maimonides explicitly declared that it is not the purpose of *Guide* to make contributions to natural science: Rather, he took the latter for granted and drew on it for the purposes of his religious–exegetical discussions. On a couple of occasions he puts forward personal ideas that deviate from the general consensus. One of them is the question of the matter of the heavenly spheres and the celestial bodies.[129] Maimonides naturally accepts the idea that the celestial matter is different from the sublunar one, but with a nuance. For him, the essential feature of matter is its capacity for motion. (In this he deviates from Aristotle, who defined matter essentially in terms of its capacity to change between opposites.) Because the heavens as a whole rotate, it follows that the spheres are all made of that fifth substance. What about the planets and the stars, however? Inasmuch as they are fixed on their respective spheres, they have no motion of their own; rather, they are at rest with respect to the rotating spheres to which they are affixed. For Maimonides this means that the matter of the planets and the stars is different from that of the spheres: "the fact that a sphere is always in motion and a star is always fixed proves that the matter of the stars is not the matter of the spheres."[130] Maimonides concludes that there are three, rather than two, kinds of matter.

> Accordingly it has become clear to me that there are three kinds of matter . . . The bodies that are always by themselves at rest – these are the bodies of the stars; the bodies that are always in motion – these are the bodies of the spheres; the bodies that are sometimes in motion and sometimes at rest – these are the elements.[131]

Maimonides' language suggests that he regarded this insight as a significant innovation in natural science.

The idea that celestial matter is essentially defined by its circular motion raises the following question: What is the cause of the differences between the motions of

the planets? Does the fact that each planet has a different circular motion not imply that the matter of each sphere is different? Maimonides understandably shuns this implication (it would have had untoward consequences for his natural philosophy) and posits instead that the spheres all move circularly by virtue of their common matter and that the differences and irregularities in their circular motions are due to their "forms" (i.e., souls): "The matter of all the heavenly spheres is one, as all of them have circular motion; [but] the form of every sphere is different from that of every other sphere."[132] Thus, where the conceptual resources of natural philosophy prove insufficient, metaphysics is called in to fill the gap.

(c) A second innovation in matters of natural science one finds in the *Guide* bears both on the *topos* of celestial influences on sublunar affairs and on the question of cosmology.[133] We begin with the former. It will not anymore come as a surprise that, as all thinkers of his time, Maimonides acknowledges that the sublunar world is not a closed physical system.

> It is known and generally recognized in all the books of the philosophers speaking of governance that the governance of this lower world – I mean the world of generation and corruption – is said to be brought about through the forces emanating from the orbs.[134]

To drive home the point that divine governance is effectuated through "forces emanating from the orbs," Maimonides reminds his readers of the stock argument confirming this view: As Aristotle already had observed, the sun exerts an "influence" on the sublunar element fire, and the moon "moves" the element water; generalizing this observation, we conclude that the other planets, too, exert influences (albeit less visible ones) on the sublunar beings. We saw that this "generalization" goes back to Alexander of Aphrodisias, and was shared by Averroes.

The celestial bodies influence not only large-scale phenomena but also individual sublunar substances. In the sequel to the previous passage, Maimonides writes:

> You will find likewise that the Sages say: "There is not a single herb below that has not a '*mazzal*' in the firmament that beats upon it and tells it to grow" (*Bereshit Rabbah* 10:6) . . . Now they also call a planet [lit. star]: *mazzal* . . . By means of this dictum they have made it clear that *even individuals subject to generation have forces of the planets [lit. stars] that are specially assigned to them*.[135]

This statement supposes the already encountered argument to the effect that without positing the enormously variegated effects of the heavenly bodies on the sublunar realm it is impossible to account for the variety of forms of material substances. Maimonides details the nature of the different forces emanating from the heavenly bodies as follows:

Heaven in virtue of its motion exerts government over the other parts of the world and sends to every generated thing the forces that subsist in the latter . . . Know that . . . the forces that come from heaven to this world are four: [1] the force that necessitates the mixture and composition – there is no doubt that this force suffices to engender the minerals; [2] the force that gives to every plant a vegetal soul; [3] the force that gives to every animal an animal soul; [4] the force that gives to every rational being a rational faculty. All this takes place through the intermediary of the illumination and the darkness [on earth] resulting from the light in heaven and from the heaven's motion round the earth.[136]

These ideas are close to those that Averroes considered, reflecting the two philosophers' common intellectual backgrounds. It is important to stress that, the celestial governance notwithstanding, Maimonides holds that the stars "do not exist for *our sake* and so that good should come *to us* from them."[137] In this statement Maimonides crisply expresses his profoundly anti-anthropocentric theology: Man is not the center of creation, and God did not create His perfect world "for us."[138] Indeed, Maimonides exhorts his reader to compare the matter out of which he is made with the substance of the celestial bodies.

Then the truth will become manifest to you, and you will know that man . . . is the most perfect and the most noble thing that has been generated from this [inferior] matter; but that if his being is compared to that of the spheres and all the more to that of the separate beings, it is very, very contemptible.[139]

Maimonides has an interesting, novel, and personal version of the theory of heavenly influences to offer (*Guide* II:19). He begins by positing an astronomical premise. Following Ptolemy (*Almagest* IX, 1), medieval astronomers considered the question whether Mercury and Venus are situated above or below the sun as undecidable, although most of them followed Ptolemy in settling for the latter alternative. A minority view in Maimonides' time, defended by the Spanish astronomer Jābir ibn Aflah, held however that Venus and Mercury were both situated above the sun.[140] Appealing to the authority of the latter, Maimonides declares that he too adopts this view (which, let us note in passing, he had not at all mentioned in the *Book of Knowledge*).[141] This opens the way to the introduction of his novel cosmology. Maimonides suggests that the orbs of the five planets (which on the adopted assumption do not have the sun in between them) should be viewed as making up *a single globe*, and that the entire supralunar realm is to be construed as consisting of four concentric "globes" (instead of eight orbs):[142] "[1] the globe of the fixed stars, [2] that of the five planets, [3] that of the sun, and [4] that of the moon," above which there is the star-less globe or sphere.[143] The point of this new construal is that it entails a new theory of celestial influences, in which each globe is taken to affect one of the four sublunar elements.

While the four globes having stars have forces that emanate from them as a whole toward all the things subject to generation . . . each globe is also specially assigned to one of the four elements, the globe being the principle from which the forces of that particular element exclusively derive and that in virtue of its motion causes the element to move in the motion of generation. Thus the globe of the moon moves the water, the globe of the sun the fire, while the globe of the other planets moves the air. . . . The globe of the fixed stars moves the earth. Perhaps the earth's motion is so sluggish to receive the affections to which it is subjected and in undergoing combinations because of the slowness of the motion of the fixed stars.[144]

Maimonides here extends the scheme that posited that the sun "moves" the element fire and the moon that of water to hold that the sphere of the fixed stars moves (albeit sluggishly) the element earth, and that the newly posited globe including all the planetary spheres "moves" the element air. This is a new and original version of the physical theory of the governance of the sublunar material world by the supralunar one.

Why did Maimonides go out of his way to frame this theory? He does not tell us explicitly, and instead repeatedly remarks that the number four is of the utmost significance here and in several other contexts (e.g., he noted that there are four kinds of forces emanating from the heavenly bodies). Already Maimonides' early interpreters were quick to come up with the observation that the four-globe theory is the indispensable basis for Maimonides' interpretation of Ezekiel's two visions of the chariot (*merkavah*) (*Guide* 3:1–7). Maimonides there suggests that the *ofanim* mentioned in the visions (Ez. 1, 3, 10) stand for the sublunar elements, and the *ḥayot* for the globes. According to Maimonides, the point of Ezekiel's vision is that the *ḥayot* move the *ofanim*. According to this reading, the message of the prophet's visions was that the heavenly bodies exercise divine Providence over the sublunar world.[145] Now the number of the *ofanim* in Ezekiel's visions and the number of the elements is indeed the same, namely four. For the interpretation to work, it was necessary that the number of the moving celestial bodies be four, too, as the number of the *ḥayot*. The replacement of the eight orbs by four globes achieved precisely this aim. This, presumably, was the motivation behind Maimonides' cosmological innovation.

It would seem that Maimonides hit on this idea only late in life, which may explain why the cosmology outlined in *Book of Knowledge* is traditional and so different from that in *Guide*. It also appears that the newly discovered interpretation of Ezekiel's visions entailed a change of Maimonides' notion of *maʿaseh merkavah*. Whereas in his early writings Maimonides had repeatedly identified *maʿaseh merkavah* with the most sublime metaphysics, according to the

interpretation just considered, the point of Ezekiel's Chariot visions was merely the universally accepted and quite banal idea of governance of the sublunar world by the heavenly bodies, albeit in a new version.[146] Maimonides' four-globe theory did not encounter much success with later authors.

As were all Aristotelian philosophers, Maimonides was strongly opposed to astrology, both because he believed it was factually wrong and because it had negative theological consequences: It negated free will and could thereby sap religious observance, and it also opened the door to star worship, the worst form of idolatry. Maimonides was keenly aware that the philosophical doctrine of the celestial influences on the sublunar was adduced by astrologers to justify their discipline. Thus, after exposing the commonly held view that the planets "act at some particular distances, I refer to their nearness to or remoteness from the center, or their relation to one another," Maimonides observes that it is precisely through this notion that astrology "comes in."[147] We have indeed seen that Abraham ibn Ezra was happy to buttress his claim for astrology precisely with this idea,[148] and that Maimonides himself recognized that "even individuals subject to generation have forces of the stars that are specially assigned to them." Maimonides' important observation, or rather admonition, that the doctrine of celestial influences allows astrology to "come in" is therefore perspicacious and justified. It should be kept in mind that Aristotelian natural philosophy could open the door to astrology because in Maimonides' day it had moved far away from Aristotle: The Greek philosopher had merely referred in general terms to the influence of the sun and the moon on generation and corruption in the sublunar world; the reference to the other planets, as well as the distinctively astrological idea that the influences exerted by them depend on their aspects ("their relation to one another"), was introduced later, namely by Alexander.

It is possible, although by no means certain, that in introducing the four-globe cosmology Maimonides also sought to pull the carpet from underneath the astrologers' feet. For, if the five planets are all grouped in a single globe that acts on the element air globally, then they cannot anymore be assumed (as in astrology) to act on individual sublunar substances, including human beings, and their influences cannot be supposed to depend on "their relation to one another." By considering the influences of the five planets "globally" rather than individually, the four-globe theory *ipso facto* negates the grounding that astrology claimed to have in natural philosophy. This reading of the four-globe theory is of course compatible with its obvious use as the basis for the interpretation of the Chariot visions. Although it is possible that Maimonides intended this antiastrological consequence of his theory, he does not say so explicitly.[149]

Aristotelian philosophers regarded astrology as sheer nonsense and therefore as unworthy even of refutation. Some of them (e.g., al-Fārābī and Avicenna) composed refutations of astrology, but usually only upon requests of lay people who were (then as now) intrigued or attracted by it. This holds for Maimonides as well. Although he had consistently rejected astrology and expressed this attitude clearly in many places, he sat down to compose his *Epistle in Opposition to Astrology* (1194–1195) only after a group of persons from the south of France, who were thrown into confusion by Abraham ibn Ezra's astrological writings, explicitly asked him for his view of it.[150] The *Epistle* is addressed to lay people whom Maimonides knew not to have studied science and philosophy. He therefore does not go into any detailed refutation, although in this text, too, he acknowledges that the governance of the sublunar world is mediated by the heavenly bodies. Maimonides' main concern is to reassure his correspondents with respect to man's free choice and thus vindicate the value of religious practice.

In conclusion it can be said that for Maimonides, as for all other medieval thinkers, the heavenly bodies fulfill a capital role in the economy of the cosmos: They exercise the divine governance of the sublunar world (although this governance was not put in place for the sake of humankind). Maimonides identified this important doctrine, or rather a specific version of it, in Ezekiel's visions: The four *hayot* are the four celestial globes, and the four *ofanim* are the four sublunar elements, moved by the *ḥayot*; the four-globe theory allowed Maimonides to affirm that the message (*nimshal)* of the entire vision was the divine governance of the world by means of the heavenly bodies. Maimonides was aware that ascribing to the planets a decisive role in sublunar affairs opens the gate to astrology, a human folly about which he repeatedly warned and against which he composed his famous *Epistle.* For Maimonides the knowledge of how God governs His universe was of great significance, a stance that accorded religious value to the study of astronomy and cosmology. The study of the celestial bodies was important for yet another reason, namely, because it allowed Maimonides to discover in the very structure of the cosmos "particularities," which he interpreted as empirical evidence that the world was created (rather than eternal). On the epistemological level, Maimonides considers that a full knowledge of the celestial bodies as they really are is probably unattainable (precisely because they are not the consequence of a natural necessity), notwithstanding the astronomers' impressive achievements in calculating their motions. He formulates with particular clarity the stance that astronomy and natural philosophy are two distinct disciplines that coexist, each with its own practitioners and knowledge claims that must be "compartmentalized."

III. THE HEAVENLY BODIES IN THE THOUGHT OF SCHOLARS HAVING ACCESS TO WRITINGS IN HEBREW ONLY

Gersonides. Continuing the process of transmission of Greco–Arabic science in Hebrew initiated by Abraham bar Ḥiyya and Abraham ibn Ezra, scores of books were translated from Arabic into Hebrew from the second half of the twelfth century onward, mainly in southern France and northern Spain. They in turn triggered Hebrew compositions by Jewish scholars who had access to the translated works only. The most brilliant and original among them is doubtless Gersonides (R. Levi ben Gershom, 1288–1344), to whose ideas about the heavenly bodies we now turn. Of all medieval Jewish scholars in Europe, Gersonides has the greatest scientific stature, comparable to that of his most distinguished non-Jewish contemporaries.[151] The heavenly bodies were at the core of Gersonides' thought, and because we can attend here only to one representative of the Hebrew philosophical tradition, it is most fitting that he be the one chosen.

Gersonides, who expressed his views most extensively in his philosophical treatise *Milḥamot ha-Shem* (*Wars of the Lord*), can be described as a critical admirer of Maimonides: While he fully endorsed the thrust of the latter's global program to accommodate tradition and science, he parted company from him on a number of major issues. One of them is that of creation. Whereas Maimonides maintained that the question whether the world was eternal or "newly created" could not be decided by scientific inquiry, Gersonides believed that he could prove the createdness of the world. One of the proofs he adduces consists in the affirmation that the cosmos is perfectly designed and that this perfection bespeaks a Designer. This holds specifically of the heavenly bodies, whose effects on the sublunar world endow it with the utmost possible perfection.

> In the foregoing it has been conclusively established that whatever is found in the substance of the heaven is of the utmost possible perfection with a view to perfecting these [sublunar] beings. Indeed, were that [heavenly] order corrupted even slightly, these [sublunar] beings would be corrupted [i.e., destroyed] too.[152] [The heavenly bodies] safeguard [the balance of] the opposite elements making up every composite [sublunar] being as long as possible. They safeguard also the vital heat of each [living] being. So much so that if the action exerted by them ceased for even a tiny instant, all these beings would be deprived of their good and their perfection, and no living being would remain alive.[153]

We clearly recognize here Alexander's idea, restated and endorsed by Averroes (whose writings Gersonides studied very intensively in Hebrew translation), that even the slightest change in the celestial configuration would entail a corruption of the sublunar existence dependent on it.[154] Gersonides indeed repeatedly stresses

that we know from physical theory that the equilibrium of the opposite qualities (hot/cold and dry/humid) constituting any sublunar substance is inherently unstable and precarious: Left to itself, any substance would soon perish because one of the qualities would overpower the others. Consequently, the fact that sublunar substances persist over certain periods of time is due to the "preserving" influences of the heavenly bodies. To his predecessors' lists of characteristics of the heavenly bodies that affect the sublunar world, Gersonides adds many more variables: their distances from the earth; their magnitudes; the shapes of the orbs; the variety of the rays emitted by them, each having its distinctive effect; the position of a planet in its orb; the number of the orbs of a given planet; and some others. Of all of these features, Gersonides affirms that they "have been perfected to the utmost possible" to perfect the sublunar existence.[155] Gersonides also puts this idea to a new use: It is not only that the providence exercised over the natural world is perfect, but this very perfection of the influences emanating from the heavenly bodies testifies that they have been purposefully designed *with a view to* bringing it about. In other words: This perfection is evidence that this order has been put in place intentionally, i.e., by a wise Creator.[156] Gersonides states that the "stars are in the spheres not for their own sake, but in order to exert influence on this sublunar existence," so as to perfect it to the utmost.[157] He thus believes that the perfect "programming" of the celestial influences on the sublunar world – the global natural order (*nomos*) – is empirical evidence that the world is created.[158]

Gersonides indeed outlined a scientific account of creation. In his original cosmogony, which cannot be considered here, he postulates that the act of creation consisted in the deity's imprinting upon a preexisting "body devoid of all forms" the elemental forms, thereby generating the four sublunar elements and the heavenly bodies. The salient point is that the forms with which the deity endowed sublunar and supralunar matter are perfectly attuned to one another, with the result that the celestial bodies continually maintain the sublunar world in the best possible state of equilibrium. Also the fact that humankind is the most perfect kind of substance is a result of the divine plan: Gersonides is here in diametrical opposition to Maimonides' radically antianthropocentric stance.

As an avid student of Averroes, on many of whose writings he commented in detail, Gersonides could not ignore the crucial, age-old question: How can bodies consisting of the fifth element possibly affect the sublunar world? Gersonides devoted an entire chapter of his *Wars of the Lord* to "An explanation of how the sun heats the air, in which the cause will be clarified how each planet produces the effects that are proper to it."[159] Once we understand how the sun heats the air, Gersonides promises, we will also know how the other planets exercise their

respective roles in the divine providential scheme. Gersonides states the problem very clearly.

> It has been demonstrated in natural science that the heavenly bodies do not possess the qualities which inhere in the elements and in bodies compounded of them. Therefore one cannot state that the sun heats because it is warm . . . It thus appears [to follow] necessarily that heat does not derive from the sun essentially . . . Rather, its [the heat's] existence derives from something whose existence is consequent upon the substance of the sun. Therefore we should think that the sun heats by virtue of something other [than being hot itself]. This having been demonstrated, we should inquire what this something is.[160]

Gersonides goes to some length to refute the two accounts given by the Philosopher (i.e., Aristotle, as presented by Averroes). The latter postulated that light warms because, by virtue of a divine force, a ray of light heats when reflected. Gersonides argues, if it were true that light *qua* light warms when reflected, then the light emitted by all heavenly bodies should warm, not the sun's light alone. The moon, however, never warms, even when it is full and in the summer, when the nights are long. The Philosopher's second explanation, according to which the sun heats through motion, is brushed aside with the argument that, in order that this be the case, the intermediary bodies (the sphere of the moon notably) should transmit the heat; because however they cannot become warm any more than the sun itself, this is not possible. A new departure is thus called for, and Gersonides offers his own account, which in fact is an improved version of what he found in Averroes.

> To my mind, the cause [by which the sun heats] is this: by virtue of a divine force in the ray of the sun, there is a rapport [or affinity] between it and the [element] fire, owing to which the ray moves the fire; it heats the air as it does because of the air's being immixed with the [element] fire . . . This being so, the light [of the sun] has this power [to warm] inasmuch as it is the light of the sun, not inasmuch as it is light *tout court*. Since [this faculty] accrues to the light of the sun by virtue of the nature of the element fire [in the air], which the ray of the sun moves, this warming should accrue also to the light emitted by fire when it is reflected. That this is the case we have ascertained empirically [lit. by sense-experience]: we placed a burning mirror facing the light of a candle, and we found that at the point of intersection of the reflected rays it was burning. [By contrast,] you won't find that the light emitted by the moon generates heat by means of the burning mirror. All this shows that the sunlight's faculty of burning accrues to it inasmuch as it is light emitted by the sun, [namely] by virtue of the divine power it has to set in motion the element fire. Just so, we find that the moon has an effect on increasing the watery nature . . . This is [also] why the color of the ray of the moon is in rapport [or affinity] and adequate to the cold and moist nature, and the color of the ray of the sun is in rapport [or affinity] and adequate to the warm and dry nature . . . You will find the same holds with respect to the colors of the other planets, i.e. that we find them to be in rapport [or affinity] and adequate to the nature which that planet contributes to

producing. This is evident to whoever studied astrology a little. . . . This is how the planets produce the elements and preserve the equilibrium of what is composed out of them.[161]

Gersonides, we see, gave Averroes' notion of divine force a new twist. Averroes, who followed Aristotle closely, attended mainly to the sun's effects on the sublunar world. Although he followed Alexander and the subsequent tradition in asserting that the other planets too have effects on the sublunar substances, he did not pause to elaborate a theory accounting for their multifarious effects. Gersonides, who was much more committed to astrology than was Averroes, needed a theory accounting for each planet's specific effect on sublunar beings. He therefore postulated that the rays emitted by the planets are all different, as are their colors, and that each has what we may describe as an *elective affinity* with a given type of sublunar substances. Thus, the rays emitted by the sun affect the element fire only, whence their capacity to warm; the rays emitted by the moon affect the element water only, whence their capacity to produce tides and other phenomena related to the humid quality. The same holds for the other planets, even though their effects are less perceptible. This theory provided a rational grounding for Gersonides' astrologically enriched Aristotelian physics. Unbeknownst to him (presumably), Gersonides is an heir to Alexander: Under the influence of astrology and Stoicism, the latter introduced the notion of "divine force" to reconnect the supra- and the sublunar parts of the cosmos; Gersonides carries this reasoning further by differentiating the notion of divine force so as to allow it to account for the diverse effects of the planets. He distinguished in some detail the factors on which the intensity of the celestial influences depends at given times and places.[162]

The view that the deity exerts His perfect providence over the created world through the celestial bodies makes the study of their design into an inquiry bearing on the perfection of the Creator. Because the most minute details of each and every one of the heavenly motions and of the influences emanating from them are indispensable for the preservation of the ordered world, their study will reveal God's divine plan, bearing witness to the Creator's wisdom and goodness. Astronomy therefore emerges as the divine science *par excellence*.

The prophets and those who spoke by virtue of the Divine Spirit made us aware that it is appropriate to expand this [astronomical] investigation because by it we are led to understand God, as will become evident in this study. Indeed, the orbs and the stars were created by the word of God, as will become clear from our treatise, God willing, by making evident the ampleness of God's wisdom and the ampleness of His power [as manifest] in His bringing into existence these noble [heavenly] bodies in this wondrously wise way and in His endowing them with heterogeneous emanations – even though [the heavenly bodies] are all of one

single nature, devoid of the qualities that emanate from them – by virtue of which this lowly [sublunar] existence is perfected.[163]

Astronomy thus is an integral part of Gersonides' research program, whose ultimate highly ambitious purpose is to describe the arrangement of the supralunar realm as it really is and thereby uncover the blueprint of creation. Gersonides indeed composed a highly innovative astronomical work, which is an integral part of *Wars*. Seeking to understand how the cosmos really is, Gersonides could not but reject the "compartmentalization" between physics on the one hand and mathematical astronomy as a discipline providing merely useful computational models on the other. His epistemology was bound to be realist, and his life of research was devoted to constructing a theory of the heavens that would accord both with specific dated observations of celestial phenomena and with physical theory.[164]

Gersonides' intellectual investment in astronomical research, guided as it was by a commitment to realist epistemology, yielded a particularly innovative astronomical œuvre.[165] Gersonides is best remembered for a new observational instrument he invented, the so-called Jacob Staff, allowing one to measure the angular distance between a star and a planet. Gersonides conducted astronomical observations – a rare procedure at that time in Europe – and modified his parameters accordingly. Most of his time and energy he invested in calculating astronomical tables and in revising, at times repeatedly, astronomical models accounting for planetary positions, or even inventing new ones. Very impressive, and most directly relevant to the subject of this chapter, is Gersonides' radically new departure in assessing the cosmic distances. Whereas Ptolemy and the medieval tradition considered the distance of the fixed stars from the earth to be 20,000 earth radii, Gersonides maintained this number to be 157×10^{12}, thereby immensely increasing the dimensions of the universe. This bold innovation was bound up with an original cosmological idea. Gersonides maintained that between two successive planetary shells is a "body that does not preserve its shape," that is, a body with no fixed shape, what we would call "fluid." This body he took to prevent that the motion of one planet interfere with that of the next. Various assumptions, and sophisticated calculations, allowed Gersonides to determine the thickness of the layers of the posited fluid body, which in turn implied the new cosmic dimensions. In a characteristic move combining natural philosophy and mathematical astronomy, Gersonides assumes that the "body that does not preserve its shape" is a remnant of a "body devoid of all forms" that preexisted creation, and out of which the deity created the material world (supra- and sublunar). In the scientifically demonstrated existence (as he believed) of this

body in the heaven, he saw an empirical confirmation of his cosmogony. For Gersonides, all branches of knowledge constituted a unity: "Truth agrees with itself from all sides," he repeats time and again.

Gersonides' confidence in perfect divine providence exercised through the heavenly bodies goes hand in hand with his penchant for astrology, which he thinks is compatible with Peripatetic natural philosophy. Gersonides' precise attitude toward to astrology needs further research, but it is clear that some of his assumptions were drawn from astrological theory, and he uses some of its vocabulary to describe how the heavenly bodies operate: He takes much of astrology and its literature for granted, and does not pause to discuss arguments against it, as, for example, those that were adduced by Maimonides.[166]

Gersonides in fact seeks to ground the tenets of astrology in Aristotelian natural philosophy. He thus states, "the temperament of every person is given to him by the spheres and by the planets [lit. stars], as this has already been established in this science [viz., astrology]."[167] The "temperament" is the balance of qualities, or humors, within the body, and astrology indeed affirms that it is determined by the celestial influences at the moment of birth. Now, a universally accepted postulate of medieval psychology and medicine stated "That the Powers of the Soul Follow Upon the Temperament of the Body" (the title of a work by Galen).[168] The conjunction of both statements implies that the psychological traits of an individual depend on the heavenly bodies. This is how Gersonides puts it:

> The heavenly bodies preserve the sublunary existents by reinforcing now this contrary, now another . . . As when you say that Mars reinforces the fiery nature, the moon the watery nature. The contraries thus produced by [the heavenly bodies] in the temperament of the human individuals influence their moral qualities [*middot*] and the practical capacities. It follows that in one position the heavenly bodies direct a man toward one quality, and in the contrary position they direct him toward its opposite.[169]

Note that Gersonides refers to an individual's tendency, or propensity, to act in a given way, not to his actual behavior. Here he seems to distance himself from astrology, or at least from horoscopic (or genethialogical) astrology, which affirmed that a person's future is predictable. Gersonides emphasizes that the astral determination and the actual behavior are separated by man's free choice, for which man can draw on his intellect: "God has placed in us an intellect, whose finality is to allow us to achieve something other than what is determined by the heavenly bodies."[170] Still, the (sad) fact of the matter is that only a tiny fraction of humanity use their intellects, so that the great majority of men and women indeed display the

actual behavior to which the heavenly bodies incline them. Therefore, although the behavior of an individual cannot be predicted with certainty, that of a social group can. Consider the following example.

In each society, Gersonides notes, we find people who choose even the most distasteful work. Why should they? Astral influences, we saw, bring about differences of temperaments. Different temperaments produce different dispositions, which incline people to choose different occupations. Thus, the individual freedom of choice notwithstanding, the *overall* distribution of the professions in a society is unfailingly due to the celestial influences. Because disagreeable occupations are useful to society, Gersonides sees in the fact that some individuals choose them yet another aspect of God's providence.[171]

Gersonides' intellectual mentality was that of a scientist: He sought to give a naturalistic account of the world. He believed that the world followed a natural order established by the deity in an act of purposeful creation and that man can uncover this order. In his view, the natural order entirely depended on the influences of the celestial bodies, which act according to how they were "programmed" at creation. Because the natural order is the result of divine volition, it is perfect: Contra Maimonides, Gersonides believes that the purpose of the celestial bodies is to produce and maintain the perfection of the sublunar world, and particularly of the most perfect substance it comprises – man, which is the *telos* of creation. This provided the context of his acceptance of the principles of astrology.

CONCLUSION

In the medieval worldview, the heavenly bodies occupied a primordial role. Although *qua* material bodies, they were not as noble in the ontological hierarchy as the separate forms (i.e., intellects), yet inasmuch as they were unchanging and eternal, they were nobler than any sublunar substance. Moreover, the celestial bodies had (rational) souls (their forms), as well as intellects, by which they cognized. The heavenly bodies could therefore be regarded as God's instruments in exercising His providence over the sublunar word, vouchsafing in particular the permanence of the natural order. Here the role of the heavenly bodies was in fact essential: If left to itself, the sublunar world would have come to naught, owing to the opposite elements of which it is composed. Only the input from the celestial influences stabilizes the sublunar natural order. Some authors even ascribe the specific forms of sublunar substances to the influences emanating from the heavenly bodies.

Although Aristotelian philosophers usually rejected astrology, many Jewish scholars accepted it wholeheartedly, seeing in it a key to understanding the scripture or to a calculation of the date of Deliverance. Even those scholars who rejected astrology included in their natural philosophy the idea that the celestial influences depend on the joint actions of all planets and on their respective positions (aspects). Maimonides correctly recognized that from this stance "astrology comes in." Our historical overview showed how these astrological ideas accrued to Aristotelian natural philosophy, notably though the heritage of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who was writing under the strong influence of a culture permeated with astrological lore.[172]

NOTES

1 Discussions of some of the topics not treated here can be found in the following works: on medical astrology: Bos et al. 2006; on the drawing down of *pneumata*: Schwartz 2005b; on the heavenly bodies in the thought of Hasidey Ashkenaz: Freudenthal 1994–1995, 1998. All these works naturally give references to other studies.
2 I use the term "Mediterranean scientific tradition" in a very large sense to refer to the continuous tradition that began (although not *ex nihilo*) in Greece and was subsequently developed in a multitude of cultures and languages including Syriac, Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin.
3 For an insightful brief account of Aristotle's concept of celestial matter see Glasner 2000, pp. 313–6.
4 *De Caelo* 2.7; *Meteor.* I.3, 341a12–36.
5 See Longrigg 1975.
6 For details see Freudenthal 1995.
7 Balme 1990; Freudenthal 1995, pp. 38–9 and the references there.
8 Aristotle assumes this to be the case, although the relationship between the moon and the tides was not yet known to him.
9 Gersonides, *Milḥamot ha-Shem* (*Wars of the Lord*), V.1.43; edited and translated in Mancha and Freudenthal 2005, pp. 159–60.
10 See Goldstein 2007.
11 The orb of a planet (often the term "sphere" is used as well) is a spherical shell onto which the planet is taken to be fixed. The motion of the planet is assumed to result from the orb's revolution about a given center. The orb has a thickness: Its inner radius is the least distance of the planet from the earth, whereas its outer radius is the greatest distance of the planet from the earth.
12 For an admirable synthesis see Boll 1922–1923.
13 The classic work is still Bouché-Leclerc 1899. For a history of astrology in chronological order see Gundel and Gundel 1966, esp. pp. 202ff (from the middle of the second century CE onward). See also the insightful Long 1982; and the overviews in Boll, Bezold, and Gundel 1917; Tester 1987; Barton 1994. The popular success of astrology was enhanced by the discovery that the tides are caused by the moon; see Duhem 1965, chap. XIII.
14 Rochberg 2004.
15 Cumont 1909, chap. VII, notably pp. 240–69.

16 Cumont 1912, pp. 90, 99; see also p. 133. See as well Gressmann 1925.
17 Festugière 1986, esp. pp. 89ff.
18 Ptolemy 1940, pp. 6–7.
19 Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 1:2; quoted from Ptolemy 1940, pp. 8–9. The "aspect" is the position of one planet relative to another.
20 Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 1:2; in Ptolemy 1940, pp. 11–9.
21 For an overview see Lawrence 2006.
22 Cumont 1912, p. 84.
23 See, e.g., Dillon 1996 [1977]; Scott 1991, pp. 76–103.
24 Gundel and Gundel 1966, pp. 312–8.
25 For a superb overview on Alexander see Sharples 1987.
26 Thillet 1984, pp. LXXIX–LXXX.
27 For the history see Moraux 1970; Alexander of Aphrodisias 2003, Introduction, pp. 17–45.
28 Freudenthal 2006.
29 Alexander of Aphrodisias 2001, §51; §§56, p. 127; Alexander of Aphrodisias 1992, p. 41:12–19.
30 Alexander of Aphrodisias 1983, Introduction, p. 26; Sharples 1987, p. 1217.
31 Alexander of Aphrodisias 2001, §132. The Arabic translation uses both the term *quwwa ilāhiyya* (§131) and *quwwa ruhāniyya* (§§128, 129), which here are synonymous.
32 Alexander of Aphrodisias 2001, §§128; cf. §§129, 132.
33 Alexander of Aphrodisias 2003, p. 10:25-26; Alexander of Aphrodisias 1999, pp. 124–6.
34 Alexander of Aphrodisias 2003, p. 19:6-7; Alexander of Aphrodisias 1999, p. 150.
35 See e.g., in Alexander of Aphrodisias 2001, §§57, 80; Sharples 1982, p. 198; Alexander of Aphrodisias 1983, Introduction, p. 26; Sharples 1983, p. 64; Sharples 1994a.
36 Alexander's scheme implies that the world is the best possible one on the level of its cosmological order but not with respect to individuals, providence being limited to species. The crucial turning point in this respect is Avicenna, as has been persuasively shown in M. Rashed 2000 (see notably p. 236).
37 Alexander of Aphrodisias 2003, p. 11:4–18; Alexander of Aphrodisias 1999, p. 126. This argument is echoed in Galen, *De usu part*. 3.10 (*in fine*).
38 Alexander of Aphrodisias 2003, p. 13:4–20; Alexander of Aphrodisias 1999, p. 132. A similar argument in *De Mundo,* 6, 399a20–30.
39 For an overview see sevaral of the essays in R. Rashed 1996.
40 On the history of this tradition see Gauthier 1909; Sabra 1984; Sabra 1998; Saliba 1999.
41 Bos and Burnett 2000, p. 98 [Hebrew], pp. 162–3 [Engl.], modified.
42 Bos and Burnett 2000, pp. 99–100 and 163–4, respectively.
43 Bos and Burnett 2000, p. 100 and 164, respectively.
44 See notably Lemay 1962.
45 Text in Fārābī 1964; medieval Hebrew translation by Samuel ibn Tibbon in Fārābī 1849; translation into modern Hebrew in al-Fārābī 1992. See also Druart 1981.
46 Al-Fārābī 1964, p. 55:13-56:12; al-Fārābī 1849, p. 21.
47 For an excellent introduction see Jouana 1999, esp. pp. 210–32.
48 See Mattock and Lyons 1969, pp. xxxv–xxxviii.
49 Strohmaier 1997. For an overview of the theory of climates in medieval thought see Altmann 2005.
50 See, e.g., Freudenthal 1995, pp. 22–6 and the references there. Like his contemporaries, al-Fārābī subscribes to this theory; see, e.g., al-Fārābī 1985, pp. 188–93.
51 Druart 1978, 1979.
52 Averroes 1998, pp. 166–8 (§§74–77).

53 Averroes 1992, p. 49:5-50:11; Averroes 1958a, pp. 121:67–122:78; Averroes 1958b, pp. 133. Quoted from Freudenthal 2000, p. 343.
54 Averroes 1958, pp. 90, 102. Quoted from Freudenthal 2000, p. 343.
55 Averroes 1947, 49:2-8 (Epitome of *De Caelo*). Quoted from Freudenthal 2000, p. 343.
56 Alexander's treatises discussing the notion of divine force were available in Arabic. To be sure, in Alexander's scheme it has a more general significance, and the history of the reception of this concept still needs investigation.
57 The interested reader will find a comprehensive and exhaustive account in H. Davidson 1992a, on which the following outline is based.
58 Neither the Arabic nor the Hebrew have different terms for the intellect *qua* mover of the spheres and the intellect alluded to in other contexts. The terminological distinction between "intellect" and "intelligence" goes back to Latin scholasticism and has become customary in scholarship. See H. Davidson 1992a, p. 6.
59 Most philosophers held that the active intellect's role is limited to endowing composite substances with vegetative, animal, and rational souls. The question whether the forms of the elements and minerals are produced by the active intellect or whether they are produced by natural necessity was a matter of dispute.
60 For a comprehensive overview and bibliography see Goldstein forthcoming.
61 Bonjorn, LJS 57, fol. 1a.
62 See Drori 2000.
63 See Goldstein 2001.
64 Although Shem-Tov ibn Falaquera was essentially a transmitter of knowledge, some of his discussions are informed by his own philosophical agenda. A case in point is precisely his account of the celestial bodies in his encyclopedia *De'ot ha-filosofim* (*The Opinions of the Philosophers*), in which he very skillfully wove together elements from diverse sources to produce a coherent, personal doctrine. The argument being too involved to be developed here, I refer the reader to my detailed treatment in Freudenthal 2000.
65 The works composed in Arabic were quickly translated in Hebrew. Therefore, the language of composition did not play a crucial role in the reception of these works.
66 Goldstein 2001.
67 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* I.3, "eighth theory"; Saadia 1970, pp. 61:27-33, 62:11-15; Saadia 1948, pp. 70–1 (modified).
68 See Freudenthal 1996b.
69 Saadia 1972a, pp. 86–7.
70 Ben-Shammai 2004.
71 Text in: Levin 2005, pp. 262–3. English translation quoted from Cole 2001, pp. 153–4.
72 Text in: Levin 2005, p. 268. English translation quoted from Cole 2001, p. 161.
73 Loewe 1979. For the identification of Ibn Gabirol's sources in astronomical matters Loewe quotes a letter from Prof. B. R. Goldstein.
74 Bar Ḥiyya 1720, p. 1a.
75 Bar Ḥiyya 1720, p. 1a–1b. Very similarly in his "Epistle [on Astrology] to R. Judah of Barcelona," in Bar Ḥiyya 1917, p. 29.
76 On Abraham Bar Ḥiyya's astrology see Sela 2006, esp. pp. 133–5.
77 The basic textbook of this discipline is Abū Maʿashar 2000. See the editors' discussion of "The Sources and Doctrines" on pp. 1:573–613.
78 A triplicity consists of three signs having the same nature (and each triplicity is associated with one of the four Aristotelian elements): for an illustration of the triplicities, see, e.g., Goldstein 1991, p. 300.
79 See the account in Bar Ḥiyya 1924, pp. 116–8.

80 Bar Ḥiyya 1924, pp. 125. On Bar Hiyya's unconventional astrological theory of history see Sela 2006.
81 Bar Ḥiyya 1924, pp. 146–7.
82 Bar Ḥiyya 1924, pp. 152–5.
83 Goldstein and Pingree 1990.
84 Reported in Abraham ibn Ezra's Commentary on Dan. 11:31.
85 Sela 2003, pp. 162–8.
86 Baer 1926; Even-Shmuel 1954, pp. 258–67, 324–5; Weltecke 2003.
87 E.g., *Emunah Ramah* 6:1; Ibn Daud 1852, p. 86; Ibn Daud 2001, p. 97, where the "world-wide upheavals and the change of dynasties" are given as examples of occurrences brought about by God through the "intermediaries," that is, the heavenly bodies.
88 Goldstein and Pingree 1990, p. 3.
89 Goldstein and Pingree 1990.
90 See Ben-Shammai 2004.
91 Maimonides, "Letter in Opposition to Astrology," in Maimonides 1988, p. 481.
92 Maimonides 2000b, pp. 120–2. Maimonides shows that many fortunate events of Jewish history occurred when, on the astrological premises, the opposite should have been the case. Similarly, the Yemenite inquirers attributed their low state of knowledge to "the conjunction being in the earthly trigon," but Salomon, the wisest of all men, lived precisely in the earthly trigon.
93 On Ibn Ezra's astrology see Langermann 1993; Sela 1999, 2003.
94 Freudenthal 2005b.
95 *Emunah Ramah* 2:6:1 in Ibn Daud 1852, p. 87; Ibn Daud 2001, pp. 97–8
96 Levy and Cantera 1939, v-vi; 153.
97 Levy and Cantera 1939, vii; 154.
98 Levy and Cantera 1939, vii; 154.
99 Levy and Cantera 1939, viii; 155.
100 Abraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Exodus 33:21. This view is occasionally expressed in astrological writings too.
101 Abraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Gen. 11:5.
102 Abraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Gen. 31:19.
103 Abraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Exodus 23:25.
104 Abraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Exodus 33:20. The Aristotelian Ibn Daud formulates and refutes precisely this argument in *Emunah Ramah* 2:4:3, in Ibn Daud 1852, pp. 65–6; Ibn Daud 2001, p. 75.
105 In fact, when the planet "ascends" on its epicycle, its distance from the center of the earth increases. Ibn Ezra thus presumably has in mind the planet's set of orbs, taken together, which does not vary in distance from the center of the earth.
106 Ibn Ezra refers to this idea, *Re'shit Ḥokhmah* see Ibn Ezra 1939, pp. xxxix; 190.
107 For Ibn Ezra on the 120 conjunctions of the seven planets (the five planets plus the sun and the moon), see Sela 2003, pp. 313, 378, 381–2.
108 Abraham Ibn Ezra, Commentary on Exodus 3:15. I am indebted to Prof. B.R. Goldstein for his invaluable help in translating this passage. On the ideas presupposed here, see Sela 1999, pp. 72–84 (where our passage is analyzed). A very similar account is given in *Yesod Mora'* 12:1.
109 Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, §3:23; see also §§1:77 and 4:9.
110 Sela 2004.
111 Sela 2004, pp. 104–5.

112 Sela 2004, pp. 110–1.
113 Maimonides, *Book of Knowledge*, "Rules of the Fundamentals of the Torah," 1:1. In Maimonides 1981, p. 34a.
114 Maimonides, *Book of Knowledge*, "Rules of the Fundamentals of the Torah," 1:2; Maimonides 1981, p. 34a.
115 Maimonides, *Book of Knowledge*, "Rules of the Fundamentals of the Torah," 2:1-2; ed. Maimonides 1981, p. 35b.
116 For what follows see Maimonides, *Book of Knowledge*, "Rules of the Fundamentals of the Torah," 3; Maimonides 1981, pp. 36b–38a.
117 Maimonides, *Book of Knowledge*, "Rules of the Fundamentals of the Torah," 3:10; Maimonides 1981, p. 37b.
118 *Guide* II.19.
119 H. Davidson 1987, pp. 197–201.
120 *Guide* II.24, in Maimonides 1963, p. 327.
121 *Guide*, II.24; Maimonides 1963, p. 326.
122 See Langermann 1991.
123 *Guide*, II.24; Maimonides 1963, p. 326.
124 The term *hay'a* refers both to the branch of astronomy dealing with models in three dimensions (to be distinguished from table-making, computations, etc.), and to an astronomical model (i.e., sets of orbs, one for each planet). In what follows, I will usually use the English term "astronomical system" as an equivalent.
125 Maimonides 1963, p. 326, slightly modified.
126 *Guide* II.11; Maimonides 1963, pp. 273-4.
127 Maimonides' view was seen by some twentieth-century philosophers as expressing the essence of the so-called instrumentalist philosophy of science, a stance that holds that scientific theories do not, and should not, make claims to depict reality, but only provide ideational instruments allowing trustworthy control of nature. See Freudenthal 2003b.
128 *Guide* I.34; Maimonides 1963, p. 74.
129 The discussion in this section does no more than summarize the insightful account in Glasner 2000.
130 *Guide* II.19, Maimonides 1963, p. 309.
131 *Guide* II.19, Maimonides 1963, p. 309.
132 *Guide* II.19, Maimonides 1963, p. 305f.
133 The following section is based on Freudenthal forthcoming a.
134 *Guide*, II.10, Maimonides 1963, p. 270. Similarly, "there is a consensus of all philosophers to the effect that the governance of this lower world is perfected by means of the forces overflowing to it from the orb" (p. 260).
135 *Guide*, II.10, Maimonides 1963, p. 269f. The term *mazzal* here probably means "planet" rather than star.
136 *Guide* I.72, Maimonides 1963, p. 186f.
137 *Guide* III.15, Maimonides 1963, p. 451–2.
138 Maimonides' unbending theocentrism has forcefully and repeatedly been highlighted by the late Yeshaiahu Leibowitz. Cf. notably Leibowitz 1987, chap. III.
139 *Guide* III.15; Maimonides 1963, p. 455.
140 This is the so-called Platonic order; see *Republic* X.616-7 and Heath 1913, pp. 108–10. (I am indebted to B.R. Goldstein for these references.) Abraham bar Ḥiyya discusses the issue in *Sefer Tzurat ha-Aretz*, Introduction to the Second Gate; see bar Ḥiyya 1720, p. 11a.

141 *Guide* II.9, Maimonides 1963, pp. 268–9.
142 "Globe" [*kura*] is not an established scientific term, and Maimonides introduces it advisedly: The difference between a globe and an orb [*falak*] is that a globe can encompass more than a single planet-carrying orb.
143 *Guide* II.9, Maimonides 1963, p. 269, modified.
144 *Guide* II.10, Maimonides 1963, pp. 270–1, modified.
145 H. Davidson 2005, pp. 347–50.
146 This is my contention in Freudenthal forthcoming a, where more details can be found.
147 Maimonides, *Guide* II.12; Maimonides 1963, p. 280. It is noteworthy that Abraham ibn Daud (ca. 1110–80), the great Jewish Aristotelian before Maimonides, makes an identical remark: The awareness that it is the multifarious motions of the "heavenly sphere" (a collective name for all the heavenly bodies) that inform sublunar matter is "the postulate [*hatḥalah*] on which astrology [proceeds];" see *Emunah Ramah* I.6 in Ibn Daud 1852, p. 32; Ibn Daud 2001, p. 39. Abraham ibn Daud adds that whereas astrology is forbidden by the Torah, the fact that the planets bring about effects in the sublunar world is recognized by the rabbis in the Talmud. Because the planets operate according to divine decree, scripture calls them "servants who accomplish His Will" (Ps. 103:21). He distinguishes the informing action of the active intellect from those of the planets in II.4.3 (Ibn Daud 1852, p. 64–6; Ibn Daud 2001, pp. 75–7), but expresses a positive appreciation of astrology (Ibn Daud 1852, pp. 68–9, 86–8; Ibn Daud 2001, pp. 78–9, 97–8).
148 Maimonides in all likelihood did not read Abraham ibn Ezra's statement, but was reacting to an argument made many times, as Abraham ibn Daud's similar remark shows.
149 On this interpretation see Freudenthal, forthcoming a.
150 This writing is commonly known as "Letter on Astrology" but the title suggested in H. Davidson 2000, p. 494 captures its nature better. Text in Maimonides 1988, pp. 474–90; English translation in Maimonides 2000a. The ascription of the bulk of this epistle to Maimonides seems well-founded, but some phrases or passages are inconsistent with Maimonides' known views and may be later interpolations. See H. Davidson 2005, pp. 494–501. On Maimonides' attitude to astrology, see Langermann 1991 and Freudenthal 1993b. For the request from southern France and its dependence on Ibn Ezra, see Sela 2004.
151 For an overview of Gersonides' thought see Freudenthal 1996a, on which I draw in what follows. For comprehensive bibliographies see Kellner 1995, 2003.
152 *Wars* VI.1.7, Gersonides 1560: 51va, Gersonides 1866: 310.
153 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1560: 28^{vb}, Gersonides 1866: 170.
154 This argument can be found also in Abū Ma'ashar's writings; see Lemay 1962, p. 113.
155 *Wars* VI.1.7; Gersonides 1560: 51va, Gersonides 1866: 310-12.
156 Cf. also Feldman 1967; H. Davidson 1987, pp. 209–12.
157 *Wars* V.2.3; Gersonides 1560: 32^{vb} ; Gersonides 1866, pp. 194–7.
158 More precisely: Gersonides holds that each separate intellect controls the influences – formal and efficient – emanating from "its" planet; the synthesis of the partial knowledge of all the intellects is the active intellect and is in fact the *nomos* of the world. The notion that the active intellect is a "synthesis" of the other intellects is one of the few innovative points in Gersonides' theory of the intellect. For an exhaustive comparison of Gersonides' views with those of his predecessors, cf. H. Davidson 1992b.
159 Gersonides, *Wars*, V.2.6; in 1566, fol. 33va; 1866, p. 201.
160 Gersonides, *Wars*, V.2.6; in 1566, fol. 33va; 1866, p. 201.

161 Gersonides, *Wars*, V.2.6; in 1566, fol. 34[ra]; 1866, pp. 203–4. On colors associated with the planets, see Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, II.9 (Ptolemy 1940, p. 193).
162 Gersonides, *Wars*, V.2.8; in 1566, fol. 35[va]; 1866, pp. 207–8.
163 *Astronomy*, chap. 2 (*Wars* 5.1.2); quoted (with modifications) after Goldstein 1985, p. 24 (English), p. 303 (Hebrew).
164 *Astronomy* chap. 1 (*Wars* 5.1.1), Goldstein 1985, p. 305 (Hebrew), p. 22 (English). On Gersonides' astronomy see notably the numerous studies by B.R. Goldstein listed in Kellner 1995, 2003.
165 For an overview of Gersonides' astronomical work see Goldstein 1992. The following paragraph is based on this work.
166 We do not know whether Gersonides read Maimonides' "Epistle in Opposition to Astrology."
167 Altmann 1979–1980, p. 17.
168 Biesterfeldt 1973, 1986. See also Freudenthal, forthcoming c.
169 *Wars* II.2, in 1566, fol.17[ra-b]; 1866, p. 96.
170 *Wars* II.2, 1566, fol. 17[rb]:13–4; 1866, p. 97, 3–4.
171 *Wars* II.2, 1566, fol. 17[rb]; 1866, p. 97f.
172 I am grateful to Ruth Glasner and Shlomo Sela for their helpful comments on a draft of this chapter. Special thanks go to Bernard R. Goldstein for his detailed and very valuable suggestions.

11

MIRACLES

ARI ACKERMAN

Jewish philosophy has been defined as "the confrontation or encounter of the nonphilosophic Jewish sources and the non-Jewish philosophic sources."[1] In its medieval stage, Jewish philosophy is therefore concerned with the conflict between biblical and rabbinic literature, on the one hand, and Greek philosophical literature as transmitted by Islamic philosophers, on the other hand. The biblical and rabbinic corpuses represent different stages in Jewish spirituality, and each body of literature articulates multiple perspectives. Likewise, Greek philosophers differ on seminal philosophical and theological issues. Nevertheless, one can distinguish between the general orientation of the biblical–rabbinic tradition and the Greco–Islamic philosophical tradition toward anthropological, cosmological, and theological questions – particularly regarding the role of speculation in obtaining human perfection and the relationship between God and nature. It is the navigating between these differing worldviews that occupies center stage in the drama of medieval Jewish philosophy.

Medieval Jewish philosophers then devoted particular attention to the subjects in which the divergence was greatest. One issue that particularly captures the differing theological conceptions between the biblical–rabbinic tradition and the Greco–Islamic philosophical tradition is miracles. Indeed, in his depiction of the fundamental difference in their understanding of God, Galen, the well-known second-century Greek physician and philosopher, pointed to the contrasting approaches of Greek philosophy and the Jewish Bible to miracles and creation:

> It is precisely this point in which our own opinion and that of Plato and of the other Greeks who follow the right method in natural science differs from the position taken up by Moses. For the latter it seems enough to say that God simply willed the arrangement of matter and it was precisely arranged in due order; for he believes everything to be possible with God, even should He wish to make a bull or horse out of ashes. We however do not hold this; we say that there are certain things impossible by nature and that God does not even attempt such things at all but He chooses the best out of the possibilities of becoming.[2]

The sharp disagreement regarding God's involvement in the world between their two sources of truth generated much deliberation on the topic of miracles among

medieval Jewish philosophers. In particular, medieval Jewish philosophers debated two issues regarding miracles. First, they considered the question of the existence of miracles: Can and does God cause supernatural events or are events recognized in the tradition as miracles actually natural events? Second, they contested the question of the religious significance of miracles: Are miracles necessary to recognize God's power and role in history and the veracity of divine revelations, or does God's sovereignty best express itself through nature?

In this chapter, we will focus on four of the most extensive and influential treatments of the topic of miracles in the medieval Jewish philosophical tradition: the discussions of Saadia Gaon, Judah Halevi, Maimonides, and Gersonides. Each of these philosophers forges a unique balance between the Jewish and philosophical traditions on miracles. We will therefore commence with a brief examination of the differing conceptions of miracles in the biblical–rabbinic tradition and the Greco–Islamic philosophical tradition, which lays the groundwork for the medieval Jewish philosophical treatment of the issue.

I. MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE

God is often depicted in the Bible as contravening nature.[3] Although the Bible does not articulate a doctrine of natural law, it accepts that nature evinces a regularity and continuity. Jeremiah, for example, praises God as the giver of eternal ordinances for planetary motion and the movement of the seas (Jeremiah 31:34). The biblical God, however, is able to break the natural pattern that He[4] initiated. The Bible therefore emphasizes the unprecedented nature of certain miracles. In the case of the miracle of the cessation of the heavenly bodies, for instance, the Bible exclaims: "Neither before nor since has there even been such a day" (Joshua 10:14). Likewise, after relating that Sarah would give birth at an advanced age, God highlights the supernatural aspect of the act: "Is anything too wondrous for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14).

Yet, the Bible does not recognize a separate category of acts that contravene natural patterns. Rather, biblical miracles must be seen as part of a broad class of marvelous acts of God that display His supreme power. Thus, the terms that generally refer to miracles (*gedolot* ["great deeds"], *pele* ["wonders"], *nifla'ot* ["wondrous acts"], *ot* ["sign"], and *mofet* ["wonder"]) also refer to God's manifestation of His omnipotence through the act of creation, fortuitous occurrences, and the regularity of natural cycles. Nevertheless, the Bible uses miracles as one of the most important demonstrations of God's absolute sovereignty over nature and history. Just as God created the world, displaying the nonidentity of God and nature, He continues to

exhibit His continued control of nature through miraculous interventions. Likewise, God reveals His power through miraculous involvement in the history of humanity in general and the Jewish people in particular. He does so by punishing the wicked through supernatural means as in the ground swallowing Korah and his rebels (Numbers, chapter 16); delivering the Jews from Egypt through a miraculous series of plagues; and redeeming the Jews at the end of days through extraordinary acts.

Biblical miracles are, then, educative tools that engender faith in God and His prophetic emissaries. At times, the educational message is directed to other nations or humanity at large. Thus, God declares that the purpose of the plagues is "in order that My fame may resound throughout the world" (Exodus 9:16). Miracles, however, are generally aimed at a Jewish audience, instructing the Jews regarding the credibility of their prophets and the supremacy of their God. Indeed, the Jewish people are often portrayed as easily falling prey to the seductive powers of idolatrous forces and requiring a miraculous sign to exhibit God's powers of deliverance. Jews are commanded to recount these miracles, particularly God's delivering them from slavery, and ritualize the acts of remembrance so that their faith carries on with the next generation.[5]

Despite the prevalence of miracles in the Bible, aspects of the biblical portrayal of the relationship between God and humanity lend themselves to a more naturalistic orientation. In fact, biblical scholars have argued that the Bible presents history as a trajectory from a state of substantial divine intervention to one in which God cedes control to human beings.[6] In addition, God's miraculous interventions are completely absent from some of the later books of the Hebrew Bible, such as Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah.[7] Medieval Jewish philosophers who were advocating a naturalistic approach to miracles generally did not utilize these aspects of the biblical understanding of miracles (although certain modern Jewish thinkers note in approval this reading of biblical history).[8] Medieval Jewish philosophers did highlight other biblical notions in their naturalistic arguments, particularly verses and ideas from the Wisdom literature. For example, God's failure to intervene on Job's behalf and the fatalistic declarations in Ecclesiastes concerning the continuously recurring set of events appear prominently in the naturalistic approach of Maimonides and other medieval Jewish philosophers.[9]

II. MIRACLES IN THE RABBINIC TRADITION

The rabbinic authors of the Mishnah, Talmud, and *midrashim* unequivocally affirm the existence of biblical miracles.[10] At times, they even expanded the supernatural

character of the biblical miracles, arguing for a "miracle within a miracle," which further magnifies God's glory.

> R. Shimon the Shilonite expounded: when the evil Nebuchadnezzar cast Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah into the fiery furnace, Yurkami, the Prince of hail, rose before the Holy One, blessed be He, and said to Him: "Sovereign of the universe. Let me descend, cool the furnace and deliver these righteous men from the fiery furnace." Gabriel said to him: "The might of the Holy One, blessed be He, will not be manifested in this manner, for you are the Prince of hail and all know that water extinguishes fire. But I, the Prince of fire, shall descend, cool it within and heat it without and will thus perform a miracle within a miracle." The Holy One blessed be He said to him: "Descend." It was then that Gabriel commenced with praise and said, "And the Lord's truth endures forever."[11]

What is more, the Mishnah, Talmud, and *midrashim* view many of the rabbinic sages themselves as performers of miracles.[12] The rabbis through their prayers, good deeds, and Torah study could bring about divine intervention, supervening the natural order. They could bring rain (Taanit 24b, 23a), kill the unworthy (Yevamot 45a), heal the sick (Berakhot 34b), create new life (Sanhedrin 65b, 67b), and even resurrect the dead (Megilah 7b). In particular, they expounded on the wondrous acts of the holy men, R. Haninah ben Dosi and Honi the Circle Maker.

The rabbinic literature also displays statements and views in a more naturalistic vein, even more so than the Bible. Perhaps the most important naturalistic element of the rabbinic approach to miracles for medieval Jewish philosophers is the rabbinic notion that miracles were implanted in nature at the time of creation. In one formulation of this notion, the Mishnah in Avot (5:6) states, "Ten things were created on the Sabbath eve at twilight: the mouth of the Earth, the mouth of the well, the mouth of the she-ass, the rainbow, the manna, the rod, the shamir worm, the script, writing and the table of stone."[13] In addition, the rabbis declared "one should not rely on miracles" (Taanit 20b; Pesachim 64b), and certain rabbis viewed their age, unlike the former generations, as bereft of miracles.[14] Even their attitude toward the miraculous acts of the holy men in their midst was ambivalent. Thus, Abaye responds to a miracle performed for a particular man by stating, "How unworthy this man must have been so that the natural order was changed in his case" (Shabbat 53b). What is more, the rabbis often discounted miracles as a factor in *halakhic* decision making.[15] Most famously, the Talmud relates that after R. Eliezer ben Hyrkanos performed a series of spectacular miracles in support of his position in a particular legal debate, R. Joshua declared, "The Torah is not in heaven."[16] R. Joshua thereby dismisses the epistemological value of supernatural acts in the *halakhic* process.

III. GREEK AND ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

In contrast to the biblical God, who is both personalistic and supernatural, the God of Greek philosophy does not supervene the natural order and is devoid of any personal character. Greek philosophers generally do not dispute the biblical assertion that a single God is responsible for the universe, rejecting the mythological approach of popular Greek religion; however, they severely limit God's relation to the sublunar realm. At best, God is the First Cause of the causal chain that determines terrestrial events, lacking any knowledge of or interest in the happenings of the universe in general and human affairs in particular. Clearly then any notion of miracles is completely foreign to the worldview of Greek philosophy, setting up the problem for medieval Jewish philosophers who are committed to Greek philosophy and to the canonical biblical and rabbinic texts.

Not all facets of the mechanistic and naturalistic theology of the Greek philosophers were known to medieval Jewish philosophers, however. They were aware of and greatly impacted by aspects of Aristotle's theology, in particular of his conception of God as the Unmoved Mover and divine activity as confined to *theoria*. An equally formative influence on the theology of medieval Jewish philosophers was the negative theology of Neoplatonic philosophers and their use of emanation as a means of explaining divine influence on the lower worlds. However, medieval Jewish philosophers recognized the Neoplatonic notions of Plotinus and Proclus from the *Theology of Aristotle* and *Liber de causis*, which they mistakenly attributed to Aristotle.[17]

Aristotle's theology

Aristotle's most extensive and systematic deliberations on theology appear in book twelve of his *Metaphysics*. Therein Aristotle sets out to prove the existence of an eternal unchanging First Cause of the eternal circular movement of the heavenly sphere and the world of change. He argues that the eternal motion and change can only be explained by positing an immaterial first principle whose essence is actuality and whose causal activity does not bring about any internal change. This single, unchanging eternal actuality is described as the Unmoved Mover.[18]

Aristotle then proceeds to probe the nature of the causal influence of the Unmoved Mover and the way it imparts motion without undergoing movement itself. He argues that the First Cause cannot operate as an efficient cause but only as a final cause.[19] That is, the First Cause does not directly bring about the change but acts as the end of the activities of the spheres of the fixed stars, as an object of love and desire. The spheres, according to Aristotle, are intelligent beings, and the

unchanging motion of the first sphere is motivated by its desire to emulate the fixed existence of the First Cause. Its eternal circular motion is the closest approximation of the heavenly spheres to the perfection of the First Cause.

Having examined its casual role, Aristotle then investigates the nature and the activity of the Unmoved Mover. He concludes that the only action that would not compromise its eternally fixed nature is pure thought. In one of the more enigmatic statements in the Aristotelian corpus, he describes the divine activity as the highest form of activity, which is "thought of thought."[20] Although the object of the thought of Aristotle's God is unclear, it is certainly not the world of change. Aristotle's God is thereby clearly removed from human beings and everything else concerning the terrestrial world. It does not know anything that undergoes change and certainly does not contravene laws of nature through miraculous interventions.

The denial of miracles is also evident in Neoplatonism, the second major ancient philosophical source that shaped Jewish medieval philosophy. On the one hand, the God of Neoplatonism is even more transcendent than the God of Aristotle. Neoplatonic philosophers such as Plotinus and Proclus adopt a much stricter negative theology. Their God is absolutely unknowable, and no positive predicate can be attributed to the deity. Plotinus, for example, regards the One as beyond being and therefore ineffable and incomprehensible. On the other hand, Neoplatonism extends God's causal activity through the doctrine of emanation. At the core of the Neoplatonic theology is the notion that all things are emanated from the most elevated being ("the One" or "the Good"). The static God of Aristotle who is only the cause of motion is replaced with a dynamic entity who is also the cause of existence through the continuous emanation of forms. The eternal procession of being from the One is not a volitional act of God; it is the natural overflowing of perfection that renders God undiminished and unmoved. Hence God does not create the world or act supernaturally, but divine casual activity is through the eternal, natural, and necessary process of emanation.

Islamic Aristotelians

The impact of the philosophies of the Islamic Neoplatonic Aristotelians was crucial in shaping the medieval Jewish philosophers' theological views. More than the translated texts of Aristotle and Plotinus, Jewish medieval philosophers assimilated the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic theological views and their denial of the existence of miracles through the medium of the naturalistic worldview of al-Fārābī and Avicenna (and al-Ghazālī's rendition of Avicenna's philosophy).

Despite their differences, al-Fārābī and Avicenna shared much in their cosmological and theological views.[21] They maintain that God should be understood as

the first cause of all existence and causal activity through an eternal, necessary, and nonvolitional process of influx. God's emanations produce a series of incorporeal beings called intelligences and spheres and the sublunar world, which is composed of a hierarchical structure of four realms: mineral, plant, animal, and human. Each realm is composed of matter and form; the particular forms emanate from the Active Intellect onto the material substratum, which is properly mixed to receive its form. The unique form of human beings is also a product of the emanation from the Active Intellect, but an individual's character is also influenced by astrological and climatic factors.

Hence, they claim that the transcendent God lacks will and the deity's actions are without purpose and intent. God's knowledge must be eternal and immutable and the divine being therefore knows nothing of the contingent events of the sublunar realm. Due to lack of will and knowledge of contingent events, the God of the philosophers can obviously not be the author of miraculous events and creation should be understood metaphorically. Although God is the ultimate cause, He is only directly involved in the first link in the causal change, the emanation of the first intelligence.

Despite the rejection of God as an agent of miracles, Avicenna did, however, try to provide an explanation for miracles. He argues that the prophet or saint is the actual cause of miracles through the ability of his soul to bring about physical changes in the world.[22] By freeing itself of material desires, the soul of the perfect individual is able to bring about essential and accidental changes to matter: "Indeed, when a soul is powerful and noble, resembling the higher principles, matter throughout the world obeys it, is affected by it, and actually receives forms which exist in such a soul."[23] Avicenna thereby sees the soul of the prophet and saint as able to bring about changes in nature, although the mechanism that he uses is itself natural.

IV. SAADIA ON MIRACLES

The first medieval Jewish philosopher to discuss expansively the issue of miracles was Saadia b. Joseph Gaon (882–942), in his main theological work, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, composed in 931.[24] In the realm of Jewish theology, Saadia was preceded by Isaac Israeli (d. 932), Daud al-Muqammaṣ, and various Karaite thinkers. Saadia's *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* represents the first systematic attempt to provide a rational justification of Judaism in general and the Jewish belief in miracles in particular. Saadia's primary interest in his main work of Jewish philosophy, like in his groundbreaking work in other fields, is defending the principles of rabbinic

Judaism against many of its enemies. His polemical orientation manifests itself in his approach to miracles, in which he attempts to defend rationally the biblical and rabbinic belief. Indeed, although internalizing aspects of the philosophical outlook and innovating theologically on certain issues, Saadia budged little from the traditional approach to miracles.

Consequently, Saadia affirms the existence of miracles, which he defines as impermanent changes in the natural pattern.[25] He argues that God repeatedly upsets the casual order so the Jews will come to believe in the divine being, the prophetic emissaries, and God's ability to reward them both in this world and the world to come. In support of the traditional approach to miracles, Saadia attempts to prove the reasonability of the divine supernatural interventions.[26] In his discussion of resurrection, for example, he argues that the existence of miracles can be derived from *creatio ex nihilo*.[27] If God can create matter from nothing, he reasons, God could *a fortiori* transform matter at will. Saadia also argues that biblical miracles can be verified empirically, for the public nature of miracles such as the ten plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea preclude their fabrication and testify to their authenticity.[28]

Saadia's belief in the existence of miracles appears most prominently in the three sections devoted to eschatological themes.[29] Saadia's treatment of the end of days was written in opposition to contemporary Jewish exegetes who interpreted biblical verses regarding the messianic age in a naturalistic fashion. Indeed, he commences his discussion by denouncing those who argue that biblical references to resurrection refer to "the revival of a Jewish government and the restoration of the nation."[30] Saadia does accept that biblical verses can be reinterpreted if they conflict with reason; however, he puts forth the aforementioned argument regarding miracles and therefore opposes any figurative interpretations of biblical and rabbinic passages of the supernatural nature of the end of days. Instead, he relies heavily on the mythical depiction of the messianic era in *Sefer Zerubbabel*, an apocalyptic midrashic work whose origin and province is uncertain.[31] Accordingly, he provides a detailed litany of the miracles that will occur during God's deliverance. For example, Saadia, in a particularly mythical description, depicts the cause of the demise of gentile soldiers in the battle of Armageddon as "the fire and the sulphur and the stones of clay baked in hell that will rain down upon them."[32]

Saadia on Faith, Miracles, and Reason

The centrality of miracles for Saadia emerges also from his discussion regarding the epistemology of faith. Saadia's understanding of the role of miracles in engendering faith appears in his treatment of the sources of truth. He enumerates four

sources of truth: sense perceptions; self-evident truths such as "truth is good"; truths deduced and inferred from sense perceptions and self-evident truths; and authoritative traditions demonstrated by public and incontrovertible miracles that God performs.[33]

From his discussion of the sources of truth, it emerges that reason and revelation (and the miracles that support them) are complementary sources of truth. What is more, according to Saadia, reason can independently arrive at all truths that have been transmitted by revelation.[34] Saadia therefore opposes contemporaries who fear that intellectual investigations will lead to heresy, and avers that the Torah enjoins rational speculation.[35] His commitment to the ability of reason to uncover truth is seemingly so strong that he even questions the need for revelation and miraculous proofs.

> Inasmuch as all matters of religious belief, as imparted to us by our Master, can be attained by means of research and correct speculation, what was the reason that prompted [divine] wisdom to transmit them to us by way of prophecy and support them by means of visible proofs and miracles rather than intellectual demonstration?[36]

His answer however reveals that despite his repeated statements of the harmony between faith and reason, Saadia ultimately subordinates intellectual speculation to revelation and the miracles that support it. In response to the question of the necessity of revelation, Saadia replies:

> We say, then [that] the All-Wise knew that the conclusions reached by means of the art of speculation could be attained only in the course of certain measure of time. If, therefore, He had referred us for our acquaintance with His religion to that art alone, we would have remained without religious guidance whatever for a while, until the process of reasoning was completed by us so that we could make use of its conclusions. But many of us might never complete the process because of some flaw in his reasoning. Again he might not succeed in making use of its conclusions because he is overcome by worry or overwhelmed by uncertainties that confuse and befuddle him. That is why God, exalted and magnified be He, afforded us a quick relief from all these burdens by sending us His messengers through whom He transmitted messages to us, and by letting us see with our own eyes the signs and the proofs supporting them about which no doubt could prevail and which we could not possibly reject.[37]

That is, Saadia argues that intellectual investigations generally fail to arrive at the truth due to the investigator's lack of diligence or intelligence. For this reason, rational analysis is limited to confirming that which was demonstrated by miracles. For speculation can run off course due to its inconsistent and uncertain nature, whereas miracles lead to truths of which "no doubt could prevail and which we could not possibly reject." In this sense, Maimonides' depiction of *Kalām*

philosophy and its Jewish representatives among "the writings of some *Gaonim*" (a veiled reference to Saadia) as apologetic theologians, with little commitment to philosophic reasoning, accurately captures the polemical role of reason for Saadia.[38] For Saadia, only miracles can provide epistemological certitude.

V. JUDAH HALEVI ON MIRACLES

The next detailed and influential treatment of miracles and causality among medieval Jewish philosophers appears in the work of Judah Halevi (1085–1141), best known by its Hebrew title, *Sefer ha-Kuzari* (*The Book of the Khazars*).[39] Halevi, one of medieval Jewry's most accomplished poets, penned a philosophical dialogue among a king, philosopher, Christian, Muslim, and Jew. The work uses as a frame story the historical narrative of the conversion to Judaism of the king of Khazars, an Asian tribe, during the eighth century. The pious king is rebuked by an angel who appears to him in a dream and relates to him that his actions are not pleasing to God, although his intentions are praiseworthy. The king seeks guidance initially from a philosopher, Christian and Muslim. Dissatisfied with their answers, he enters into a wide-ranging discussion with a Jewish sage. The Jew apologetically and polemically defends the superiority of Judaism by combating a number of opponents including Christianity, Islam, and Karaism; his most contentious and sustained quarrel is with the worldview of the philosopher. Inasmuch as central to the philosopher's critique of revealed religions in general and Judaism in particular is the question of miracles and causality, Judah Halevi treats extensively the issue of the existence and nature of miracles and related topics such as prophecy, providence, and divine election.

Sefer ha-Kuzari contains two different responses to the naturalism of the philosophers and their denial of miracles. Halevi's opposition to the philosophers' approach to causality and miracles, at times, expresses itself in his affirmation of the existence of miracles defined as supernatural actions in which God is the immediate cause.[40] Although the natural order too derives from God as the First Cause, miraculous events, which he depicts as "divine acts," are a direct result of God's will.[41] Halevi particularly focuses on God's supernatural acts directed toward the Jewish people and believes that these acts are the defining characteristic of the Jewish God. Hence, the Jewish sage begins his exposition of Judaism by underscoring God's miraculous deliverance of the Jews from Egypt: "I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, who led the Israelites out of Egypt with signs and miracles; who fed them in the desert and gave them the (Holy) Land, after having made them traverse the sea and the Jordon in a miraculous way."[42] Thus, by performing a series of miracles in Egypt, God demonstrates that the Jewish God is not bound by the laws of nature

and is distinguished from the God of the philosophers who lacks will and is merely the First Cause of the natural order.[43]

Halevi, in his polemic with the philosophers, depicts the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the ruler of history who shapes historical developments through miraculous interventions.[44] Judaism's indifference to the God of nature and its focus on the God of history manifests itself in its failure to stake out a position in the question of whether the world is created or eternal.[45] From a Jewish perspective, claims Halevi, what is important is God's supernatural involvement with the Jewish people in history and not God's causal role in bringing about the existence of the world. This aspect of Halevi's understanding of the relationship of God to the world represents a return to the personalistic and supernatural character of the biblical God. It veers from the biblical approach, however, in its sharp dichotomy between the God of history and miracles and the God of nature. Whereas Halevi believes (in this strand of *Sefer ha-Kuzari*) that Judaism is primarily concerned with God as manifest in history, the Bible sees God as equally involved in the natural and historical realms.

Judah Halevi and the Naturalistic Understanding of Miracles

Judah Halevi's defense of the existence of miracles, at times, adopts a different strategy entirely.[46] According to this understanding of miracles and God's involvement with the Jewish people, Halevi attempts to cut the Gordian knot of naturalism and rationalism and formulates a notion of miracles that is naturalistic but not rationalistic. That is, Halevi tethers miracles to a realm of the natural order that is inaccessible by rational inquiry but is uncovered in the revelatory reports of God's unique interactions with the Jewish people. In this vein, Halevi does not reject Aristotle's natural explanations that are grounded in the distinction between form and matter and the hierarchy of four souls, each acting as matter for the soul above it. They astutely depict emanations of a range of forms hierarchically ordered that are received by substances depending upon the disposition of its material substratum and external circumstances such as climate. Halevi sees this explanation as an accurate explanation of God's interaction with all terrestrial phenomena apart from those involving the Jewish people. They are fragmentary, however, inasmuch as they fail to detect the final link of the chain of being. The last level of Halevi's universe explains God's miraculous and providential relations with the Jewish people. This miraculous level of existence, like the previous levels, however, is characterized by natural laws that govern the interactions among particular forms, souls, and matter.

The central plank in Halevi's naturalistic understanding of miracles is the "divine form" (Hebrew: *inyan elohi*; Arabic: *al-amr al-ilāhī*), a multivalent concept that plays

a pivotal role in Halevi's thought in general.[47] For our purposes, two meanings of this concept are particularly relevant. Halevi speaks of the "divine form" as an elevated soul that only resides in the Jewish people. Just as humans are essentially distinct from other animals, so Jews are essentially distinct from other humans, forming an additional layer to the Aristotelian sublunar hierarchy. As in the case of the other rungs of the terrestrial ladder, the distinctive nature of the Jews is determined by their material composition, whose refined nature allows for the reception of a superior form.[48]

A second related meaning of the "divine form" is the divine overflow that is received by the Jewish soul. The Jewish people as a whole and individual Jews who have actualized the potential of their Jewish soul serve as receptacles for the divine overflow that automatically flows directly from God. By receiving the divine overflow, the Jewish people are guided by divine providence and are the recipients of God's miracles. Individual Jewish prophets who receive the divine overflow are able to walk into fire and abstain from food for long periods of time without being harmed, contrary to the laws of nature.[49] In contrast, the destiny of other nations is bound to the natural order, and non-Jews are unable to become prophets or experience prophecy.[50]

The reception of the divine overflow and the participation in its miraculous, providential, and prophetic effects are dependent on the Jews' preparing their matter so that it can serve as a receptacle for the divine overflow. For Halevi, the performance of the commandment in the Land of Israel by a member of the Jewish people is understood as the natural conditions required to trigger the reception of *inyan elohi*. They are the climate and cultivating acts necessary for the flourishing and development of the divine form.

> It is the same case as with your hill on which you say the vines thrive so well. If they had not planted vine branches on it and cultivated them well, it would never have produced grapes. So precedence belongs to those particular people who, as stated before, represent the 'pick' and the 'heart' (of mankind); the land has also its part in this and so have the religious acts connected with it, which I would compare to the cultivation of the vineyard. But no other place could share with this pre-eminent people the influence of the Divine power, whereas other hills are also able to produce good wine.[51]

To defend his naturalistic understanding of the Land of Israel, Halevi uses the theory of seven climates, a central doctrine of ancient and medieval geographic climatology. According to Halevi, the Land of Israel is in the fourth climate, the central climate, and in the middle of the inhabited earth.[52] It is therefore the most exemplary land due to its innate properties and receives the most influence

from above. Likewise, Halevi draws from ancient and medieval scientific theory to explain the efficacious nature of the performance of the commandments (by a Jew in the land of Israel). He compares the ability of the commandments to draw down the divine overflow to the powers attributed to talismans in astral magic theories to receive the astral influence.[53]

His more naturalistic understanding of miracles differs with the philosophers' approach in two respects, however. First, the divine forms that descend on the Jewish people and the prophet are not like other forms, which emanate from the Active Intellect. Rather, the divine forms emanate directly from God. Second, although the interaction between the forms and the Jewish people is not the product of God's will, they follow a different set of laws than the other realms of the natural world.[54] It is not the laws of Aristotelian physics that govern the divine form but the Jewish land, people, and law that activate the flow of these particular forms. Nevertheless, despite these differences, this understanding of miracles is naturalistic and differs from the Biblical and rabbinic conception of miracles as a volitional act of God. Thus, according to this conception, miracles require certain preparatory acts that automatically facilitate miracles. In this sense, Halevi agrees with the philosophers that all events including miracles are actually brought about by a mechanical and automatic process dependent on the causal interaction of matter and form.[55]

Miracles, Reason, and Sensory Experience in the Kuzari

Both understandings of miracles in *Sefer ha-Kuzari* are united in their positing of miracles as testimony to the defectiveness of speculative reason and the certitude of the Jewish faith. Indeed, central to Halevi's defense of Judaism against the criticism of the philosophical worldview is his comparison between the epistemic underpinnings of the philosophers' creed and the Jewish belief in God's supernatural revelation. He concludes that greater certitude is possessed by the Jewish believer than that of the philosopher. That is, Halevi's opposition to philosophers is not grounded in an antirationalistic or fideistic position in which faith is in opposition to reason or lacks demonstration. Rather, Halevi argues that belief in Jewish miracles – the lynchpin of the Jewish faith – is completely reasonable and possesses a far stronger basis than the weak foundations of the beliefs of the philosophers. Halevi grounds his argument in the cardinal epistemic principle of *Sefer ha-Kuzari*: Empirical confirmation trumps speculative demonstrations. In other words, sensory evidence (which corroborates the miracles of the Bible) is more potent than logical proofs (which support the scientific and metaphysical views of the philosophers).

Halevi introduces this principle before the Jewish sage even joins the dialogue. In the King's response to the Christian sage, he argues:

> Here is no logical conclusion; nay, logical thought rejects most of what thou sayest. It is only when both appearance and experience are so palpable that they grip the whole heart, which sees no way of contesting, that it will agree to the difficult and the remote will become near. This is how naturalists deal with strange powers which come upon them unawares; they would not believe if they only heard of them without seeing them; but when they see them, they discuss them and ascribe them to the influence of stars or spirits, because they cannot disprove ocular evidence. As for me, I cannot accept these things, because they came upon me suddenly, seeing that I have not grown up in them.[56]

That is, the king rejects the Christian creed, because he has no empirical evidence to support it. To support the superiority of empirical evidence, the king cleverly points to the scientists who accept the existence of extraordinary phenomena that they directly experience and contrive explanations that would support their existence. Thus, according to Halevi, the scientist and philosopher implicitly accept that their professed epistemic hierarchy, which values theoretical reason over sensory experience, must actually be inverted. Subsequently, echoing Saadia's argument, Halevi argues that miracles recorded in the Bible were confirmed by sensory experience and due to their public nature could not have been fabricated.[57]

VI. MAIMONIDES' CONCEPTION OF MIRACLES

Like his view on most seminal theological issues, Maimonides' treatment of miracles is both profoundly opaque and exceedingly influential. His discussion of miracles in his various works has generated vast interest by medieval and modern scholars and commentators. Those who have been drawn to his many statements and allusions on the topic have shaped the Maimonidean material into different forms. Some depict him as a staunch defender of the existence of miracles, combating Aristotle's view that God acts of necessity.[58] In this view, Maimonides' arguments for creation and opposition to eternity are paradigmatic of his understanding of God's involvement in the world. Others portray him as a radical naturalist who accepted an esoteric view that approximates Aristotle's position and rejected a God who acts spontaneously and freely.[59] According to this interpretation, Maimonides viewed miracles as a "necessary belief," which possesses political value but lacks truth.[60]

The contrasting portrayals of Maimonides' position derive from conflicting tendencies within his theology. In certain of his theological discussions, particularly his detailed treatment of creation in the *Guide*, Maimonides is preoccupied with

opposing Aristotle's theory of eternity that entails God's actions must be unchanging and necessary. For Aristotle, according to Maimonides, "if He [God] wished to lengthen a fly's wings or to shorten a worm's foot, He would not be able to do it."[61] By contrast, Maimonides argues that God created *ex nihilo* the world and continues to exercise will and volition by acting supernaturally. He does not maintain that the beliefs in creation or miracles are demonstrable, but he sees them as reasonable and identifies the belief in miracles as one of the fundamental principles of Judaism.[62] Thus, declares Maimonides, "the rod was turned into a serpent, the water into blood, and the pure and noble hand became white without a natural cause that necessitated this."[63] Although God cannot do the impossible or enact permanent changes to the natural order,[64] according to Maimonides, the miracles recorded in the Bible are within the purview of God's powers. Maimonides affirms his belief in miracles most extensively in his works directed for a more popular audience, such as the *Epistle of Resurrection of the Dead*.[65] It also surfaces in many discussions in the *Guide* (although he surprisingly fails to devote even one chapter of the *Guide* to a sustained discussion of miracles).[66]

Yet, Maimonides also displays a more naturalistic tendency in other statements and arguments regarding miracles. First, in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Maimonides seems to accept the rabbinic statement that denies that biblical miracles result from a new divine volition. The midrash, according to Maimonides' interpretation, avers that all biblical miracles were implanted into nature at the time of creation and do not entail a new volition of God's will.[67] After creation, then, the world is governed exclusively by nature. It should be noted, however, that Maimonides presents a more ambivalent attitude to this midrash in the *Guide*.[68]

Second, he denies the historicity of a number of biblical miracles. In this vein, Maimonides asserts the following hermeneutic principle: "For inasmuch as you find in the course of the event that he who was seen and had spoken was an angel, you ought to know and to establish as true that the event was from the first a *vision of prophecy* or *a dream of prophecy*."[69] That is, every biblical story that refers to an angel must be understood as occurring subjectively. Maimonides is thereby able to refute the historicity of the biblical account of the miracles surrounding the three angels who visited Abraham and Lot (Genesis chapters 18–19), Jacob wrestling with an angel (Genesis 32), and the she-ass speaking to Balaam (Numbers 22).[70] Likewise, he claims that the seemingly miraculous sign that God performs for Gideon (Judges 6) occurred only in Gideon's dream.[71] Finally, for other reasons, Maimonides possibly rejects the literal meaning of the biblical account of the miracle of the standing of the sun in the Valley of Aijalon (Joshua 10:12–14).[72]

Third, Maimonides underscores the perfection and immutability of the cosmic order that God's wisdom initiated through creation.

> Now the works of the deity are most perfect, and with regard to them there is no possibility of an excess or a deficiency. Accordingly they are of necessity permanently established as they are, for there is no possibility of something calling for a change in them.[73]

Maimonides does state that miracles that only change nature temporally are compatible with the perfection of the world.[74] Perhaps Maimonides is only upholding the possibility of miracles and not their actual occurrence.[75] This median position would allow Maimonides to oppose Aristotelian necessitarianism and affirm a voluntaristic conception of God, while endorsing the immutability, perfection, and naturalism of the created order.

Maimonides on the epistemic value of miracles

Maimonides' ambiguity regarding the existence of biblical miracles should not mask the overall naturalism of his approach to miracles. Most importantly, Maimonides unambiguously rejected the epistemic value of miracles or reliable traditions thereof for the contemporary Jew, viewing the requisite knowledge of the divine being as related to the conclusions of science and philosophy and as apart from God's miraculous acts. In addition, he asserted unequivocally that future miracles have little bearing on the development of Jewish history and the redemption that the Jews will experience. Moreover, Maimonides' naturalistic views in these areas appear clearly and decisively not only in his philosophical work, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, but also in his legal work, *Mishneh Torah*, which is intended also for those without a philosophical education.

Maimonides' downgrading of the value of miracles pertains to his understanding of the commandments of belief in God and in divine unity.[76] Maimonides argues that the first two commandments concern the proper belief (or perhaps knowledge) of God. According to Maimonides, these commandments do not concern God's creation of the world or miraculous interventions in the natural order. Instead, the Jew is charged with belief in God as the Mover of the outer sphere and the Necessary Existent. Moreover, God's existence is derived not from the empirical evidence of miracles but from the philosophical proof of the continuous motion of the sphere.

Maimonides also dismisses the religious value of miracles in his discussion of love and fear of God.

What is the way to love and fear God? When a person contemplates God's wondrous and great works and creatures, and sees through them God's infinite wisdom, he or she immediately loves and extols and experiences a great desire to know the great God, as David said: "My soul thirsts for the Lord, the living Deity" (Psalms 42:3). And when thinking of these matters themselves, he or she immediately recoils from fear and terror.[77]

Here also it is the intellectual apprehension of Aristotelian metaphysics and science and not the examination of miracles that leads one to these heightened religious states of intellectual wonder, passion, and trepidation. Likewise, Maimonides' diminishing of the epistemic value of miracles relates to the relationship between miracles and the validation of prophecy. He argues that the purpose of Moses' miracles was not to validate his prophecy, and one was to believe other prophets due to God's commandment and not due to the miracles they perform.[78]

Maimonides also unequivocally diminishes the significance of miracles in his stripping the messianic figure and the messianic era of its supernatural features.[79] Like his position regarding prophets, Maimonides argues that the messiah does not have to produce any miraculous proof to verify his existence.[80] The only way to identify the messiah is *ex post facto* through the success of his efforts on the battlefield, in his upright behavior, in his impact on the righteousness of others, in his ingathering of the exilic Jews, and in his building the Temple. That is, to deny the miraculous nature of the messianic figure, Maimonides is willing to allow for a period in which the messianic figure's validation is in abeyance. Regarding the messianic age, he is even more emphatic.

Let no one think that in the days of the Messiah any of the laws of nature will be set aside, or any innovation be introduced into creation. The world will follow its normal course. The words of Isaiah: "And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall be lie down with the kid" (11.6) are to be understood figuratively meaning that Israel will live securely among the wicked of the heathens who are likened to wolves and leopards, as it is written: "A wolf of the deserts doth spoil them, a leopard watcheth over their cities" (Jeremiah 5.6).[81]

Maimonides then proceeds to relate to the long Jewish tradition of apocalyptic messianism, which clearly conflicts with his naturalistic position, dismissing it as lacking authority and causing neither fear nor love of God.

Maimonides' negation of future miracles also manifests itself in his philosophy of history. Maimonides argues that the ideal human society is achieved through a natural historical process that does not involve God's supernatural intervention. Indeed, God's intervention is limited to the giving of the Torah, and the divine commandments are able to produce the requisite intellectual and political shifts for ushering in the messianic age. Accordingly, Maimonides' innovative discussion

of the reasons for the commandments is not only to bolster his claim that the commandments are not in conflict with reason, but they are also needed to support his naturalistic understanding of history. The commandments are portrayed, in Maimonides' account, as the motive forces for the historical progress toward the messianic era. Thus, when Maimonides declares that the ultimate aim of the commandments is intellectual perfection, it is not just in an individual sense.[82] For Maimonides the ultimate aim of the commandments is twofold: welfare of the body and welfare of the soul.[83] Just as welfare of the body does not only refer to individual bodies but also to the national body as a whole (reflected in its *polis*) so too the intellectual development that the commandments engender is also national.

VII. GERSONIDES ON MIRACLES

A group of southern French and Spanish Jewish philosophers in the two centuries following Maimonides' death deepened and radicalized his rationalistic approach to miracles. Samuel ibn Tibbon, Joseph ibn Kaspi, R. Nissim of Marseilles, and Gersonides, *inter alia*, presented miracles as natural phenomena with much less hesitancy and ambiguity than did Maimonides. Consequently, they expanded Maimonides' interpretative strategies and adopted new ones that attempt to demonstrate the compatibility between biblical and rabbinic accounts of miracles and Aristotelian science and metaphysics. They accepted Maimonides' political and hermeneutic principles regarding the need to conceal the philosophical secrets of the Bible from the masses. They argued that the putative biblical belief in miracles was for the consumption of the untutored, but its true view was more naturalistic and closer to the views of the philosophers.[84] Despite their political beliefs and in contrast with Maimonides, they were willing to surface the esoteric meaning of the biblical and rabbinic accounts of miracles, publishing openly their radically naturalistic readings of the text.

The most significant and influential of these rationalistic Jewish philosophers was R. Levi b. Gershom (Gersonides). His approach to miracles is viewed as paradigmatic of naturalistic trends among southern French and Spanish Jewish philosophers in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In comparison with other members of this group, however, Gersonides displays an independent spirit, and his treatment of miracles differs substantially from the largely derivative views of other post-Maimonidean medieval Jewish philosophers.[85] To highlight the distinctive nature of Gersonides' treatment, we begin by reviewing briefly other naturalistic approaches to miracles by Jewish philosophers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in southern France and Spain.

Naturalistic Interpretative Strategies

These philosophers use two general hermeneutic strategies to neutralize the supernaturalistic aspect of biblical and rabbinic miracles. According to one approach, biblical and rabbinic narrations of miracles do not recount historical occurrences. Rather, they relate to prophetic experiences or depict allegories articulating philosophical truths. Maimonides introduced the strategy of viewing biblical accounts of miracles as prophetic visions, but he used it sparingly.[86] Likewise, Maimonides interpreted biblical and midrashic texts metaphorically, but he hardly, if at all, explicitly identified biblical stories of miracles as allegories. In contrast, Maimonides' rationalistic followers in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries used these hermeneutical principles liberally in their exegesis of biblical and rabbinic texts.[87]

A second interpretative strategy regarding biblical and rabbinic miracles views them as historical occurrences, but argues that they came about naturally.[88] That is, biblical miracles are viewed as supernatural due to insufficient understanding of scientific principles and the circumstances surrounding the occurrence of the miracle. One particular popular theory in this vein among thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Spanish and southern French Jewish philosophers is the anthropological theory of miracles, which identifies the human soul or intellect of the philosopher, saint, or prophet as the source of miracles.[89] This theory has its roots in several enigmatic intimations in the Torah commentary of R. Abraham ibn Ezra, a twelfth-century Bible exegete and philosopher. Ibn Ezra, who appropriated elements of Avicenna's theory of the noble soul, argued that the individual (or in his formulation "the part" [*ha-ḥeleq*]) is able to transcend his particularity and "create signs and wonders" when he comes to know and then cleave with "the All" [*ha-kol*].[90] That is, the miracle does not represent an act of God's will, but it is caused by the prophet who is able naturally to go beyond material limits and change matter. This theory was particularly popular with a group of Neoplatonically oriented Spanish Jewish philosophers who displayed an interest in magic and astrology. They maintained that the prophet through communion with the Active Intellect and an understanding of astrology draws down the influence from the stars and is able to produce miracles.[91]

R. Nissim's Treatment of Miracles

To highlight the different strategies of understanding miracles rationalistically, let us take the example of R. Nissim's *Ma'aseh Nissim*, which devotes the final chapter of its first section to an analysis of biblical and rabbinic miracles.[92] R. Nissim divides the miracles recorded in biblical and rabbinic literature into a number of

categories. He first discusses miracles that involve a prophet and distinguishes among those between God and the prophet exclusively and those that involve other people as well. Regarding the first category, R. Nissim argues that none of these miracles actually occurred, but they represent prophetic visions. In contrast to Maimonides' limited use of this interpretative strategy, R. Nissim places all private prophetic miracles in this category.

R. Nissim then proceeds to investigate prophetic public miracles. He begins by following Abraham ibn Ezra's strategy, arguing that in some instances of public miracles the prophet is the agent. In these cases, it is the superior scientific and astrological knowledge of the prophet that allows him to perform acts that seem to defy the natural order. R. Nissim, however, limits this category to miracles that occurred at Sinai and beforehand.[93] For after Sinai the Jewish people elevated themselves intellectually and are no longer in need of verification of their prophets. Instead, after the revelation at Mount Sinai, all public miracles involving a prophet are completely natural acts in which the role of the prophet is limited to predicting the occurrence of the natural act.

R. Nissim also argues that many of the miracles recorded in the Bible not involving prophets are also natural acts, and he even regards the ten plagues as events that are not contrary to the natural order.[94] In addition, R. Nissim limits the supernatural element of other biblical miracles not involving prophets by arguing that aspects of the biblical description of miracles should be understood metaphorically. Most important, he clearly depicts the metaphorical interpretation of the biblical story involving miracle as negating the historical veracity of the story.[95] That is, metaphorical interpretations are not an additional level of interpretation, but the metaphorical interpretation indicates that the story has no historical import. In short, R. Nissim provides multiple strategies that conceive of biblical and rabbinic miracles as natural phenomena. He aptly ends his treatment: "One should understand from all these [i.e., miracles] that I discussed . . . that God is only interested in the truth . . . And you should not maintain like the Gentile that the Torah upholds things that are far from and precluded by reason."[96]

Gersonides' Rejection of the Anthropological and Metaphorical Approaches to Miracles

Gersonides develops a rationalistic theory of miracles, but one that differs with the prevalent trends in southern French and Spanish Jewish philosophy of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. First, Gersonides rarely, if at all, denies that biblical miracles actually occurred. Thus, in contrast to Maimonides and many of his followers, Gersonides does not tend to view biblical accounts of miracles as

part of a prophetic vision and even criticizes Maimonides directly in this regard.[97] Gersonides was also averse to allegorizing biblical passages that spoke of miracles. In his commentary on the Bible, Gersonides does not tire of showing that the Bible contains moral and philosophical truths. He believes, however, that these truths emerge from the recounting of the historical occurrences themselves and do not require delving into a supposedly allegorical level of the text. Gersonides also rejects the political–educational assumption that undergirds the allegorical reading of biblical miracles.[98] That is, he does not believe that philosophical truths should generally be hidden from the masses and the biblical statements regarding miracles are for the consumption of the masses.

Gersonides also generally refrains from interpreting miracles as natural acts. One important exception is his comments on the verse: "And the sun stood still and the moon halted while a nation wreaked judgment on its foes" (Joshua 10:13–14). Gersonides argues that the verse does not refer to the cessation of the movement of the heavenly bodies but the speed with which the Israelites vanquished their enemies.[99] Gersonides makes clear, however, that his nonliteral interpretation does not derive from a general opposition to miracles as supernatural acts. Rather, he is opposed to understanding this story as depicting a miracle due to his belief that miracles occur only in the sublunar realm.[100]

More particularly, Gersonides rejects one of the most common naturalist explanations of miracles, namely, the anthropological theory of miracles. Gersonides enumerates a series of objections to the theory that prophets are the proximate agents of miracles.[101] First, he argues that prophecies about miracles are transmitted to the prophet from the Active Intellect, and if the prophet is the proximate cause of miracles there is no need to inform the prophet about the miracle.[102] Second, the ability to bring about a miracle requires a complete understanding of the laws of nature, which all human beings woefully lack. Third, the anthropological theory of miracles posits that the prophet's ability to change matter occurs during his attachment to the Active Intellect and requires a change in the will of the human being. Gersonides queries, how can the prophet generate a change in his volition in a state of detachment from his human body?

Gersonides' Seminaturalistic Explanation of Miracles

Gersonides' rejection of the metaphorical and anthropological approaches to miracles does not imply that he adopts a traditional understanding of miracles. His approach is naturalistic inasmuch as he rejects two assumptions of the traditional approach. First, God directly causes miracles; second, miracles represent a spontaneous act that does not follow preordained laws.

Gersonides rules out God as the proximate cause of miracles for the following reasons:[103] God's actions must be good essentially, but miracles are good only in a contingent manner. For example, the goodness of the change of a staff into a snake derives only from its accidental impact on the beliefs of those who observe it, but it cannot be considered an absolutely good occurrence. In addition, God's actions must be continuous and not intermittent, and therefore miracles that represent a temporary change in the natural order cannot be attributed to God. Finally, miracles would represent a change in God's will and knowledge, which is impossible.

In place of God, Gersonides identifies the Agent Intellect as the being responsible for miracles. In his religious philosophy, the Agent Intellect plays a crucial role in its responsibility for governance and providence over the terrestrial world.[104] Its providential role is twofold. First, the Agent Intellect, in conjunction with the heavenly spheres, maintains the sublunar realm through the emanation of forms – essential and accidental – on material substrata that are properly prepared through the motion of the stars and planets.[105] The forms brought about by the Agent Intellect in coordination with its planetary instruments are fixed and determined. Second, the Agent Intellect acts apart from the stars and the planets at times. This additional activity of the Agent Intellect is to minimize the evil in the world. For although the natural order is essentially good and perfect to the greatest extent possible, it is imperfect accidentally. God therefore implants within the world other providential mechanisms that allow for human beings who have developed their intellects to supervene the natural order and bring about even greater good to themselves and those who are related to them.[106]

One way in which the Agent Intellect acts in this special manner is through the prophet with his perfected intellect who triggers the Agent Intellect to act in a miraculous fashion. According to Gersonides, miracles are nonnatural acts inasmuch as they do not occur through the motion of the heavenly spheres and do not possess fixed and determined causes.[107] They are, however, no less automatic than natural acts, and Gersonides considers them governed by "the laws of the universe."[108] Consequently, the Agent Intellect does not relate to the recipient of the miracle personally. Rather, the Agent Intellect continuously emanates an overflow, and the only change that occurs during the miracle relates to the receiver of the emanated form.

Because the miracle is not a product of God's volition, Gersonides places numerous qualifications regarding miracles. First, they require the existence of a prophet who either activates the miracle or is the reason the miracle is activated.[109] Second, they cannot bring about permanent changes in the natural order but must be temporary because the natural order is essentially good and therefore better

than any other law in the long run.[110] Third, following Maimonides, Gersonides maintains that miracles cannot involve something that is logically impossible.[111] Fourth, as we noted previously, he argues that miracles cannot change the motions of the heavenly bodies and are confined to sublunar events.[112] Last, Gersonides claims that "whatever occurs miraculously must also be within the realm of natural possibility, [at least] over a long interval of time."[113] That is, the matter transformed by receiving a form during a miraculous occurrence must be able to receive the form naturally, even if the miracle accelerates the process.

NOTES

1 Ravitzky 1996a, p. 4.
2 Walzer 1949, p. 12.
3 In my treatment of the biblical notion of miracles I have consulted the following studies: Eichrodt 1964, pp. 162–7; R. Kasher 1986; Zakovitch 1990; Friedman 1995; Miles 1995.
4 In discussing the biblical and rabbinic understandings of God I use masculine pronouns, because God is consistently described as male in the Bible and generally as male in rabbinic literature. Elsewhere I will use gender neutral terminology, unless I am quoting a translation that uses male pronouns in reference to God.
5 See, for example, Exodus 10:2; Deuteronomy 6:20–24.
6 See, in particular, Friedman 1995, pp. 7–117; Miles 1995.
7 On medieval Jewish philosophical interpretations on the Book of Esther and their discussions of miracles see Walfish 1993, pp. 75–89.
8 See Hartman 1985, pp. 21–32; Greenberg 1988.
9 On naturalistic interpretations of Job by medieval Jewish philosophers see Eisen 2004.
10 On miracles in rabbinic literature I consulted the following works: Guttmann 1947; Neusner 1947; idem 1972, pp. 79–86; Kadushin 1932, pp. 143–69; Sarfatti 1956; Urbach 1975, pp. 102–23; idem 1988; Baumgarten 1983. See also the sources collected in Isaacs 1997, pp. 61–101.
11 Pesachim 118a-b. See also Canticles Rabbah 3:6.
12 On the rabbis as miracle workers see Neusner 1972; Sarfatti 1956.
13 See also Genesis Rabbah 4:5; Exodus Rabbah 21:5.
14 See Berakhot 20a; Sanhedrin 94b; Taanit 18b.
15 See Urbach 1988; Baumgarten 1983.
16 Baba Metzia 59b; Jerusalem Talmud Moed Katan 80c-d.
17 On these works see Fenton 1986; Zimmermann 1986; Taylor 1986.
18 *Metaphysics* XII.6.
19 *Metaphysics* XII.7.
20 *Metaphysics* 1072b20.
21 For a good overview of the theological and cosmological scheme of al-Fārābī and Avicenna, see H. Davidson 1992a.
22 On Avicenna's theory, see Rahman 1958, pp. 45–52; Kreisel 1984a, pp. 103–5; Ravitzky 1984, pp. 232–5.
23 Quoted in Rahman 1958, p. 49.
24 For the Arabic text (in Hebrew characters) see Saadia 1970; for the English translation see Saadia 1948.

25 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* III.4, Saadia 1948, p. 148. Thus, despite often shaping his theology along the lines of *Kalām* theologians, he rejects their denial of causality. In contrast, he argues for "the fixity of things," that is, a natural pattern and fixed essences that God does not contravene without cause (ibid). On his rejection of *Kalām* denial of causality, see H. Wolfson 1979, pp. 172–5.
26 For Saadia's demonstrations regarding miracles, see Kreisel 2001a, pp. 44–5.
27 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* VII.1, Saadia 1948, p. 264.
28 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Introductory Treatise, VI, Saadia 1948, pp. 29–30.
29 Section seven examines resurrection; section eight explores redemption during the messianic age and section nine discusses eternal reward and punishment at the end of days. For these chapters, see Schwartz 1997a, pp. 28–45.
30 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* VII.1, Saadia 1948, p. 265.
31 It should be noted that Saadia's rationalistic sensibilities lead him to excise certain elements of the description of *Sefer Zerubbabel* from his account. For example, *Sefer Zerubbabel* relates that Satan impregnated a stone monument of a woman who gave birth to Armilus, the enemy (Even-Shmuel 1954, p. 74). The mythical description of the origins of Armilus does not appear in Saadia's treatment.
32 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* VIII.6 Saadia 1948, p. 306.
33 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Introductory Treatise, V, Saadia 1948, pp. 16–8.
34 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Introductory Treatise, Saadia 1948, pp. 18–9. Saadia does, however, believe that regarding Jewish Law, there are commandments that cannot be arrived at through reason; and even regarding those commandments whose existence could be uncovered apart from revelation, the details of these commandments can only be known through revelation (Saadia 1948, pp. 140, 145).
35 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Introductory Treatise, VI, Saadia 1948, pp. 26–7.
36 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Introductory Treatise, VI Saadia 1948, p. 31.
37 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Introductory Treatise, VI Saadia 1948, ibid.
38 *Guide* I.71, Maimonides 1963, p. 176.
39 The full Arabic name is *Kitāb al-Radd wa'l-Dalīl fi'l-Din al-Dhalīl* (*The Book of Refutation and Proof in Defense of the Despised Faith*). For a critical edition of the text, see Halevi 1977.
40 This aspect of Halevi's understanding of miracles is explored in H. Wolfson 1977f.
41 *Kuzari* V.20.
42 *Kuzari* I.11, Halevi 1965, p. 33.
43 *Kuzari* I.83; II.54.
44 *Kuzari* I.25. See also Abraham ibn Ezra's commentary on Exodus 20:2 (Ibn Ezra 1976, volume 2, pp. 131–4).
45 *Kuzari* I.67. On Halevi's view on the question of creation, see Langerman 1997a, pp. 515–7.
46 Although positing two approaches within *Sefer ha-Kuzari* I am not arguing that these two approaches within Halevi are an expression of two stages of Halevi's thought, as Yochanan Silman (1995) has cleverly argued. My understanding of the relationship between these two approaches within *Sefer Ha-Kuzari* more closely approximate that of Julius Guttmann (1964, pp. 132–3).
47 On the different meanings of this terms and its usage in *Sefer ha-Kuzari* see Goldziher 1904; H. Wolfson 1977d, pp. 367–70; H. Davidson 1972a, pp. 381–95.
48 *Kuzari* I.95.
49 *Kuzari* I.40–43.

50 *Kuzari* I.109; II.32; IV.3.
51 *Kuzari* II.12; Halevi 1982, pp. 64–5. On Halevi's understanding of the land of Israel and its relation to ancient and medieval scientific theory see Altmann 2005; Silman 1991.
52 *Kuzari* I.95.
53 Schwartz 1999, pp. 31–61.
54 *Kuzari* V.21; II.12.
55 On Halevi's naturalistic account of miracles see also his argument that miracles are implanted in nature from the time of creation and his claim that one can arrive at an understanding of God's power through a gradual investigation of nature (*Kuzari* III.73; V.2).
56 *Kuzari* I.5, Halevi 1982, p. 31.
57 *Kuzari* I.49; see also *Kuzari* I.84 where he depicts the sensory experience of an actual miracle as self-verifying.
58 Heller 1958; H. Kasher 1998; Langerman 2004 (although Langerman argues for a development in Maimonides' approach to the issue).
59 Reines 1974; Kreisel 1984a, pp. 106–14.
60 On Maimonides' notion of "necessary beliefs" see *Guide* III.28.
61 *Guide* II.22, Maimonides 1963, p. 319.
62 *Guide* II:25, Maimonides 1963, p. 228.
63 *Guide* II:29, Maimonides 1985b, p. 345.
64 *Guide* III:15, II:29, Maimonides 1985b, pp. 224, 231–2.
65 Maimonides 1985b, pp. 221–33, see also Maimonides 1970–1971, p. 216.
66 On Maimonides' commitment to the existence of miracles in the *Guide* see the references in notes 62–64 and *Guide* II:32 on God's ability to withhold prophecy from a worthy candidate and *Guide* III:50 on the miracle of *manna*.
67 Maimonides 1975, p. 87.
68 *Guide* II.29, Maimonides 1963, p. 345.
69 *Guide* II. 42; emphasis in Pines' translation.
70 Ibid.
71 *Guide* II.46.
72 *Guide* II.35; Schwartz 2005b, pp. 81–3.
73 *Guide* II.28, Maimonides 1963, p. 335.
74 *Guide* II. 28-29, Maimonides 1963, pp. 336, 345.
75 Seeskin 2000, p. 183; Nehorai 1990.
76 On Maimonides' approach to knowledge of God in his various works see Kreisel 1992.
77 *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah 2.2. On Maimonides' understanding of love and fear of God see Kreisel 1999, pp. 189–224.
78 *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah 7.7–8.3. On Maimonides' conception of the validation of prophecy, see Kreisel 1984b, pp. 8–11.
79 On Maimonides' messianism, see Funkenstein 1977; Kraemer 1984; Ravitzky 1991; and Schwartz 1997a, pp. 69–91.
80 *Mishneh Torah*, The Book of Judges 11.3–4.
81 *Mishneh Torah*, The Book of Judges 12.1; Maimonides 1949, p. 240.
82 *Guide* III. 27.
83 Ibid.
84 See, for example, Joseph ibn Kaspi's view that the Bible purposely formulated stories involving miracles in an ambiguous manner so that it can be understood differently by the masses and the philosophers (Ibn Kaspi 1996, pp. 47–50, 189–202).

85 Gersonides discusses the issue of miracles in *Wars of the Lord* VI.2.9–12 (Gersonides 1866, pp. 453–60; translated in Gersonides 1999, pp. 470–97). On Gersonides' view of miracles see Touati 1973, pp. 469–77; Kreisel 1984a, pp. 122–6; Eisen 1995, pp. 22–8; Feldman's discussion in Gersonides 1999, pp. 211–20; Manekin 2003. Manekin, in particular, underscores the differences between Gersonides' rationalism and the rationalistic trends in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Jewish philosophy.
86 See notes 69–72.
87 On metaphorical interpretation of aggadic texts depicting miracles see Sapperstein 1980, pp. 36–8.
88 For examples of this approach see Sirat 1985, pp. 229–30, 328–9.
89 See Ravitzky 1984.
90 Ibn Ezra 1977, Numbers 20:8, p. 171. On Ibn Ezra's theory see Ravitzky 1984, pp. 239–40; Kreisel 1984a, pp. 117–8; on the relationship between Ibn Ezra's theory and Avicenna's see Ravitzky 1984, p. 239.
91 Schwartz 1996, pp. 188–91.
92 Nissim 2000, pp. 200–14.
93 Nissim 2000, pp. 207–8.
94 Nissim 2000, p. 204.
95 Nissim 2000, p. 209.
96 Nissim 2000, pp. 212–3.
97 See in particular Gersonides 1993, p. 268. Gersonides does, however, accept Maimonides' interpretation of the she-ass speaking to Balaam (Numbers 22); see Gersonides 1998, Numbers 22:21, p. 125.
98 On Gersonides' approach to esotericism see Eisen 1995, pp. 99–113.
99 *Wars of the Lord* VI.2.12, Gersonides 1866, pp. 456–8; Gersonides 1999, pp. 491–5.
100 Gersonides also interprets naturally the miracles regarding the transformation of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt. He maintains that when the verse states "and she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt" (Genesis 19:26) it refers to the annihilated cities of Sodom and Gemorrah inasmuch as the scorched earth produced salt. Here again, however, Gersonides states that his deviation from the plain rendering of the text does not represent a categorical rejection of supernatural miracles, but derives from his condition that supernatural miracles must benefit others and this miracle, which occurs in a solitary fashion, does not meet this criterion (Gersonides 1993, pp. 259–61, 268).
101 *Wars of the Lord* VI.2.10, Gersonides 1866, p. 449; Gersonides 1999, pp. 480–1.
102 Gersonides sets out his understanding of prophecy in the second treatise of *Wars of the Lord* (Gersonides 1987, pp. 5–74).
103 *Wars of the Lord* VI.2.10, Gersonides 1866, p. 447; Gersonides 1999, pp. 478–80.
104 See H. Davidson 1992b.
105 *Wars of the Lord* II.2, Gersonides 1999, pp. 30–7.
106 *Wars of the Lord* IV.6, Gersonides 1999, p. 184.
107 *Wars of the Lord* VI.2.10, Gersonides 1866, p. 452; Gersonides 1999, p. 485.
108 *Wars of the Lord* VI.2.10, Gersonides 1866, p. 450; Gersonides 1999, p. 483.
109 *Wars of the Lord* VI.2.9, Gersonides 1866, p. 442; Gersonides 1999, pp. 470–1.
110 *Wars of the Lord* VI.2.12, Gersonides 1866, p. 454; Gersonides 1999, p. 489.
111 *Wars of the Lord* VI.2.12, Gersonides 1866, p. 455; Gersonides 1999, p. 490.
112 See note 98.
113 *Wars of the Lord* VI.2.12, Gersonides 1866, p. 459; Gersonides 1999, p. 496.

12

TIME, SPACE, AND INFINITY

T. M. RUDAVSKY

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of the concepts of time, place, and the continuum in medieval Jewish philosophy involves three sets of issues. The first issue has to do with divine omniscience from the perspective of the apparent discontinuity between past and future. Clearly the past appears to be fixed in a way that the future is not. More bluntly, the past is actual whereas the future is possible. From the divine perspective there is no ontological difference between past and future: All events exist in an "eternal now" for God, and so what is possible from the human perspective is actual from God's eternal gaze. A second issue is related to the notion of creation. Traditionally, God the Creator is said to be eternal, or outside of time, whereas creatures are construed as being in time, or subject to the flow of time. By understanding the notion of creation and how an eternal, timeless Creator created a temporal universe, we may begin to understand how the notions of eternity and time function. A third issue, having to do with infinity and the continuum, leads to consideration of the notion of space (or place). The problem of infinite divisibility, which has vexed philosophers since the time of Zeno, centers on whether both time and space are infinitely divisible. If only one is divisible, we are left with a discontinuity between space and time, and yet if both space and time are infinitely divisible, then numerous paradoxes result, such as Zeno's celebrated "Achilles and the Tortoise." In this chapter I shall focus primarily on the latter two issues but will examine the former briefly. I shall also examine the formative sources found in classical Greek thought, turning to the transmission of these sources in both late Hellenistic thought and in representative rabbinic sources.

II. TIME AND DIVINE OMNISCIENCE

Importance of Aristotle's De Interpretatione

The general problem of divine omniscience comprises a number of subsidiary problems: the problem of logical fatalism as introduced by Aristotle in his *De*

Interpretatione and further developed by the Stoics; the problem of God's foreknowledge of human events and the relation of this knowledge to free will; and particular theological difficulties centering around the notions of prophecy, providence, and retribution.[1] Inasmuch as the problem of divine omniscience has been discussed in at least two other chapters (see Feldman; Nadler), this chapter will focus only on those logical issues that relate directly to the domain of temporality.

The logical dimension of this issue can be traced back to Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*. In his celebrated "Sea-Fight" Paradox (*De Interpretatione* 9), Aristotle is concerned to safeguard the limits of the Law of the Excluded Middle with respect to statements about future contingent events. Having claimed earlier that this law pertains to statements about past and present events, in Chapter 9 he limits the Law of the Excluded Middle, arguing that any statement about a future contingent event is now neither true nor false. If future contingents did have a truth value, there would be no human freedom; however, Aristotle postulates that we know that future events originate as a result of our deliberation. As an example of a future contingent event, Aristotle discusses a sea battle, stating, "it is necessary for there to be or not to be a sea-battle tomorrow; but it is not necessary for a sea-battle to take place tomorrow, nor for one not to take place – though it is necessary for one to take place or not to take place."[2] Distinguishing in this case between two types of necessity, Aristotle states, "what is, necessarily is, when it is; and what is not, necessarily is not, when it is not. But not everything that is, necessarily is; and not everything that is not, necessarily is not."[3] On the basis of this distinction between simple and temporal necessity, Aristotle feels that he has safeguarded the indeterminacy of the future without sacrificing the truth value of all other statements. Note that, in this model, the future is ontologically distinct from both the past and the future; according to Aristotle, this distinction is rooted in human behavior as well as in our linguistic utterances.

Maimonides on Knowing the Future

The relevance of Aristotle's sea-fight battle to the topic of time becomes clear when we focus on the ontological status of both the future and the past with respect to God's knowing intellect. More specifically, if God is present to all of time, and knows all time in one act, what does this imply about the ontological status of the future? If what is future is as available to God as what is past, does it follow that the future is as fixed ontologically as the past? Although the problem of divine omniscience is discussed by earlier Jewish philosophers such as Judah Halevi and Saadia Gaon, it is Maimonides who connects divine knowledge to issues of time. In *Guide of the Perplexed* III.15-21, Maimonides is concerned with two questions: whether God

knows actually existing particulars, and whether God's knowledge extends as well to the domain of possibles. Of these, the latter is of direct concern with respect to God's knowledge of future contingents. The claim that God's knowledge is unaffected by any change in its objects is supported in the context of a distinction between absolute and relative nonexistence. According to Maimonides, absolute nonexistence is never an object of God's knowledge.[4] Relative nonexistents, or future contingents, are possible objects of God's knowledge. It is not impossible, Maimonides claims, that God's knowledge have as its object those "non-existent things about whose being brought into existence."[5] Maimonides illustrates this with the case of God's knowing that a certain man who is now nonexistent, will exist at a future time, will continue to exist for some time, and then cease to exist. "God's knowledge does not increase when this person comes into existence – it contains nothing that it did not contain before." God's knowledge does not imply plurality or change: "Something was produced of which it had been perpetually known that it would be produced in the way it came into existence."[6] Maimonides is quick to point out, however, that God's knowledge does not bring about the necessary occurrence of the entity in question: The possible remains possible.[7] In other words, given two unactualized states of affairs p and $-p$, God's knowledge that p will become actualized does not affect the possible status of $-p$. Maimonides asserts that God's knowledge of future possibles does not change their nature nor is his nature altered by a change in the objects of his knowledge.

Temporal Asymmetry of the Future: Ibn Daud and Gersonides

In contrast to Maimonides, both Ibn Daud and Gersonides are deeply committed to the asymmetry of the past and the future. They both claim that the truth value of statements about future contingents is as yet undetermined, whereas the truth value of statements about past events is determinately true or false; there are no truth-value gaps in the past. Informing his reader that he has undertaken to write his philosophical work *'Emunah Ramah* in response to the problem of free will and omniscience, [8] Ibn Daud answers this quandary with a position not evidenced hitherto in Jewish thought, namely, that God's omniscience does not extend to future contingents.

Distinguishing between two types of possibility, Ibn Daud claims that genuine ontological possibility is one that God Himself has created *qua* possible: God "created it as a thing that can bear one or the other of two contrary attributes."[9] The most God knows is that such a thing is possible; even God, however, does not know which of the two possibilities will be actualized. To the "sophist" who argues that this imputes ignorance to God, Ibn Daud replies that "this is not ignorance"

because, technically speaking, there is nothing determinate to be known.[10] Not to know *what is-not* does not constitute a deficiency in God's omniscience; therefore, Ibn Daud feels that he has safeguarded the contingency of future events while extending God's power to know all that is knowable.

Similarly, in *Wars of the Lord* (*Milḥamot Adonai*), Gersonides upholds the indeterminate nature of the future.[11] According to Gersonides' interpretation, Aristotle offered a number of reasons why God cannot know particulars. Of these, the most important for our purposes are the second and the sixth. The second reason states that particulars are temporal (*zemaniyim*), but because nothing of which neither motion nor rest is predicated can perceive temporal entities, God cannot perceive particulars. The sixth reason states that knowledge of changing particulars would itself be mutable; because God's essence is immutable, he cannot perceive mutable objects.[12] Both these arguments deny to God knowledge of particulars on the basis that particulars are qualitatively different from God's essence. Because a nontemporal being cannot know temporal entities and an immutable being cannot know ever-changing entities, God could not know particulars without undergoing a radical change in essence.

Against this backdrop, Gersonides argues that God knows that certain states of affairs may or may not be actualized. Insofar as they are contingent states, however, he does not know which of the two alternatives will in fact be actualized. Because if God did know future contingents prior to their actualization, there could be no contingency in the world.[13] Echoing Ibn Daud, Gersonides claims that God's inability to foreknow future contingents is not a defect in His knowledge: "The fact that God does not have the knowledge of which possible outcome will be realized does not imply any defect (*ḥisaron*) in God. For perfect knowledge of something is the knowledge of what that thing is in reality; when the thing is not apprehended as it is, this is error, not knowledge."[14] With respect to future contingents, God knows their ordered nature or essence, and He knows that they are contingent, but He does not know which alternative will become actualized. Hence the contingent status of future events has been retained with no apparent sacrifice of omniscience.

Crescas' Theological Determinism and Time

In contradistinction to Gersonides, Crescas reintroduces in *'Or ha-Shem* a theory according to which the future is as fixed as is the past. Crescas' stated goal in this work is to examine those arguments of the philosophers, and that of Gersonides in particular, which threaten divine omniscience. Crescas first responds to the claim that if God knows all events, then God is being perfected by this knowledge, but God cannot be affected by matters in the world. To the question whether temporal

change from future to past affects God's essence,[15] Crescas responds that because God knows before the occurrence of an event that it will happen, God's essence does not change when the event actually occurs. How can we call a thing possible if God knows before its occurrence how it will happen? Not to minimize in any way God's knowledge, Crescas attempts to distinguish two senses of contingency, arguing that a thing may be necessary in one way and possible in another.[16] According to Crescas, events known by God, although "possible in themselves," nevertheless are necessary with respect to their causal history. In other words, if God knows *p*, then the truth value of *p* is determinate and "is necessary in terms of its causes."[17] Giving the analogy of a man's knowledge, which does not change the nature of the possibility of the thing known, Crescas argues that similarly the knowledge of God does not change the nature of the possibility in question.[18]

On this view, ontological differences between past and future have vanished. The temporal and ontological conflation of past and future is evidenced even more strikingly in Crescas' description of God's knowledge as timeless. By "timeless" Crescas means that God's knowledge is outside the domain of time altogether. Equating divine foreknowledge with the knowledge of present events, Crescas states, "the science of God is beyond time (*bilti nofelet bi-zeman*); his knowledge of the future is like his knowledge of things existing which does not necessitate compulsion (*hekhreḥ*) and necessity in the nature of things."[19] By conflating present and future events, Crescas has eliminated the metaphysical openness of the future and reduced it to the necessity of the present. Any remaining possibility is "in the mind of the actor," as it were, and not in the event itself, and so it is the very doctrine of timelessness, which removes any vestige of contingency from the world.

III. THE ONTOLOGY OF TIME: GREEK AND BIBLICAL ANTECEDENTS

Let us turn now to the ontology of time as developed in medieval theories of creation. No Jewish philosopher denied the centrality of the doctrine of creation to Jewish belief. Jews were enormously affected by scripture and in particular by the creation account found in *Genesis* I-II. The very term *b'reishit* designates the fact that there was a beginning, that is, temporality has been introduced if only in the weakest sense that this creative act occupies a period of time. The issue of creation is further complicated by consideration of the notion of infinity. Medieval Jewish philosophers thinking about creation were deeply influenced not only by Genesis but also by Aristotle's model of an eternally existing world. When trying to prove that God created the world in time, philosophers who wanted to support

a biblical theory of creation in time had to respond to Aristotle's position that time is infinite.

A specific subset of these arguments is devoted to refuting the eternity of the world by incorporating issues pertaining to traversal of the infinite. The issue of whether the infinite can be traversed is descended from Zeno's Paradoxes of Motion. These paradoxes, transmitted through Islamic philosophical channels, have inspired an enormous body of literature devoted to issues connected with infinity, the continuum, and the divisibility of both magnitude and time.[20] Medieval discussions concerning the eternity of the world were thus couched in considerations having to do with traversal of the infinite, God's knowledge of the infinite, and God's own infinity. We must therefore examine Jewish discussion of these issues.

Biblical and Rabbinic Conceptions of Time

For reasons having to do as much with contemporary theological concerns as with pedagogical research, modern biblical scholars have devoted much time trying to uncover a "theory of time" in the Hebrew scriptures. The enterprise has been fraught with frustration, however, and has not reached a scholarly consensus. That linguistic analysis of biblical temporal terms has yielded little fruit is obvious, especially in light of the ostensible lack of significant discussion in scripture having to do with time per se. The word *'et* is the most important word in biblical Hebrew for time and tends to mean the moment or point of time at which something happens.[21] The point of time can change over into a longer period of time. Other words used for time indications include *mo'ed, zeman, 'olam,* and *yom*. The term *mo'ed* means "place of meeting," and with reference to time, comes to mean "appointed time." It emphasizes more than *'et* conscious designation and arrangement. The term *zeman* occurs only three times in the latest period (Nehemiah 2:6; Esther 9:27; 31) and means, like *mo'ed*, appointed day. By Mishnaic times the term *zeman* takes over and it is the most commonly used term in medieval texts.[22] The term *'olam*, frequently translated as "world" in rabbinic texts, refers as well to time or duration in the Bible.[23] The term *yom* can be used to indicate the era of an important event or the day of someone's birth, death, and so forth. Additional temporal words that are occasionally used include *rega', qetz, a'ḥarit, qedem,* and *dor*. The rabbis, however, were not philosophers and were not interested in elucidating a philosophical theory of time per se. With the exception, perhaps, of Ecclesiastes, there is very little speculation of a specifically metaphysical nature in biblical texts, little awareness of time as a metaphysical construct. Even in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, which contains numerous references to space, little mention is made of time.[24]

What we do find in biblical and rabbinic texts is a model of time that emphasizes life cycles. Given the preeminence of ritualized events in Judaism, the marking of time assumes overwhelming importance in the rabbinic period. Inasmuch as the rabbis are equally concerned with the daily rituals and events, which are performed at specific times, so the exact determination of temporal demarcations, such as "day," "twilight," "cycle" becomes of paramount importance in rabbinic literature.[25] The importance in this context of liturgical time cannot be overemphasized.[26] The religious calendar orients celebrants in time through the use of regularly repeated rituals; this temporal system structures the life of the community.[27] Such time is not just chronological time but is connected with repetitions: Temporal repetition is one essential attribute of ritual. Calendars are not restricted to purely practical functions, that is, to refer to points in time and to time durations. They also represent a process of human cognition in which the experience of time is conceptualized, structured, and comprehended. "Calendars make sense of the dimension of time by imposing a rational, human structure on it. Calendars represent at once a way of describing time and of establishing conceptual order amidst a seemingly disordered world."[28] As Stern has noted, although the importance of timing is critical to rabbinic law, it is difficult if not impossible to abstract an independent notion out of these calendrical discussions. Even the calendar, Stern notes, "[is] not necessarily a scheme for measuring time, nor does it necessarily imply the existence of an abstract time dimension."[29]

Time, Order, and Creation in Plato

A complete account of theories of time in the Greek philosophical tradition is beyond the scope of this chapter.[30] Nevertheless, several motifs and arguments emerge that are extremely influential on subsequent medieval Jewish discussions. The influence of Plato can be felt most in his most explicitly cosmological dialogue, the *Timaeus*, a work that has exerted tremendous influence on medieval cosmology and cosmogony. In the *Timaeus,* Plato distinguishes between eternity (*aionios*) and everlastingness (*aidios*): everlastingness is "the nearest approach to eternity of which sensible things are capable."[31] Plato distinguishes further between the sphere of eternity and that of time (*Timaeus* 37c-d). What Plato calls the Living Being is identified with the domain of pattern or forms and is eternal and hence not subject to time. The world-soul and the world-body, which characterize the world of becoming, cannot be eternal because they comprise "motion"; hence the Demiurge makes them a "moving likeness of eternity." Time is then defined as a likeness of eternity, which is the measure of the world-soul and world-body, or more specifically an "everlasting likeness" moving according to number.

When time actually comes into being, however, is a problematic issue and has been subjected to much interpretative ink. In *Timaeus* 38b Plato suggests that inasmuch as time came into being with the heavens, it would appear that before creation there is no time: "Be that as it may, Time came into being together with the Heaven, in order that, as they were brought into being together, so they may be dissolved together."[32] Other early passages in the *Timaeus* suggest that time itself was created along with the cosmos as a whole.[33] Later passages in the dialogue, however, support the interpretation that time may preexist the creation of the heavens. In contradistinction to those passages adduced earlier that suggested *ex nihilo* creation, other passages suggest that time existed, in some ontological measure, before creation.[34] If we take seriously Plato's definition of time as "a likeness moving according to number," which is aligned with the creation of the heavenly spheres, and if we emphasize the importance of these celestial spheres with respect to the measure of time, then it is not possible that time preexisted the creation of the Heavens. It is here that the discontinuity between time and space appears most explicitly in *Timaeus*. For unlike time, which is the measure of motion, place (*chora*) is the necessary precondition for the coming into being of motion. Although it is perfectly possible for *chora* to preexist the creation of the Heavens, it is not possible for time to so preexist.

Time and Motion in Aristotle

When Aristotle turns to issues of creation and time, he does so against the fabric of Plato's *Timaeus*. Both thinkers were influenced by cosmological considerations. For Aristotle, the prime example of time and motion is the relation between time and the circular motion of the heavens. Time is therefore construed in terms of a circle, measured by the circular motion of the heavens.[35] In *De Caelo* 1.10 he summarizes the positions of his predecessors, in particular that of Plato, who claimed that the cosmos had a beginning but is everlasting. Aristotle presents a number of arguments against Plato, arguing that a universe that is ungenerated and indestructible at all times is not capable of nonexistence; he rules out the possibility in which things exist for an infinite time and then cease to exist for an infinite time.[36] Aristotle then applies these and other considerations to Plato's arguments in the *Timaeus*, arguing that it is impossible for something to be once generated and yet indestructible.[37]

The eternity of the cosmos is integrally related to Aristotle's conception of time. In answer to the question whether time was generated, Aristotle further develops Plato's notion of the instant or "now" (*to nūn*) as a basic feature of time. The instant is defined as the middle point between the beginning and end of time. Because it is a boundary or limit, it has no size and hence cannot be considered to exist:

It is a durationless instant. Because instants do not in and of themselves exist, it might be argued that time itself does not exist. That is, the past and future do not now exist, and the present "now" is not a part of time because, as we have already noted, it is sizeless. Because the extremity, or limit, of time resides in the instant, Aristotle claims that time must be exist on both sides of it: "Since the now is both a beginning and an end, there must always be time on both sides of it."[38] In *Metaphysics* XII.6 Aristotle claims that there can be no "before" or "after" if time does not exist, for both terms imply the existence of relative time. "For there could not be a before and an after if time did not exist."[39] For these reasons he insists that time must be uncreated.

Aristotle's emphasis on an ungenerated cosmos is reinforced in his analysis of the relation between time and motion.[40] This characterization is developed further in his classic discussion on time in *Physics* IV.10-14. Having asked of time whether "it belongs to the class of things that exist or that of things that do not exist,"[41] he rejects various considerations that might lead one to think that time does not exist. Time, he claims, is connected with movement. This leads to a definition of time in terms of the movement of the "now": "When we do perceive a 'before' and an 'after,' then we say that there is time. For time is just this – number of motion in respect of 'before' and 'after' . . . time is only movement in so far as it admits of enumeration . . . Time then is a kind of number."[42]

Aristotle then stipulates two important qualifications to his characterization of time in terms of movement. First he points out, "not only do we measure the movement by the time, but also the time by the movement, because they define each other."[43] Furthermore, he argues that time is the measure not only of motion but of rest as well. "For all rest is in time. For it does not follow that what is in time is moved, though what is in motion is necessarily moved. For time is not motion, but 'number of motion:' and what is at rest also can be in the number of motion."[44] We shall return to the importance of this passage in Section 5.4 when we examine Crescas' critique of Aristotle.

Time and Eternity in Plotinus

The last important Greek philosophical school to influence Jewish philosophy is Neoplatonism, which was largely based on the writings of Plotinus and Proclus. The work of Plotinus was transmitted in a variety of ways, most notably through *The Theology of Aristotle* (a paraphrase of books 4, 5, and 6 of the *Enneads*), and through doxographies. Plotinus' distinction between time and eternity is carried out against the background of both Plato's characterization of time in the *Timaeus* as the "moving image of eternity," and Aristotle's description of time in *Physics*

IV as the measure of motion. The main distinction in Plotinus is between that which is outside of time altogether and that to which temporal predicates apply.[45] In contrast to the Aristotelian view, Plotinus and his followers develop a theory of time according to which time does not depend on external objects and their motion for its existence. On this view, the essence of time is not motion but rather duration. In *Enneads* III.7 Plotinus rejects the view that makes time dependent on physical motion. Rather, he connects it with the "the Life of the Soul in a motion of change from one stage of life to another."[46] Plotinus defines eternity as:

> A life which remains always in the same state, always having the whole present to it – not one thing now and then another, but everything at once, and not different things now, and afterward different things, but a partless completion, as if all things existed together in a single point, and never flowed forth, but remained there in the same state, and did not change, but were always in the present, because none of it has gone by, nor shall it come to be, but it is just what it is.[47]

In this important and influential definition, we note that eternity always has the whole present to it; it is changeless, always present. Eternity is "all at once, and is everywhere full yet unextended."[48] Plotinus is ostensibly aware of the dilemma of speaking about eternity by using temporal predicates. Because eternity always is, it never "is not" and cannot be other than it is. In contrast to eternity, then, time represents the domain of incompleteness. Temporality reflects the image of the eternal. For Plotinus, time is a function of the movement of the life of the soul: It is "the product of the spreading out (*diastasis*) of life."[49] Time is dependent on soul, and so upon the return of the soul to the One, time itself will disappear. The origin of time, and the soul, is unclear in Plotinus. Originally time "was not yet time, but it too was at rest in Eternity."[50] Due, however, to the "officious nature" of world-soul, the world-soul moved away [and down] from eternity, and time moved with it; in this move away from eternity the world-soul "produced time as the image of eternity" when it produced the sensible world in imitation of the intelligible world.[51] What is interesting about this myth of generation is that in the beginning, time was both in eternity and yet distinguishable from it. Neither does Plotinus explain what accounts for the initial discontent of the soul, nor does he explain why time moves along with the soul away from eternity.

IV. TIME, INFINITY, AND CREATION IN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

We have noted the most important characteristics of time as developed by both the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian schools and inherited by medieval philosophers.

In addition, medieval philosophers inherited from Aristotle two distinct conceptions of infinity: the quantitative and the substantive notions. That the quantitative notion of infinity is to be found in Aristotle is fairly uncontroversial. We need only turn to Aristotle's discussions in *Physics* III.4 204a where Aristotle distinguishes four types of quantitative infinite, and in *Metaphysics* XI.10 1066a 35-1066b where quantitative infinity is characterized further. In the first sense, infinity is contrasted with finitude and refers to "an unlimited distance or length, something that has no end or boundary."[52] As an accident of number, infinity refers to something that is endlessly "add-ible" or divisible. In the second sense, infinity refers to a self-existent substance, one whose essence is so unique and so incomparable that it cannot suffer any form of limitation. Both these notions of the infinite undergo radical transformation in the hands of later Greek and Islamic thinkers.

Time and Creation in Philo

Philo (20 B.C.E. – c.a. 50 C.E.) was influenced by Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic ideas, as well as by the Jewish sources available to him in Hellenistic Alexandria. Philo is not an original philosopher, but rather a highly competent student of the entire range of the Greek philosophical tradition available to him. As stated in a number of works, Philo characterized his mission as one of assimilating the wisdom of the Greek philosophers with his Jewish heritage. His genius, as depicted by Runia, was to "select, modify, amplify, refine and synthesize this great mass of material and place it in service of an elaborate religious-philosophical worldview."[53] Although Philo rarely makes mention of Plato by name, nevertheless echoes of Plato's works resonate throughout Philo's corpus, particularly when he discusses the issue of creation.

Philo's presentation of creation occurs in several works, but most notably in his treatise *On the Creation of the Cosmos According to Moses*, in which he tries to show that both Genesis and Plato's cosmogony share similar philosophical features. Philo depicts Moses as an author who not only had reached "the very summit of philosophy" but had also been instructed "in the many and most essential doctrines of nature by means of oracles."[54] Turning to the issue of why and when God created the cosmos, Philo rejects the view that the cosmos is "ungenerated and eternal" on the grounds that it would not only impute idleness to God, but further that it would eliminate the doctrine of Providence. To present the world as uncreated leaves God with nothing to do.[55] The cosmos is, according to Moses, generated, in contradistinction to God who is unchanging and ungenerated. According to Philo's reading of Genesis, Moses says that God fashioned the cosmos in six days to provide

order. God, however, was not needful of a length of time, because God "surely did everything at the same time."[56] Creation is thus envisaged as an instantaneous process.

What does Philo mean when he claims that time itself (*chronos*) began with the ordered cosmos? If he allows that matter existed before the cosmos, then he must allow for a "before" before creation; on the other hand, if, as he claims, creation is simultaneous, then there can be no "before."[57] Scholars have been divided on how to read Philo. The major question has to do with whether God is the producer of the beginningless matter; most commentators, with the exception of Wolfson, have claimed that the formless matter had no beginning. Most recently, Runia argues that Philo's conception of time is compatible with both simultaneous creation and eternal creation. In the former case, creation takes place as a temporal event, and involves a beginning of time. In the latter case, there is no creation of time, but creation reflects the dependence of the cosmos on God.

The discussion of time in the treatise *Quod Deus Immutabilis Sit* (*On The Unchangeableness of God*) emphasizes a number of motifs pertaining to God and time. First, Philo emphasizes that for God nothing is future: "Nothing is uncertain or future to God."[58] Furthermore, God is the "maker of time" as well, for God is depicted as "the father of time's father, that is of the universe . . . thus time stands to God in the relation of a grandson."[59] Finally, reminiscent of Plato's *Timaeus* 37d, Philo characterizes God's eternity in contradistinction to temporality: "God's life is not a time, but eternity, which is the archetype and pattern of time; and in eternity there is no past nor future, but only present existence."[60]

Philo reiterates in a number of passages the view that time is dependent for its existence on the ordered movement of the cosmos. In *Legum Allegoriae* (*Allegorical Interpretation*), for example, Philo argues that inasmuch as every period of time is a collection of days and nights, which are brought about by the sun's movements, it follows that "time is confessedly more recent than the world."[61] Philo then continues by saying, "it would therefore be correct to say that the world was not made in time, but that time was formed by means of the world."[62] Similarly in *De Opificio Mundi (On the Creation of the Universe)* 26 he claims that time did not exist before the cosmos, but came into existence either with the cosmos or after it; it is therefore either as old as or younger than the cosmos. Reflecting the Stoic definition of time as a measured space,[63] or duration, Philo argues, "there was no time before the cosmos, but rather it either came into existence together with the cosmos or after it. When we consider that time is the extension of the cosmos' movement, and that there could not be any movement earlier than the thing that moves but must necessarily be established either later or at the same time, then we

must necessarily conclude that time too is either the same age as the cosmos or younger than it. To venture to affirm that it is older is unphilosophical."[64]

Philo maintains further that Moses does not take the term "beginning" in a temporal sense but rather in a numerical sense. Commenting on Genesis I, Philo interprets the verse to refer to a beginning according to number, rather than a temporal beginning. Time cannot be separated from the cosmos itself; so it should be understood "numerically" because there is a close relation between number and order.[65] That time did not exist before the creation of the world is evidenced in a number of passages. In this regard Philo follows Aristotle's conception of time as connected with motion. Philo presents the purpose of the heavenly bodies as giving us temporal measure and quantitative measure: to give the "right times for the annual seasons"; and "for days and months and years, which indeed have come into existence as the measure of time and also have generated the nature of number."[66] In this latter case, Philo claims that time makes manifest number: "from a single day the number one is derived, from two days two . . . and from infinite time the number that is infinite."[67]

Finally, mention must be made of the treatise *Aeternitate Mundi (Eternity of the Universe)*, in which Philo adduces Greek philosophical considerations to prove the eternity of the cosmos based on the eternity of time. If time is uncreated, so too must the world be uncreated. Because time is what "measures the movement of the universe . . . the world is coeval with time." Time itself has no beginning or end; the very words "was" and "ever" indicate time, and so it is absurd to suggest that there was a time in which time did not exist. Philo concludes the argument by stating, "it is necessary that both [time and the cosmos] should have subsisted from everlasting without having any beginning in which they came into being."[68] What are we to make of this argument? Does Philo endorse it? Runia provides compelling evidence to the effect that Philo does not in fact subscribe to the view expressed by this argument, as evidenced by his use of the Mosaic account of creation.[69]

Theories of the Infinite: Aristotle, John Philoponus, and the Kalām

Philo's works did not, for a number of reasons, enter the medieval Jewish canon. The individual who enabled medieval Jewish philosophers to incorporate Aristotle's model into a theological context is John Philoponus, whose works contain a refutation of Aristotle's theory of the eternity of the world from the perspective of theories of the infinite. John Philoponus' major work *Contra Aristotelem* has been lost and survives only in quotations from Simplicius' commentaries on Aristotle's *De Caelo* and *Physics*.[70] In this work, Philoponus hopes to demonstrate the creation of the world by arguing that Aristotle's assumption of eternal motion leads

to untenable conclusions. Philoponus' works were known to Arabic philosophers, and were transmitted by the Islamic school of Kalām, through Saadia Gaon, to eleventh- and twelfth-century Jewish and Christian philosophers.[71] For this reason his arguments are of crucial importance to understand theological attempts to refute Aristotle's eternity arguments, which are based on a theory of the infinite.

In his *Contra Aristotelem* Philoponus presents two sets of arguments in support of creation, both of which are directed against Aristotle's eternity thesis. According to Simplicius, Philoponus assumes as axiomatic that "it is impossible for an infinite number to exist in actuality or for anyone to traverse the infinite in counting and that it is also impossible that anything should be greater than the infinite, or that the infinite should be increased."[72] From this axiom he argues as follows. Imagine an infinite series of transformations that has taken place among the four elements. In an eternal world, these transformations would constitute an infinite series; however, using Aristotle's characterization of infinity, it is clear that an infinite number cannot exist actually or be traversed. Therefore, in an eternal world, the infinite series of transformations could never be completed and the particle now known to exist could never in fact have come into existence.[73] Furthermore, imagine that the scenario were expanded to the spheres. If the motion of the heavens is without a beginning, and if spheres revolve at unequal periods of revolution, then it is necessary that the sphere of Saturn has rotated with an infinite number of revolutions; however, on this celestial model, the sphere of Jupiter must have rotated with nearly three times more revolutions, the sun with thirty times more revolutions than Saturn, and that of the fixed stars more than ten thousand times greater. Philoponus, argues, "if it is not [even] possible to traverse the infinite once, is it not beyond all absurdity to assume ten thousand times the infinite, or rather the infinite an infinite number of times?"[74] Hence he concludes that the circular motion of the heavens is not eternal but must have had a beginning.

A final ingredient to the issue of whether time is infinitely divisible emerges from Islamic atomism. Both the Aristotelian and atomistic positions were available to Jewish thinkers, the majority of whom sided with Aristotle against atomism. By the time of Israeli, in the ninth century, *Kalām* atomism is as influential as the atomism of Democritus; however, *Kalām* atomism differs from its Greek precursors in two important respects. First, atoms in *Kalām* thought are construed as unextended, sizeless points, as opposed to Greek atoms, which were thought to be indivisible yet with extension.[75] Second, the *Kalām* theologians introduced an occasionalist tinge to their doctrine, arguing that these atoms are destroyed and recreated at every instant by the deity.

A useful overview of these views is Maimonides' presentation of *Kalām* thought in *Guide* I.71–76.[76] Maimonides summarizes *Kalām* theory in terms of eleven premises. The first premise posits the existence of indivisible atoms that are unextended and yet when combined form extended bodies. The second premise postulates the existence of a vacuum and states that, according to *Kalām* theologians, "vacuum exists and that it is a certain space or spaces in which there is nothing at all, being accordingly empty of all bodies, devoid of all substances."[77] The unstated *Kalām* argument, already intimated in Aristotle, is that for atoms to be individuated one from the other, there must be space between them, which is "atom-less," or void of body. To account for motion, the void must therefore exist. The third premise applies the metaphysics of space to that of time and introduces the existence of indivisible time atoms. Finally, the eleventh premise pertains directly to the problem of infinite divisibility and states that the existence of the infinite in any mode is impossible. From these premises, Maimonides tells us, the *Kalām* atomists deduce a number of consequences that deny the possibility of motion and that hark back to Zeno's paradoxes of motion. These consequences lead ineluctably to postulating the beginning of the world. As we shall see later, both Maimonides and Saadia reject these arguments on both metaphysical and epistemological grounds.[78]

Time, Infinity, and Creation in Saadia Gaon

Saadia Gaon incorporated *Kalām* influences into his major philosophical work *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (*'Emunot ve-De'ot*).[79] In his chapter on creation, Saadia presents eight arguments for the creation of the world that can be divided into two groups of four arguments each: The first group proves that the world must be finite (i.e., not eternal), and the second group that the world was created *ex nihilo* and not out of a preexistent matter. His fourth proof of creation "from time" draws on John Philoponus' first proof of creation and is based on Philoponus' premise that no infinite can be traversed. Saadia argues that if the present instant is infinite, then it is never possible to traverse the very instant in which we find ourselves. So too, it would not be possible to traverse any other infinite instant to reach the point we now inhabit. We know, however, that we have in fact reached this present point in time. It follows, therefore, that the time we have to traverse is finite.[80]

Having argued that proof of the traversal of past time supports his postulating the finitude of time, Saadia then applies the argument to the traversal of future time as well. Saadia raises a possible objection to the argument, attributing to an anonymous heretic a variation of Zeno's paradoxes of motion: The heretic claims that inasmuch as any distance is infinitely divisible, the fact that a person can travel from one point to another demonstrates that the infinite can be traversed.[81] How can

Saadia account for traversing an infinite distance, without abandoning his argument for the finitude of time? Saadia focuses on *Kalām* solutions to the problem based on the notion of the leap. The *Kalām* philosopher al-Naẓẓām, for example, introduced the notion of the leap as a response to Zeno.[82] Believing in infinite divisibility, but eschewing atomism, al-Naẓẓām adopted the idea of infinitely divisible leaps to explain how we can traverse an infinity of subdistances. On this theory any journey involves a finite number of variably short leaps.[83]

Rejecting this *Kalām* position as untenable, Saadia proposes his own solution, one that reflects Aristotle's distinction between actual and potential infinity as mediated through the works of John Philoponus.[84] Saadia argues that Zeno's paradox is sophistical in that it fails to note that "the infinite divisibility of a thing is only a matter of imagination (*maḥshavah*), but not a matter of reality (*po'al*)."[85] If, Saadia argues, the infinite traversal had occurred in the past in imagination alone, the paradox would be valid. Because, however, the process of generation has traversed real time and reached us, it "cannot invalidate our proof, because infinite divisibility exists only in the imagination."[86] In answer to this paradox, then, Saadia distinguishes between actual and potential traversal. Traversing a finite spatial distance is not the same as traversing infinity, because in this case there *is* no actual infinity, only an infinitely divisible finite distance.

Creation and the Ontology of Time in Maimonides

Having already examined Maimonides' depiction of *Kalām* atomism, let us turn to his refutation of those arguments that make use of *Kalām* assumptions. With respect to the *Kalām* insistence on time-atoms, Maimonides is quick to point out that the *Mutakallimūn*, even more than "the cleverest philosophers," have "no knowledge at all of the true reality of time."[87] He does not present a counter-argument, however, and is content to rely on an *ad hominem* statement, which will be amplified in *Guide* II.13, in the context of discussing creation.

In *Guide* I.74.7, Maimonides points out that whoever wishes to demonstrate the creation of the world in time must use this premise to rule out infinite regress. For from the hypothesis that the world is eternal, it follows that many imaginary infinite series can be postulated. Those who postulate the eternity of the universe believe both "that an infinite may be greater in number than another infinite," and congruously that "an infinite number of revolutions may be greater than another infinite number of revolutions."[88] Having rejected the infinite in all its guises, the *Mutakallimūn* are able to reject the hypotheses of the eternalists. Against the first argument, Maimonides emphasizes the distinction made by Aristotle between actual and potential and between essential and accidental infinite. The second

argument is dismissed by his saying, "all these things are mere fictions and have no reality."[89] The major thrust of Maimonides' rejection of the *Kalām* arguments, however, is contained in *Guide* I.71. Maimonides' general contention is that these arguments "are derived from premises that run counter to the nature of existence that is perceived."[90] Maimonides adopts the theoretical stance of an eternalist and tries to argue for creation by using Aristotle's own premises, rather than those of *Kalām*. In this way, he feels, the shaky metaphysical ground of *Kalām* metaphysics is obviated.

The definition of time plays an important role in Maimonides' discussion of creation. In the Introduction to Part II of the *Guide* Maimonides lists twenty-five propositions drawn from Aristotle, which purportedly he accepts. That Maimonides is sympathetic to an Aristotelian theory of time is evidenced by the following definition he adopts in the fifteenth proposition.

(Proposition 15) Time is an accident consequent upon motion and is necessarily attached to it. Neither of them exists without the other. Motion does not exist except in time, and time cannot be conceived by the intellect except together with motion. And all that with regard to which no motion can be found, does not fall under time.[91]

In this formulation, Maimonides is clearly following the Aristotelian definition of time as the "measure of motion." The implication of this definition occurs in *Guide* II.13, in the context of delineating Aristotle's eternity thesis. Having stated that Aristotle's notion involves the creation of all existence, including time, "time itself being one of the created things,"[92] Maimonides raises several puzzles concerning creation and time, raising the issue of the relation between God's actions and the domain of temporality. Surely, he claims, no temporal predicates can be used to describe God's activities or nature before the creation, because before creation there is no time:

Accordingly, one's saying: God 'was' before he created the world – where the word 'was' is indicative of time – and similarly all the thoughts that are carried along in the mind regarding the infinite duration of his existence before the creation of the world, are all of them due to a supposition regarding time or to an imagining of time and not due to the true reality of time.[93]

Several points are worth noting in this passage. First, Maimonides is suggesting that inasmuch as God transcends the temporal sphere and does not operate in a temporal context, Maimonides describes the duration or eternity of the deity in atemporal terms, so as to preclude any temporal predications of God. To predicate of God infinite duration has no temporal meaning. Second, and more important for our purposes, Maimonides' use of the terms "supposition" or "imagining" of time (*demut zeman*) brings to mind his dismissal of the *Mutakallimūn* on the grounds that

they were unable to distinguish between imagination and intellect.[94] Maimonides is suggesting that Aristotle's view involves one in a crude or vulgar understanding of time based on imagination, one that is contrasted with the "true reality of time." This true reality, of course, is consistent with an Aristotelian theory of time. As we have seen, however, an Aristotelian theory of time lends credence to the eternity theory of the universe. Thus with respect to creation, Maimonides maintains, "God's bringing the world into existence does not have a temporal beginning, for time is one of the created things."[95] Maimonides does not want to suggest that time itself is eternal, for "if you affirm as true the existence of time prior to the world, you are necessarily bound to believe in the eternity [of the world]."[96] Maimonides will not claim that the creation of the world is a temporally specifiable action, for on the Aristotelian definition of time, the world must be beginningless in the sense that it has no temporal beginning. Although supporting on an exoteric level the scriptural reading of creation, on an esoteric level Maimonides is suggesting that an Aristotelian theory of time (which he accepts) is more consistent with an eternity model of the universe.

Time, Creation, and Infinite Divisibility in Gersonides

Like Maimonides, Gersonides is concerned with whether time is finite or infinite, as well as with whether the creation of the world can be said to have occurred at an instant. Unlike Maimonides, however, Gersonides' discussion includes the physical manifestation of time and matter, as well as the theoretical implications of temporality. In *Wars of the Lord* VI.1.2, Gersonides hopes to refute Aristotle's eternity thesis by showing that the infinity of time and motion fail as exceptions to Aristotle's own finitistic universe.[97] To reject Aristotle's eternity thesis, Gersonides must demonstrate the finitude of time. To this end he first makes a number of observations pertaining to the general characteristics of time.

Time, Gersonides argues, falls in the category of continuous quantity. We speak, for example, of the parts of time as being equal or unequal. Time itself is measured by convention (*be-hanaḥa*) as opposed to by nature, and its limit is the "instant," which itself is indivisible.[98] Echoing Aristotle, Gersonides points out that time cannot comprise "instants" because the instant measures time but is not a part of time. Unlike time, which is divisible, the instant is indivisible.[99] Furthermore, Gersonides claims that time can be construed both as separate from its substratum and as residing in it. That time resides in its substratum is demonstrated from the fact that it has distinguishable parts; that is, present time is distinguished from both past and future time. Were these parts not distinguishable, argues Gersonides, then any part of time would equal the whole of time. Hence, time must reside in that which it measures. At the same time, it is separable from any substratum, because

if it were in its substratum, there would be as many times as there are substrata. We know that there is only one time and not a multiplicity of times. Hence time must not reside in its substratum.[100]

According to Gersonides time is partly potential and partly actual. Aristotle had argued that the past, in being a potency, was infinite. Gersonides, however, claims that potency refers only to the future and not to the past.[101] If the past were potential, then, Gersonides argues, contrary possibilities would inhere in the past as well as in the future; however, this is absurd, because we know that the past has already occurred.[102] Hence, Gersonides concludes that only future time carries within itself potency. In contradistinction to Aristotle, Gersonides distinguishes two roles of the instant: an initial instant, which does not yet constitute time, and subsequent instants, which demarcate "before" from "after." According to Gersonides, these two notions of the instant serve different functions. The first delimits a particular portion of time, namely continuous quantity, and is characterized in terms of duration. The latter reflects the Aristotelian function of the instant as characterizing division. Gersonides claims that if there were no difference between these two functions of the instant, we could not distinguish between any two sets of fractions of time, for example three hours and three days, because our measure of the two sets would be identical. Because each period of time would be divided by the same kind of instant, there would be no way of distinguishing three days from three hours.[103] On the basis of distinction Gersonides therefore defines time as "the measure of motion (*ha-zeman hu maʿaseh ha-tenuʿah bi-khelallah*) as a whole according to the instants which form the boundaries of motion but not according to the instants which only distinguish the before from the after."[104]

Crescas and Albo on Time, Creation, and Infinity

Gersonides has presented an ambitious account of the finitude of time, one that attempts to refute the eternity thesis while at the same retain a sense of "initial instant" that remains true to Aristotle. Let us turn now to two critics of Gersonides, namely Crescas and his student Joseph Albo. Crescas' characterization of time occurs in *Or ha-Shem*, in the context of elaborating Maimonides' summary of Aristotle's twenty-five metaphysical propositions.[105] Proposition fifteen, as was introduced and discussed already by Maimonides, pertains to time and is summarized by Crescas as follows.

> Proof of the fifteenth proposition which reads: 'Time is an accident that is consequent on motion and is conjoined with it. Neither one of them exists without the other. Motion does not exist except in time, and time cannot be conceived except with motion, and whatsoever is not in motion does not fall under the category of time.[106]

This statement, which is taken directly from Maimonides, is then contrasted with Aristotle's own definition: "Aristotle defines time as the number of priority and posteriority of motion."[107] In Part II of *'Or ha-Shem* Crescas turns to a critical evaluation of this Aristotelian conception of time, replacing Aristotle's definition with his own, namely that time can measure rest as well.[108]

Crescas makes several points. The first is that time can measure rest as well as motion. Second, time can be measured by rest as well as by motion. Finally, time exists only in the soul. The first two points are captured in Crescas' revised definition of time: "The correct definition of time is that it is the measure of the continuity of motion or of rest (*she'ur hitdabequt ha-tenu'ah 'o ha-menuhah*) between two instants."[109] In this definition Crescas retains Aristotle's and Maimonides' notion of time as a "measure" or "number." Crescas adds the important qualification that time is the measure not only of motion or change, but of rest as well. We should remember in this context that, although Aristotle did allow that time could measure rest, he did not amplify this suggestion.

Crescas then goes on to say that the genus most appropriate to time is magnitude. Inasmuch as time belongs to continuous quantity and number to discrete quantity, if we describe time as number, we describe it by a genus, which is not essential to it. Time is "indeed measured by both motion and rest, because it is our conception of the measure of their continuity that is time."[110] On this basis Crescas concludes, "the existence of time is only in the soul."[111] It is because humans have a mental conception of this measure that time even exists. The continuity of time depends only on a thinking mind, and is indefinite, becoming definite only by being measured by motion. Were we not to conceive of it, there would be no time.

The implications of Crescas' theory of time are apparent in the light of his discussion of creation in *'Or ha-Shem* III.1. Without entering into the intricacies of this technical discussion, several important points can be made. Crescas takes as his point of departure the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, which for him represents a nontemporal concept. Crescas tries to show that eternal creation is a plausible doctrine even in the context of creation *ex nihilo* by exploring the notion of divine omnipotence. God's power is infinite in the sense that God's acts are not temporally limited. Inasmuch as God acts under no constraints, when God creates the world, He is able to create something that is infinite in duration, or eternal. It is in this sense that Crescas claims that the world is both eternal and created.[112]

Following the precedent of Gersonides who distinguished two types of instant, Crescas argues that an "initial instant" can serve as the absolute beginning of time without implying a prior temporal unit. He claims, "God created and brought forth the universe at a definite instant (*be-'et yedu'ah*)."[113] That is, that the universe

has a temporal beginning. This does not mean that he rejects the doctrine of eternity altogether. In III.4 he rejects Maimonides' contention that the world has a temporal beginning, claiming that it is based on the mistaken Aristotelian equation of time and motion. Because he has already abandoned this Aristotelian conception, Crescas is able to argue that the notion of "creation" of the world does not refer to a temporal beginning. Rather, for Crescas, the world is both eternal and created: Because time and motion are not interconnected, Crescas is able to adopt a position that on Aristotelian grounds appears to be self-contradictory.[114]

Crescas' response to this and similar arguments from circular motion is that "they are likewise inconclusive, being again based upon the analogy of a [finite] sensible body."[115] More specifically, he argues that motion has no absolute beginning, as it is infinitely divisible. The time of motion, as well, has no beginning. When two infinite lines (from a sphere) meet, they do not meet at an absolute first point or at an absolute first time. Therefore there is no infinite distance being passed through in finite time. So any distance traversed by a sphere in finite time, and on a finite axis, will be finite.[116] Crescas' response to the first argument highlights the point that infinite increase and decrease still do not change the nature of a finite magnitude. For example, "it is possible for a distance infinitely to decrease and still never completely to disappear . . . if in the case of decrease, there is always a certain residual distance which does not disappear, *a fortiori* in the case of increase it should be possible for a distance, though infinitely increased, always to remain limited."[117] Hence, returning to our original query, Crescas is able to explain the motion of the outermost celestial sphere on the grounds that it rotates in an infinite vacuum; the sphere is no longer conceived as the final limit or boundary of the space of the universe.

In an interesting gambit, Crescas uses Aristotle's arguments against an absolute beginning to motion (in *Physics* VI.5.23a 236aff) to uphold an infinite series of causation. Appropriating Aristotle's dictum that there can be no first part of motion, because every object that is moved must have already been moved, Crescas maintains, "it is not inconceivable, therefore, that the infinite line [in question] should meet the other line in a finite distance with a finite motion, and this may be accounted for by the fact that the extreme beginning of motion must take place in no-time."[118] In his parting company with generations of Aristotelians who had used the denial of an infinite series of causes to postulate the necessary existence of a prime move, Crescas therefore will have to resort to other arguments to postulate the existence of God.

Crescas' refutation of Aristotle's theory of infinity affects notions of time and number as well. To reject Aristotle's idea that every number is odd or even, and

hence finite, Crescas distinguishes what is in theory numerable from what [is] actually numbered, allowing him to postulate the notion of infinite number: Things that "have the capacity of being numbered but are not actually numbered (*asher mi-darkam she-yisapru 'aval 'einam sipurim be-foal*) . . . are not excluded from the possibility of being infinite."[119] To infinite numbers, ascription of even and odd is inapplicable.[120] What Crescas has in mind here is an infinite series of finite numbers, which has no end. With respect to the infinity of time, Crecas takes seriously the notion that the infinite is not traversable, claiming that just as a numerical series can be infinite, so too can the temporal series of causes be infinite. Again, turning Aristotle against his own principles, Crescas argues that inasmuch as it is not impossible for an infinite number of effects to emanate from one single cause, it is not inconceivable to postulate an infinite series of intermediate causes and effects within a causal series emanating from and coexisting with an uncaused eternal cause.[121] Replying to the obvious counter-argument encountered herein that an infinite series cannot be traversed and so our own existence is proof of a finite causal series, Crescas responds, "that which cannot arrive except by the precedence of what is infinite does actually arrive."[122] More specifically, Crescas maintains that in the case of things, which coexist in time, such as the infinite series of intermediate causes and effects, their nontraversibility must be proved and not simply assumed. Just as a causal series can be infinite, time as well can be conceived without a beginning.

In his work *Sefer ha-'Ikkarim* [*The Book of Principles*], Crescas' student Joseph Albo incorporates Maimonides' discussion of preexistent matter into his own examination of creation, which is couched in the context of developing a theory of time. Albo is one of the first Jewish philosophers to espouse the view that time is a phenomenon of the imagination, a motif introduced by Crescas and recurring in Spinoza. Albo's discussion of time occurs in the context of demonstrating that God is independent of time. For Albo, God's independence of time comprises both eternity (*ha-qadmut*) and perpetuity (*ha-nitz khiyut*) and is upheld as a basic principle:[123]

> The third dogma is that God is independent of time. This means that God existed before time, and will exist after time ceases, therefore his power is infinite. For everyone who is dependent upon time is necessarily limited in power, which ends with time. Since, therefore God is not dependent upon time, his power is infinite.[124]

By God's priority Albo means that nothing was prior to God, not even nonexistence; God has always existed "in the same way without change."[125] Similarly God's eternality means that nothing is posterior to God, not even time. For if time outlasted God either *a parte ante* or *a parte post*, then God would exist at one instant

of time and not at another; this, of course, would undermine God's necessary existence. These comments lead Albo to examine the nature of time and creation more closely. God's eternality holds, he claims:

> Even if by time we mean unmeasured duration (*ha-meshekh ha-bilti mesho'ar*) conceived only in thought, existing always, both before the creation of the world and after its cessation, but without the order apparent from the motion of the sphere, since the sphere was then neither in motion nor existent.[126]

Only measured time cannot exist without motion. Time itself, according to Albo, is not dependent on motion and even preexisted the world. This non-Aristotelian motif is developed more fully. In another context Albo compares the commandments to time inasmuch as both time and commandments are not actual existents (*bilti nimtza'im be-fo'al*).

> [Just as] time is not an actual existent, for the past is no longer here, the future is not yet, and the present is merely the now which binds the past to the future. The now itself is not real time (*zeman 'al derekh ha-'emet*), since it is not divisible, whereas time is divisible, pertaining as it does to continuous quantity (*ha-kamah ha-mitdabeq*). The now is related to time as the point is related to the line. Time is therefore not an actual existent, and yet it gives perfection of existence to all things existing in time.[127]

Albo then distinguishes between "plain time" and "the order of time" as follows.

> Our Rabbis are of the opinion that time in the abstract (*ha-zeman be-shilua'h*) is such a duration. Time measured or numbered through the motion of the sphere they call "order of times" (*seder zemanim*), not simply time (*zeman stam*). According to this there are two species of time, the one is numbered and measured by the motion of the sphere, to which are applicable the terms prior and posterior, equal and unequal. The other is not numbered or measured but is a duration (*hemshekh*) existing prior to the sphere, to which the words equal and unequal do not apply.[128]

Whereas plain time is neither numbered nor measured, the order of times is numbered and measured by the motion of the diurnal sphere. In contrast to ordered time, plain time is eternal duration. Albo then raises two perplexities pertaining to time. The first puzzle is whether time originates in time or not. The solution is that, although time has no origin and does not come to be in time, the "order of time" originates in time.[129] The second puzzle concerns the instant: "The now (*ha-'atah*), it is said, divides the past from the future. There is therefore a time before the first now, and hence time and the sphere are eternal."[130] Albo's answer, relying on his twofold notion of time, is that Aristotle's argument refers only to the "order of times" and not to "plain time": Plain time in which there is no motion "has not the elements prior and posterior, and it is not subject to measure because measure

cannot apply to time without motion. The terms prior and posterior apply to it [plain time] only figuratively and loosely."[131]

V. THEORIES OF SPACE, PLACE, CONTINUUM, AND THE VOID

Judaic and Greek Antecedents

We turn now to our final topic, namely the characterization of place and void in medieval Jewish philosophy. As in the case with time, classical Judaic texts do not offer much in the way of a characterization of place or space. Within early biblical and rabbinic texts, the name of God was often associated with spatial characteristics. Marmorstein has pointed to sixteen terms that refer to place, dimension, presence, or nearness; of these, the terms *maqom* and *Shekhinah* are most relevant to our study.[132] The term *maqom* occurs nearly 400 times in scripture, and in most of these contexts is used in a general, nonphilosophical sense. Not until the later rabbinic period, as in *Genesis Rabbah*, did it come to stand for the divine name, "the place" and become associated with the Divine presence.[133] Occasional use of the term *Shekhinah* can be found as well when discussing space. The notion of *Shekhinah*, used extensively in kabbalistic texts, refers to God's immanence in the world as a presence. It is used to characterize God's omnipresence, as reflected in the passage from *Genesis Rabbah* 8:10, "God is the place of the world, and the world is not His Place." The term, normally associated with *Sefer Bahir* and the *Zohar* and ascribed to the feminine principle of the *Sefirot*, appears as well in philosophical writings. Philosophers were generally careful to distinguish the *Shekhinah* from God to avoid anthropomorphizing the deity.

The term *maqom* appears already in Philo. Philo used the term *maqom* as an appellation for God, possibly as an abbreviation for *maqom qadosh*, the place of the *Shekhinah*.[134] In his commentary on Jacob's dream (in Genesis), Philo ascribes three meanings to "place:" the room filled by a body; the divine logos; and God himself who is called place inasmuch as He encompasses the entire universe.[135] Saadia, for example, identifies the *Shekhinah* with *kevod ha-Shem*, which functions as an intermediary between God and the world.[136] Halevi follows in the same trajectory, identifying the *Shekhinah* with *inyan ha-Elohi*.[137] These identifications do not, however, acquire an ontological significance.

The ontological complexities surrounding notions of space, place, and void are developed by Plato and Aristotle, as well as the Stoic philosophers. Plato in *Timaeus* develops his notion of the receptacle (*chora*) of qualities, as the space or place in which qualities come to be.[138] Plato introduces a third ingredient in the process of

becoming, which he terms the receptacle, the "nurse of all Becoming." Various examples are given to explain this third entity, which Plato designates as a "this." Plato suggests that when we try to speak, for example, of fire or water, these things "slip away and do not wait to be described as 'that' or 'this' or by any phrase that exhibits them as having permanent being." The receptacle is the only element that can be called "this" for its nature is permanent and unchanging, having no character or qualities of its own. The receptacle is then identified with space (*chora*) in the sense in which it always is (*aei on*). Whether *chora* preexists time is unclear in the *Timaeus*. Plato argues that being, *chora*, and becoming all existed "even before the Heaven came into being." Plato argues that the Demiurge creates the world not out of nothing, but out of a preexistent stuff: "when He took over all that was visible, seeing that it was not in a state of rest but in a state of discordant and disorderly motion, He brought it into order out of disorder." Plato thus associates place with matter, as that thing which, when endowed with qualities, yields an object: "fire, earth, water, and air are bodies; and all body has depth. Depth, moreover, must be bounded by surface; and every surface that is rectilinear is composed of triangles."[139] This *chora* is essentially shapeless (because it receives form).

Aristotle acknowledges that Plato is the only philosopher to have grappled seriously with the question of what a place is.[140] According to Aristotle, Plato's theory of place is unable to account for how entities change their place (locomotion); his own theory is intended to do that. He thus replaces Plato's notion of *chora* with his own notion of *topos*. Aristotle's discussions of space and place occur in a number of works, most notably in the *Categories*, *Metaphysics*, and *Physics*. In *Categories*, space is identified as "continuous quantity"; it is the sum total of all places occupied by bodies. Place (*topos*) is that part of space whose limits coincide with the limits of the occupying body. For Aristotle, places, like the other categories, are reflective of the way the world is and result from asking "where" questions.[141]

In Aristotle's *Physics* IV.1, space is identified with place (*topos*) and forms an integral part of Aristotle's theory of motion, which is defined as "change of place."[142] Aristotle develops a deductive theory of the characteristics of place, which must satisfy three conditions: First, place must surround that of which it is the place; second it must be equal to the thing surrounded by it; and third it must be separate from the thing it surrounds. In *Physics* IV.4. 212a 2-6 Aristotle argues that place is "the boundary of the containing body at which it is in contact with the contained body." The very fact that a body is contained implies that bodies have limits (*peras*). In fact Aristotle defines the limit of a body in terms of its extremity: "the first point beyond which it is not possible to find any part, and the first point within which every part is."[143] Anything whole and complete (i.e., body) has a limit; there are no

infinite bodies. Hence "the place of a thing is the innermost motionless boundary of what contains it."[144] Place is an accident of the body it defines. It is construed not as a tridimensional extension, but as a two-dimensional surface. The containing body must be everywhere in contact with the contained, and so cannot have gaps or voids. On the basis of this characterization, Aristotle proceeds in *Physics* IV.6 to reject the possibility of a vacuum, for in a theory that does not allow for a place not correlated to any body, there can be no "empty space" or void. Because a vacuum is homogeneous, there can be no distinct regions or places within it. Thus any body in a vacuum would move not at all or in all directions at once. This is absurd, Aristotle argues, rejecting the notion of vacuum.

One problem that immediately asserts itself has to do with the place and subsequent motion of the outermost celestial sphere. Aristotle had maintained in other contexts that the outermost celestial sphere could not be in a place, because body, place, void, or time did not exist beyond the limit of the world; yet, that this sphere moved was a vital piece of Aristotle's cosmology and astronomy.[145] How, then, could this outermost sphere move (i.e., change its place) with constant velocity if it was itself without place? Aristotle articulated the difficulty, noting that "the universe is not anywhere . . . for what is somewhere is itself something, and there must be alongside it some other thing wherein it is and contains it. Alongside the universe or the Whole there is nothing outside the universe, and for this reason all things are in the world; for the world, we may say, is the universe. Yet their place is not the same as the world."[146] Aristotle's own solution, that the sphere "somehow" contained itself, that the soul and the world are "in a way, in place, for all its parts are; for on the circle one part contains another,"[147] proved most unsatisfactory to his followers. Either, they maintained, Aristotle's theory of place had to be modified or the dogma of the motion of the outermost sphere had to be abandoned. [148]

John Philoponus in particular criticized Aristotle's theory of place, arguing that the Aristotelian account of place is inconsistent with other features of his system. Most notably, he argues as follows: Either the universe itself has a place, or it does not. If it does, then Aristotle's definition is wrong, in that there is nothing between the universe and that which contains it. If not, then Aristotle is still wrong because there exists something not in a place. Philoponus concludes that place is the space occupied by a body. We thus see that the Peripatetic theory of place rests on two propositions: the first that the place of a body must contain the contained body; and the second that the place of a body must be motionless. As Aristotle's medieval critics pointed out, these two propositions are mutually exclusive when applied to the ultimate celestial sphere. It cannot have a place because nothing can contain it, and even if it were to have a place, as it were, it

would not be capable of motion. This question regarding the "place of the Heavens" was discussed by Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius and was picked up by Averroes in his *Intermediate Commentary on the Physics*. Averroes' commentary generated numerous Jewish supercommentaries on the topic, including those of Narboni and Gersonides.[149]

Both Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of space continued to assert themselves during the Hellenistic period. In Stoic cosmology, the notion of *topos* developed an association with the universe itself. Stoic pantheism led to an identification of the universe with God through the principle of active *pneuma*; this active *pneuma*, a mixture of fire and air, was seen to endow the material universe with coherence. It eventually became transformed into an abstract and incorporeal spirit. Freudenthal has argued that, for the Stoics, the *pneuma* represents the godhead that can direct aspects of the world because it is immanent within the cosmos – the *pneuma* permeates all matter and substance.[150] Furthermore, Plotinus in *Enneads* II.4 distinguished between physical space, which corresponds to *chora*, and intelligible space. The former represents the receptacle for matter, whereas the latter is the "very source of soul and intellect."[151] Finally, the question of the existence of the void interested Islamic *Mutakallimūn* as well. *Kalām* philosophers were interested in the straightforward question: Is it possible for two atoms to be separated without a third atom between them? Various arguments, derived from the Peripatetic tradition, were generated both for and against the existence of voids.[152] These refinements all influence subsequent medieval Jewish discussions.

Infinite Divisibility of Substance, Place, and Matter: Neoplatonic Considerations

When we turn to Isaac Israeli (ca. 855–955), we find operative many of these cosmological ingredients adduced previously, superimposed onto an emanation scheme derived ultimately from Plotinus. Of Israeli's many surviving works, the *Book of Definitions*, and the *Book of Substances* comprise the main sources of Israeli's philosophical ideas. His best-known work, the *Book of Definitions*, deals with definitions of philosophical, logical, and other terms.[153] The *Book of Substances* has survived only in incomplete fragments of the original Arabic.[154] Finally, the *Chapter on the Elements* (the *Mantua Text*) exists only in manuscript, at Mantua.[155] From this text we learn that Israeli based his view of creation and the series of emanations on an earlier text known as *Ibn Hasdai's Neoplatonist*.[156]

The doctrine of atomism is clearly expressed in Israeli's *Book on the Elements*. In this work Israeli is concerned to define the term "element," out of which the sublunar world is composed. In the context of this discussion he combats the atomistic theory of both the Mutazilites and of Democritus and attempts to prove

that a line is not composed of points. Israeli is not a systematic thinker, and he does not develop his key concepts; however, from fragments scattered throughout his works, we can pull together a number of definitions and concepts, which pertain to his view of infinite divisibility. Israeli introduces the discussion in the context of discussing Galen's definition of the term "element." According to Israeli, by "element" Galen means "the minimum part of a thing,"[157] echoing Aristotle's use of the term. He then introduces a fictitious interlocutor who suggests that by "part" he means those parts into which a body is divided naturally and of which it is composed, just as a body is divided into surfaces and surfaces into lines and lines into points.

Israeli rejects the mathematization of atoms by arguing that the union of two points can be conceived in two ways: Either the totality of the one unites with the totality of the other, or a part of one comes in touch with a part of the other. [158] In the first case, there is no distance between the two, and so the result would be a point; in the second case, a contradiction results – a partial union of atoms that are *ex hypothesi* spaceless and devoid of parts. In either case, mathematical points cannot produce an extended body.[159] Israeli therefore concludes that inasmuch as bodies cannot be composed of atoms that are both indivisible and unextended, neither can they be composed of atoms that are indivisible and extended; it is thus not appropriate to postulate the existence of indivisible magnitudes. Furthermore, in the *Mantua* text, Israeli notes, reflecting Plotinus' *Enneads* III.7.11, that in the sphere itself there exists neither place nor time. None of the simple substances require place or time, and they are not "in time or place but they are the place for time and place."[160] Israeli reflects the sentiment expressed in pseudo-Empedocles that "the soul is the place of the world, and not the world its place."[161]

Echoes of Israeli's Neoplatonic cosmology can be found in Ibn Gabirol's *Meqor Ḥayyim* as well. In this work, there exists a hierarchy of different kinds of place, some spiritual and others physical. God represents the infinite place (space), whereas simple corporeal place occupies the lowest rung of the hierarchy. In *Meqor Ḥayyim* II.14, Ibn Gabirol defines space as "the contact between two bodies."[162] Two types of place are then distinguished: corporeal and spiritual *maqom* (*yesh shnei minei maqom: gufani ve'ruḥani*). In III.32 Ibn Gabirol argues that whether an entity occupies place depends on the ontological make-up of its foundation. Hence whatever is simple and spiritual does not occupy place, whereas corporeal entities do occupy place. Ibn Gabirol further notes that although simple substance can function as a "spiritual place" for spiritual forms, the same does not hold of corporeal forms: "Of whatever functions as corporeal place for something, it is not possible that many things can inhere in it simultaneously."[163]

Ibn Gabirol raises the issue of the infinite divisibility of matter and substance in treatise two of *Meqor Ḥayyim*, in the context of working out his ontologies of matter and form. Although he does not mention Zeno by name, his analysis pertains to the ultimate divisibility of the parts of substance, reflecting issues raised by Zeno. Having maintained that each composite of substance is composed of that of which it was put together, and because the parts of the quantity of the substance in question are all similar, Ibn Gabirol asks whether the ultimate constituents of reality are divisible or indivisible.[164] In posing this question, Ibn Gabirol reflects the concern of the *Mutakallimūn* who had argued for the ultimate indivisibility of matter. Ibn Gabirol presents a number of arguments designed to support the divisibility of parts and concludes, "the part in question between the parts of the quantity of the world is divisible, and it is clear to me that it is divided into substance and accident."[165] In response to his disciple who presents an argument in favor of infinite divisibility, Ibn Gabirol responds by distinguishing between two types of divisibility, arguing that we may not be able to detect divisible parts beyond our senses but nevertheless they do exist.[166]

Ibn Gabirol concludes that "the smallest part in question is not non-divisible, for we cannot find an indivisible part; and it is clear as well that the part in question between the parts of the quantity of the substance of the world is composed of substance and accident."[167] In this discussion, Ibn Gabirol has posited the infinite divisibility of substance on the grounds that there is quantity only where there is substance. "I concede now in a clear and certain manner the continuity of the totality of the substance with the totality of quantity."[168] Ibn Gabirol's contention is that extension and indivisibility pertain to two different kinds of being: The former is associated with matter and the latter with spirit. It is impossible to reduce the one to the other. Hence matter cannot be composed of indivisible, spaceless atoms (*minimae partes*).[169]

Jewish Aristotelian Conceptions of Place and Void

A second motif within Jewish medieval thought reflects variations on the Aristotelian conceptions of place adduced previously. Until the fourteenth century, most Jewish philosophers adopted pieces of the Aristotelian notion of place, focusing primarily on the characteristic of contiguity. Four tenets of Aristotle's system were particularly influential: that place (*topos*) is the innermost surface of a surrounding body; that no space or void exists; that outside the heavens nothing exists; and that the first heaven that moves is the greatest divinity.

Philo refers in several places to Aristotle's definition of place as "the boundary of the containing body," and with Aristotle rejects the notion of a void outside the

world.[170] For Philo the void reflects simply empty space, where nothing corporeal exists. He follows the views of both Plato and Aristotle, arguing that there is no actual void because the cosmos occupies the whole of reality. The void forms a kind of substrate for the whole of physical reality.[171] Philo reflects approvingly Plato's view that the receptacle was created by the Demiurge, claiming that God "created space (*chora*) and place (*topos*) simultaneously with bodies."[172]

Turning to Saadia Gaon, we find in *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* the ingredients of an Aristotelian conception of place, albeit somewhat garbled: "The true essence of place (*maqom*) is not [what our opponent] thinks it is, but simply the meeting of two contiguous bodies the place of whose contact is called *maqom*; In fact each one of them becomes the *maqom* of the other."[173] Were there no earth, or bodies, "it would be idle to speak of *maqom* in any sense."[174] A similar definition is given in II.11, in the context of elucidating the category of quality as it pertains to God. Reiterating the definition of space, Saadia states that only material objects occupy space: "space is required only by a material object which occupies the place of the object that it meets and comes in contact with, so that each one of the two contiguous objects forms the place of the other."[175] In this characterization, Saadia has picked up on certain Aristotelian elements of place, but with an interesting twist. According to Saadia, either contiguous body can be construed as the "place" of the other.

Saadia then approaches the issue of God's omnipresence. How is it possible, he asks, for God to be everywhere, without His being "everywhere" introducing multiplicity into God's nature? Saadia's answer reiterates that inasmuch as God existed "before there was any such thing as space," the existence of many places does not introduce multiplicity in God.[176] Neither the existence of space, nor corporeal bodies in space, removes from God the ability to be everywhere. It is inconceivable, says Saadia, that God should occupy place, because God is not only the Creator of all spaces (*kol hameqomot*), but God also existed at a time when there was no such thing as place.[177] A related discussion occurs in Saadia's *Sefer Yetzirah* commentary. In this work we find numerous references to place, dimension, distance, and the relevance of these terms to God. God encompasses and dwells in all things, and He surrounds the universe entirely. Although God is "seated at the world's summit," this does not mean that God "is in one place rather than another, but He is in every place."[178] Saadia tries to explain how phrases in scripture that appear to attribute material manifestations ought to be interpreted. His view is that these accounts describe real physical manifestations in which an entity distinct from God is perceived; it is this entity that is meant by the terms *Kevod* (Divine Glory), *Shekhinah* (Divine Presence), or *Ruaḥ ha-Qodesh* (Holy Spirit). Saadia identifies this

entity with what he names the "second subtle air." Freudenthal has suggested that Saadia's conception of "second air" can be traced back to Stoic physics and its use of "*pneuma*." Both *pneuma* and second air are all-pervading ontologically in that both function as the cause of cohesion of hard substances.[179]

Maimonides' discussions of place, reflecting Aristotelian influence, occur in two contexts: in his description and rejection of *Kalām* ontology, and in his discussion of anthropomorphic terms applied to God. In chapters eight to twenty-seven of *Guide I*, Maimonides turns to those anthropomorphic expressions having to do with place, space, and position. He first examines the general notion of place, and then turns to the notion of the throne which God is said to occupy. Finally, he turns to those terms often applied to the deity in scripture, such as ascend, descend, sit, stand, approach, fill a place, come in, go out, return, walk, or rest. *Guide* I.8 says that originally the term *maqom* was given the meaning of "particular and general place," by which he means a particular spot (place) and space in general. Language was subsequently expanded to include in the meaning of the term an individual's "rank and situation." With respect to God, the term *maqom* is used to express not God's physical location, but rather God's rank. This point is elucidated in *Guide* I.9 in the context of the term "throne" (*kisse*). Often scripture alludes to God's throne, but how can God be said to occupy a place, upon a throne? Maimonides points out that inasmuch as God is not corporeal, and does not "have" a body, we cannot speak of God's being anywhere.

In *Guide* I.73 proposition two, Maimonides summarizes the *Kalām* argument in favor of the vacuum. This premise postulates the existence of a vacuum and states that, according to the *Mutakallimūn*, "vacuum exists and that it is a certain space or spaces in which there is nothing at all, being accordingly empty of all bodies, devoid of all substances."[180] The unstated *Kalām* argument, already intimated in Aristotle, is that for atoms to be individuated one from the other, there must be space between them, which is "atom-less," or void of body. To account for motion, the void must therefore exist. From these propositions, the *Kalām* atomists deduce a number of consequences that deny the possibility of motion and [hark back] to Zeno's paradoxes of motion. The first *Kalām* consequence postulates that motion is illusory, asserting that because what we call motion is nothing more than the passage of one atom from one void to another, such passages all occur at the same rate. What accounts for apparent differences in speed is the number of rest units that must be traversed. Maimonides rejects the discontinuity of space and gives the counterexample of a millstone whose complete revolution demonstrates that the circumference travels more quickly than the inner circle at the center, and hence that body is in continuous motion. In this example, two concentric circles

with different radii move in such a way that each of them rolls along a straight line.[181]

When Gersonides turns to issues pertaining to space and the continuum, he does so primarily against the backdrop of Aristotelian arguments. Gersonides argues, "when we posit a body actually divided at every place where it can be divided, we have postulated as existent something that is impossible, for it cannot be divided except into that which is [capable] of [further] division."[182] In other words, Gersonides is distinguishing here between two senses of infinite divisibility: the claim that a continuum is divisible into parts that are themselves further divisible, and the claim that a continuum is actually divisible into indivisible parts. The main thrust of Gersonides' discussion is to distinguish between infinite and endless division: A continuum is not actually infinitely divisible, but rather endlessly, or potentially, divisible. The first refers to a complete divided state, whereas the second refers to the process itself of endlessly dividing, a process that is not capable of being completed.[183]

Gersonides' distinction between infinite and endless division is brought out even more strikingly in his discussion of number. This discussion occurs in two contexts. In *Wars of the Lord* VI and III Gersonides has characterized matter in terms of continuity (*hitdabbequt*), that is, that by virtue of which matter can be infinitely divided and its parts still retain their continuity.[184] Suppose one were to argue that inasmuch as number is augmentable, so too is quantity augmentable, or infinite. Gersonides' response is that the endlessness we find in number is not an endlessness of quantity, but rather of the *process* of division and augmentation. That is, Gersonides distinguishes between quantity itself and the act of increase/diminution, which is based on quantity. Although the act of augmenting is never exhausted, quantity itself remains finite.[185]

Fourteenth-Century Anti-Aristotelian Critiques: Crescas on Space and Vacuum

In the fourteenth century, in part as a result of the Condemnations of 1277, Christian scholastics (e.g., Thomas Bradwardine, Jean Buridan) began to question the basic premises of Aristotelian physics and suggest non-Aristotelian alternatives. One of the most pervasive results of the Condemnations of 1277 was that it encouraged alternatives to Aristotelian natural philosophy.[186] More specifically, the condemned propositions directly affected theories of place, the void, and plurality of worlds, thus giving way to new modes of thinking that helped usher in the new science. We have seen that, according to Aristotle, the ultimate sphere has no movement other than that of rotation, its fixed center belonging to the absolutely immobile body earth. This view threatened scholastic notions of omnipotence; that is, it suggested

that not even God was able to displace the immobile center of the universe. The Condemnations of 1277 thus targeted those propositions that imputed to God any limits. The two propositions most important to this new way of thinking were proposition 34 "*Quod prima causa non posset plures mundos facere,*" and proposition 49 *"Quod Deus non possit movere celum motu recto. Et ratio est, quia tunc relinqueret vacuum."*[187] As Murdoch and others have argued, these two propositions represented the foundation of the whole edifice of Aristotelian physics. Their being declared anathema implicitly demanded the creation of a new physics that would be acceptable to Christian reason.[188]

In exploring the consequences of these condemnations, scholastic philosophers were encouraged to develop concepts contrary to Aristotelian physics and cosmology. With respect to the topic of place/space, philosophers became increasingly interested in the properties of the vacuum, for example, the idea of a completely empty space. Proposition 49 led to speculation about the existence of multiple universes. Prior to the condemnations, scholastic philosophers considered the impossibility of multiple worlds against the backdrop of Aristotelian arguments that outside the world there cannot be any place because there are no bodies, and there cannot be a void, because a void is a place where there could be a body where there is presently no body.[189] Inasmuch as these arguments were linked to the issue of God's omnipotence as well, it became increasingly popular to argue that God's creative omnipotence allowed for the creation of multiple worlds. For example, God was said to create multiple worlds, each with its own center. On the supposition that God did make other worlds, it was argued that empty space would intervene between them. So if God could create a vacuum between worlds, certainly God could create vacua within the world.[190]

Against the backdrop of these scholastic condemnations, Crescas too sought to demolish the Aristotelian natural philosophy, albeit for theological rather than purely naturalistic reasons. In the process of upholding the basic dogmas of Judaism, Crescas subjects Aristotle's physics and metaphysics to a trenchant critique. His rejection of Aristotle's theories of place and the infinite forms part of an extended attempt to weaken Aristotle's hold on Jewish philosophy. Harvey suggests that Crescas' work was "perhaps connected in some way with the pioneering work in natural science being conducted at the University of Paris."[191] Even in the absence of definitive evidence of causal interaction between Crescas and the scholastics, at the very least, it is clear that Crescas is embroiled in precisely the same set of scientific issues that occupied scholastic philosophers after the Condemnations of 1277.

One important implication of Crescas' alternative conception of place and infinity has to do with his postulating the existence of the vacuum. According to Crescas,

place is prior to bodies: In contradistinction to Aristotle's conception of place, space for Crescas is not a mere relationship of bodies but is the "interval between the limits of that which surrounds."[192] Space is construed by Crescas as an infinite continuum ready to receive matter. Because this place or extension of bodies is identified with space, there is no contradiction in postulating the existence of space not-filled with body, that is, the vacuum.[193] Crescas, in fact, assumes that place is identical with the void, on the grounds that "place must be equal to the whole of its occupant as well as to [the sum of] its parts."[194] Harvey has characterized four parallels between Crescas' concepts of space and time. First, space and time are both defined as "continuous quantity" as opposed to discrete quantity. Second, both are defined as separate from physical objects (*nibdal mi-muḥashot*); both would continue to exist even if there were no physical objects in the universe. Third, both are supposed infinite, as reflected in the description of space as an "infinite magnitude" (*godel bilti ba'al takhlit*); and finally, both the place and time of a given thing are conceived as intervals.[195]

Crescas' theory of space has important ramifications with respect to his conception of the infinite as well. To postulate the infinity of space, time, and number, Crescas must refute Aristotle's theory of the infinite. Crescas' general contention is that Aristotle's arguments are all victim to a common fallacy in that they assume that one can argue against the existence of the infinite from the analogy of the finite. Crescas, however, will want to maintain that the assumptions one makes about the finite are inapplicable to the infinite – the infinite and finite are qualitatively different and cannot be compared.[196]

Of the many arguments adduced against the infinite, several have relevance to our topic of infinite divisibility. Crescas' critique in *Light of the Lord* (*'Or ha-Shem*) centers on the twenty-six Aristotelian propositions adduced by Maimonides in the *Guide*. The first three propositions deal with the infinite and reiterate the Aristotelian dicta that an infinite magnitude is impossible, that the coexistence of an infinite number of magnitudes is impossible, and that an infinite series of causes and effects is impossible.[197] To deny the existence of infinite magnitudes, Aristotle advanced arguments to show the impossibility of incorporeal infinite magnitudes, of corporeal infinite magnitudes, of the rectilinear or circular motion of infinite bodies, and the existence of an actual infinite. Crescas immediately singles out Aristotle's denial of the vacuum as the underlying basis for his contention that incorporeal infinite magnitudes cannot exist. Aristotle had argued that motion is a function of two forces, medium and motive force. The rarer the medium, the quicker the motion. So, if there were a medium of infinitely rare density, one would expect that the body in question would move in an infinitesimal time. Because a

vacuum has no density, it would then follow that motion in a vacuum would happen in no time. This scenario, according to Aristotle, is absurd. Inasmuch as the distance moved is divisible, and a moving body must pass from one point to another, it follows that motion must take time.[198] Crescas' response to Aristotle is that every moving body has its own fundamental velocity: "Even by eliminating the receptacle there will still remain an original time of motion."[199] And so a body moving in a vacuum will therefore move according to its own fundamental velocity.

Another argument has to do with the interpenetrability of bodies. Aristotle had argued that filling immaterial infinite magnitude by an extended body would violate the impenetrability of bodies. For Crescas, however, matter alone does not account for impenetrability, but matter and dimensionality are together sufficient.[200] Extended space and void are not two kinds of space, but one – the former is mixed with matter whereas the latter is pure and hence invisible. The vacuum exists therefore and is not a physical or metaphysical contradiction. That the vacuum is infinite is presented in the following argument. Assume that an incorporeal magnitude is infinite by nature. It is also simple and homogeneous. An infinite extension, according to Aristotle, is divisible. If this infinite incorporeal magnitude is divisible, its parts are then infinite, which would imply that an infinite is composed of infinites. To avoid this difficulty, Crescas utilizes the analogy of a mathematical line.

> Examination of the argument which he has framed to prove the impossibility of an incorporeal infinite magnitude. We say that the argument is fallacious and a begging of the question. For he who assumes the existence of an incorporeal magnitude likewise affirms the existence of an incorporeal quantity. By the same token, it does not follow that the definition of the infinite would have to be applicable to all its parts, just as such reasoning does not follow in the case of mathematical line. Nor would there have to be any composition in it except of its own parts.[201]

In this analogy Crescas is making a distinction between two types of divisibility: that which comprises composition and that which does not. A syllable, for example, is divisible into letters and composed of letters, whereas a mathematical line is divisible into linear parts but not composed of these parts. In the latter case the linear parts are bounded by points, and so if the line were composed of parts, it would be composed of points. We know (from Euclid) that a line is not composed of points, and so Crescas is able to conclude that, when a thing is continuous and homogeneous, it is divisible into parts but not composed of parts. Then Crescas applies this analogy to the vacuum: Like the line, the vacuum is divisible into

infinite parts but not composed of them, and so the infinite has no composition "except of parts of its own self."[202]

The infinity of the vacuum is reinforced by additional arguments having to do with the limits of infinity. Altabrizi, for example, offered what Crescas calls "the argument from application" (*mofet ha-devequt*), which is stated as follows.

> Suppose we have a line infinite in only one direction. To this line we apply an infinite line [which is likewise infinite in only one direction], having the finite end of the second line fall on some point near the finite end of the first line. It would then follow that one infinite line would be greater than the other. But this is impossible, for it is well known that one infinite cannot be greater than another.[203]

Crescas' reply is that terms like "greater than" and "smaller than" do not apply to infinite magnitudes.[204] This point is reinforced with respect to time and number as well. When we say that time and number are infinite, we understand that terms such as "many" and "few," "large" and "small," and "equal" and "unequal" are simply not applicable. To suggest that one infinite is larger or smaller than another infinite is to commit a category error not unlike that described by Maimonides in his theory of divine predication.[205]

Spinoza on Time, Space, and Duration

Inasmuch as Spinoza's work on time and duration reflects the culmination of the medieval Jewish tradition traced in this study, this chapter concludes with a brief examination of these notions in the *Ethics*. In the case of Spinoza, the notions of time, space, and the vacuum underlie his monistic ontology and help to ground his ultimate identification of God and nature. The three temporal concepts duration (*duratio*), time (*tempus*), and eternity (*aeternitas*) are critical to his monism. Defining duration as the "indefinite continuation of existing,"[206] Spinoza claims that anything that endures must minimally exist. Time is the manner in which duration is made determinate; it is the duration of a thing less abstractly conceived. When temporality is added to an enduring entity, its existence is delimited temporally. Both duration and time apply only to *natura naturata*, the world mediated, whereas eternity pertains to the domain of *natura naturans*. In the *Appendix* to his commentary on Descartes' *Principles,* Spinoza clarifies issues pertaining to creation that relate to duration. Spinoza rejects the locution creation *ex nihilo* on the grounds that the *nihilo* itself postulates a something that is real.[207] Further, he denies that time or duration pre-exist creation, but rather "these latter have begun with things." Because time is the measure of duration, or a mode of thinking, it presupposes the existence of particular thinking individuals; furthermore, Spinoza states, "duration

ceases when created things cease to be, and begins when created things begin to exist."[208]

When Spinoza turns to the issue of infinite divisibility, he does so against a battery of Aristotelian arguments that have been mediated by the scholastics and reformulated by Descartes. Against both Aristotle and Descartes, Spinoza will want to argue for both the infinity and indivisibility of substance. His analysis of the indivisibility of substance is developed in *Ethics* I proposition thirteen: "A substance which is absolutely infinite is indivisible (*substantia absolute infinita est indivisibilis*)."[209] How does the indivisibility of substance accord with its extension? In the scholium to proposition 15 Spinoza offers a set of arguments supporting the indivisibility of extended substance. In response to his predecessors, Spinoza's general reaction is that these arguments are all based on the erroneous assumption that an infinite quantity is measurable. Spinoza's own contention is that infinite quantity, and hence substance, is not measurable. In support of this contention Spinoza draws on several additional analogies geometrical in nature.[210]

Spinoza finally brings in the example of a vacuum to show that substance must be indivisible. Spinoza clearly believes, although he does not argue the case here, that "there is no vacuum in nature."[211] If there were a vacuum in nature, then one piece of the continuum could be annihilated without affecting the remainder. According to Spinoza the parts of substance are indistinguishable, for its parts are "all so fitted together" that one part cannot remain in its condition without the other.[212]

Almost as an aside, Spinoza mentions one of his most interesting metaphysical points. Even if, he says, his reply to the original objectors were insufficient, "I do not know why [divisibility] would be unworthy of the divine nature . . . so it cannot be said in any way that God is acted on by another, or that extended substance is unworthy of the divine nature, even if it is supposed to be divisible, so long as it is granted to be eternal and infinite."[213] This apparently throw-away comment can only be meant as an entree to the topic of modes, which follows in proposition 16 and opens the door for Spinoza to argue that substance can be either divisible or indivisible so long as it is infinite.

The infinity of substance is characterized further in Letter 12 to Meijer, what has come to be known as Spinoza's *Letter on the Infinite.* In this letter Spinoza attempts to clarify several points concerning his characterization of substance, infinity, and divisibility. Spinoza distinguishes six cases of the infinite, which are contained in three pairs.[214] Of these, some kinds of infinite are divisible whereas others are not. Spinoza argues that we tend to conceive substance either "abstractly or superficially as we imagine it, or as substance, which is done by the intellect alone."[215] It is

only from the perspective of the imagination that substance appears to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts.[216]

The imagination is brought in to talk about perception of time and number as well. Time and measure, for example, arise from the way we imagine quantity abstracted from substance: "Measure, Time and Number are nothing but Modes of thinking, or rather, of imagining."[217] Construed as aids to the imagination, measure, time, and number, which are discrete measurable quantities, have no status as real things (*entia realia*) existing outside the intellect (*extra intellectum*).[218] Furthermore, many of the mathematical notions are not considered by Spinoza as *entia realia* but as *entia rationis*, or even as *entia imaginationis*. The implications of such a construal are revealed in the example of somebody who, conceiving duration abstractly and, conflating it with time, gets confused and does not understand how an hour can pass.

> When someone has conceived duration abstractly, and by confusing it with Time begun to divide it into parts, he will never be able to understand, for example, how an hour can pass. For if an hour is to pass, it will be necessary for half of it to pass first, and then half of the remainder, and then half of the remainder of this. So if you subtract half from the remainder in this way, to infinity, you will never reach the end of the hour.[219]

This example, Spinoza says, is "the same as composing Number merely by adding noughts."[220] On these grounds Spinoza concludes that "neither Number, nor Measure, nor Time (since they are only aids of the imagination) can be infinite."[221] On this basis, modes turn out to be infinitely divisible and hence continuous. Interestingly enough, Spinoza uses this last point to recall an argument of Crescas', which involved the denial of an actual infinite.[222] Giving a mathematical example to demonstrate that there can be an actual infinite, Spinoza stands in marked contrast to the Aristotelians who denied such a case.[223] Summarizing his discussion, Spinoza offers three meanings to the term infinite: Some things are "infinite by their nature and cannot in any way be conceived to be finite." Others are infinite "by the force of the cause in which they inhere, though when they are conceived abstractly they can be divided into parts and regarded as finite." Others, finally, are called infinite or indefinite because "they cannot be equated with any number, though they can be conceived to be greater or lesser."[224]

VI. CONCLUSION

The interrelationship among time, cosmology, and creation in medieval Jewish philosophy is exceedingly complex, particularly in light of existing theological

constraints. Although the early biblical and rabbinic works did not contain an ontology of time or place, the theological assumptions and constraints underlying these works reverberated throughout the medieval Jewish literature. Whereas in some cases these theological constraints were challenged, as reflected in the works of Maimonides and Gersonides, in other cases, as in the case of Spinoza, these constraints were rejected altogether. Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the problem of creation continued to occupy philosophers and theologians, both Jewish and scholastic. Maimonides had set the parameters for the discussion by arguing in *Guide* II.13-25 that inasmuch as Aristotle's arguments for the eternity of the world do not constitute demonstrative proofs for the eternity thesis, *ex nihilo* creation is the only plausible alternative. Maimonides found his critics in Gersonides, Crescas, Albalag, and Narboni, among others, all of whom subjected his theory of time and creation to critical examination. Among the scholastics, Thomas Aquinas cited Maimonides' discussion of creation with approval and used it as a basis for arguing that the creation of the world cannot be posited demonstratively.[225] By the 1270s numerous scholastic treatises appeared supporting the eternity thesis; as mentioned earlier, this proliferation was in part responsible for the Condemnations of 1277. Of the 219 propositions condemned by Bishop Tempier, for example, about thirty propositions have to do with the eternity of the soul, of the intelligences, of the heavens, and of matter, in addition to the eternity of the world. Within the shadow of the scholastic condemnations, Jewish views of place, time, and the void underwent transformation as well, as evidenced in the works of Crescas.

NOTES

1 For an introductory survey to the vast primary and secondary literature dealing with issues connected with God's omniscience, the following works should be consulted: Baudry 1950; Kenny 1979; Normore 1982; Rudavsky 1985; Sorabji 1980; Stein 1882.
2 Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 9. 30–32.
3 Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 9. 23a.
4 *Guide of the Perplexed* (henceforth *Guide*) III. 20, Maimonides 1963, p. 480.
5 *Guide* III. 20, Maimonides 1963, p. 481.
6 Ibid.
7 *Guide* III. 20, Maimonides 1963, p. 482.
8 *Sefer ha-'Emunah ha-Ramah* (*The Exalted Faith*), Ibn Daud 1852. For a recent study of this work, see Fontaine 1990.
9 *Sefer ha-'Emunah ha-Ramah,* II.6, Ibn Daud 1852, p. 96.
10 *Sefer ha-'Emunah ha-Ramah* II.6, Ibn Daud 1852 p. 96. See Fontaine 1990, pp. 13–4 for a discussion of this position.
11 For discussion of Gersonides' theory of divine omniscience, see Manekin 2003; Rudavsky 1983; Samuelson 1972; Sirat 1969; Touati 1973.
12 *Wars* III.2, Gersonides 1987, pp. 92–3.

13 *Wars* III.4, Gersonides 1987, p. 116.
14 *Wars* III.4, Gersonides 1987, p. 118. See Abraham ibn Daud who, in *Sefer ha-'Emunah ha-Ramah* (Ibn Daud 1852, p. 96), develops a similar view according to which God's lack of knowledge of future contingents is not a deficiency.
15 *'Or ha-Shem* II. Princ 1, chap. 2, Crescas 1990, p. 29a.
16 *'Or ha-Shem* II.1.4, Crescas 1990, p. 33a.
17 Feldman 1980; *'Or ha-Shem* Bk II, princ. 1, chap. 4, p. 33a.
18 Crescas, *'Or ha-Shem* II.1.4, p. 33a (in W. Harvey 1998b, p. 251).
19 *'Or ha-Shem* II.5.3 Crescas 1990, p. 49a.
20 For a survey of the vast literature associated with Zeno's paradoxes, see Barnes 1982; Kretzmann 1982b; Salmon 1970; Sorabji 1983.
21 Jenni 1962, p. 643.
22 Barr 1962, pp. 117–8.
23 Stadelman 1970, note 5, pp. 1–3, 39.
24 See S. Stern 2003, p. 133.
25 See for example Mishnah 1:1 9b.
26 See Higgins 1989, pp. 232ff.
27 Robbins 1997, p. 73.
28 S. Stern 1996, p. 104.
29 S. Stern 2003, p. 137.
30 For a succinct overview of theories of time in Greek philosophy, see Sorabji 1983.
31 See Lloyd, 1976, p. 138.
32 Plato, *Timaeus*, 38b. Although in general I follow the translation in Cornford, I have replaced his term "ever-existent" with the term "everlasting" for the Greek word *aidios.*
33 See for example, "Concerning the whole Heaven or World . . . it has come to be" (28b); "at the same time that he ordered the Heaven, he made . . . Time" (37d); "For there were no days and nights, months and years, before the Heaven came into being; but he planned that they should now come to be at the same time that the Heaven was framed" (37e); "In virtue, then, of this plan and intent of the god for the birth of Time, in order that Time might be brought into being . . . " (38c); "Now so far, up to the birth of Time" (39e).
34 See for example Plato, *Timaeus*, 39e3; 38e3–5; 34b-c; 53a; 69b.
35 See Whitrow 1988, chap. 1 for further details.
36 See Aristotle, *De Caelo* 281b 33.
37 Aristotle, *De Caelo* 283a 30.
38 Aristotle, *Physics* VIII.1 251bff.
39 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII.6 1071bff.
40 See Aristotle, *De Caelo* I.9 279a 15ff.:
41 Aristotle, *Physics* IV.10 217b32.
42 Aristotle, *Physics* IV.11 219b1–2. Annas points to the anti-Platonist thrust of this definition.
43 Aristotle, *Physics* IV.12 220b15; *Physics* IV.12 220b15.
44 Aristotle, *Physics* IV.12 221b8.
45 See Gerson 1994, p. 116.
46 Plotinus, *Enneads* III.7.11, p. 263.
47 Plotinus, *Enneads* III.7.3, p. 255.
48 Plotinus, *Enneads* III.7.3, p. 255.
49 See Lloyd 1976, p. 143.
50 Plotinus, *Enneads* III.7.11 p. 262.

51 Ibid.
52 H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 133.
53 Runia 1986, p. 23.
54 Philo 2001, p. 49.
55 See Sorabji 1983, p. 250 for discussion of the "idleness" argument.
56 Philo 2001, p 49.
57 See Sorabji 1983, p 209 for a discussion of the various scholarly views on this issue.
58 *Unchangeableness of God* 5:30, Philo 1960d, p. 25.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid. 5:32, p. 27.
61 *Allegorical Interpretation* I:2, Philo 1960a, p. 149.
62 Ibid.
63 This Stoic definition is explicitly stated in Philo's *Eternity of the World* 4:4: "and time, they [the Stoics] say, is what measures its movement."
64 Philo 2001, p. 53.
65 Philo 2001, p. 156.
66 Philo 2001, p. 60.
67 Ibid., p. 61.
68 *Eternity of the World* 52-54, Philo, 1960c, p. 221.
69 For extensive analysis of Philo's theory of time, see Runia 1986, p. 218ff.
70 For a detailed discussion of the history and transmission of these texts, see H. Davidson 1987, pp. 86ff; Sorabji 1983, pp. 197ff. Some of Philoponus' relevant texts can be found in Philoponus 1987.
71 For a history of this transmission see H. Davidson 1987, pp. 86–116. Davidson notes at least thirteen medieval discussions that draw on Philoponus' position that the infinite cannot be traversed.
72 Philoponus 1987, p. 144.
73 Philoponus 1987, p. 145. See H. Davidson 1987, p. 88. Philoponus expands this argument, claiming, "if on the one hand the ascent (*anodos*) took place *ad infinitum*, complete things would not precede the incomplete, and the actual not the potential; but if on the other hand [the motions] are limited [in number], then the first [motion] which evidently exists together with the universe, has made a beginning which starts from something actual and complete for the subsequent motions." Philoponus 1987, p. 145.
74 Philoponus 1987, p. 146.
75 For a discussion of different types of atomism and their implications, see Sorabji 1983, pp. 350ff; H. Wolfson 1976, pp. 472–86.
76 Wolfson discusses the question of the transmission of *Kalām* thought into Jewish philosophy fairly extensively in 1976, pp. 82ff; see also L. Goodman 1972b, pp. 3–19.
77 *Guide* I.73, Maimonides 1963, pp. 195–6.
78 For an analysis of other influential *Kalām* arguments, see H. Davidson 1987, pp. 117–53.
79 In this paper, unless otherwise noted, Saadia's text will based on the English translation found in Altmann 1972.
80 The actual text of the argument is presented in Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*: "I know that time is threefold: past, present, and future. Although the present is shorter than any instant, I take the instant as one takes a point, and say: If a man should try in his thought to ascend from that point in time to the uppermost points, it would be impossible for him to do so, inasmuch as time is now assumed to be infinite and it is impossible for thought to penetrate to the furthest point of that which is infinite . . . The same reason will also make it impossible that the process of generation should traverse an

infinite period down to the lowest point so as ultimately to reach us. Yet if the process of generation did not reach us, we would not be generated, from which it necessarily follows that we, the multitude of generated beings, would not be generated and the beings now existent would not be existent. And since I find myself existent, I know that the process of generation has traversed time until it has reached us, and that if time were not finite, the process of generation would not have traversed it." Saadia 1972c, p. 56.

81 Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*: "It has come to my notice that a certain heretic in conversation with one of the Believers in the Unity of God, objected to this proof. He said 'It is possible for a man to traverse by walking that which has an infinite number of parts. For if we consider any distance which a man walks, be it a mile, or an ell, we should find that it can be divided into an infinite number of parts." Saadia 1972c, p. 57.

82 Maimonides describes al-Naẓẓām's theory of the leap in greater detail in *Guide* I.73 prop. 3. See also the discussions in Dhanani 1994; Sorabji 1983, pp. 385ff.

83 Sorabji 1983, p. 388.

84 See Ivry 1974, p. 74: "Before every temporal segment there is (another) segment, until we reach a temporal segment before which there is no segment, i.e. a segmented duration before which there is no segmented duration. It cannot be otherwise – if it were possible, and after every segment of time there was a segment, infinitely, then we would never reach a given time – for the duration from past infinity to this given time would be equal to the duration from this given time regressing in times to infinity; and if [the duration] from infinity to a definite time was known, then [the duration] from this known time to temporal infinity would be known, and then the infinite is finite, and this is an impossible contradiction." Al-Kindī's argument then continues as follows: "Furthermore, if a definite time cannot be reached until a time before it is reached, nor that before it until a time before it is reached, and so to infinity; and the infinite can neither be traversed nor brought to an end; then the temporally infinite can never be traversed so as to reach a definite time. However its termination at a definite time exists, and time is not an infinite segment, but rather is finite necessarily, and therefore the duration of body is not infinite, and it is not possible for body to be without duration. Thus the being of a body does not have infinity; the being of a body is, rather, finite, and it is impossible for body to be eternal."

85 Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*. Altmann notes that the term imagination (*wahm*; *maḥshavah*) is sometimes used by the Arabic philosophers in the sense of "potentially." See Altmann 1972, p. 57.

86 Ibid.

87 *Guide* I.73.3, Maimonides 1963, p. 196.

88 *Guide* I.74.7, Maimonides 1963, p. 222. See Wolfson's discussion of these arguments in 1976, pp. 427ff.

89 *Guide* I.74.7, Maimonides 1963, p. 222.

90 *Guide* I.71, Maimonides 1963, p. 182.

91 *Guide* II Intro prop. 15, Maimonides 1963, p. 237. This definition is reflected in two other contexts as well. In *Guide* I.52, Maimonides defines time as "an accident attached to motion when the motion of priority and posteriority is considered in the latter and when motion becomes numbered." And in a letter to Ibn Tibbon he defines time as "the measure of motion according to prior and posterior in motion."

92 *Guide* II.13, Maimonides 1963, p. 281.

93 Ibid.

94 For the importance of this passage for subsequent Jewish philosophers, see W. Harvey 1980, pp. 220ff.
95 *Guide* II.13, Maimonides 1963, p. 282.
96 Ibid.
97 For an examination of the underlying logical moves implicit in Gersonides' attack, see Feldman 1967.
98 The various characteristics of time are elaborated in *Wars* VI.1.10, Gersonides 1866, pp. 329ff.
99 For a discussion of this point, see Staub 1982, p. 30.
100 *Wars* VI.1.10, Gersonides 1866, pp. 329–30. Aristotle's arguments can be found in *Physics* 4.10–14.
101 *Wars* VI.1.10, Gersonides 1866, pp. 330–1.
102 *Wars* VI.1.10, Gersonides 1866, p. 331.
103 *Wars* VI.1.21, Gersonides 1866, p. 387.
104 *Wars* VI.1.21, Gersonides 1866, p. 388.
105 This discussion occurs in *'Or ha-Shem [The Light of the Lord*], Part I.2.11 and I.1,15 in H. Wolfson 1929a, pp. 282–91. Recent discussions of Crescas' theory of time and its relation to Aristotle can be found in the following works: W. Harvey 1980b; W. Harvey 1981a; Schweid 1970; H. Wolfson 1929a.
106 Crescas, *'Or ha-Shem*, I.1.15 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 283).
107 Crescas, *'Or ha-Shem*, I.1.15 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 285).
108 Crescas, *'Or ha-Shem*, I.2.15 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 287–9).
109 Crescas, *'Or ha-Shem*, I.2.15 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 289). For a discussion of the term *hitdabequt* and whether it means duration or continuity, see W. Harvey 1981, p. 47. In this chapter I follow Harvey's suggestion to translate the term *hitdabequt* as continuity.
110 H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 289.
111 Ibid.
112 Crescas' argument is contained in *'Or ha-Shem* III.1.5, Crescas 1990, p. 69a. For a critical discussion of these arguments, see Feldman 1980, pp. 304ff.
113 *'Or ha-Shem*, III.1.5, Crescas 1990, p. 70a.
114 *'Or ha-Shem*, III.1.4, Crescas 1990, pp. 66a–68b. Commentators have tried to make sense of Crescas' apparently contradictory theory. For further discussion of this theory of creation, see Feldman 1980, pp. 289–320.
115 *'Or ha-Shem*, I. II (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 205).
116 The text of the argument is found in Crescas, *'Or ha-Shem* I.2 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 211). The argument is presented by Aristotle in *De Caelo* I.5 272a 7–20, and restated by Averroes; cf. H. Wolfson 1929a, pp. 383ff for the history of the transmission of this argument through Averroes and Altabrizi.
117 *'Or ha-Shem*, I.1.2, in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 207.
118 *'Or ha-Shem*, I.1.2, in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 213.
119 *'Or ha-Shem*, I.3.1, in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 221.
120 See his application of this dictum to intellects and souls in *'Or ha-Shem*, I.3.1 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 223).
121 *'Or ha-Shem*, I.3.2 (in H. Wolfson 1929, p. 227). See H. Davidson 1987, pp. 365–6.
122 Ibid.
123 *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, I.15, Albo 1946, vol I, p. 130.
124 *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, II.18, Albo 1946, vol II, pp. 108–9.
125 *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, II.18, Albo 1946, vol II, p. 109.
126 *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, II.18, Albo 1946, vol II, p. 110.

127 *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, III.27, Albo 1946, vol III, p. 259.
128 *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, II.18, Albo 1946, vol II, pp. 110–1.
129 *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, II.18, Albo 1946, vol II, p. 111.
130 Ibid.
131 *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, II.18, Albo 1946, vol II, pp. 111–2.
132 See Marmorstein 1927 for a discussion of these terms in greater detail.
133 See Efros 1917 for further discussion.
134 See Jammer 1979 for further discussion.
135 See Philo *De Somn.* 161–164.
136 See Saadia *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.10.
137 See Halevi, *Kuzari*, II.20, II.23, III.23 for references to the *Shekhinah*.
138 Plato, *Timaeus* 52A 8-9.
139 Plato, *Timaeus* 53C 4-5D.
140 See Aristotle, *Physics* IV 2.209b16–17.
141 Morison 2002, p. 4.
142 Aristotle, *Physics* IV.1 208a31.
143 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V 17, 1022a4–5.
144 Aristotle, *Physics* IV 4 212a20.
145 See Aristotle, *De Caelo* I.9.278b35 – 279a.18: "There is neither place, nor void, nor time, outside the heaven"; *De Caelo* II.10 291b1–5: "It is established that the outermost revolution of the heavens is a simple movement and the swiftest of all."
146 Aristotle, *Physics* IV.5 212b 10.
147 Aristotle, *Physics* IV.5 212b 11–13.
148 For a study of the reactions to Aristotle, see Jammer 1979, pp. 72ff; Grant 1994, pp. 122–35; Schwartzmann 1994; H. Wolfson 1929a, pp. 433–41.
149 For a brief introduction to these Jewish supercommentaries, see Schwartzmann 1994.
150 For further discussion of the importance of *pneuma*, and its relation to *topos,* see Sambursky 1977, p. 175; Freudenthal 1996b, p. 116.
151 Plotinus, *Enneads* II.5.3.39.
152 For elaboration of *Kalām* argumentation, see Dhanani 1994, p. 73; Grant 1981, pp. 80–6.
153 The entire treatise exists in Hebrew and Latin translations; only a portion survives in the original Arabic. It opens with an account of Aristotle's four types of inquiry (whether, which, what, why) and an elaboration of al-Kindī's definitions of philosophy.
154 Discovered by A. Borisov and edited by S.M. Stern, this work seems to have been written in Arabic characters, although the extant manuscripts are in Hebrew script. See Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 80.
155 Attributed to Israeli by Altmann and Stern, this text is a commentary on a work by Aristotle. The *explicit* says that the aim of the text is to explain the words of the philosopher by way of arguments and proofs. See Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 118.
156 Ibid., p. 119.
157 See *Sefer Yesodot* ll. 3–8, Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 40: "After we have reached this point in our treatise and have explained all that the philosopher has said concerning the essence of the elements and its limits . . . it is now incumbent that we mention in the second part what Galen says and his beliefs on this; and this is that Galen's view was similar to the philosopher and said that the element is the minimum part of a thing." For discussion of the notion of "minimum part," see Dhanani 1994, p. 106.
158 *Sefer Yesodot* ll. 12–17, Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 43. The final point of this argument is that we cannot speak of indivisible magnitudes.

159 This argument can be found in Aristotle, *Physics* VI.1 231b2–5; *De Generatione et Corruptione* I.2 316b14–18; *Metaphysics* XIII.8 1083b13–16.
160 Israeli *Mantua Text*, Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 127.
161 This reference is given by the editor in Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 126.
162 *Meqor Ḥayyim* II.14, Ibn Gabirol 1964, p. 73. This definition is reiterated in II.15: place (*maqom*) is "one body in another body."
163 Ibid., III.37, p. 198.
164 *Meqor Ḥayyim* II.16, Ibn Gabirol 1964, p. 94. Schlanger notes that Ibn Gabirol is posing the problem of atomism here, and hopes to prove that there is quantity only where there is substance. He also notes that this entire discussion of atomism in chapters 16–19 was omitted from the Falaqera edition presumably because he was not interested in this discussion. See Ibn Gabirol 1970, p. 86 for further discussion of these passages.
165 *Meqor Ḥayyim* II.18, in Ibn Gabirol 1964, p. 84.
166 The text for this argument is found in *Meqor Hayyim* II.18, in Ibn Gabirol 1964, pp. 84–5.
167 *Meqor Ḥayyim* II.18, in Ibn Gabirol 1964, p. 85.
168 *Meqor Ḥayyim* II.19, in Ibn Gabirol 1964, pp. 87–8.
169 See the discussion in Efros 1917, pp. 44, 53.
170 See H. Wolfson 1947, p. 318; also *Aet.* 16. 78; 19. 102.
171 Philo 2001, p. 170.
172 See Philo, *Conf.* 27, 36.
173 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* I.4, Saadia Gaon 1948, p. 84.
174 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* I.4, Saadia Gaon 1948, p. 85.
175 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.1.1, Saadia Gaon 1948, p. 124.
176 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.13, Saadia Gaon 1948, p. 131.
177 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.11, Saadia Gaon, 1948, p. 125.
178 Saadia 1891.
179 For further discussion of these passages, see Freudenthal 1996b, p. 119; Pessin 2000.
180 *Guide* I.73, Maimonides 1963, p. 195–6.
181 See Rudavsky 2000 for further discussion of these examples.
182 *Wars* III.4, Gersonides 1987, pp. 127–8.
183 Feldman points out that this twofold distinction between potentiality *in facto esse*, which at some time or other will actually be realized, and potentiality *in fieri esse*, which can never be realized completely, can be found in the Latin scholastics as well. This distinction is crucial for Gersonides' argument. See *Wars*, Gersonides 1987, p. 128, note 28.
184 See *Wars* VI.1.11, Gersonides 1866, p. 345 for an elaboration of the continuous quality of matter. For a discussion of Gersonides' theory of matter, see Touati 1973, pp. 243ff; Rudavsky 1982, pp. 30–50.
185 See *Wars* VI.1.11, Gersonides 1866, p. 334. See Touati, 1973, p. 224 for further discussion of this point.
186 For an extensive discussion of the importance of the Condemnations of 1277 on medieval science, see Grant 1982.
187 See Murdoch 1991. Proposition 34 reads "That the first cause could not make many worlds." Proposition 49 reads "That God could not move the heavens with rectilinear motion, and the reason is that a vacuum would remain."
188 The question of the extent to which the Condemnations of 1277 causally affected the development of late medieval and early modern science is itself problematic and has recently been revisited. Whereas Duhem argued for a strong causal relation, recent

scholars have been reluctant to posit a straightforward causal connection. For discussion and summary of recent views, see Murdoch 1991; Grant 1994; Emery 2001.

189 Duhem 1985, p. 442.
190 Grant 1994, pp. 537–40.
191 W. Harvey 1998b, p. 23.
192 *'Or ha-Shem* I.1.2 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 195).
193 For a detailed analysis of Crescas' conception of space, see H. Wolfson 1929a, pp. 38–69. See also H. Davidson, 1987, pp. 253ff.
194 *'Or ha-Shem*, I.1.2 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 199).
195 See W. Harvey 1998, pp. 6–7 for elaboration of these points.
196 See H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 42.
197 See Crescas' statements of these propositions in H. Wolfson 1929a, pp. 135, 219, 221.
198 Crescas, *'Or ha-Shem* I.1.1 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 143–7).
199 *'Or ha-Shem* I.1.2 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, pp. 183–5).
200 Aristotle's argument is summarized by Crescas in *'Or ha-Shem* I.1.1 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 147); his critique is on p. 187.
201 *'Or ha-Shem* I.1.2 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 179).
202 See Wolfson's discussion of this text on pp. 62–3.
203 *'Or ha-Shem* I.1.1 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 149).
204 *'Or ha-Shem* I.1.2 (in H. Wolfson 1929a, p. 189).
205 *'Or ha-Shem* III.1.4. 67b. See H. Davidson 1987, pp. 125–7.
206 *Ethics* IId5.
207 Appendix, *Cogitata Metaphysica* II.10, Spinoza 1985, p. 334.
208 Appendix, *Cogitata Metaphysica* II.10, Spinoza 1985, p. 335.
209 *Ethics* IP13, Spinoza 1985, p. 420.
210 *Ethics* IP14s, Spinoza 1985, p. 423.
211 Ibid.
212 Ibid. This argument, incidentally, was often exploited by ancient and medieval philosophers. See for example, discussions in Kretzmann 1982.
213 *Ethics* IP14s, Spinoza 1985, p. 423.
214 *Letter 12*, Spinoza 1985, p. 200.
215 *Ethics* IP14s, Spinoza 1985, p. 424. [NS: without the help of the imagination]
216 We cannot in this study examine the importance of the concept of imagination to Spinoza's overall epistemology. Suffice it to say that for Spinoza imagination represents a less adequate form of knowledge, in that understanding knows essences, whereas imagination knows existences.
217 *Letter 12*, Spinoza 1985, p. 203.
218 Ibid., p. 204.
219 Ibid., pp. 203–4.
220 Ibid.
221 Ibid.
222 *Letter 12,* Spinoza 1985, p. 205.
223 See *Letter 12*, Spinoza 1985, p. 204. This example is further discussed in *Letters* 80 and 81. See also Descartes' discussion in his *Principles* I.198–199.
224 *Letter 12*, Spinoza 1985, p. 205.
225 See Dales 1990, pp. 97ff. Aquinas mentions Maimonides' *Dux Dubitantium* (*Guide of the Perplexed*) approvingly in his *Commentary on the Sentences* 2, d. 1, q. 1, art 5.

13

EXHALATIONS AND OTHER METEOROLOGICAL THEMES

RESIANNE FONTAINE

INTRODUCTION

At first sight it might seem surprising to find a chapter on meteorology in a volume devoted to medieval Jewish philosophy. Meteorology, one of the branches of Aristotle's natural philosophy, is certainly not the first subject that comes to mind when one thinks of medieval Jewish philosophy. Indeed, medieval Jewish scholars were far more occupied with topics deriving from other fields of natural philosophy, such as motion or the soul, than the causes of rain and wind. Nonetheless, there are meteorological notions that raised considerable interest among medieval Jewish thinkers. In the following I shall examine these issues and describe the various contexts in which medieval Jewish savants studied meteorology.[1]

I. ARISTOTLE'S *METEOROLOGY*

Aristotle's *Meteorology* was, either directly or indirectly, the principle source for meteorological discussions in medieval Jewish philosophy and science. In his proœmium to this treatise Aristotle describes the place of meteorology within the wider framework of his enquiry into the natural world, stating that it follows his investigations of the first causes of nature and natural motion (*Physics*), the movements of the stars in the heavens (*On the Heaven*), and the mutual transformations of the elements (*On Generation and Corruption*).[2] The proœmium concludes with his announcement of his investigations of animals and plants.[3]

Aristotle does not go into much detail about the precise connection of *Meteorology* with the preceding treatises of natural philosophy. The treatise in question, however, can be viewed as supplementing and completing the first three, whether or not this was actually Aristotle's intention.[4] Whereas *On the Heavens* is concerned with motions of the elements in general and their natural places, and *Generation and Corruption* with their nature, origin, and mutual transformation, *Meteorology* connects the two preceding treatises by studying more specific processes of transformation, that is, the particular phenomena that are referred to as *meteora*.

Moreover, whereas *On the Heavens* takes the region of the first element as its subject, *Meteorology* discusses what happens below this zone. In other words, the fourth of the treatises on the natural world presents the material that, although connected with the subject matter of the preceding treatises, had not yet been thoroughly examined.

This material includes a wide variety of subjects, a survey of which Aristotle provides in his introduction. He describes the province of meteorology as "everything which happens naturally, but with a regularity less than that of the primary element of the material things, and which takes place in the region which borders most nearly on the movement of the stars."[5] The treatise also deals with events that take place in the lower celestial region as well as with phenomena in which earth and water are involved. Thus, among the subjects discussed in Books I–III of the treatise we find a broad variety of topics, such as the Milky Way, shooting stars, comets, aurora borealis, clouds, rain, hail, snow, dew, origin and nature of rivers and seas, saltiness of the sea, winds, earthquakes, lightning and thunder, thunderbolts, haloes, rainbows, and mock suns. In sum, the first three books also include topics, which would today be classified as seismic or atmospheric, rather than meteorological. In contrast, Book IV deals with chemical processes and does not contain meteorological material.

Although Aristotle does not distinguish between the earthly, the meteoric, and the heavenly within the context of meteorology, the reason for his grouping together these rather disparate topics becomes immediately clear when one considers the centrality of Aristotle's doctrine of the double exhalation in the treatise under consideration. According to this theory, two kinds of evaporation are constantly drawn up from the earth due to the sun's heat: one hot and dry (in Greek: *anathumiasis*), that is drawn up from the earth itself, and the other moist and vaporous (*atmis*), which rises from the water within and on the earth.[6] The hot dry exhalation that rises to the upper atmosphere is the material cause of "fiery" phenomena, such as shooting stars, comets, and the Milky Way, as well as winds and wind-related phenomena, that is, earthquakes and thunder. In contrast, the origin of the "watery" formations such as clouds, rain, hail, snow, and the like lies in the moist and vaporous exhalation. This theory underlies Aristotle's explanation of the origin of the aforementioned multiple phenomena and serves as the unifying and organizing principle for his *Meteorology*. Moreover, it accounts for the inclusion of Book IV in the treatise, as this book deals with the action of the hot and the cold on the dry and the moist. It should, however, be conceded that the theory of the double exhalation is less prominent here than in the first three books, which also explains why the authenticity of Book IV has often been questioned.

II. METEOROLOGICAL MATERIAL IN PRE-MAIMONIDEAN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

On the whole, little purely meteorological material can be found in pre-Maimonidean Jewish philosophical texts that were composed in Arabic. It is true that some of these treatises, most notably those written by twelfth-century Andalusian authors like Josef ibn Tzaddiq and Abraham ibn Daud, provide fairly systematic accounts of the sublunar world, which were based on Aristotle's natural philosophy.[7] These accounts pay ample attention to the building blocks of Aristotle's natural philosophy, that is, his views on the elements, their upward and downward motion, processes of change and transformation, generation and corruption, or the influence of the higher world on earthly processes. These are views that, as we have seen, are presupposed in *Meteorology*. Moreover, when describing the transformation of elements into one another, Ibn Daud refers in passing to the hot exhalation and the origin of lightning and comets.[8] Nonetheless, these authors do not display an interest in meteorological phenomena as such.

Some meteorological material can be found in a commentary on the cosmogonical treatise *Book of Creation* (*Sefer Yetzirah*) by Dunash ibn Tamim (tenth century). This author discusses the elements and their transformations and the atmosphere, basing himself on Aristotle's cosmology and its further development in Stoic thought. Occasionally, however, he draws on Aristotle's meteorological explanations. For example, he designates wind as the cause of earthquakes and eclipses.[9] Nevertheless, however, his commentary generally testifies to a cosmogonical rather than a meteorological interest.[10]

A theme that *was* addressed in medieval Jewish philosophical discourse before Maimonides and that is related to the subject matter of *Meteorology* concerns the question of the suitability of different regions of the earth for habitation. Aristotle discusses this issue in his *Meteorology* within the context of his account of winds. Addressing the question from where the south wind blows, Aristotle divides the world into five zones, three of which are uninhabitable: the two polar zones due to extreme cold and the torrid zone because of extreme heat. Only the remaining zones that are situated between them are inhabitable because they are temperate with regard to cold and heat.[11] Obviously, Aristotle's preoccupation with both balance and the mean as the middle between two extremes plays a clear role here.

The theory that some regions of the earth are more suitable for habitation than others due to their temperateness became particularly important in Judah Halevi's defense of the Jewish faith, the *Kuzari* (written ca. 1140). He makes extensive use of this theory in his exposition of the geographical centrality of the Land of Israel

and its temperate environmental conditions, which, in his view, account for the Jewish people's singular aptitude for receiving prophecy.[12] Halevi needed the notion of the temperate zone because it provided a scientific basis for the establishment of the doctrine that was crucial to him, that is, that the Jews are the people of prophecy par excellence. It should be emphasized, however, that the immediate meteorological context in which Aristotle developed his view of the *oikoumene* is absent in the *Kuzari*; Halevi does not deal with the direction of winds. Instead, he draws on theories that were widespread among medieval Muslim and Jewish scholars who in turn inherited them from classical antiquity. To be more precise, Halevi adopts the theory of geographical climatology, which divides the moderate zone on the northern hemisphere into seven climes, of which the fourth was the most moderate and thus the most suitable for habitation. The common denominator of this theory and the five-zone theory as expounded by Aristotle lies in the concept of moderateness. Another source of inspiration for Halevi is Hippocrates' theory of causal climatology, according to which physique and character of the inhabitants of a certain region are determined by environmental factors.[13] These views, however, are not found in the *Meteorology*, which is why I will not devote any further attention to Halevi's use of them.[14]

III. *METEOROLOGY* AND BIBLICAL EXEGESIS: MAIMONIDES AND HIS INTERPRETERS

A more specific interest in meteorological themes on the part of Jewish thinkers emerges with the Hebrew translation of Aristotle's *Meteorology*, entitled *'Otot ha-Shamayim* (*The Signs of Heaven*, 1210) by Samuel ibn Tibbon, the famous translator of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*.[15] His translation of the *Guide* triggered a wide-scale Arabic-into-Hebrew translation movement of philosophical and scientific texts.[16] *'Otot ha-Shamayim* presents a special case in the history of this movement for two reasons. First, as far as we know it was the first Hebrew translation of an Aristotelian text, and second, the Aristotelian text was translated before Averroes' commentaries on it, whereas – as a rule – the Hebrew translation of Averroean commentaries on other Aristotelian treatises of natural philosophy preceded that of the Aristotelian text.

One may wonder why the *Meteorology* rather than the *Physics*, the *Metaphysics*, or *On the Soul* should be the first Aristotelian text to be translated from Arabic into Hebrew. The explanation for this fact is not, as might be supposed, that meteorological phenomena have always fascinated the human imagination. Instead, Ibn Tibbon's choice appears to have been motivated by his personal interest in

meteorological subjects, an interest that was related to his activities as an interpreter of the Bible and of Maimonides' thought. His affinity with the subject becomes clear from the fact that he devoted considerable effort to producing a more reliable and expanded Hebrew version of Aristotle's *Meteorology* than the text that served as his model, the ninth-century Arabic paraphrase composed by Yaḥya ibn al-Biṭriq. This text contained many mistakes and omissions. To improve it Samuel ibn Tibbon adduced commentaries on the Aristotelian text by Alexander of Aphrodisias (in Arabic translation) and Averroes that enabled him to correct the phrasing of his Arabic model in various instances.

It has been convincingly argued that Ibn Tibbon's interest in meteorological theories was kindled by a passage in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, which he translated into Hebrew six years before he embarked on the translation of the *Meteorology*. In *Guide* II.30, a lengthy chapter in Maimonides' extensive treatment of the question of the world's origin, Maimonides hints that the *Meteorology* provides the key for the correct interpretation of certain terms in the Account of Creation.[17] According to this interpretation, the terms "firmament," "heaven," "the waters above the firmament," and "the waters below the firmament" (Gen. 1:6–9) should be understood in light of the natural processes, which are explained in this Aristotelian treatise. The firmament of the heavens, for example, refers to the atmosphere. To be more specific, Maimonides hints that, for the educated reader, the natural processes of evaporation by the sun's heat and its subsequent condensation by cold, as well as the mutual transformation of the four elements as described in *Meteorology* explain the origin of separate layers in the atmosphere and the existence of "water above the firmament," that is, clouds that produce rain. Maimonides thus read the Account of Creation as a scientific text and attempted to provide a naturalistic explanation of events described in the biblical account by explaining them as interdependent processes, which take place both on the earth and in the atmosphere.[18] This reading implies that the rain has natural causes and is not dependent on God's will, which is why it is a "secret of the Torah" that has to be kept hidden from the multitude, lest they lose their belief in divine providence.[19] Pursuing this line of interpretation, medieval expositors of Maimonides' explained also other verses of the Account of Creation as referring to natural processes. The overall implication of Maimonides' rationalistic reading is that the biblical account does not refer to creation as an ontological concept, but that creation should instead be conceived of as the manifestation of activities generated by natural processes that take place in the sublunar realm and the atmosphere. The ultimate and radical theological consequence of this naturalistic interpretation is that the world is eternal

because the processes described (the exhalations that are continuously drawn up by the sun's heat and their transformations) are perpetual and unchanging.

Samuel ibn Tibbon, who was not only Maimonides' translator, but also the first interpreter of his philosophy, continued to study the *Meteorology* after finishing his translation. The interpretation of the Aristotelian treatise was intrinsically bound up with his philosophical quest. Choosing biblical exegesis as the platform for his ideas he drew on *Meteorology* in his later original writings, such as the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (probably after 1213[20]), and *Ma'amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayim* (completed ca. 1231). The latter composition, which takes Gen. 1:9 "Let the waters be gathered" as its point of departure, provoked heavy criticism from the kabbalist Jacob bar Sheshet, a younger contemporary who indeed accused Samuel ibn Tibbon for upholding the belief that "the world" (*'olam*) is eternal.[21] Although it is evident that Ibn Tibbon read Genesis 1 through the lens of Aristotle's scientific treatise, seeking to unravel Maimonides' esoteric doctrines and pursuing his line of exegesis, the extent to which Bar Sheshet's claim is warranted is not immediately clear.

In his translation of the *Meteorology* Samuel ibn Tibbon does not address the issue of the origin of the world directly. He does raise the question of the origin of the sea, refuting the claim of some of Aristotle's predecessors who believed that the sea will eventually disappear, whereas the universe will continue to exist. In this regard, he inserts a long passage in his translation from Alexander of Aphrodisias who writes that Aristotle held the universe to be eternal. Refuting the thesis that the sea will dry up, Alexander, as quoted by Ibn Tibbon, argues that evaporation and precipitation counterbalance each other for the exhalation that is drawn up from it will fall down as rain.[22] As a translator, Ibn Tibbon does not take sides with respect to the issue of the origin of the universe, at least not explicitly, contenting himself by presenting Alexander's interpretation. His comment that Alexander's words are necessary and useful matters may perhaps be interpreted as tacit agreement with Alexander's view, but there is no decisive proof as to his view on the origin of the universe in this stage of his career.

Things are different in the treatise that triggered Bar Sheshet's attack, *Yiqqavu ha-mayim*. The issue at stake here is the appearance of dry land, a problem that Ibn Tibbon by his own admission had been pondering for twenty years. The question that puzzled him was why earth and water do not form a perfect sphere. According to Aristotle's theory of natural motion, the elements tend to move to their own natural places and should form four concentric spheres (earth, air, water, fire) separated from one another. We find, however, dry land (continents and islands)

covering the water, so that parts of it are contiguous with air rather than with water.[23] The problem of the emergence of dry land is directly connected with the question of the world's origin, for if the world were eternal, as Aristotle believed, the elements should have reached their natural places and the earth should be covered with water entirely.[24]

After Samuel ibn Tibbon, a number of later authors, such as Samuel ibn Tzartza, Abraham Bibago, and Isaac Arama, likewise made use of meteorological theories to explain events described in the Bible in a naturalistic manner. Passages that were interpreted with the help of meteorological notions include Noah's rainbow (Genesis 9), the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14), and the revelation on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19).[25] In his biblical commentaries Gersonides also makes ample use of meteorological material, with which he was familiar through Averroes' commentaries, in his explanation of several miracles described in the Bible: for example, the column of fire (Exodus 13: 21–22), the cloud (Exodus 14:20), the swallowing up of Korah by the earth (Numbers 16:31), and the shadow of Hizkia (II Kings 20:10).[26] In this regard, Levi ben Abraham of Villefranche, author of two encyclopedic works (a genre to be discussed in the next section), should be mentioned for he explicitly sought to address a general public and to popularize science.[27] He integrated a lot of meteorological material in his discussion of the "firmament" (Genesis 1:6), which can be found in one of the still extant chapters of *Livyat Ḥen* (*Chaplet of Grace*, end of thirteenth century).[28] All in all then, the *Meteorology* came to play a significant role in biblical exegesis, and it was especially through this genre that wider circles could familiarize themselves with its contents. It is still too early, however, for a comprehensive overview and evaluation of its place in medieval biblical exegesis.

IV. METEOROLOGY AS A PART OF THE STUDY OF ARISTOTELIAN PHILOSOPHY

In the course of the aforementioned Arabic-into-Hebrew translation, other meteorological texts than the Aristotelian treatise also became available in Hebrew. Due to the influence of the *Guide*, Aristotelianism became the dominant school of thought in Jewish philosophy. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Jewish scholars studied Aristotle through the commentaries of his Muslim interpreter Averroes, who in the post-Maimonidean era soon became the Commentator par excellence. His commentaries on Aristotle's writings were all translated into Hebrew. Samuel ibn Tibbon's son Moses translated Averroes' so-called Short Commentary or Epitome on *Meteorology* (mid-thirteenth century), and Kalonymus ben

Kalonymus rendered the Middle Commentary (1316). Shortly after this translation, Gersonides (1288–1344) produced his supercommentary on *Meteorology*, making use of Averroes' two commentaries.

Moreover, during the thirteenth century Aristotelian natural science was transmitted in Hebrew through another channel, namely that of the Hebrew encyclopedias of science and philosophy. Like Samuel ibn Tibbon's philosophical biblical exegesis, this encyclopedic production was largely the result of the impact of Maimonides' thought.[29] In some cases their composition seems to be related to the contemporary debate on the desirability and permissibility of the study of philosophy: the issue that formed the bone of contention during the so-called Maimonidean controversy.[30]

The authors of the encyclopedic writings aimed to divulge contemporary secular science and philosophy to Jewish savants in Christian countries who were unable to read Arabic. They all include a section on meteorology, as one of the branches of Aristotelian natural philosophy, albeit in different degrees of detail. The first encyclopedic work is the *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah* (a title that can be translated both as *Exposition of Science* and as *The Quest for Wisdom*), by Judah ben Solomon ha-Kohen, who apparently composed the (lost) Arabic version of his encyclopedia in the early 1230s, that is, close in time to Samuel ibn Tibbon's *Ma'amar yiqqavu ha-mayim*, and very close in time, perhaps even during the second stage of the Maimonidean controversy. The Hebrew translation, produced by the author himself at the behest of Italian Jews, dates from circa 1247. Two other major encyclopedias are Shemtov ibn Falaquera's *De'ot ha-Filosofim* (*The Opinions of the Philosophers*, written ca. 1260–1270?), and Gershom ben Solomon's *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim* (*Gate of Heaven*, written toward the end of the thirteenth or during the first years of the fourteenth century). These texts differ with respect to their source material: whereas the first two encyclopedias are based primarily on Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle's *Meteorology*, which their authors read in the Arabic original, Gershom ben Solomon uses Ibn Tibbon's translation as its basic text.

In addition, there is another less expansive encyclopedic text, the anonymous *Ruah Ḥen*, which probably dates from the third or fourth decade of the thirteenth century and was intended to elucidate some passages in Maimonides' *Guide*. In the chapter that deals with meteorology, it becomes clear that its author, like Samuel ibn Tibbon, was interested in the exegetical implications of meteorological theories. This chapter focuses on the stratification of the atmosphere. Discussing the three layers of air and fire that fill up the atmosphere and their various degrees of heat and cold, the author seeks to show that the middle layer is the place where rain is formed, as an explanation to the discussion in Maimonides' *Guide* II.30.[31]

Of the aforementioned larger encyclopedias, the *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah* is the only one to introduce an exegetical comment in its presentation of the meteorology. After having explained that the rainbow originates as a result of the reflection of the sunrays to moisture in the air, Judah ha-Cohen points out that there is a seeming contradiction between this scientific explanation and Genesis 9:13 where one learns that the rainbow is a token of the covenant, which has been placed in the clouds by God. He solves the contradiction by explaining that Aristotle referred solely to three causes: the material cause (the moist exhalation), the formal one (the colors of the rainbow) and the efficient cause (the reflection of the sunshine), leaving "the final cause, which is the principal one, to those who deal with what is principal."[32] In so doing he suggests on the one hand that the natural explanation and the biblical account complement each other so that there is in fact no real contradiction, but on the other it is implied that the natural explanation put forward by Aristotle is inferior because something is lacking, namely, the explanation of the *significance* of the rainbow.

This statement fits in well with the skeptical attitude toward philosophy that characterizes this encyclopedia. The author explicitly seeks to spread knowledge of the secular sciences among his coreligionists to counter the claim raised by contemporary Christian authors that Jews possess only religious, nonscientific knowledge. At the same time he considers philosophy, that is Aristotelian philosophy as interpreted by Averroes, to be a threat to religious faith. In this regard, he argues that Kabbalah, by which he means traditional knowledge that has been handed down from generation to generation, is far superior to Aristotelian philosophy because it provides certainty, whereas Aristotle's philosophy does not.

To substantiate this last claim he draws up a long list of premises taken from Aristotle's treatises on natural philosophy, specifying that only a handful of these premises can actually be considered to have been proved by means of a *re'ayah*, that is, the kind of proof that is used in physical science. For the majority of Aristotle's teachings, however, no such proof can be adduced, let alone a demonstrative proof (*mofet*), the kind of proof that is used in mathematics.[33]

Judah's list focuses on premises that derive from *Physics*, *De Caelo* and *De Generatione and Corruptione*. Interestingly, no meteorological teachings are included. One is therefore tempted to conclude that Judah regarded meteorological views as less important or harmful to religious faith than the doctrines that are found in the preceding treatises of natural philosophy. This assumption is consistent with a statement found toward the end of his exegetical comment on the rainbow. Here he asserts that the issue of the rainbow is not more important than that of the origin

of the world, on which, Judah continues, the biblical view that the world is created differs from Aristotle's view, according to which the world's origin is "natural." The implication seems to be that, according to the *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah*, neither the specific issue of the rainbow nor the study of meteorology in general presents a danger to religious faith. This is somewhat surprising given Samuel ibn Tibbon's extensive use of the *Meteorology* as a key for biblical exegesis and the critique it aroused with respect to its implications regarding the eternity of the world (cf. preceding section). Moreover, the question of the origin of the world is certainly a crucial issue in the *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah*. According to its author, the doctrine of the eternity of the world should be rebutted as much as possible. Therefore, it is hard to explain why he does not refer to the debate of his day. Perhaps, in spite of the importance he attached to this issue in general, he considered it preferable to remain silent on it within the context of meteorology so as not to direct the attention of the readership he sought to address to sensitive issues.

As opposed to the first encyclopedia, the meteorological accounts in the *De'ot ha-Filosofim* and the *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim* contain neither critical comments on the value of Aristotelian philosophy nor interpretations of biblical verses. These compilations restrict themselves to offering a presentation of contemporary scientific explanations of meteorological phenomena in conformity with their aim of disseminating secular knowledge among Jewish scholars.

A few later encyclopedic texts also contain some meteorological information but are far less comprehensive. In this regard it is worth mentioning Meir Aldabi's *Shevilei 'Emunah* (*Paths of Faith*), dating from circa 1360. This is a text that offers some selected meteorological topics, namely, the winds, earthquakes, the rainbow, and the inhabited world.[34] It has been suggested that this compilation was intended for students in Spanish talmudic schools to enable them to acquire a minimum of philosophical–scientific knowledge, which would imply that, in the author's view, the meteorological information he provided was a part of the intellectual baggage these students ought to possess.[35] As in the case of the *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah*, Aldabi apparently did not consider knowledge of these subjects to be harmful to religious studies.

An interesting question concerns the place of *Meteorology* in the encyclopedias. According to the commonly accepted order of learning this text was the fourth of Aristotle's treatises of natural philosophy, after *Physics*, *De Caelo*, and *De Generatione et Corruptione*. This order goes back to Aristotle himself who at the very beginning of his treatise indicates the place of the *Meteorology* within natural philosophy and

adds that his inquiries in this field are to be followed by an account of animals and plants.[36] In his Epitome on the *Meteorology*, Averroes expands on Aristotle's exposition. The commentator justifies the order adopted by Aristotle by explaining that in his natural philosophy the philosopher proceeded from the general to the particular and from the more simple to the more composite.

In the *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah* and the *De'ot* the *Meteorology* is indeed the fourth discipline to be treated within the parts devoted to natural philosophy. In contrast, the *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, although also presenting meteorology within the context of natural philosophy, deals with it almost at the beginning of the work. It is preceded by an exposition on the four elements and the differentiation of the spheres of air and fire, an exposition that is apparently intended as an introduction to meteorology proper. This encyclopedia thus starts with the lower and then moves on to the higher, studying first the elements, the exhalations, minerals, plants, animals, man, and then goes on to treat astronomy and metaphysics. The idea of treating the subject matter in an ascending order is determined by Maimonides' and Samuel ibn Tibbon's interpretations of Jacob's dream of the ladder in Genesis 28 (the encyclopedia's name derives from Genesis 28:17).[37]

Similarly, in the *Ruah Ḥen* the order deviates from that of the first two encyclopedias. Here the chapter on meteorology appears after a discussion of the hierarchical order of things, the elements, the souls of plants, animals, man, and the intellect, and it is followed by a treatment of matter and form, generation and corruption, and the Aristotelian categories.

Interestingly, there is one text that belongs to the Hebrew meteorological corpus but not to the genre of encyclopedias, which assigns the *Meteorology* an extraordinary place in both the order of study and in the hierarchy of sciences. This occurs not in an independent text but instead in the Hebrew translation of a letter of the ninth-century Arab philosopher al-Kindī on moistures and rain. Here we read that one can only consider oneself a philosopher "once one has acquired comprehensive knowledge of meteorology and of the effects of the heavens and that someone can only achieve this knowledge after he has acquired profound knowledge of the four mathematical sciences – which are the introduction to philosophy – and after he has acquired knowledge of the words of the philosophers about the science of the elements and their qualities!"[38] In this passage, which is directed against the philosophers, meteorology is considered to be a spiritual science, which forms the final subject in the order of study and seems to fall under the rubric of theology rather than physics.[39] It thus appears that the medieval Hebrew meteorological texts under consideration vary as to the place and importance of the Aristotelian treatise even though in the final analysis they all derive from the same source.

V. METEOROLOGY AND BELLETTRIE

Meteorological teachings are not to be found only in translations, biblical exegesis, or scientific encyclopedias; they also appear in medieval Hebrew writings that belong to the genre of bellettrie.[40] Here Ibn Sahula's *Meshal ha-Qadmoni* is worth a particular mention. In this book of fables, popularized meteorology emerges in a pedagogical–moralistic context, as is immediately evident from the titles of the five parts into which the book is divided: Wisdom, Penitence, Sound Council, Humility, and Reverence. The various animal characters of the book offer descriptions of various meteorological phenomena, such as the doctrine of the two exhalations (in the part on Penitence), earthquakes, thunder and lightning, the rainbow, and the *oikoumene* (in the part on Reverence). All of this is written in rhyme. Although the author, who was heavily influenced by Maimonides, inserted these topics as well as others with a view to providing students with some information on science and philosophy, he also emphasizes that the validity of the scientific explanations of the meteorological phenomena under consideration ultimately depend on God's will and wisdom.[41]

Another popular literary text to include some meteorological views is Josef ibn Zabara's *Sefer ha-Sha'ashu'im* (*Book of Delights*), a book that similarly contains a lot of fables.[42] Here the two protagonists of the story interrogate one another about various scientific subjects including the sea's salinity and the formation of hail. The title suggests that the book concerns "light" science, that is, with meteorology as forming part of general education and learned entertainment.

VI. THE PROBLEMATIC CHARACTER OF THE ARABIC–HEBREW METEOROLOGICAL CORPUS

In spite of the fact that Jewish scholars in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had access to an ever-increasing number of meteorological texts in Hebrew, the study of this discipline continued to be problematic. Although Aristotle is in part responsible for this because at times he does not express himself unambiguously, it is primarily due to the transmission of the text in Arabic. To be more precise, the textual problems found in the main source-text, which underlie the meteorological corpus, both in Arabic and in Hebrew have plagued students of this discipline from the very beginning of its reception. As noted previously, Samuel ibn Tibbon was aware that the Arabic *Vorlage* he used for his *'Otot ha-Shamayim* contained significant errors and omissions, which he attempted to correct. This *Vorlage* is also the source of Averroes' commentaries. Averroes also

noted the discrepancies between this version and the authentic Aristotelian text as he knew it through Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary in Arabic translation, and tried to overcome them by "harmonizing" or "smoothing" conflicting views or by explaining them away.

Notwithstanding Ibn Tibbon's attempts to reconstruct the Aristotelian text and Averroes' endeavor to harmonize the two versions, many obscurities remained.[43] Averroes' Hebrew translators translated the text as they found it without addressing the textual problems. Furthermore, it may be noted that Kalonymus' Hebrew translation of the Middle Commentary is quite poor. The compilers of the encyclopedias each chose their own method for dealing with the textual difficulties. The *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah's* policy is to ignore them, in line with its general approach to highlight the main points of Aristotelian natural philosophy without going into much detail. In contrast, the *De'ot* skillfully combines Averroes' two commentaries in an attempt to elucidate certain problematic passages. It is likely that Jewish scholars who were interested in Averroes' presentation of Aristotle's *Meteorology* would have found this text the most useful. Given its verbosity, however, it is doubtful whether this encyclopedia was widely studied. By far the most popular of the three was the *Sha'ar,* which, as has been already noted, takes *'Otot ha-Shamayim* as its source-text and "solves" the textual problems by incorporating the results of Ibn Tibbon's research into his own text, thus creating an easily readable account.

A good example of the obscurities in the text concerns the theory of the two exhalations, the very doctrine that is the pivotal component in the *Meteorology*, as the exhalations are the material causes of all the meteorological phenomena discussed in the book. In the Arabic paraphrase, which Samuel ibn Tibbon used as a model, we find passages where the double exhalation has in fact split into a threefold exhalation: a hot dry exhalation that may kindle the upper air, a hot moist exhalation that will become air, and a cold moist exhalation, which returns to the earth through various kinds of precipitation. In other passages of this text, reference is made to Aristotle's twofold exhalation: a cold moist one that rises from the water (vapor) and a hot dry smoky one that rises from the earth.[44] As we have seen, the Arabic transmission of the text was flawed and many errors have crept into the Arabic version of *Meteorology*. Nonetheless, it would seem that the ambiguity is partly caused by Aristotle's own presentation of various and divergent accounts of the dual exhalation with different details in each of them. It is somewhat confusing, for example, when he says that vapor (which is supposed to be cold and moist) is hotter than water because it contains the fire that caused it to rise.[45] Already Aristotle's Greek commentators struggled with the question whether Aristotle's moist exhalation was in fact cold or hot.[46] The issue is directly related

to the question of the stratification of the atmosphere because the exhalations rise upward. Here too, Aristotle is not clear: He states that the exhalations while rising upward together at some point separate out in two different layers of air, and at the same time he seems to subdivide the air into more strata, the highest being the stratum of the hot, dry inflammable material that is ignited by the motion of the celestial spheres.[47] Perhaps his observation that the lower part of the air is moist and hot, because it contains both the vapor (that is, the moist and cold exhalation) and the hot, dry exhalation, may be the origin of the threefold exhalation in the Arabic and Hebrew traditions.[48] As might be expected, this confusion has led to different schemes of stratification in the Hebrew meteorological corpus, and the threefold division of exhalations emerges alongside the doctrine of the dual exhalation.

It goes without saying that not all students of these texts were aware of the background of the different schemes of stratification, or more generally of the textual problems. It stands to reason that a reader who needed some quick basic information on specific meteorological phenomena would not have been hampered by the many obscurities and inconsistencies in the text. It is, of course, different for accomplished philosophers like Samuel ibn Tibbon, who took considerable pains to make sense of the models he had at his disposal. Another example concerns Gersonides. It has been demonstrated that in his treatment of the halo and the rainbow, two more sections where Ibn al-Bitriq's paraphrasing presents great textual difficulties, even this eminent scholar could not fully overcome the ambiguities he encountered.[49]

VII. CONCLUSION

Future studies will hopefully shed light on the question of whether this has adversely affected the study of the Hebrew meteorological traditions and its application in biblical interpretation on the part of medieval Jewish savants. Moreover, it remains to be investigated to what extent this circumstance has hampered the study of this discipline as compared to that of other branches of Aristotle's natural philosophy.

NOTES

1 I shall not discuss optical aspects or scientific weather prognostication as these topics constitute scientific disciplines in their own right. For optical aspects, see Meiron 2003; for weather prognostication Bos and Burnett 2000.

2 *Meteor.* I.1.

3 *Meteor.* I.1.

4 For a discussion of Aristotle's purpose in writing the *Meteorology*, see Solmsen 1961, pp. 393–407.

5 *Meteor.* I.1, 338b.
6 *Meteor.* I.3, 340b24–29, 341b6–11.
7 Cf. *'Olam qatan*, I.3–4, Ibn Tzaddiq 2003, pp. 10–9, and *Ha-'emunah ha-ramah* I.2–5, Ibn Daud 1986, 20b–54b.
8 *Ha-'emunah ha-ramah* I.2, Ibn Daud 1986, 22 b4–14.
9 *Le commentaire sur le Livre de la création,* I.11, Ibn Tamim 2002, pp. 76–7, 112–8.
10 In addition, brief reference may be made to Solomon ibn Gabirol's philosophical poem *Keter Malkhut*, written in Hebrew, where some lines discuss the four concentric spheres of earth, water, air, and fire as well as the distribution of water and dry land on the earth, cf. Ibn Gabirol 2005, p. 261, lines 91–97. However, Ibn Gabirol does not go into meteorological detail.
11 *Meteor.* II.5, 362a31–b10.
12 Cf. Altmann 2005, pp. 218, 244–6. See esp. *Kuzari* I.95. Halevi 1887, pp. 42–7; Halevi 1947, pp. 46–9; IV.17, Halevi 1887, pp. 260–3; Halevi 1947, pp. 197–8.
13 Altmann 2005, p. 219.
14 Climatology in Halevi and later Jewish thought has been the subject of several studies, cf. Altmann 2005, Freudenthal 2004, pp. 97–106 and the literature quoted there in n. 86.
15 On Samuel ibn Tibbon's work and importance, see Robinson 2005, pp. 204–16 and Robinson 2007, pp. 7–17.
16 For this translation movement, see Steinschneider 1893; Freudenthal 1993a; Zonta 1996; S. Harvey 2003.
17 *Guide* II.30, in Maimonides 1963, p. 353; Klein-Braslavy 1987, p. 66; Ravitzky 1990c, pp. 230 ff; Ravitzky 1996b, pp. 276–8. According to an alternative interpretation, Maimonides did not have the *Meteorology* in mind at all, but rather referred to "traditions," cf. Langermann 1997b, p. 389. Be this as it may, Ibn Tibbon took Maimonides to hint at the Aristotelian treatise, cf. Klein-Braslavy 1987, p. 66, n. 3. It should be noted that we do not know whether Maimonides refers to a specific text. In all probability, the reference is to the ninth-century Arabic adaptation by Ibn al-Biṭriq that served as Ibn Tibbon's *Vorlage*, even though Maimonides was highly critical of the quality of Ibn al-Biṭriq's translations. The possibility that he referred to another text, however, cannot be entirely excluded.
18 For more details, see Ravitzky 1990c; Ravitzky 1996b, pp. 276–7.
19 Klein-Braslavy 2006, p. 158.
20 For this work, see Robinson 2007.
21 Ravitzky 1996b, p. 278.
22 *'Otot ha-Shamayim*, II.95–126, Ibn Tibbon 1995, pp. 88–93.
23 Solmsen 1960, pp. 394–5 suggests that the question of the cosmic distribution of the elements may have led Aristotle to writing the *Meteorology,* recalling that it was Plato who raised this problem.
24 Ibn Tibbon's solution of the difficulty together with the question of whether he indeed believed the world to be eternal is the subject of current research by Gad Freudenthal. In a detailed investigation of the treatise under discussion, Freudenthal argues that Samuel ibn Tibbon in fact works out a synthesis between the thesis that the world is eternal and the view that the world came into being after not having been: The biblical account in Genesis 1:1 – Genesis 2:3 describes a process of "creation," which is, however, not a singular event. Instead, it is a phase in a natural and infinite process in which dry land will again be covered by water, from which dry land will eventually reemerge, and so forth. Thus, although each individual sublunar world is new, the world in a more general sense is eternal. See Freudenthal forthcoming d. My thanks to Professor Freudenthal for having provided me with an unpublished version of his paper.

25 See Schwartz 1997b, p. 148.
26 For this information I am indebted to Prof. Sara Klein-Braslavy, who is currently exploring Gersonides' use of *Meteorology* in his biblical commentaries.
27 On Levi ben Abraham and his writings, see W.Z. Harvey 2000a, pp. 171–88.
28 *Livyat Ḥen* VI.3.12, Levi ben Avraham 2004, pp. 276–303.
29 For recent studies on the Hebrew encyclopedias, see S. Harvey 2000a; Zonta 1996, pp. 199–220. The bulk of this encyclopedic material is still in manuscript.
30 On the controversy, see Ben-Sasson 1972 and Berger 1997.
31 *Ruah Ḥen* 1826, pp. 18r-22r.
32 *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah*, ms Oxford, Bodl. Mich. 551, fol. 65r.
33 *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah*, ms Oxford, Bodl. Mich. 551, intro fols. 6r-8r.
34 *Shevilei 'Emunah* II.2 and II.4, ed. Jerusalem 1985, pp. 47–50, 65–7; see Fontaine 2004.
35 Schwartz 1994a, p. 72.
36 *Meteor.* I.1; see above, p. 434.
37 Robinson 2000, pp. 252–3 and the literature referred to in n. 18.
38 Bos and Burnett 2000, pp. 161–2.
39 Bos and Burnett 2000, p. 327.
40 See Fontaine forthcoming.
41 Loewe 2004, xxii.
42 See Fontaine forthcoming.
43 For a fuller discussion of this issue, see Fontaine 2001.
44 Cf. Lettinck 1999, pp. 45–7.
45 *Meteor.* 347a24–25; cf. Lettinck 1999, pp. 15, 34–5.
46 Cf. Lettinck 1999, p. 16, p. 40.
47 Lettinck 1999, pp. 15–6.
48 *Meteor.* 340b26.
49 See Meiron 2003, p. xiv.

PART IV

EPISTEMOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY

14

BELIEF, KNOWLEDGE, AND CERTAINTY

IDIT DOBBS-WEINSTEIN

De'ot harbeh yesh le-qol eḥad ve-eḥad mi-bnei-'adam, ve-zo me-shunah mi-zo u-reḥokah mi-mena be-yoter. Mishneh Torah, Sefer ha-Madda, Hilkhot De'ot, 1 *Multiple 'opinions' are possessed by each and every human being, and each one is as different from another as it is distant from it.*

'Ad 'ei-matai ḥayav lilmod torah?'Ad yom moto. Mishneh Torah, Sefer ha-Maddah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah, 1, 10
Until when is one obligated to study the Torah? Until death.

Gnothi se auton. The Delphic Oracle
Know thyself.

Pantes anthropoi tou eidenai oregontai phusei. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980a22. *By nature, all human beings desire to know.*

PROLEGOMENON

The plurality of Hebrew terms denoting knowledge, as well as the lack of a clear distinction between knowledge and belief, is rarely, if ever, reflected in translation. In fact, the same Hebrew term is sometimes translated as "knowledge," at others, as "belief," and at yet others as terms that the modern reader would not recognize as a species of either knowledge or belief. I begin this chapter with two citations from Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, and two from the Greek philosophical tradition to focus on the problematic nature of "knowledge," as well as caution against attempts to neatly fit ancient and medieval philosophical terms and concepts into what initially may appear to be their modern and contemporary equivalents. The two terms used by Maimonides in the first two epigraphs, *de'ot* and *limud Torah*, respectively, exemplify this difficulty. In particular, the term *de'ot*, (sing. *de'ah*) can denote opinion, knowledge, and even character.[1] Nonetheless, irrespective of one's preferred translation of *de'ot*, insofar as the term is a form *da'at*, the epistemic as well as psychological state to which it refers is some form of cognition, and indicates some corresponding form of conviction. Like *da'at*, *ḥokhmah* and *binah*, the two terms related to cognition and traditionally associated with it, are

not univocal and are more readily mistranslated (or misunderstood) as they are not, especially *ḥokhmah*, of which the common translation as "wisdom" is, at best, misleading and often erroneous. For example, whereas "wisdom" is the translation of the Greek *sophia*, for the medieval Jewish philosophers, especially Maimonides, it translates *phronesis*, *prohairesis*, or *sophrosune*. Nonetheless, these terms and concepts do not present the same difficulty as does *daʿat*, because their epistemic status as species of cognition cannot be in question. In this sense, terms such as *ḥokhmah* and *binah* are not unlike different Greek terms for knowledge and the activities pertaining to them. Whereas the different Greek terms for modes of knowledge are clearly distinguished from terms and concepts denoting opinion and belief (*doxa*, *endoxa*, and *pistis*), the Hebrew term *daʿat* is not, as will become evident later, as soon as we consider the first Jewish philosopher, Saadia Gaon, whose primary concern was the relation between knowledge, belief, and certainty.

Now, were it the case that the plurivocity of terms for knowledge and the indeterminacy of the boundaries between knowledge and belief was simply a philological matter, it could be clarified through notes, glossaries, and so forth. However, philology is not a primary concern of this chapter. For, although the problem of language here makes evident the indispensibility of philology for philosophical investigations in the history of philosophy, philology does not clarify the difficulties pertaining to degrees and forms of cognition and, in fact, may obscure a fundamental, less visible, and more intransigent difficulty. The latter difficulty originates in radical historical transformations in the understanding of science and hence in (1) what is taken by philosophy to constitute knowledge, (2) which modes of knowledge are taken to be authoritative and/or certain, and (3) what the source of authority is.[2]

Although it is indeed the case that Jewish philosophy must always address the problematic relation between "faith" or, more precisely, Torah and Halakhah, on the one hand, and reason, on the other,[3] at the outset it is important to clearly distinguish this relation from the relation between belief and knowledge *simpliciter*. Although in both cases the question of the cognitive status of the binary concepts in question concerns certainty and authority, the distinction between faith and reason presents them as contradictories, whereas both belief and knowledge are viewed as species of cognition. More precisely, whereas in this context faith is a strictly religious category, belief is not. Hence, philosophically speaking, I do not consider the distinction between Jerusalem and Athens relevant to understanding Jewish *philosophy*. As will become evident, whether or not revelation is relevant to claims to knowledge will depend on the epistemic status of revelation in relation to philosophical knowledge. This relation changes significantly in accord with the

radical changes in the understanding and ethos of science from the premodern to the Modern period mentioned previously. Nevertheless, the insistence on situating Jewish philosophy historically, as *philosophy*, is neither relativist nor neutral. Rather, in this chapter, the major criterion for inclusion or exclusion, let alone importance, for consideration of a philosopher or text as both *Jewish* and *philosophy*, will be determined by the engagement with the preceding philosophical tradition, in general, the Jewish philosophical tradition, in particular. Hence, the bulk of this chapter will be devoted to the two prominent, or most influential, medieval Jewish philosophers, Saadia Gaon and Maimonides. For similar reasons, despite his preeminence as a philosopher, the discussion of Gersonides will be restricted to his protomodern understanding of knowledge and certainty that is based on his rejection of the classical medieval emenationist cosmology, but which is in tension with his account of prophecy.[4] For reasons that will become more explicitly evident below, Spinoza will serve as the exemplary Jewish philosopher on the cusp between the premodern and modern ethos and as a harbinger of the crises of authority.

To shed some light on the nature of the difficulty arising from the historical transformation in the ethos and language of science, in these preliminary remarks I provide a brief sketch of some differences that will be developed in much greater detail later. Whereas ancient as well as medieval philosophers distinguish between authoritative and certain knowledge, modern philosophy conflates them; whereas the former view the immediacy of intellect as the highest form of knowing, the latter view reason and construction as the standard of certainty (and beauty).[5] More important, whereas premodern philosophy recognizes different modes of inquiry requiring different standards and degrees of precision, modern philosophy seeks a single method and a single standard of precision. Whereas the question of precision is inversely related to the importance of a science/knowledge in premodern philosophy, precision is the single standard of science recognized by modern philosophy.[6] Differently stated, whereas the premodern philosophers desire truth, modern philosophers desire certainty. In short, whereas premodern philosophers pursue truth, which does not originate in the subject, the modern subject constructs certain knowledge.[7]

For the purpose of understanding the relation among knowledge, belief, and certainty, the most problematic and occluded difference between premodern and modern philosophy, a difference that renders them incommensurate, originates in the modern subject. Whereas the unified, isolated modern subject, the Lutheran believing I or the Cartesian thinking I, is foundational to modern philosophy, it is quite literally unintelligble to premodern philosophy. For, in the absence of *substance* dualism, a dualism originating in Christian philosophy, and receiving

its most comprehensive philosophical articulation in Decartes, there can be no determined, unified "subject" independent of sensible "objects"; rather, there is a dynamic, aspectival relation between affection and action, a power (*dunamus*, *koaḥ*) and act (*entelecheia*, *energeia*, *poʿal*), sense, sensation, and sensed, whereby the more an individual is affected, the more she comes to be in act and, in turn, can affect others in the same respect. What can be said to be unified is experience that comes about by repeated sensation, which sensation is the result of the aspectival relation between sense and sensed. Despite the translation of experience (*empereia*) into "empiricism," for the premodern philosophers experience is not immediate, let alone transparent to, or constructed by, a sensing subject.[8]

Despite significant differences among modern conceptions of the relations between knowledge and belief, their shared conception of the modern subject, who is prior to experience, is the locus of certainty and authority. This subject is also the *subject* of post-Shoah critiques of philosophy, irrespective of the names by which we designate, or denigrade them. Before proceeding to a discussion of distinct Jewish philosophers, it cannot be overemphasized that this modern subject is both incoherent to, and renders incoherent premodern discussions of human knowledge, philosophical as well as prophetic. Conversely, this is also the subject that is put into question by most contemporary philosophers, analytic as well as continental.

Two final provisos concerning the differences between premodern and modern philosophy are necessary. First, in the absence of a unified foundational science governed by a single method of precision, there can be no "epistemology." Rather, there are many sciences/knowledges (*epistemai*, *scientiae*), of which the precision depends on the subject matter or "object" of inquiry. Medieval Jewish philosophers (and their Islamicate interlocutors) followed Aristotle's numerous ironic derisions of the desire for a single standard of precision. "For it is the mark of an educated man to seek as much precision in things of a given genus as their nature allows, for to accept persuasive arguments from a mathematician appears to be [as improper as] to demand demonstration from a rhetorician." Second, it is precisely on the question of precision in science that Aristotle makes evident the inadequacy of the modern philosophical distinction between "epistemology" and psychology, emphasizing the affective dimension of, and hinderences to cognition.

> The way we receive a lecture depends on our custom; for we expect a lecturer to use the language we are accustomed to, and any other language appears *not agreeable but rather unknown and strange* . . . The *power* of custom is clearly seen in the laws, in which the mythical and childish beliefs *prevail over our knowledge about them*.[9]

As will become evident, this insight about the affective dimension of cognition is indispensable for understanding the medieval Jewish philosophers, especially

Maimonides, and some of their modern heirs, especially Spinoza. Rather than distinguish between epistemology and psychology, the medieval Jewish philosophers' inquiry into knowledge, belief, and certainty takes the forms of epistemic psychology and moral psychology. In fact, in some cases, such as Maimonides and Spinoza, the inquiry concerns the tension between them, rather than attempts to reduce the one to the other.

SAADIA GAON

The Arabic title of Saadia Gaon's most influential philosophical work, *Kitāb al-'Amānāt wa'l-I'tiqādāt*, simultaneously presents us with the subject matter of this chapter and with the difficulty confronted by the modern philologist as well as philosopher in adequately translating and/or understanding premodern engagements with the question of knowledge. Not surprisingly, the title of the Hebrew translation, *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot*, does not simplify the difficulty, and the difficulty is not overcome by consulting medieval philosophical lexicons pertinent to Jewish philosophy.[10] Is *emunah* doctrine, belief or opinion? Is *da'at* opinion or is it knowledge? It is no surprise, therefore, that the translations into English vary. What is surprising, however, is that, whereas none of the English translations render Saadia's use of *da'at* as "knowledge," Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Maddah* is always translated as *The Book of Knowledge*, despite the fact that it is addressed to a traditional, nonphilosophical audience. Moreover, as will become evident in the following discussion of Saadia's understanding of distinct modes of knowledge, his position is anything but traditional. In light of the difficulty and ambiguity of the text, I shall, henceforth, use its Hebrew title, *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot*, because the Hebrew reflects the same ambiguity as the Arabic does and it is the Hebrew translation that is responsible for its dissemination and influence on Jewish philosophy.[11]

Despite the paucity of our information about Saadia's education, his writings attest to extensive knowledge of Greek philosophy and science, as well as familiarity with Islamic dialectical theology (*Kalām*), Christian doctrine, and various forms of Eastern philosophy. Although Saadia's work was and remains unknown to the Christian West, its influence on Jewish philosophy was (and is) extensive. Irrespective of Maimonides' subsequent criticism of Saadia's work as *Kalām*, rather than philosophy, it is no exaggeration to insist that, properly speaking, he was the first Jewish philosopher, as distinct from a philosopher who happened to be Jewish,[12] precisely insofar as his foremost concern was the relation between philosophy and the Hebrew Bible. In this respect, Saadia announces in the medieval Jewish context, the classical motif of medieval philosophy in general. As a result, subsequent Jewish philosophers had to respond to his work, even if critically.[13]

Despite significant differences among them, all of Saadia's writings, polemical, pedagogical, and philosophical, are concerned with knowledge, in some sense, insofar as they share a single aim, namely the education of the Jewish community at a time when Hebrew literacy was in decline and, among the literate, confusion and error were wide-spread. Because *The Book of Creation*, one of Saadia's two philosophical works, does not directly address the question of knowledge, whereas *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot* does, and because the former work exerted little or no influence on subsequent Jewish philosophy, I shall focus strictly on the latter.

Saadia identifies the compelling need for the composition of the *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot* as the errors and doubts rampant in the Jewish community, owing to which members of the community are hindered from, or misled in their pursuit of their proper end, justice and truth. Ironically, although initially it may appear as though he identifies the primary source of error and doubt as the sensible origin of knowledge, a careful reading of the opening text as well as the subsequent discussion of the proper order of knowledge/science makes evident the fact that the failure is due to a deficiency in the "knower," rather than the knowable, sensibly, or intelligibly understood. Rather, the deficiency is attributed to the habits of the one seeking knowledge, that is, it is an ethical deficiency. Indeed, following Aristotle, Saadia insists that sensibility is the ground of intelligibility and that, although sensibility may appear to cause doubt, the reasons for the doubt are not the senses but rather improper pursuit, carelessness, and laziness that hinder the pursuit of both the sensible (*al-mahsusat*) and intelligible (*al-ma'aqulat*) sciences. In fact, it may be argued that it is only because Saadia locates the problem of error and doubt in human habit rather than nature that he can maintain an exuberant and surprisingly democratic confidence in the perfectibility of human knowledge, an egalitarian confidence unequal among medieval philosophers.

Having outlined the obstacles to any investigation, natural, rational, biblical, let alone an investigation into disputed questions concerning which opinions greatly vary not only between philosophy and Torah but also among different schools of thought, sects, etc. – before he addresses specific questions foundational to the Torah, such as creation, and having cautioned at length about the proper order of inquiry so as to acquire good habits or correct bad ones, Saadia seeks to clarify what he understands by *de'ah*. I quote at length.

> Having clarified the errors and doubts, it is fitting that we should explain what *de'ah* is. We say that it is an "idea" that arises in the soul about every knowable thing in accord with its state; and when it is clarified by speculation, the intellect comprehends as well as accepts it, and it enters the soul and is absorbed by it. It is then that a man has a *de'ah* about this "idea" which he attained and he preserves it in the soul for another time or other times.[14]

That Saadia understands *deʿah* as a state of the soul is clear from the aforegiven quotation. It is also clear that it carries with it conviction about the knowable, sensible, or intelligible, or that whose knowledge is sought. For, as Saadia states in the following sentence: "*Deʿah* has two aspects, true and false. A true *deʿah* is '*knowledge*' of something as it is . . . a false one is 'knowledge' of something as it is not." That is, a false *deʿah* is the contradictory, rather than contrary, of a true one. For, as a state of the soul, false "knowledge" is held as if it were true and hence carries conviction with it. Because the *Sefer Emunot ve-Deʿot* is concerned with the relation between *al-amanat* and *al-ʾiʿtiqādāt* (*emunot ve-deʿot*), and because the former are affirmative doctrines whose origin is revelation and whose authority is extrinsic, it is best translated by "belief."[15] In contradistinction, insofar as *deʿah* comes about in virtue of inquiry or speculation (*al-nazar*) in which the intellect comes to understand something, that is, insofar as its origin as well as authority are intrinsic, the conviction pertaining to it has a different epistemic status than that of belief. Although both entail conviction, insofar as its origin and authority are intrinsic, I shall henceforth translate *deʿah* as *conviction*.[16] In this light, unlike *deʿah*, to ask whether or not *emunah* (belief) is a species of knowledge, is to ask about the epistemic status of belief rather than knowledge. In contrast, insofar as *deʿah* can be either true or false, it can be distinguished into knowledge and opinion, both of which are species of knowledge, whose authority is intrinsic and both are held as true. Moreover, it cannot be overemphasized that the difference between the authoritative status of the two types of conviction must be understood as the necessary condition for a resolution of possible differences between *emunot* and *deʿot*, revelation and reason. Before proceeding, it is important to emphasize that Saadia's theory of knowledge is indebted to Aristotle's epistemic/moral psychology in which beliefs, opinions, and knowledge constitute powers of the soul, which powers always possess an affective dimension informing pursuit and avoidance. Hence, Saadia explicitly emphasizes that humans cling to their beliefs and opinions and are resistant to their contraries, a theme that will be further and more thoroughly developed by Maimonides and Spinoza. As Saadia states (rather dramatically), he is astonished about such individuals: "Although they are really servants, they are convinced that they have no master and feel confident that what they reject is false, and what they affirm is the case."[17] Hence, it must be added that a doctrinally held belief cannot be the contradictory of a philosophical *conviction*, that is, although doctrinal beliefs are not related to one another as the true is to the false, a *conviction* can be either true or false. In short, the concern with reconciling apparent contradictions between revelation and reason is always already also ethical.

From the outset, Saadia repeatedly argues that the different sciences must be cultivated in successive stages. In an interesting *apologetic* argument for the *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot* (and one that anticipates later medieval and modern Latin debates), Saadia presents this view of knowledge as proportionately progressive, rather than perfect from the beginning, in response to an objection from the existence of a perfect Creator. According to the objection, a perfect Creator would have been able to create a perfect world with perfectly rational creatures. In response, Saadia argues from the order of the created rather than Creator and insists on a sensible origin of human knowledge, from which all the sciences and arts develop in stages, with the actual perfection of one becoming the power to pursue another.

By insisting on the successive acquisition of knowledge, Saadia (following Aristotle) insists that the perfection of one science is a necessary condition for the pursuit of the next science. Differently stated, and in a manner that anticipates subsequent Aristotelian philosophy, Saadia formulates the difference between types of self-evidence as a difference between what is most evident to us (sensible knowledge) and what is most evident in itself (first principles).[18] What is especially striking about Saadia's procedure in the *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot* is the fact that it performs in deed what it argues is proper order, beginning from general observations about the state of knowledge, followed by clarifications of the reasons for doubt and error, positing general principles/roots/sciences and subsequently identifying the proper order of science to which distinct disputed questions belong.

Following the clarification of the proper scientific procedures, Saadia posits four general principles/origins of knowledge, of which the first three are philosophical, and the fourth, traditional. Together these four principles sustain Saadia's theory of biblical interpretation as well as the more strictly philosophical side of his endeavor to harmonize Torah and philosophy.

The first principle of knowledge is identified as sensation (lit.: sensible science). Provided that the sense organ is healthy and the individual is not deluded, knowledge derived from sensation is sound and is the basis for all subsequent forms of knowledge. Saadia points out that only a few radical skeptics reject this principle and claims that, in so doing, the skeptics also reject the second and third roots, because the further knowledge is from sensation, the more it is subject to doubt. "The reason for this unequal distribution of views lies in the fact that the second type of knowledge is more hidden than the first and likewise the third more hidden than the second. Naturally, one is more readily inclined to deny what is hidden than what is evident."[19]

The second principle is intellect (*al-ʿaql*, *sekhel*[20]) or "intellectual science." According to Saadia, some truths are intrinsically (*necessarily*) evident or knowable per se and, hence, entirely free from doubt. Insofar as Saadia's example for this kind of self-evidence is the assent to truth and rejection of falsehood, his claim seems to endorse Aristotle's law of noncontradiction in which the assent to truth immediately entails the rejection of its contradictory. Saadia's description of this kind of knowledge shows his unqualified confidence in the natural powers of the human intellect, provided that reason is properly trained. "As to intelligible knowledge (literally, the intelligibles), we hold that every conception formed in our intellect when it is free from defects is true knowledge, free from doubt, provided we know how to reason, complete the act of reasoning, and guard against illusions and dreams."[21] He adds, however, that those who believe in the rational status of dreams and illusions do so to safeguard sensible knowledge, confusing, as it were, sense perception and imaginative representation. Assuming that dreams derive directly from sense perceptions, they believe that to deny the rational status of dreams is simultaneously to deny the sensible origins of human knowledge. Saadia's explanation for trust in dreams is both novel and striking. On the one hand, he uses it to bolster his own claim for the close relation between sensation and intellection. On the other hand, he uses it to safeguard the rational status of prophetic revelation in dreams, claiming that they "contain some flash of inspiration from above in the form of hints and parables."[22] That is, according to Saadia, provided that proper distinctions are recognized among different types of representation, sensible, imaginative, and rational (which requires proper training), there is no fear of confusing waking states with dream states and no need to doubt the veracity of sensations. In the light of Saadia's twofold account of dreams, it is no exaggeration to view his account as a bold and original argument that implicitly posits revelation both as the culmination of the natural process of human cognition, and as a divine aid that circumvents the slow temporal process of perfection, ensuring that those who are intellectually weaker would not be bereft of religious beliefs, albeit by means of imaginative representation rather than reasoned conclusions.

The third principle of knowledge posited by Saadia is inference (literally, knowledge by necessity) when it yields propositions that cannot be denied without simultaneously denying propositions derived either from sensible or from intellectual knowledge. It is a distinct order of knowledge insofar as the inference is rendered necessary when neither sensible nor rational evidence, or both, are sufficient to account for a phenomenon. More precisely, inference is rendered necessary when the evidence available from the first two orders of knowledge are insufficient to produce a *conviction* in the soul. For example, when we perceive smoke without

perceiving fire, we infer the existence of fire to account for the evidence of smoke. In a strikingly analogous manner, Saadia maintains that our knowledge of the existence of the soul is inferential.

> We are compelled to admit that man possesses a soul, although we do not sense it, so as not to deny its evident activities. Likewise, we are compelled to admit that the soul is endowed with an intellect, even though we do not sense it, so as not to deny its evident activities.[23]

Most important, as will become evident, according to Saadia, when we perceive the existence of the universe we are compelled to infer that its cause exists. Saadia's subordination of proofs for God's existence to proofs for creation will be explicitly criticized as *Kalām* by Maimonides and implicitly by Gersonides.

Ironically, in light of Maimonides' criticism of his methods, after he explains the nature and necessity for inferential knowledge, Saadia states that this mode of knowledge is the cause of many errors, and of "most of the controversies between men as well as the differences among their modes of argument."[24]

The fourth principle of knowledge posited by Saadia is correct tradition. Saadia refers here primarily, but not exclusively, to the revealed tradition. In fact, he argues that this root is not only based on both sensibility and intelligibility but also that the prophetic books verify the other three principles as true modes of knowledge. More precisely, the first three principles of knowledge are both confirmed by the prophetic texts and confirm the veracity of prophecy. For, certainty concerning the status of prophetic instruction is derived from the prophet's performance of miracles that is witnessed by others and cannot be explained otherwise. Thus, both sense knowledge, in the form of witness, and inference to a cause of an event that cannot be explained otherwise serve to verify the status of prophecy.

After he provides numerous hypothetical examples of the kind of mistakes that are occasioned by improper inferences, Saadia outlines seven rules for inference pertaining both to philosophy and to the interpretation of the biblical tradition. These again confirm the authority of human reason or *intellect*. Inference should not contradict (1) sense perception, (2) reason, or (3) some other truth, and (4) it should not be self-contradictory or (5) involve greater difficulties than those we seek to resolve. The sixth and seventh rules enjoin caution so as to avoid hasty conclusions. Provided the interpreter exercises proper care, according to Saadia, the first four rules should be applied to all biblical interpretation.

Having provided a very condensed overview for an analytics[25] and a theory of knowledge, Saadia offers two justifications for a speculative approach to religion, a mode of inquiry that makes use of sense perception, reason, and inference and does not simply take any dogmatic tradition as authoritative ipso facto. First, according

to Saadia, speculative inquiry turns into real, *intrinsic*, authoritative knowledge of what God has revealed through *extrinsic* authoritative prophetic instruction. Second, taking advantage of every principle of knowledge enables the believer to refute those who deride religious belief. Again, in this respect, Maimonides was to question Saadia's overwhelming confidence in the power of the human intellect as a misguided form of *Kalām*.

According priority in biblical interpretation to sensible and intelligible knowledge over tradition would not be surprising when applied to many questions. What is striking, however, is that Saadia maintains this priority even when dealing with the question of the origin of the universe; and because, as he notes at the beginning of his discussion, sensible knowledge provides no data on this question (if it did, there would be no disagreement about it), he in fact proceeds on the basis of what he takes to be intelligible knowledge and philosophical speculation. Maimonides will be especially vehement in his critique of Saadia's procedure here, claiming that his speculation is based on imagination rather than intellection. Insofar as the question of the origins of the universe is the foundational question in the debate between philosophy/Aristotle and tradition, it exemplifies the differences among the noetics found in medieval Jewish philosophy.

There is a fundamental or originary inconsistency in Saadia's proofs for creation that is exemplary of a tension in his theory of knowledge and that is vehemently criticized by Maimonides. For although he denies that sense perception can provide data about the origin of the world, he bases his proofs on the perceived nature of actually existing finite beings. (The previously quoted examples of inferential knowledge exhibit the same problem). Moreover, and more important, according to Maimonides, Saadia's pseudo-demonstration of the origin of the world, like those of other *Mutakallimūn*, not only is based on ignorance of the distinction between contrariety and contradiction, and hence, confuses imaginative and real possibility and impossibility, but as a consequence, it renders the existence of the deity the necessary consequence of the existence of the world rather than vice versa. In view of Saadia's unfailing belief in the power of human reason, the greatest irony about Maimonides' vehement criticism is that he accuses Saadia of the error for which Saadia accused others: pseudo-reason. It is important to note, however, that the vehemence of Maimonides' criticism of Saadia is proportionate to his authoritative status.[26]

MOSES MAIMONIDES

Despite radical differences between their works, and irrespective of Maimonides' vehement criticisms of Saadia's philosophical positions as well as methods,[27] their

shared concerns and commitments, their shared philosophical ethos, can best serve to illustrate the radical difference between the medieval and modern ethoi with respect to knowledge. Such comparison is warranted precisely because both medieval Jewish philosophers identify doubt and perplexity as the cause of the need for their respective *magna opera*. Whereas however the modern concern with doubt exemplified by the Cartesian doubting ego is an individual concern, the concerns of both Saadia and Maimonides are with the well-being of the community. Whereas the modern "I" is posited as a source of knowledge independent of sensibility, the medieval Jewish philosophers view sensibility as the very condition of knowledge. Although for both the moderns and the premoderns, sensibility may lead to error, for the premoderns it is not the cause of error; rather, error originates in improper methods, hasty judgment, as well as doxa, which doxa always already overdetermines the "reception" of sensibility. Moreover, whereas the overcoming of Cartesian doubt requires nothing less than certainty, for the premodern philosophers certainty is neither the necessary condition for knowledge nor even a mark of it. Certainty or conviction is equally a mark of belief as it is of opinion and knowledge, but such a conviction may be erroneous and is then an affective obstacle to knowledge, inhibiting further inquiry, teaching, and learning.

In a manner strikingly similar to that of Saadia, Maimonides begins his *magnum opus*, the *Guide of the Perplexed*,[28] with the perplexity occasioned by improper methods and often hasty procedure, especially in the investigation of questions regarding which there appears to be disagreement between philosophy and Torah. More important, with respect to the concern of this chapter, according to Maimonides, these questions give rise to doubt precisely because they are aporetic and do not admit certainty, except a dogmatic one. Indeed, insofar as the inquiry into these questions is an inquiry into first principles and, as such, can only proceed dialectically, it does not yield certainty; for, as Aristotle states, dialectics lies on the way to first principles rather than provides knowledge of principles.[29] That is why, following Aristotle, Maimonides begins with the prevailing opinions, whether they are of the many with respect to language, or of the philosophers and the Sages when they concern foundations of knowledge, which foundations are not themselves sensible, as is exemplarily the case with the question of the origin of the universe. As already indicated, it is on the question of origin that Maimonides' critique of Saadia (and other *Mutakallimūn*) is most acerbic. Insofar as Maimonides regards questions concerning first, that is, indemonstrable, principles to belong to the science of metaphysics and/or to "divine science" (*al ʿilm al-ilāhī*),[30] he also regards this/these science(s) as the foremost site of disagreements not only between philosophy and Torah but, more important, among philosophers. Conversely, where

demonstration is available, where conviction is about a necessary truth, there can be no perplexity or doubt.

> For in all things whose true reality is known through demonstration there is no tug of war and no refusal to accept a thing proven – unless indeed such refusal comes from an ignoramus who offers a resistance that is called resistance to demonstration . . .
>
> The things about which there is this perplexity are very numerous in divine matters, few in matters pertaining to natural science, and nonexistent in matters pertaining to mathematics.[31]

As Maimonides' claims make evident, there are at least two distinct difficulties with respect to knowledge: the first concerns "resistance to demonstration"; the second pertains to the inverse relation between rational demonstration or clarity to us, which clarity depends on indemonstrable first principles, and philosophical as well as theological difficulties (*aporiae*),[32] concerning first principles, and which requires immediate intellectual apprehension, philosophical or prophetic.[33] Now, although Maimonides' reference to the one resistant to demonstration as an ignoramus may appear to limit the difficulty to the vulgar, as will become evident this phenomenon extends to the "educated" as well. For, were this resistance limited to the vulgar, its remedy would be simple: education in an idiom proportionate to the capacity of the audience through familiar, hence attractive images and language. Although adopting such an idiom may require problematic accommodation, such accommodation would still be a form of *imitatio dei*, as is the case with many of the commandments according to Maimonides.[34] In this light, properly speaking, the resistance to demonstration which is of central concern to Maimonides is not predominantly, perhaps not at all, that of the vulgar and it does not have a single subject of knowledge. Rather, Maimonides' concern with resistance to demonstration – that is, his concern with the centrality of affect/passion to belief, opinion, and knowledge, let alone certainty (conviction), which is an affective state of the soul – is twofold and pertains to two different classes of possible "knowers," namely, those who hold themselves to be knowers and whose epistemic authority is unquestioned, whether or not they really are by nature capable of knowledge, such as the Rabbis and *Mutakallimūn* and those who are capable of knowledge, the perplexed, whose perplexity often arises from having been misled into perplexity/doubt by the former authorities. That is, with the exception of intellectual conviction, the conviction of the philosophers and prophets, potential knowers, who are perplexed, may be resistant to demonstration either because of acquired conviction that prevents/resists investigation into real aporiae or because of improper methods that often fail to distinguish between demonstrable and indemonstrable methods, let alone present faulty demonstrations. In this light, Maimonides' vehement criticism of Saadia,

like Plato's criticism of the sophists, is pedagogical and arises from the concern for the well-being of the community. As will become evident later, Spinoza's biting criticism of the metaphysicians and theologians is strikingly similar to Maimonides' and is equally concerned with the affective resistance to demonstration owing to dogmatic conviction.

One of the most striking aspects of the *Guide* is the fact that, with the exception of one chapter, *Guide* I.68, and the investigation of the epistemic status of prophecy, Maimonides' discussions of knowledge are always bracketed between discussions of the obstacles on the way to knowledge, on the one hand, the limits of human knowledge, on the other.[35] It cannot be overemphasized, at the outset, that this double limitation is a limitation on an already significantly limited number of human beings; that is, it does not concern the vulgar or the majority. In fact, emphasizing the "great differences in capacity between individual of the species," Maimonides claims that among the vulgar there are some who could not understand a certain notion even after a long time, irrespective of the idiom deployed, including the parabolic. The mind of such an individual "would not penetrate it in any way, but would turn back without understanding it."[36] Properly habituated to right practice, however, the vulgar, who are the many, present no difficulty because they have no desire for knowledge and are neither perplexed nor subject to doubt but who, on the basis of authority, hold beliefs of which they are convinced or are certain. It must be emphasized that, for Maimonides, the "truth" or "falsity"of these beliefs is philosophically irrelevant, provided that they are not harmful, either to the individual or to the community. In fact, strictly speaking, vulgar beliefs cannot be true, although they are held as certain. For, as already stated, certainty/conviction is an affective state, whereas the apprehension of truth is an epistemic/intellectual state, irrespective of pleasure or pain, even when it gives rise to affective conviction.[37] Furthermore, whereas dogmatic certainty is neither accompanied by, nor gives rise to, a desire for further knowledge, on the contrary, intellectual perplexity as well as apprehension are both manifestations of the desire for knowledge and give rise to further desire.

As already stated, it is the potential elite, those capable of knowledge, who are Maimonides' concern, for it is they whose habituation is in question. For, although Maimonides repeatedly emphasizes the natural limit of the human intellect, and although it may appear as if such a limit must, therefore, also be a *natural* limit on the desire to know,[38] bad habituation can subvert nature and present through "corrupt imaginings"[39] as demonstrable that which is indemonstrable, as knowable that which is not knowable. Seeking knowledge, let alone certainty, where knowledge cannot be had, is, according to Maimonides, very harmful. Likewise, disclosing

truths to those incapable of receiving them, whether they are the vulgar, who are absolutely incapable of knowledge, or the potential elite, who are not yet capable of it, is not merely harmful but, in the case of the latter, can destroy the capacity to know.[40]

In light of the nature and extreme limit of intellectual apprehension (*'idrak*), that understanding limited to the very few elite that consists of the identity between intellect, the intelligible and intellecting "subject," (*nous*, *noema*, *noesis* or *al-'aql*, *al-ma'aqul*, *al-'aqil*), first briefly outlined in *Guide* I.68, and then resumed in the discussion of prophecy, following Maimonides I shall first address the obstacles to and differences between belief and knowledge and the ethical/affective dimension of cognition before I turn to a discussion of the distinction between philosophical knowledge and prophetic knowledge – knowledge whose purpose is the well-being of the community. Again, the question of knowledge, as a question, at least for medieval Jewish philosophers and Spinoza, is not primarily a question about an individual knower but one about the commonwealth.

In the light of the affective dimension of knowledge as well as ignorance (willed and unwilled) it is not surprising that, when he lists the four causes of disagreements or diversity of opinions, two of them are strictly affective, one strictly epistemic, and one can be viewed as mixed. Of these, three reiterate Alexander of Aphrodisias' list and *seem* to pertain to the individual only, whereas the fourth, added by Maimonides, clearly concerns the ethos of a community. Whereas the first three causes *seem* to refer to human nature, the forth is historical and hence is clearly a cause by convention rather than nature. As Maimonides states, "[h]owever, in our times there is a fourth cause that he [Alexander] did not mention *because it did not exist among them*."[41]

The first three causes of disagreements or multiplicity of conflicting opinions/convictions are love of domination and strife, the difficulty of the intelligible, and intellectual limitation of the one who claims knowledge about what is knowable. The fourth, added by Maimonides, is love for the customs, beliefs, and opinions in which one has been habituated and a repulsion by what is contrary to these. Now for Maimonides, with the exception of the difficulty of the intelligible, the other three obstacles to knowledge are both affective and depend on the nature/ethos of the community. Although this claim does not seem to be warranted in relation to the third cause, the limitation of the knower, the key differences between the second and third causes are differences between nature and habit. That is, the second limitation is one by nature, the third is a result of a habit *because of which* the one who seeks, let alone claims, to know is ignorant of her/his own inability with respect to what is by *its nature* knowable.[42] Understood in this light, and as

becomes clearly evident in his elaboration, Maimonides' added fourth cause is a modification of the first three rendered necessary by religion. That the feelings of love for one's beliefs and opinions and repulsion for their contraries, which render "man blind to the apprehension of the true realities and inclines him towards the things to which he is habituated,"[43] originates in religious doctrine is made amply manifest in Maimonides' examples of such beliefs, namely belief in God's corporeality and other subjects central to divine science. "All this is due to people being habituated to, and brought up on, texts that it is an established usage to think highly of and to regard as true and whose external meaning is indicative of the corporeality of God and other imaginings *with no truth in them*."[44] More precisely, it is not religious doctrine per se that constitutes an obstacle to knowledge, let alone certainty, but rather an erroneously perceived disagreement between religion and philosophy, where acquired religious doctrines are acquired and held as certain through the interpretations of those who present themselves as and are believed to be knowers, those whose authority establishes imaginative beliefs as true. In a manner similar to Averroes' condemnation of al-Ghazālī, Maimonides' condemnation of such authorities is unmitigated. Expressing a conviction that they will not be benefited by instruction, Maimonides described them as individuals

> Whose brains have been polluted by false opinions and misleading ways *deemed by them to be true sciences and who hold themselves to be men of speculation* without having any knowledge of anything that can truly be called science.[45]

Maimonides' Introduction to the *Eight Chapters* makes vividly and succinctly evident the effects and extent of received dogmatic repulsion. Explaining why he would not identify his sources Maimonides states, "The name of such an individual might make the passage offensive to someone without experience and make him think it has an evil inner meaning of which he is not aware."[46] For Maimonides, it is the aim of the philosopher/guide, and especially prophet, to habituate affect/desire in a manner such that will make knowledge possible in proportion to the capacity of the "knower."

Insofar as Maimonides views prophecy as a natural phenomenon, albeit an extraordinary one, and insofar as it is the same in kind as all disclosures in dreams, the investigation seeks to clarify what the difference is between the philosopher and the prophet and whether and how this difference is related to their knowledge. As already indicated, Maimonides is surprisingly reticent about philosophical knowledge and the most explicit account occurs in the context of the discussion of prophecy. This is not surprising, because the philosopher qua philosopher, according to Maimonides, is the one who communicates his knowledge, albeit to the few.

As in all other investigations of aporetic questions, so in his discussion of prophecy, and in a classically Aristotelian dialectical manner, Maimonides begins with a brief outline of prevalent existing opinions. At the outset, Maimonides situates the opinions/convictions concerning prophecy in the same class of opinions as those that concern the origin of the universe and by extension providence, and miracles, that is, opinions concerning principles about which there is, or appears to be, disagreement between the Torah and philosophy. The first opinion, which is held by the multitude, Jewish as well as Pagan, maintains that God communicates knowledge to whomsoever God chooses, provided that he/she is morally upright, irrespective of his/her cognitive status, or prior intellectual preparation. This view is summarily dismissed by Maimonides as a version of *Kalām* occasionalism, according to which prophecy would be an extranatural miraculous event. The second opinion, that of the philosophers, is the dialectical contradictory of the first. It maintains that anyone who has attained the highest moral and intellectual natural perfection, and provided that no *natural*, external cause should intervene, will necessarily become a prophet. Thus understood, prophecy is not only a perfection of nature but also a natural, *species* perfection. It is, therefore, not an extraordinary form of knowledge. The third opinion, that of the Torah, according to Maimonides' interpretation, is a modification of the philosophical opinion, which only adds one negative proviso to the philosophical position, namely, that one who has attained all requisite natural perfection may be prevented from becoming a prophet by "the divine will."[47]

Although intellectual and moral perfection are necessary conditions for all extraordinary modes of knowledge, they are not their cause, and hence cannot explain them in their specificity, that is, in their difference from philosophical/ordinary knowledge. The key to understanding extraordinary knowledge is the imaginative power, a power upon which "no commandment or prohibition can be placed,"[48] that is, a power whose disposition and perfection cannot be attained either through study or through training. According to Maimonides, it is the perfection of this faculty, owing to conjunction with the Agent Intellect, in which all modes of extraordinary knowledge consist. Although the imagination depends on sensation for its "objects," its activities, at their most perfect, *appear to be* independent of sensibles. In fact, in Maimonides' emanationist cosmology, with the exception of one of its activities, namely the retention of sensibles that renders it into a power capable of independent activity, once perfected, the other two imaginative activities, construction and imitation, are free of sensibles.

> [I]t is then that a certain overflow overflowed to this faculty according to its disposition, and it is the cause of the veridical dreams. *This same overflow is the cause of prophecy. There is only a difference in degree not in kind*.[49]

Maimonides insists that all prophecy, with the exception of Moses,[50] occurs as vision or dream. For Maimonides the proper distinction is not one among dreams, divinations, and prophecy, but rather among types and degrees of prophecy. The more vivid or clear the representation, the more it makes *present* what is *absent* or, again, the more it obliterates the difference between the internal and external, the more perfect the vision or dream. Clearly the more the difference between the internal and external is obliterated the greater the conviction and the lesser the possibility of doubt. At his materialist Aristotelian best, Maimonides links extraordinary imaginative disclosure to the desire for knowledge, naturally understood.

> It is known that a matter that occupies a man greatly – he being bent upon it and *desirous* of it – while he is awake and while his senses function, is the one with regard to which the imaginative faculty acts while he is asleep when receiving an overflow of the intellect corresponding to its [the imagination's] disposition.[51]

Stating that this is a truism, Maimonides offers no further justification for the relation between the natural desire and the extraordinary knowledge. Nonetheless, the question of the natural desire for knowledge and its relation to extraordinary modes of knowing/perfection is central for understanding the distinction he draws among the nature and aims of the modes of knowledge proper to philosophers, prophets, governors of cities, and others "like" them. Although, in accord with an emanationist cosmology, Maimonides understands all modes of knowledge to result from an overflow of the transcendent, and external Agent Intellect, such overflow must be understood as proportional not only to prior preparation but, more important, to the natural desire for knowledge or rather its aim/telos. Men of science or philosophers engaged in speculation receive an overflow that perfects their rational faculty and extends no further. From the perspective of prophecy, insofar as philosophers do not desire to communicate their knowledge (perhaps, except to the few) and/or insofar as their imaginative faculty remains unaffected by such knowledge, *qua prophecy*, their knowledge is "deficient" and "private," that is, it remains apolitical and ahistorical.[52] That is, although the philosophers' knowledge is rendered certain by the overflow, and hence is a perfect form of knowledge, it neither claims to be prophetic nor seeks to produce certainty in others. In contrast to philosophers, there is a class of individuals whose knowledge is deficient *qua knowledge* but whose claim to prophetic authority is of primary concern to Maimonides, namely, those whose desire is for domination or governance of cities. Whereas the former knowledge is praiseworthy, even if practically deficient, the latter claim to knowledge is dangerous in many respects. Although I cannot discuss the third class further in the context of this chapter, it is important to note that its diverse members include legislators, soothsayers, and augurs, all of

whom believe themselves to be wise, despite their deficient rational and imaginative perfection. This belief, when reinforced by a desire for domination, is the cause of the political danger that they constitute, because they are the promulgators of the opinions/convictions of the many, whose power depends on opposition to philosophical knowledge, which opposition, insofar as it is critical, is dangerous to the purveyors of dogma. Their desire is for domination rather than human flourishing. Indeed, for Maimonides, the prophet is their dialectical overcoming.

BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND MODERN PHILOSOPHY: GERSONIDES AND SPINOZA

As already indicated, with the exception of the mathematical sciences (*ta mathemata*) in which certainty is not a question but a datum because the knowable is generated by the knower, for the medieval Jewish philosophers at least up to the fourteenth century the desire for knowledge and the desire for certainty are not only distinct but often contradictory. Although the inverse relation between the clarity of the mathematical sciences or clarity in accord with the knower and the clarity of the knowable is retained and repeated in both Gersonides and Spinoza, it is significantly reinterpreted by Gersonides and subsequently Spinoza as a consequence of the new physics and the rejection of emanation, which rejection also entails a more stringent materialist account of belief, knowledge, and certainty. Gersonides' mediating and intermediary role in this transformation is nowhere clearer than in the tensions between his philosophical account of knowledge in the *Supercommentary on Averroes' Epitome of the 'De Anima'* and his account of prophecy in *The Wars of the Lord*. Although both accounts insist on the material, sensible origin of all knowledge, although both accounts view the imagination as a necessary intermediary between sensibility and intelligibility, although both view the Agent Intellect as an immanent rather than transcendent principle of cognition, and although Gersonides argues that philosophical perfection is a prerequisite to prophetic perfection, his insistence on a difference in kind between prophetic knowledge and other forms of extraordinary knowledge is irreconcilable with his stringent materialist account of knowledge. It is also surprisingly more traditional or less Aristotelian than Maimonides' account. Rather than attempt to account for these tensions, which are beyond the scope and concern of this chapter, I shall briefly outline the ontology and physics of Gersonides' account of cognition because his transformation of the noetics of his predecessors is highly significant both in its own right and as a precursor to Spinoza.

Before proceeding, it is important to emphasize, however, that, even in the *Wars*, Gersonides' concern is first and foremost philosophical. Insofar as the *Wars*

is devoted to investigations of six philosophical aporiae/difficulties, Gersonides proceeds dialectically through an examination of strengths and weaknesses of the different opinions on each subject to derive principles from them as well as to distinguish the true from the false and eradicate doubt. In a striking manner, Gersonides explicitly states that his concern is to help "the man of inquiry," not those who attempt to prohibit inquiry, for philosophical inquiry is an "imitation of God," and the "Torah is not a nomos that forces us to believe falsehoods but rather directs us toward the attainment of truth to the extent possible."[53] In light of his account of knowledge, according to which the elimination of error/falsehood is a material condition for knowledge, Gersonides' dismissal of those who attempt to prohibit inquiry clearly indicates that, like Maimonides and later Spinoza, he considered certain beliefs/convictions to constitute powerful affects that resist questioning not only passively by refusing to consider contrary opinions but also actively by seeking to prohibit all philosophical inquiry. It is surprising, therefore, that despite the fact that Gersonides' account of prophecy as well as his discussion of practical reason in the *Supercommentary* explicitly mention the political dimension of these modes of knowledge, his general philosophical concerns seem to be surprisingly apolitical, that is, individual, in comparison to both Maimonides and Spinoza.[54] Despite his stated recognition of "the fools who are wise in their own eyes,"[55] he refrains from discussing their capacity to harmfully redirect the natural desire for knowledge of those who hold them in high esteem or for whom their doctrines are authoritative. In sum, unlike Maimonides and Averroes before him or Spinoza after him, Gersonides' accounts of knowledge even in relation to appetition/desire are entirely indifferent to prejudice. Thus understood, not only are Gersonides' investigations of knowledge ahistorical and apolitical but also, as such, they are strikingly modern, perhaps more so than Spinoza's.[56]

Above all, Gersonides' silence about ethics/politics is especially striking in light of the central role of desire in the *Supercommentary*. Moreover, in a departure from Maimonides, Gersonides argues that the natural desire to understand philosophical aporiae indicates that such knowledge is *naturally* attainable, rather than that it may exceed human understanding and mark a perverted desire for the impossible. Once again, in this light, Gersonides' insistence on a distinction in kind between prophecy and other modes of extraordinary knowledge is in tension with all his general theory of knowledge.[57]

Nowhere is Gersonides' materialist philosophy more evident than in his account of the becoming of knowledge, which becoming expresses the aspectival relation between potency/power and actuality. Investigating the physics of knowledge as a motion from potencies to actualities following the idiom and intention of the

Islamicate tradition, Gersonides is explicit that in the absence of a sensible there can be no intelligible and presents the generation of knowledge as a motion from the material/possible intellect to the acquired intellect, governed by the Agent Intellect. More important, insofar as he argues that the imaginative forms are a potential intellect, insofar as form is what strives to preserve determinate existence,[58] and insofar as the Agent Intellect is the immanent, unified order of intelligibility that governs all temporal processes of knowledge, it is clear that the physics of Gersonides' noetics, if it is understood ontologically, cannot by itself account for error or the kind of false belief that "resists demonstration." Viewed more stringently as an Aristotelian physics, whose fundamental principle(s) are the different motions governing all forms of becoming, the idiom of the "striving of form to preserve itself" must be understood quite literally in terms of appetition, that is, desire/passion, which appetition is expressed *inter alia* in the desire to know and is indispensable to its actualization.

Gersonides' physics of knowledge is at the same time a psychology of appetition in which the imagination and memory serve a double intermediary role, a role that makes amply evident the material, sensible origin of all knowledge. Although the intellect can be a cause of appetition, such as the desire to know, it cannot be a cause of motion except through an imagined particular. More important, insofar as motion depends on concord between an imaginative form and appetition, it is the imagination, whose origin is a sensible individual, rather than the appetitive power, which is the active principle of motion as well as knowledge. In a rather striking manner, Gersonides claims that the intellect is *aroused*, that is, is generated and is moved by sensation, memory, and imagination and, hence, that "whoever lack one of the senses lacks some intelligible."[59] Once it is understood as a material dialectic between the physics and the psychology of knowledge, Gersonides' noetics can account both for error and for the kind of false beliefs that can "resist demonstration."

The key to understanding error is found in the two modalities of perfection by which the material intellect becomes the acquired intellect, namely conception and judgment. It is also the key to bringing into full relief Spinoza's proximity to Gersonides. Conception (*tziur*) is independent of extramental particulars, rather "it is the cognition of the very order inherent in the Agent Intellect." That is, with respect to conception, there can be no error or doubt; rather, either there is or there is no conception, for, as the intelligible order, the Agent Intellect is atemporal and unchanging.[60] In contradistinction, judgment "refers to individuals outside the mind."[61] It is in this respect that the intellect can be the indirect cause of appetition and motion "insofar as the imagination imagines a particular thing,

whose universal (*kholelo*) the intellect judges to be good,"[62] that is, beneficial or harmful to the well-being of the individual. Insofar as judgment is concerned with the verification that a mental concept is a true representation of an actual, natural existent, its truth and falsity do not originate in the Agent Intellect and it is not permanent. More important, judgment about an individual as "good" or "bad," "beneficial" or "harmful," is unrelated to the Agent Intellect. It is precisely here, precisely where judgment is concerned and knowledge is individual, that erroneous belief and dogmatic conviction can occur.

Spinoza's account(s) of knowledge exhibit his debt to both Maimonides and Gersonides, albeit in different ways. In fact, it is fair to claim that his investigations represent a combination of Maimonides' politics of knowledge and Gersonides' physics of knowledge, in a radicalized form. As for Maimonides and Gersonides, so for Spinoza the possibility of knowledge depends on the elimination of error. Whereas Gersonides' investigation only examines the opinions of his philosophical predecessors, however, Maimonides' and Spinoza's more urgent concern is the powerful affective hindrances to truth, whose origin is the opinions of the purveyors of beliefs, who are held in high esteem as knowers. That is, their primary concern is with political power as a source of opposition to philosophical inquiry. In short, Maimonides' Rabbis and Mutakallimūn are the political predecessors of Spinoza's theologians and metaphysicians. As the material concrete actuality that is mind, and as an active principle of the striving for self-preservation, false belief/conviction or prejudice, for Spinoza, constitute not only powerful affects but, more important, affects that are far more forceful than the desire to know. Spinoza's letter to Willem van Blijenbergh is exemplary.

> For I see that no demonstration, however solid it may be according to the laws of demonstration, has weight with you unless it agrees with that explanation which you, or theologians known to you, attribute to sacred scripture. But, if you believe that God speaks more clearly and effectively through sacred scripture than through the light of the natural intellect . . . then you have *powerful reasons for bending your intellect to the opinions you attribute to sacred scripture. I myself could hardly do otherwise.*[63]

Because a discussion of prejudice is beyond the scope of this chapter, let alone this brief conclusion, let me turn to Spinoza's radicalization of Gersonides' physics of knowledge.[64]

In Spinoza's accounts, the status of beliefs as the actuality of the human mind/intellect exhibits at the same time (1) the sensible or material (extended) origin of all knowing, for "prejudice" and error are exemplary instances of first order knowledge, knowledge *ex auditis et signis* and *ab experientia vaga*, and (2) the

sameness and difference between "extension" and "thought," that is, sensibility and intelligibility. It also makes manifest the difference between "conception" and "judgment," a difference that, by "locating" error in judgment, explains the relation between extension and thought or, more precisely, affect and intellect. The sameness and difference that characterize these diverse aspects of the relation between "body" and "mind," a relation that, paradoxically and simultaneously, underlies both error and understanding, is clearly and succinctly disclosed through a discussion of the relation between "imagination" and "mind." They also recall Gersonides' discussions of the relations and distinctions between the "material intellect," "imaginative forms" and "intellectual forms." In a similar manner, after repeating numerous times that "the order and connection of things (affects) is the same as the order and connection of ideas," Spinoza is at pains to distinguish between imaginative ideas and adequate ideas without admitting any real distinction between body and its idea, namely, mind. Beginning with the question of the status of images Spinoza states

> . . . the affections of the human body whose ideas present external bodies as *present* to us, we shall call images of things, even if they do not reproduce the figures of things. And when the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines.[65]

Insofar as this proposition seeks to resolve the question how the affects are both the same as, and distinct from the mind, its concern is clearly the status of the "mind" rather than that of the imagination, or how images are regarded by the mind. It is precisely in his discussion of the relation and distinction between mind and imagination that Spinoza's radicalization of Gersonides' epistemic psychology is most evident. Following the elimination of an extranatural source of knowledge, Spinoza rejects his predecessors' Aristotelian faculty psychology and the understanding of different activities of the soul as expressions of different powers, whose abstractive activities of forms progressively dematerialize processes of knowledge. Instead, all differences reflect the aspectival relations between extension and thought and body and mind. Mind/intellect is not the form of the body and it does not know external bodies; rather, it is the body's idea that is constituted by the multiplicity of the forces that affect it. It is for this reason that for Spinoza (against the Cartesian) doubt is no more than a confused idea and judgment cannot be suspended at will.

For Spinoza, the images that make possible the mind's regard of external bodies as present, properly speaking, belong to memory rather than to imagination. It is the capacity to retain the affects as images, once the affects are no longer immediately experienced, that constitutes the problem of representation for Spinoza. And it is a

problem because these images are formed by the simultaneous experience of two or more bodies as one affect that is retained in memory as a single image.

> For [memory] is nothing other than a certain connection of ideas involving the nature of things which are outside the human body – a connection that is in the mind according to the order and connection of the affections of the human body . . . the connection is only of those ideas that involve the nature of things which are outside the human body, *but not of the ideas that explain the nature of the same things*. For they are really (by P16) ideas of affections of the human body which involve both its nature and that of external bodies.[66]

The problem then is not the composite, but nonetheless singular, affect that constitutes the human body but the single image that makes it possible to regard as a present single external body what is, in fact, the simultaneous impact of a multiplicity of bodies with which the human body is involved at any given time and which, in fact, constitute its individuality. For when the mind regards the order and connection of ideas "according to the order of the intellect, by which the mind perceives things through their first causes, [it] is the same for all men,"[67] and hence, not individual. The former order is a more radical form of the order named by Gersonides "material intellect(s)"; the latter order is the radical form of "the Agent Intellect."

The ways in which the mind regards images emerge, in fact, as the two ways that underlie both the material relation and distinction between affect and intellect, imagination and mind, and the epistemic distinction between knowledge and error. The latter distinction concerns the "presence" or "absence" of external bodies to the mind.

> And here in order to begin to indicate what error is, I should like you to note that the imaginations of the mind, considered *in themselves* contain no error *or* that the mind does not err from the fact that it imagines, but only insofar as it is considered to lack an idea that excludes the existence of those things that it imagines to be present to it.[68]

Because the mind's idea of the body *is* its existence, it *prevents* or "excludes the existence of those things that it imagines to be present to it." Consequently, error as well as truth and falsity, let alone "good" and "evil," for Spinoza as for Gersonides, can only pertain to "judgment," that is, verification rather than to understanding that cannot be other than it is. The former belongs to the second kind of knowledge or reason and the latter to the third kind of knowledge. In concord with his preeminent medieval predecessors Maimonides and Gersonides, Spinoza regards this knowledge as the greatest human happiness, which happiness is the most difficult to attain and is reserved to the very few, who truly desire to know.

NOTES

1 See Maimonides 1962.
2 In this light, I think it is a modern conceit that critical philosophy begins with Kant.
3 I use the term "faith" with reluctance because, properly speaking, Judaism is not an orthodoxy or right belief, but rather an orthopraxy, or right practice with very few dogmas, of which the foremost is the belief in the unicity and uniqueness of God. As Gersonides states, "The Torah is not a law that forces us to believe false ideas; rather it leads us to truth to the extent possible." The *Wars of the Lord*, Book 1, introduction; Gersonides 1984, p. 98. That is, the Torah does not pronounce certain dogmata as true but leads to truth.
4 Because the tensions between Gersonides' philosophical account of knowledge in the *Supercommentary on Averroes' Epitome of the 'de Anima'* and his account of prophetic knowledge in the *Wars of the Lord* are irreconcilable and present a tension between philosophy and Torah that cannot be adequately addressed within the confines of this chapter, the discussion of his noetics would be very brief and will serve as a transition to the concluding consideration of Spinoza. As Menachem Kellner noted, Gersonides is "a man caught between two worlds." See Kellner 1977.
5 Kant viewed mathematics as "pure poetry" (*reinen dichtung*). I point to the aesthetic dimension of knowledge and conviction/certainty in anticipation of Maimonides' and Spinoza's focus on the role of the affect/passions in knowledge.
6 It cannot be overemphasized that, following Aristotle, the premodern philosophers repeatedly underscore the inverse relation between "clarity to us," that is, the "subject" of knowledge, or more precisely "sensation" and clarity in itself, that is, the "object" of knowledge, or more precisely "the intelligible." See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, and *Metaphysics* A.
7 Again in a preliminary manner, it is important to note that, with the exception of Euclidean geometry (*ta mathema*) – the prephilosophical mode of learning found in Aristotle's *Organon* – for the premoderns no science proceeds by construction, let alone depends on the subject. Construction in philosophy originates in Descartes' "construction of concepts" (in accord with analytic, as distinct from Eucleadian geometry), continues in Leibniz's "construction of language," (where the relation to mathematics is thematized), and culminates in Kant's construction of intelligibility in accord with the categories of pure reason. For an illuminating discussion of the differences between the premodern and modern ethoi, see Lachterman 1989.
8 It cannot be overemphasized that the isolated, unified subject is essential to all forms of modern philosophy. In fact, it is no exaggeration to argue that the unified subject unifies the disparate forms of modern philosophy, rationalist (Descartes), empiricist (Locke and Hume), and idealist (Kant) and their heirs.
9 *Metaphysics* A 3, 995a1–5, my emphases.
10 Jacob Klatzkin's *Thesaurus Philosophicus* is exemplary here. Notwithstanding Klatzkin's excellence as a philologist, the lexicon exemplifies nineteenth- and twentieth-century biases, whose discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter.
11 *Sefer ha-Nibhar be-Emunot u-be-De'ot, le-Rabenu Sa'adiah ben Yosef Fayummi*. It is generally believed that the first, nonextant translation of the Arabic text into Hebrew was in the ninth century. A later, extant translation, and the one that remained authoritative until Kafih's edition and translation, was made by Judah ibn Tibbon in 1186.
12 Philo of Alexandria (Philo Judaeus) was the first philosopher who happened to be Jewish. He exerted no influence on subsequent Jewish philosophy nor was the concern of his

biblical exegesis the relations between Torah and philosophy, the mark of the medieval Jewish philosophical tradition. Ironically, he exerted significant influence on the medieval Christian tradition.

13 These critical responses were rarely explicit, as is evident in Gersonides' criticism of an a priori argument for creation, mentioned later.

14 *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot*, Introduction; Saadia 1969b, pp. 11–2. Awkward as this "almost" literal translation is, it does not cover over the difficulties. The exception is the term *ma'ani* (Hebrew: *'inyan*) which, with Altmann I very reluctantly translate as "idea." I do so reluctantly because both in the Arabic and in the Hebrew the term is far more vague and can be translated in many, even homonymous ways. I do, however, studiously shy away from translating terms such as *shay ma'alum*, as "object of knowledge." This is a modern anachronism that occludes rather than clarifies medieval conceptions of knowledge. As stated in the introduction, the subject–object opposition is a product of the modern ethos. In fact the aspectival relation among knowledge, knowable, and knower as that of intellection (understanding), intelligible, and intellect reflects the relation of sensation, sensible, and sense and is indispensable for understanding medieval noetics.

15 The epistemic status of *emunah* is the same as that of the Greek *pistis*.

16 I deliberately avoid translating *de'ah* by opinion both because it does not resolve the multivalence or ambiguities and because opinion is commonly used to translate the Arabic *ra'y*.

17 *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot*, Introduction, Saadia 1969b, p. 13.

18 The inverse relation between what is most evident in itself and what most evident to us is a mainstay of Aristotle. See, for example, *Posterior Analytics* and *Metaphysics* A.

19 *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot*, Introduction, Saadia 1969b, p. 14.

20 I translate *al-'aql* (Hebrew: *sekhel*) by intellect rather than mind or reason because it is a noetic power of the soul that is distinct from *dhihn* or mind, another power governing cognitive activities, a significant difference whose discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter. Although this distinction is less important in the discussion of the work, it is key to understanding the difference between reason and intellect in Maimonides, a difference necessary for Maimonides' account of knowledge and its legacy.

21 *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot*, Introduction, Saadia 1969b, p. 17.

22 *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot*, Introduction, Saadia 1969b, p. 18.

23 *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot*, Introduction, Saadia 1969b, p. 14.

24 *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot*, Introduction, Saadia 1969b, p. 21.

25 By "analytics" I intend the general methods of inquiry proper to different sciences as they are articulated in Aristotle's *Organon* and in contradistinction to the epistemic/moral philosophy found in *De Anima* and *Nicomachean Ethics*.

26 Gersonides too disagrees with Saadia's method arguing that no proof for creation can be derived from the essence of the first cause; however, in disagreement with Maimonides, he argues for an a posteriori demonstration of creation.

27 Insofar as Maimonides views Saadia as a *Mutakallim* his critique extends to method. In fact, it may be argued that, in Maimonides' view, it is because of his practice of *Kalām* that Saadia's arguments as well as conclusions are not sound. Again, the attempt to demonstrate the origin of the universe is the locus classicus of their disagreement; the other, closely related disagreement concerns the nature of providence.

28 All English references to the *Guide* are to Maimonides 1963. The standard Arabic text is Maimonides 1964, a photomechanic reproduction of Munk's 1856–1866 edition.

29 *Topics* 1, 101b3–4.

30 It is important to note that although metaphysics and "divine science" have some common aporiae, they are not coextensive. Clearly a proper discussion of their difference is beyond the scope of this chapter. See Altmann 1987.
31 *Guide* I.31, Maimonides 1963, p. 66.
32 I use the term "theological" reluctantly because, properly speaking, Judaism has no theology. By theology I intend "divine science," as it is understood by Maimonides, and I shall use this term sparingly and only at moments in which "divine science" would be idiomatically unwieldy, for example, when it is used as an adjective.
33 I must hasten to state that, for Maimonides, the only prophet who attained this kind of theoretical knowledge, that is, apprehension (*idrak*) or intelligible clarity about first principles, was Moses.
34 *Guide* III.32, Maimonides 1963, p. 526. "And, therefore, man, according to his nature, is not capable of abandoning suddenly all to which he was accustomed." I shall return to a discussion of custom as a hindrance to knowledge later.
35 Note that, properly speaking, the extended discussion of degrees of prophecy is not a discussion of knowledge per se. I shall return to the discussion of prophecy later.
36 *Guide* I.31, Maimonides 1963, p. 65.
37 For example, although the immediate apprehension of the fourth proportional may give rise to the highest form of pleasure/happiness/joy possible for human beings, its truth is independent of that or any other affect. On the other hand, an opinion contradictory to what one takes to be true is repulsive.
38 Maimonides is emphatic that his emphasis upon the limits of the human intellect is philosophical rather than doctrinal. See *Guide* I.31, Maimonides 1963, p. 67.
39 *Guide* I.33, Maimonides 1963, p. 70.
40 Compare Averroes 2001.
41 *Guide* I.31, Maimonides 1963, p. 67.
42 The third imitation is key to understanding Maimonides' discussion of miracles. It is also an exemplary instance of Maimonides' extensive influence on Spinoza's thought, in general, and his concern with prejudice and superstition, in particular, not only in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* but, more important, in *Ethics*. See *Ethics*, Part I, Appendix.
43 *Guide* I.31, Maimonides 1963, p. 67.
44 *Guide* I.31, Maimonides 1963, p. 67.
45 *Guide* I.16, Maimonides 1963, p. 42.
46 *The Eight Chapters*, Introduction; Maimonides 1975, p. 61.
47 Although a discussion of this proviso that is highly problematic in the context of a naturalist account of prophecy is clearly beyond the scope of this chapter, suffice it that I indicate that it must be understood both in terms of the impossibility of attaining full moral perfection, and in terms of the impossibility of changing the original bodily disposition, both of which can be said to be a consequence of the "divine will." See, respectively, *The Eight Chapters*, Maimonides 1975, p. 7; and *Guide* II.36.
48 *The Eight Chapters*, Maimonides 1975, p. 2.
49 *Guide* II.36, Maimonides 1963, p. 170. My emphasis.
50 A discussion of Mosaic prophecy, which is different in kind from all other forms of prophecy, is beyond the scope of this chapter.
51 Ibid. My emphasis.
52 Thus understood, the knowledge communicated to philosophers, insofar as it is limited to "truths" of science, is no different from other forms of strictly theoretical knowledge, whose truths are ahistorical and apolitical; for truths do not differ among individuals, nor

are they "affected" by their individuation. Such knowledge, however, is therefore also indifferent to human flourishing, which is the purpose of prophecy. Again, this type of knowledge is independent of pleasure and pain, even if it may be most pleasing to the philosopher. See note 37.

53 *Wars* I, Gersonides 1984, p. 98.

54 It is tempting, of course, to explain Gersonides' political disinterest as a prudent reticence consequent upon the Averroist and Maimonidean controversies, as well as the Paris and Oxford condemnations. Such an explanation, however, cannot be justified in the light of the fact that Gersonides composed supercommentaries on most of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle, including the *De Anima*, the most controversial of all the texts, and that he did so in Avignon the Papal See in the fourteenth century.

55 *Wars*, I, Gersonides 1984, p. 97.

56 Even if the reader ignores the political nature of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and *Ethics*, she cannot overlook the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise*.

57 For a discussion of tensions within Gersonides' noetics and prophecy see Dobbs-Weinstein 2006; Kellner 1977, p. 6.

58 See the discussion of creation in *Wars*, Book VI.

59 Gersonides 1981, p. 104.

60 Thus knowledge named by conception is necessary and cannot differ among individual knowers, such as mathematical truths. There can be no false opinion about it, but only knowledge or ignorance of it.

61 *Wars* I, Gersonides 1984, p. 213.

62 Gersonides 1981, p. 183.

63 *Letter* 21, Spinoza 1985, p. 375.

64 For further consideration of the power of prejudice see Dobbs-Weinstein 2002, 2003.

65 *Ethics* IIP17. Emphasis added. I deliberately refrain from capitalizing the English translation of Latin nouns since it may easily lead to confusion, at best, or worse still the erroneous (mis)understanding of "mind" and "body" substantively.

66 *Ethics* IIP18. My emphasis.

67 Ibid.

68 *Ethics* IIP17. First emphasis added.

15

UNDERSTANDING PROPHECY: FOUR TRADITIONS

BARRY S. KOGAN

I. INTRODUCTION

For untold generations, whenever Jews gather in worship to read from the Torah and the Prophets, they praise God for having given them a "Torah of truth" and for having "chosen good prophets and taken pleasure in their words, which were spoken truthfully."[1] At a minimum, these words expressed a widespread confidence that the scrolls about to be read contained no falsehoods, lies, or outright fabrications about God, about divine interactions with humanity in general and Israel in particular, about what God requires as expressed in the commandments of the Torah and the teachings of the prophets, and, finally, about the worthiness and truthfulness of God's chosen messengers. For many, no doubt, this generalized confidence was a matter of the deepest conviction. For others, however, there appeared to be grounds for skepticism about various claims; from time to time, they evidently expressed their doubts, difficulties, and occasionally even outright denials. This may be inferred, in part, from the strictures recorded in the Mishnah, Sanhedrin, chapter 10, regarding those who have no share in the world to come,[2] from the wide range of interpretive problems recorded in the *Ancient Questions Concerning the Bible* from the Cairo Genizah,[3] and from the objections of Hiwi of Balkh regarding the propriety and credibility of numerous passages from the Torah.[4] Even so, people's underlying confidence in the truthfulness of the Torah and the Prophets remained largely, if unevenly, intact until the advent of modernity.

This was due, in part, to the intrinsic plausibility of a hierarchical world order being ultimately governed by God as "the King of the kings of kings," whose sovereignty was longed for but not yet fully recognized, when the world of daily life was governed, whether badly or well, by unstable hierarchies of kings and emperors whose exercise of sovereignty was all too familiar, but often unwelcome and rarely longed for. It was also due, in part, to the popular recognition that much of what the prophets had predicted – destruction, exile, restoration, and moral and religious renewal – had in fact taken place with uncanny accuracy. Finally, the relative openness of Jewish religious leaders to novel interpretations of what the

sacred sources really meant and/or mandated, albeit within broadly accepted limits, as these views came to be expressed in *midrash* and *Halakhah*, also helped to sustain popular confidence in the veracity of what the sources reported. Thus, the rabbinic tradition itself provided ample evidence that in regard to whatever was unclear, implausible, or otherwise problematic in the received meanings and mandates, new interpretations consistent with truth and goodness could eventually be found.

Within the context of what we now call the Middle Ages, after the emergence and early expansion of Islam, Jews were increasingly an urbanized minority, scattered throughout the Middle East, North Africa, the Mediterranean basin, and Western Europe. Their livelihoods were now, more often than not, tied to commerce, the crafts, the professions, government service, the arts, and related intellectual pursuits, such as philosophy. Moreover, these activities put many Jews in regular contact with other skilled people of diverse backgrounds who could be expected to raise important questions about many things, and especially about religion. Equally important, because Jews could no longer claim to be the only monotheistic faith community or even the only one to take seriously the idea of a divine, revealed Law as the model for living the best life, they were often challenged to explain and/or defend their beliefs and practices to others, many of whom did not hesitate to point to the worldly success of Christianity or Islam as the ultimate proof of both religious truth and divine favor. Still, these developments were not altogether unprecedented or unfamiliar. What came closest to being both, however, was the revival of classical scientific and philosophical learning through translations of seminal texts from Greek and Syriac into Arabic.

The translation process that began in the eighth century C.E. came to flourish in the ninth and tenth centuries under the aegis of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad. Subsequent generations of translators carried the enterprise forward by enlarging the range of available materials and the number of languages within which they could be studied. The revival, in turn, was aided and enriched by the emergence of independent Islamic theological and philosophical traditions that carefully examined the newly translated materials, drew from them, commented on them, raised new questions, and proposed new answers, and, by doing so, contributed greatly to the rise – or, as some might argue, the reemergence – of philosophy and philosophical theology within the Jewish and Christian traditions.[5]

In reexamining Jewish conceptions of prophets and prophecy from the early Middle Ages to the advent of modernity to which we now turn, our goal will be to highlight and explicate the views of a selection of seminal thinkers and the traditions they represent. More specifically, our focus will be directed toward clarifying (1) what they say about the nature or essential character of prophecy in general

(e.g., whether it is natural or supernatural) and what it means, and (2) how they understand the prophecy of Moses and, more broadly, the theophany at Sinai in connection to questions of prophetic rank. Because the philosophers and theologians to be discussed often drew from or responded to each other's ideas, arguments, and interpretations (or similar ones from the same tradition), either explicitly or, more often, implicitly, and sometimes anticipated developments that took shape fully only later, we will treat their remarks, wherever possible, as contributions to a conversation across the generations. This procedure is suggested to underscore the fact that philosophical thinkers characteristically address themselves to live issues, unresolved problems, and ongoing debates, whether in the smaller community of thinkers to which they belong or in the community at large. It may also have the advantage of helping to identify continuous traditions of outlook and interpretation, which, despite many changes in conceptual content and terminology, still have much to offer students of religion and philosophy alike.

II. JEWISH NEOPLATONISM: THE HARMONY OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

Among the first thinkers to benefit from and build on the revival of classical learning noted previously is the physician and philosopher Isaac Israeli (ca. 855–955 CE), who flourished in Egypt and later in Tunisia. The characteristic features of his universe of discourse suggest that he belongs to the Neoplatonic tradition and that he is directly familiar with the works of Proclus and al-Kindī as well as pseudo-Aristotelian writings that properly belong to the same tradition.[6] Although little is known about Israeli's biography and intellectual development, his attraction to Neoplatonic thought appears to be the result of several factors. These include the early and sympathetic reception accorded to Neoplatonism across North Africa from late antiquity on (witness Augustine of Hippo), its comprehensive metaphysical scope, and its striking compatibility with spiritual and religious concerns. Indeed, Neoplatonism's rigorously monistic outlook, its identification of the One or the Good as the indescribable divine source of all that exists, its conception of divine causation as a continuous overflow of plenitude from above, its hierarchy of hypostases calling for analysis, elaboration, and classification, and, finally, its emphasis on inquiry and contemplation as spiritual exercises that facilitate both a return to and mystical union with the One, made it particularly appealing to those adherents of the monotheistic religions who were open to philosophy. With regard to the question of what uniquely characterizes prophets and prophecy, Israeli comments in the Mantua text of his *Chapter on the Elements* that when the soul of

man that is nearest to Intellect (i.e., the rational soul in relation to the hypostasis) achieves perfection, that individual becomes clear-minded and truthful. He also actively pursues what is good and true, "such as knowledge and understanding, purity and holiness, the worship and nearness of his Creator, blessed be He, and that which attaches the creature to his Creator, like the souls of the prophets, peace be upon them, which are joined to Him. All this derives from the influence of the uppermost substance."[7]

Although this passage hardly offers a formal definition of prophecy, it does make clear that the souls of the prophets are already joined or conjoined with God. This idea, in turn, might easily be understood as a kind of mystical union. Union with God is not mentioned, however, and "joining" or "conjoining" need not imply the kind of complete identification that union does. Significantly, the context implies that insofar as the prophets are joined with God, they must already have the moral, intellectual, and also religious virtues that the perfect man has just acquired. Whether these are innate endowments or acquired characteristics is not explicitly stated. The most that we are told is, "All this derives from the influence of the uppermost substance."[8]

There are several reasons why the aforementioned traits are more likely acquired than merely conferred as divine gifts. First, God (or the Neoplatonic One) is generally understood to be beyond all categories, which would include even the category of substance. Accordingly, the referent for "uppermost substance" would have to be something other than God, most likely the second hypostasis, namely, Intellect, which functions as substance par excellence insofar as it comprehends the forms of all other substances. Second, Israeli also makes clear that Intellect presupposes the prior existence of matter and form as metaphysical principles. Indeed, he specifically designates matter as the "first substance" and "substratum of diversity" and form as "perfect wisdom" and "pure radiance," resembling the light reflected in mirrors of glass.[9] What emerges from these considerations is a picture in which God is less prominently featured than a growing number of intermediaries. Finally, this proliferation of causal principles helps to explain Israeli's preferred terminology for causal connection, that is, expressions such as "derive from," "emanate," and "influence." They all suggest a chain of causes characterized by impersonality and passivity, as opposed to direct action, which Israeli generally does not hesitate to apply to what the Creator does.

At this stage, there is no reason to think that prophets do not follow in the footsteps of the Intellect just as philosophers do. Beyond this, we should also note that one of the things that the perfect man pursues is "that which attaches the creature to the Creator, like the souls of the prophets . . . which are joined to

Him."[10] Here, in effect, Israeli tells us what the ultimate purpose of prophets and prophecy really is, namely, to bring about such attachment or close connection to God as they themselves have achieved. How does this come about?

In explaining why philosophers and prophets alike express themselves in an unusually subtle way in his *Book on the Elements*, Israeli says much about how and why prophecy occurs. In general, the plain sense of what they say clearly relates to sense experience, but its intellectual import is all too often unclear or hidden. Philosophers speak in this way to motivate their disciples to investigate exactly which premises will produce the intellectually correct conclusions that will facilitate understanding and refine their minds. Yet, they also wish to give those who are more rash and less able to understand abstract concepts easily something concrete that they can grasp immediately yet eventually understand in a "spiritual sense" by means of allegory or analogy. To make his point even clearer and ultimately to link this phenomenon he describes with prophecy, Israeli argues that in adopting this procedure, the ancients simply followed in the footsteps of the Intellect itself, which does likewise whenever it seeks to reveal *during sleep* something that the Creator causes to emanate upon it. This something turns out to be a form of spiritual understanding. Still, Intellect conveys it to the soul that is asleep in a form that is intermediate between spirituality and corporeality. In this way, it is immediately impressed on the common sense, which integrates all corporeal data derived from sense experience and grasps whatever is corporeal about the form received. The spiritual element cannot be fully disclosed, however, until it reaches the imaginative faculty, which is the more spiritual of these two internal senses.

This is precisely where prophecy enters the picture, for Israeli contends, "when the Creator wishes to reveal to the soul what He intends to innovate in this world, He makes Intellect the intermediary between Himself and the soul, even as the prophet is an intermediary between the Creator, blessed be He, and the rest of His creatures."[11] Subsequent analysis of what the Intellect conveys to the dreamer in spiritual/corporeal form (e.g., seeing oneself flying between heaven and earth as if endowed with wings, hearing a voice call out) is offered as evidence that such forms and images contain subtle spiritual truths that transcend the natural order. Still, an intelligent person can interpret their meaning. Thus, the prophets themselves provide evidence of the same phenomenon, namely, that of intelligent individuals who speak with subtlety in spiritual/corporeal terms and who are also able to interpret the truths that they express. As in the discussion of philosophers noted previously, Israeli also provides two explanations of why prophets behave as they do. In this case, he focuses on the human recipient of such privileged communications and then on the Source and the recipient acting in tandem.

On the human level, we learn that the prophets wished "to stand out" from the rest of men and to reveal their proper, that is, prophetic, qualities. Accordingly, "they armed themselves with those spiritual forms and revealed them to all and sundry in order that their fellow creatures might know their exalted qualities and their achievement of having passed from flesh to a spiritual state, since that which they made manifest transcends the natural order."[12] The result is that both writers on religion and believers in prophecy agree that dreams (presumably dreams intended to disclose the future) are part of prophecy. After elaborating on the contribution made by each of the internal senses and especially by the Intellect in clarifying the full meaning of these messages, Israeli then depicts the larger and more exalted context within which this activity takes place. Intellect, he argues, is only following in the footsteps of the Creator and seeking to imitate the divine example. For when God wished to create the universe and manifest His wisdom by causing its content to pass from potentiality to actuality, God created the world *ex nihilo* out of goodness and love.

> Seeing that His love was great and His wisdom was made visible, He desired to benefit His creatures and servants. Desiring this, He considered that it was not possible for men to obtain the benefits intended for them except by knowing the will of the Creator so as to do what He wanted them to do, and become worthy of receiving His reward and requital for serving Him. But it was again impossible to obtain [the knowledge of] the will of the Creator . . . except through messengers He would send them so as to make known to them His will as it affected them. For it is not becoming to wisdom to address all and sundry, seeing that some people are ruled by the animal soul, others by the vegetative soul, still others by the rational soul. Furthermore, some are ruled by a combination . . . [I]n some, the rational soul has withdrawn itself and intellect consequently radiates upon them some of its splendor and brilliance.[13]

In these observations, Israeli brings his account of prophecy in general full circle by linking it with the soul of the individual who comes closest to the Intellect, whose radiance, in turn, illuminates his pursuit of the good and the true.

Naturally enough, this pursuit leads to God, the Creator and ultimate paradigm of goodness and truth, and to His act of creation from nothing, unconstrained by any need to obtain benefit or avoid harm. It also discloses what divine goodness entails concerning God's relation to creatures, namely, the existence of divine benefits that are unobtainable without knowledge of God's will. Insofar as such knowledge is likewise unobtainable without suitably informed messengers capable of conveying it to us, namely the prophets, we become aware of both the need for such individuals and also of unanticipated and unexplained constraints even on God. These, it seems, have their source in the created universe itself, but more

specifically in the diverse kinds of human souls and the worldly preoccupations that distinguish but also limit them. Only when prophets and others who are illuminated by divine wisdom, as this is understood by Intellect, successfully transmit it to those capable of understanding and acting on it – evidently the few and not, as previously assumed, "all and sundry" – can the Creator's benevolent intentions begin to be realized.

The particular way, however, in which the Creator's wisdom and goodness are ultimately communicated so as to address "all and sundry" in need of both depends entirely on the emergence of one particular individual chosen for this purpose. Although Israeli makes no explicit reference to any religious source, the focus of his allusions is clear.

> One whose rational soul has withdrawn itself [i.e., from the lower souls] and upon whom intellect causes its light and splendour to emanate becomes spiritual, godlike, and longing exceedingly for the ways of the angels, as far as lies within human power.
>
> The Creator . . . therefore chose from among His creatures one qualified in this manner to be His messenger, caused him to prophesy, and showed through him His truthful signs and miracles. He made him the messenger and intermediary between Himself and His creatures, and caused His true Book to descend through him. Some of His words therein are unambiguous, self-evident, in no need of elucidation and interpretation. Yet there are others which use corporeal expressions, and are doubtful and in need of elucidation and commentary.[14]

By these remarks, Israeli provides an adumbration of what prophecy is and why it takes the form it does. Still, it virtually begs for clarification and elaboration. For example, what, apart from a metaphor, is emanation? How exactly does emanation work? How are the Creator's choices to be understood in relation to the emanative process? What is the nature and extent of the constraints that even the Creator must work with? Yet, brief as his adumbration is, it is essentially rationalistic in character, naturalistic in explanatory focus, and paradigmatic in several of its principal themes.

III. SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY (JEWISH *KALĀM*): A PROJECTED BULWARK AGAINST DOUBT

Saadia ben Joseph (882–942 CE), Israeli's younger contemporary, evidently knew and corresponded with him for some time on scientific and philosophical subjects before departing Egypt for Iraq circa 905. Once he had settled in Iraq, he enjoyed a truly remarkable and prolific career as head (*Ga'on*, "Excellency") of the rabbinic academy at Sura, not far from Baghdad, and became Judaism's first systematic

theologian. Despite wide disparities between their basic worldviews, both thinkers share a strong rationalistic bent and a talent for exposition. Indeed, there is reason to believe that Saadia may have been directly influenced by Israeli on one or more of his own positions.[15] Yet, of the two thinkers, Saadia is the one distinguished for involving himself in communal life and matters of religious controversy. Such activities were simply a natural extension of his passionate theological interests in expounding, explaining, and defending the teachings of the divine Law in whatever venue his talents were sought or could be of use.

In many ways, tenth-century Baghdad proved to be the ideal venue. As the capital of the Abbasid empire and a thriving commercial center, this teeming city constituted a multiethnic, multicultural, and, within limits, multireligious society whose members had numerous opportunities to meet, become familiar with, and be challenged by the diverse beliefs, practices, and ways of life they encountered. Over time, having doubts about one's own religious beliefs or practices became an increasingly frequent and familiar phenomenon, and, for some, a deeply troubling one as well. The need to find ways of responding to and cogently resolving such doubts became all the more urgent. By the time Saadia entered his fifties, he was sufficiently concerned about the pervasiveness of religious doubt both within and beyond the Jewish community that he undertook to address it in a sustained way by writing his justly famous *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* in Arabic. Actually, the title might be somewhat more programatically rendered as the *Book of Beliefs Accepted on Faith and Rationally Established Convictions*, once it is understood that Saadia's aim was to bring his readers from a condition of having only faith to sustain their traditional beliefs (amidst a sea of doubts buffeting them on every side) to one of transforming those beliefs into cogently established convictions built on the most secure foundations.[16]

The methods of argumentation that Saadia uses are basically those of scholastic or dialectical theology (*Kalām*), as practiced for nearly three centuries in Islam, whereas his outlook is broadly informed by the Mutazilite tradition of *Kalām*, which placed great emphasis on God's unity, justice, and knowledge, that is, fundamental rationality. This means, in effect, that the beliefs and practices to be argued for are those that tradition teaches are revealed by God to human beings through prophecy, while the analyses and arguments used to establish them rationally are to be the most rigorous and compelling that can be devised or borrowed, *provided that they are consistent with the religious beliefs in question*.

Ultimately, however, the secure foundations meant to ground Saadia's entire theological enterprise are what he calls the "roots" or sources of knowledge, which enable all human beings to distinguish between truth and falsehood and achieve

certainty. Three of these are entirely natural: sense perception, intellectual understanding (of essentially analytic truths), and logically necessary inference. He judges all three to be intrinsically reliable in conveying the truth as it is, once the causes of error are identified and carefully ruled out. Yet, he adds a fourth source, namely, authentic or reliable tradition, which is based on the first three and also proves to be indispensable in all activities of living. Equally important, it is especially valued by the community of monotheists insofar as it transmits what is contained in the books of prophetic revelation. Not surprisingly, he indicates that he will speak further about this source in the third treatise, which takes up prophecy in greater detail.[17]

Although Saadia does not present either a formal definition or elaborate theory of prophecy, it appears that he regards it as a form of knowledge closely related to reliable tradition. In prophecy, God, as the eternal and omniscient Creator of all things and thus, quite literally, the most unimpeachable Source of all, discloses vital information to chosen recipients that is meant to be reliably transmitted to others. In general, the information conveyed in such disclosures includes otherwise inaccessible theological truths (e.g., that God created the world *ex nihilo* at the beginning of time, that God is absolutely one, etc.), expressions of God's will (e.g., the 613 commandments), and recondite matters in human affairs (e.g., the occurrence of certain events in the near-term or long-term future). Yet regardless of the subject matter, Saadia understands the content of these messages to be communicated to the prophet in auditory and/or visible form that can be reliably apprehended in a wakeful state.

Here, however, a problem arises when it is recalled that Saadia himself proposes to present rational arguments to prove many of the same beliefs and mandates that he claims were disclosed through prophecy. If so, then these same beliefs and mandates are not really inaccessible to reason, but could, in principle, have been established rationally at any time. This, in turn, begs the question, "Why is prophecy necessary at all?" Saadia offers both a general and a specific answer to this question, especially as it applies to the revelation of the Torah's commandments. Thus, he argues first that God's motive in creating the world was to give of His bounty and grace to all creatures. As human beings were among the highest of these, God provided us with the means to attain complete happiness and permanent bliss, namely, the commandments and prohibitions in question. To be sure, compliance would require effort and exertion on our part, but, as Saadia points out, the reward for making an effort to comply is twice that for complying effortlessly by divine grace. More to the point, however, by sending messengers with laws that are to be fulfilled with sincerity and a religion by which to serve God wholeheartedly, the

prophets literally had to perform miracles to secure people's immediate compliance. It is implied that, left to themselves, people would not necessarily have done so, much less discover the intrinsic rationality of what was being offered. That came only later. As Saadia puts it, "Afterwards, we discovered the rational basis for the necessity of their prescription so that we might not be left to roam at large without guidance."[18]

The second answer comes after Saadia identifies and explains four intuitively rational principles that collectively serve to justify the obligatory character of all those scriptural commandments for which clear reasons can be given (e.g., reason demands that a benefactor be compensated by either an equivalent benefit or an expression of gratitude; reason also demands that creatures be prevented from wronging one another). Here, he maintains that even if there were agreement on and assent to such principles, there would nevertheless be interminable disagreement about the precise ways in which to implement or apply them. To prevent such a fruitless outcome, God commissioned messengers to reveal His will in general and in detail. Accordingly, Saadia's point seems to be that, in framing laws, either God is in the details (in the best case) or the devil is (in the worst), but reason, alas, is never to be found in the details. If this is true for the so-called rational commandments (*ʿaqliyyah*), whose justifications can be understood, it is all the more so for those commandments about which reason is indifferent but which must nevertheless be obeyed simply because they were "heard" (*samʿiyyah*).[19]

This oblique reference to the experiential dimension of prophecy raises another question. How does the prophet know that the message he or she receives is genuinely divine? The prospect of answering this question adequately is complicated by several of Saadia's deepest convictions. One is that God's unity is so absolute and unique as to preclude His having any feature or aspect that might diversify His nature, such as a body, bodily organs, or even physical attributes that might be seen or heard. Another is his belief that every scriptural statement ought to be understood literally, unless it is negated by sense experience, reason, another scriptural statement, or a rabbinic tradition that qualifies it. When such conditions are met, a figurative interpretation might well be appropriate, *but* the Bible is susceptible to many kinds of interpretation, and many of these lead to absurdity.[20] A dilemma naturally arises. On the one hand, it cannot be true that God Himself literally said or commanded anything or appeared in person in any visible form, for God is not embodied. On the other hand, once prophetic claims about divine self-disclosures cannot be taken literally, figurative interpretations of them may vary so greatly that resorting to them hardly affords any certainty about either the source of the message or the message itself. Saadia's response in *The Book of Doctrines and*

Beliefs appears to be based on his own arguments that God alone is able to create *ex nihilo*. Thus, he proposes that God creates on an ad hoc basis both a unique light, known as the *kavod nivra'* or "Created Glory," which is capable of assuming various forms and levels of intensity, and also a unique voice capable of uttering audible speech, referred to variously as the *qol nivra'*, "Created Voice," or the *dibbur nivra'*, "Created Speech." The former serves as the distinctive extramental token of God's real presence, the latter as the unimpeachable vehicle for expressing whatever God wishes to express. Together, they assure the prophet that it is God who communicates with them.[21]

What, then, assures those to whom the prophets address themselves that they are divinely sent and not merely imposters, pretenders, or pious frauds? In essence, it is the performance of miracles under specific conditions intended to leave no doubt that God brings them about *and* commissions the messenger.[22] Thus, ordinary human beings cannot change the essences of things or subdue the elements of nature, but God *qua* Creator can do such things without recourse to natural means. Accordingly, if a prophet performs a miracle of this kind, it is God who must have brought it about. For such an inference to be fully warranted, Saadia stipulates that God must also announce in advance through the prophet that He will bring about this miracle. Without such notice, people might conclude either that God acts without reason or that the essences of things do not remain stable over time, thereby undermining confidence in the fixity of things. (Equally important, giving advance notification of a miraculous occurrence functions as a test case for the putative prophet's claims.) Saadia likewise stipulates that it would be contrary to divine wisdom for God to allow angels to serve as messengers to humanity, lest people regard their performance of miracles as characteristic of their nature. On that assumption, there could be no certainty that God was the source of either the miracle or the message but with human prophets there could be. It turns out that the theophany at Sinai counts as a miraculous event in its own right in attesting to the people that God spoke with Moses. Yet Saadia does little to highlight the uniqueness of Moses. He is not alone in beholding the divine Glory at Sinai, although he was allowed to behold more of it than others, after its initial manifestation.[23]

Considerable research has been devoted to identifying Saadia's sources in formulating his conception of the Created Glory and Created Speech/Voice, but it is generally thought that the emphasis on their being created *ex nihilo* is distinctively his own. That may be so, but I think it is also possible that he is indebted here to his former correspondent, Isaac Israeli, who observed in his *Book of Definitions* that one who has attained union with the upper soul and illumination by the light of

intellect and wisdom "will be joined in union *to the light which is created, without mediator, by the power of God*" (emphasis added). Because Israeli holds, as we have seen, that God's creative activity occurs *ex nihilo*, Saadia may himself have seen the light, as it were, with a little help from his friend, and selectively appropriated and adapted what he found.[24] Be that as it may, we can say that insofar as both the Created Glory and Created Speech/Voice are thought to be perceivable, temporal, and subject to God's will, they seem well suited to account for both the variety and uniformity in prophetic experience. Still, they can hardly be thought to *certify* that God is the source of the experience and the message, absent the kinds of criteria and definitions that come with a theory of prophecy, a theory of mind, and an examination of alternative explanations. This Saadia does not provide, not even in his commentary on the late rabbinic cosmological work *Sefer Yetzirah* or *Book of Creation*, which he completed before his own *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*. What Saadia does offer is a very different view of the Created Glory. He characterizes it as a kind of "second air," which is even more subtle than the perceivable "first air" all around us and which therefore permeates all things as well. While he applies that view to a remarkably wide range of entities and phenomena, including the Divine Presence itself, it nevertheless does little to illuminate or justify Saadia's specific claims in his work.[25]

This outcome was probably to be expected, for commentary is an ad hoc literary form largely determined by the claims and formulations of the author of the work undergoing commentary. An exposition and defense of religion, by contrast, provides a far more congenial venue in which to articulate one's own views, either briefly or at length. Yet because Saadia wrote *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* for a popular audience to reinforce a predetermined set of supernaturalistic beliefs increasingly cast in doubt, he had little incentive to develop and test elaborate theories of his own as disinterestedly as possible. On the contrary, as a scholastic theologian, he was a passionately *interested* writer, but ultimately more interested in producing widespread persuasion than in providing broad-ranging theoretical accounts or conclusive proofs.

IV. NEOTRADITIONALISM AS BENEFICIARY AND CRITIQUE OF PHILOSOPHY

In Judah Halevi (ca. 1075–1141), like Saadia, we find a man of many gifts. By natural disposition, he was a poet, and by training, he was a physician. By virtue of his religious commitment and growing concern in the face of troubling external circumstances, he would become a highly influential theologian both in his own day

and beyond. His deep religiosity is perhaps best reflected in his remarkable religious poetry, which is often said to rival the psalms. It is evident, too, in the *Kuzari*, or *Book of Refutation and Proof on Behalf of the Despised Religion*, the great theological dialogue on which Halevi labored for nearly twenty years before leaving Spain for the Holy Land in 1140. Yet this work is also deeply informed by a remarkably wide-ranging intellectual curiosity. He was moved to write it, in part, because of the steadily deteriorating situation of Jews and Judaism in Spain in the wake of Christian advances in retaking territories lost to the Muslims and Muslim efforts to halt or reverse this process. On both sides of the shifting political and religious demarcation lines, Jews found themselves increasingly threatened by violence, social dislocation, and the uncertainties of flight. Massacres of Jews elsewhere during and after the First Crusade only added to the growing dismay.

Halevi's principal purpose in writing the *Kuzari* was to vindicate rabbinic Judaism's claim to represent the one way of life that was truly pleasing to God. His intended readers would be fellow Jews confronted by the powerful religious and intellectual challenges posed by Karaism, Christianity, Islam, and especially by philosophy in its then most advanced form, Neoplatonic-Aristotelianism. Throughout, Halevi not only displays impressive knowledge of philosophy, but he also anticipates later developments in its unfolding relation to Judaism as exemplified in the writings of Maimonides, Gersonides, and even Spinoza. Still, this does not necessarily justify calling him a "philosopher" or his project in the *Kuzari*, "philosophical," as he construed those terms. He would surely have rejected such designations, largely because of philosophy's "invincible ignorance" of the God of all religions claiming to be revealed. He would have likewise rejected the designation *Mutakallim* (i.e., scholastic or dialectical theologian), as the Jewish sage of the *Kuzari* rejects the master of theological disputation in favor of a good, simple scholar who is naturally disposed to accept what his faith teaches – to live by the Law, and to draw close to God.[26] It would be more accurate and apposite, therefore, to regard him as a theologian who regards divine things as being on a higher plane than reasoning and disputation can understand adequately, if at all. To the extent that such things can be known, they are known best through experience of the divine and reports that are equivalent to experience.[27]

Halevi's dialogue begins when a pagan Khazar king has a recurrent dream in which an angel appears and tells him that his intentions are pleasing to God, but his actions are not pleasing. Troubled by what he learns, he attempts to rectify the situation through what he takes to be appropriate acts of pagan piety. When this fails, he undertakes to investigate what actions might truly count as "pleasing to God." A series of exchanges then ensues between the king and representatives of

philosophy, Christianity, Islam, and, finally, Judaism, which eventually culminates in the king's conversion to Judaism and an extended period of further instruction. This story roughly parallels events thought to have taken place some four centuries earlier, when an actual Khazar king and many of his subjects converted to Judaism. Halevi presents the king as a naturally pious individual concerned with proper behavior and at least open to the possibility of revelation, but also as someone skeptical enough to turn first for guidance to a philosopher and later to express repeated doubts about God having any direct contact with human beings.[28] In these respects, the king begins as an inwardly divided man and probably stands for a sizable portion of Halevi's intended readership. Indeed, at various points in the dialogue, he may even speak for the author himself.

Halevi's presentation of the philosopher's views is a tour de force in many ways.[29] For our purposes, its importance lies in clearly stating the presuppositions underlying the philosophical theory of prophecy in relation to which Halevi elaborates his own views. After first explaining why philosophy denies that God could even have desires and aims, know changeable particulars, or be, literally, the "Creator" of anyone, the philosopher outlines the role of natural causes in producing each new member of the human species. He notes that each person's specific combination of forms, dispositions, and character traits derive from (1) parents and relatives; (2) the influence of climate, land, air, and water, produced by the diverse movements of the celestial bodies, all of which are traced to the emanative activity of the First Cause; and (3) education and training, which actualize one's latent potentialities. Not surprisingly, the philosopher claims to be the one endowed with the best dispositions for attaining full human development or perfection. When this is reached, a light belonging to the divine hierarchy, that is, the Active Intellect, which is the source of form and rational knowledge governing the sublunar sphere, attaches to his passive intellect so completely that he perceives himself as being one with it. This allegedly results in his behaving with complete rationality under all circumstances, in his attaining cognitive union with other great philosophers before him (insofar as they understood the truth as it really is), and only then, *perhaps*, his receiving knowledge of hidden things in true dreams, complete with the most apposite imagery. This last point is a clear allusion to an intellectualized form of prophecy.

Halevi seeks to discredit this notion of prophecy as intellectual perfection symbolically expressed by having the king point out *on empirical grounds* that philosophers are not known to be prophets or to perform feats associated with prophecy, even if they have sought both, whereas at least some nonphilosophers do receive veridical dreams and are recognized as genuine prophets. At the same time, however, Halevi also appropriates certain aspects of the philosopher's theory that he uses later for

his own purposes. Thus, when the king concludes his critical remarks, saying, "This proves that the divine order [*al-amr al-ilāhī*] and the souls [associated with it] have a secret character different from what you have mentioned, O philosopher,"[30] we find that Halevi accepts the general notion of a divine hierarchy, here called "the divine order," but without reference to separate Intelligences, such as the Active Intellect and the epistemology associated with it. Also, his pairing of the divine order with certain souls, that is, prophetic souls having a secret character and extraordinary abilities, suggests a clear association between them. Still, before this association can be explored, we need to ask what he means by the divine order or *al-amr al-ilāhī*.

This question has elicited a wide variety of answers, ranging from the highly abstract ("the divine thing," "the divine matter," "the divine," "an aura enveloping the people and land of Israel") to an array of particular things ("God as such," "God's will," "divine light," "a superrational faculty in man for prophecy").[31] The more abstract the basic connotation is, the fewer explicit criteria we have for determining what does and does not come under it and why. Conversely, the more particular and diverse the denotations are, the more difficult it is to see which "family resemblances" point to a shared connotation. Even though the idea is not explicated at this early stage of the dialogue, it is surely noteworthy that a pagan king is the one who first introduces it and that the Christian scholar also refers to it[32] before the Jewish sage even makes his appearance. This suggests, at the very least, that the notion is widely recognized and at least partially understood outside of Judaism (notwithstanding its "secret character") and thus not uniquely linked to it, at least not a priori. By attending closely to whatever explanatory language Halevi appends to the Jewish sage's references to the divine order, I believe it is possible to see how Halevi understands both the basic connotation and any derivatives following from it and also how particular instances can be related to them. Doing so should also enable us to see how Halevi builds on this basic and shared understanding to advance his overall project.

Accordingly, we find that the sage first speaks of it after winning the king's assent to the familiar Neoplatonic–Aristotelian hierarchical structure of reality, with its ascending orders of plants, animals, and human beings endowed with intellect, and the specific capabilities associated with each level. Initially, the king denies that there is any level above the intellectual order, exemplified by great savants, but he later grants that if there were indeed people with utterly extraordinary powers of endurance against otherwise lethal powers of destruction, matched by uncommon self-mastery and knowledge of hidden things in both the past and the future, they would be included in the divine order. The sage responds that this is the

level of undisputed prophets and provides additional evidence that he was actually describing Moses.[33] Because both the sage and the king speak of *levels*, distinguished by a coherent set of powers and abilities that properly belong to and govern the behavior of the members of that level, it is quite reasonable to think of each level with its members as an order, system, or dispensation, with its own hierarchies, understood as an arrangement of things that governs the affairs of all who participate in it. By maintaining that prophets like Moses properly belong to the divine level, Halevi is proposing, in effect, that prophets are actually suprahuman beings (*contra* Saadia),[34] a claim clearly meant to challenge the king's skepticism about God's entering into contact with flesh and blood. Prophets, he is saying, are *not* just flesh and blood; their souls are on a different level altogether. Still, the divine level is an ordering of reality, that is, *a hierarchy* within which God is plausibly the supreme member, followed by angels, intellects, souls, prophets, pious friends of God, and others in various ranks below. This is the primary connotation of *al-amr al-ilāhī*, and it is taken up again on other occasions.[35] Contemporary social scientists would probably speak of it as equivalent to the sphere of the sacred for a particular religion or culture. Halevi could probably agree, within limits, about an ordered domain of what is holy, but for him, the divine order is obviously far more real than any cultural construct could be.

Two related connotations derive from the first. One is that the *amr al-ilāhī* also signifies the gift or influx of prophecy itself, regardless of whether the experience (including its particular manifestations) or the faculty that makes the experience possible is intended. One or both seem to be conferred by God on suitable individuals or groups within the divine order as a sign of noble rank and, typically, with the expectation of future service, much as an ancient or modern sovereign might confer the "Order of the _____ Empire" on worthy individuals during a personal audience in which specific tasks are designated and future access assured.[36] This connotation, in turn, points to the final one, namely, that the "divine order" is, quite literally, an order or directive, that is, a divine command indicating what is pleasing or displeasing to God. As the king himself acknowledges in a crucial passage, there is no access to the divine order in the first sense, that is, dispensation, unless it is through a divine order in the third sense, that is, command.[37] By this point, of course, it is already understood that knowing what constitutes a divine commandment is itself dependent on receiving the divine order in the second sense, that is, the experience of prophecy or a reliable tradition concerning it. What Halevi evidently seeks to establish is that philosophers and others cannot presume to have *knowledge* of the divine realm unless it *comes from* the divine realm. Short of direct access, the most they can do is speculate out of ignorance.

Reference to worthy individuals raises the question of qualifications for prophecy. In contrast to Saadia, Halevi argues that there are indispensable prerequisites; however, they turn out to be very specific instances of the kinds of natural causes that, according to the philosopher, give rise to the perfect individual who attains union (*ittiḥād*) with the Active Intellect. Thus, Halevi places considerable emphasis on superior lineage, which plays a direct role in endowing the qualified individual with the divine capacity or faculty that facilitates contact (*ittiṣāl*), but not union, with God and knowledge of truths with only the slightest reflection. Adam was the first to be so endowed, but most of his offspring were not equally fortunate. Both the divine faculty and the gift of prophecy itself originally became manifest only in isolated individuals and even skipped entire generations until Abraham appeared. From him, the transmission of this capacity went on to Isaac, Jacob, and then to all or most of the children of Israel – male *and* female – thereafter.[38] The transmission of this divine capacity or faculty has often been construed as essentially biological in nature, and the faculty itself likened to hard wiring or hardware, in relation to which prophecy is like software. However congenial such analogies might be, they can hardly be credited once we recall that it is *souls*, *not bodies*, that have the secret character that accords with that of the divine order and makes prophecy possible. Furthermore, Halevi emphasizes that all who were endowed with Adam's gifts were called "sons of God," by which he suggests that they all possessed the noblest lineage possible in having God as their Creator. Surely, the point of the metaphor and its reliance on the parent/child analogy has more to do with God, the "Life of the Universe,"[39] creating souls akin to itself than with God installing divine hardware in human bodies *out of His own infinite self*, because the sage is unequivocal when he says early on that "the divine essence is no body."[40]

The second example of Halevi's appropriating and adapting elements of the philosopher's theory for his own use is the prominent role Syro-Palestine (i.e., the Land of Israel) plays as the unique geographical region within which or for the sake of which prophecy arises. He attributes this to the region's ideal configuration of temperate climate, air, water, and land; its location as the center of the inhabited world; and its being the *axis mundi* that has historically linked heaven and earth through prophecy. Together, all of these factors indicate that the optimal location for prophecy must also be a unique location, which in turn signifies God's choice of and special connection to that region.[41] The third and final example of such adaptive appropriation illustrates Halevi's conception of what education and training for the perfect individual really signify. Here, general principles and guidelines will not do. Rather, it is the specific commandments and prohibitions now recorded in

the Written and Oral Law, but issued by God both before and consequent to the Sinaitic theophany, which comprise the actual content of the education and training that properly prepares the soul to draw close to God and experience prophecy. The outcome of these three adaptations is not only to give particular content to what the philosopher outlines in abstract terms but also to suggest that philosophy, by its very nature, is unable to provide anything more than general norms and guidelines. Its preoccupation with the search for universals inevitably finds claims about special qualities and special relationships to be either problematic or naïve, and appropriate concern with matters of detail outside its purview.

Accordingly, as the dialogue unfolds, Halevi argues, in effect, that because God alone is in a position to know exactly what pleases and displeases Him and to determine exactly when, where, in what manner, and in what measure His wishes are to be fulfilled, divine instruction of human beings is obviously indispensable. Insofar as prophecy depends on God's voluntary self-disclosure to those members of the divine order who meet the aforementioned requirements, there is no reason why prophecy should not be possible. Hence, the *Kuzari*'s preeminent task is to establish in the most convincing way possible that revelation and prophecy have indeed occurred. This effort begins, however tentatively, with the king's final response to the philosopher, noted previously.[42] It continues when he subsequently recognizes that the only thing on which the Christian and the Muslim scholars he had interviewed were fully agreed was God's revelation of His will to Israel. This recognition, in turn, affords the Jewish sage an opportunity to be heard and, from that point on, to lay out in stages, complete with unexpected turns, the evidentiary basis for his belief in divine revelation and prophecy as veridical phenomena. In doing so, he is particularly attentive to showing how Judaism uniquely satisfies the king's four criteria for establishing that God enters into contact with human beings, namely, that the revelatory event occurs (1) by miraculous means plainly beyond human powers, (2) before multitudes of witnesses, (3) who see it with their own eyes, and (4) both study and test it repeatedly. It is only after his primary goal has been plausibly achieved that he ventures to comment on how the prophetic experience should be understood.[43]

Halevi's discussion of the Sinaitic revelation comes in response to the king's general query about how the Jewish sage's religion originated. More specifically, the discussion follows an extended account of Israel's miraculous liberation from Egyptian bondage and its subsequent deliverance at the Red Sea designed to show, among other things, that God both cares about human beings and enters into contact with them repeatedly. Here, we find Moses and Aaron confirming their prophetic status by repeatedly announcing miraculous feats in advance of their

actual occurrence. They also overcome all attempts to dismiss these feats as either natural occurrences, foreseeable outcomes of astrological configurations, or examples of mere chance. The plagues were too extraordinary to be natural. The most accomplished astrologers failed to predict them, and the accumulation of so many favorable "coincidences" undermines the claim that they were all the result of chance. Halevi completes this brief discussion of miracles by specifically mentioning the miracle of the divinely created manna that fed the Israelites for forty years and appeared every day except for the Sabbath. His purpose in doing so seems to be to lay out a spectrum of miraculous events, ranging from the brief and highly irregular to the greatly extended and surprisingly regular. This spectrum blurs the familiar boundaries between the natural course of things and its miraculous suspension, but without undermining the legitimacy of either category. The otherwise skeptical king is duly impressed by what he hears, although his reasons have little to do with a sudden onset of credulousness. This proves to be particularly helpful when Halevi turns to the revelation proper, for the Israelites, like the king, are plainly skeptical about the possibility of God speaking to them.

Accordingly, Halevi begins by indicating that God wished to remove this doubt from them. In describing how this occurred, he proceeds to distinguish between the events themselves and how the Israelites perceived them. Thus, we are told first that the extraordinary spectacle they witnessed consisted of (1) lightning bolts, thunderings, earthquakes, and fires enveloping the mountain for forty days; (2) Moses entering and much later emerging alive from the fire; (3) the clearly audible presentation of the Ten Commandments; and (4) the two tablets made of a precious substance inscribed with divine writing. The itemization is surprisingly bare. It says nothing about God saying or doing anything, and it does not quote any relevant biblical verse to fill in the lacunae. It emphasizes, rather, *what* the people saw and heard after experiencing three days of great terror in preparation for the theophany. We are told next, however, that "The multitude did not *transmit these Ten Commandments as* something declared by individual men or even by a prophet, but rather by God," although the people soon turned to Moses to convey God's instructions to them because they lacked his ability to witness "that great affair" directly. To make his point clearer still, the sage notes that when Moses came down with the inscribed tablets, all conjectures about his having formulated the Ten Commandments on his own, or with the help of the Active Intellect, or as a figment of his imagination while dreaming were refuted by the theophany itself and also because the people "*saw them as* divine writing just as they *heard them as* divine speech" (emphasis added).[44] Even at this early stage of the discussion, it is clear how the king's four criteria are being addressed. After three days of preparation marked

by great terror, the aforementioned extraordinary events unfold in succession. All are well beyond human powers to bring about and are plainly within the spectrum of miraculous events that Halevi has already outlined. Furthermore, a multitude of people are identified as seeing them with their eyes and hearing them with their ears. Finally, the witnesses can plausibly claim to have examined these events repeatedly, insofar as each witness overcame his or her original skepticism about theophanies and rejected the three philosophical explanations of how Moses might have come by what he taught from that day forward. Indeed, when it is later made clear that, notwithstanding the empirical character of the evidence presented, the God who is thus revealed is actually incorporeal, the need for further examination only increases. Yet the sage is unworried. On the contrary, he admits that the matter may have taken place in an even more profound way than he imagined.[45]

This admission brings to the fore once again Halevi's unexpected distinction between *what* the people saw and heard and *the way* in which they did so and then transmitted it to others ("seeing" vs. "seeing as," "hearing" vs. "hearing as"). The former is concerned only with the specific objects of the external senses. The latter is not limited in this way. Although it draws on the former, it characteristically enlarges on and interprets what is seen and heard as well. If we ask about the likely basis for this distinction, we might well recall the divine faculty or capacity implied by the second connotation of the *amr al-ilāhī*. Such a faculty might plausibly be expected to see certain objects or events as divine given its own divine character. Halevi, however, makes no explicit reference to the divine faculty while discussing the theophany at Sinai.[46] Even when he introduces it soon afterward,[47] he provides no explication. It is only in *Kuzari* 4:3, in which he raises the question of how an incorporeal being having no spatial location can even be referred to, that he both names the divine faculty and comes close to defining what he has in mind.

Thus, he argues that just as our external senses are endowed with special properties and powers that correlate so closely with the accidents inhering in physical objects that different people can perceive the same objects in the same way *and* our intellects can attain knowledge of their specific natures through inference, prophets have an internal sense or "inner eye" endowed with special properties and powers as well. It enables them to see the essences or specific natures of physical things directly and in the same way, but without recourse to their accidents or the uncertain path of inference. Even more important, the inner eye enables the prophets to apprehend the great and awesome forms associated with God and the divine order of things in such a way that there is agreement among all prophets concerning those forms. Thus, its range greatly exceeds that of both the external senses and the intellect insofar as it apprehends the divine order. Its mode of apprehension

is direct rather than indirect, and, finally, its level of certainty is greater as well precisely because it does not rely on inference. After noting that such a person, who is truly clear-sighted, regards all others as blind and endeavors to guide them on the right path, Halevi's sage makes a startling observation. He says, *literally*, "It is almost [the case] that that eye is the imaginative faculty as long as it serves the intellectual faculty."[48] What he means by this is less clear.

Some have interpreted this statement as indicating that Halevi ultimately embraced the Neoplatonic–Aristotelian philosopher's view that endorses the supremacy of the intellect and leaves to the imagination its familiar mimetic functions.[49] Yet this interpretation goes well beyond the evidence. The sage says nothing about the attainments of the intellectual faculty, much less about its relation to the Active Intellect or the mimetic functions of the imagination. Others have rightly noted the parallels between Halevi's and al-Ghazālī's notions of an inner eye and emphasized its intuitive, self-validating, supraintellectual character as well as its kinship with the poetic sensibility and prophecy.[50] Yet no explanation is given for why it is self-validating, or why it must serve the intellectual faculty, if it is supraintellectual. Still others argue that insofar as the inner eye is understood to receive information about the divine realm directly from that realm, Halevi is dismissing both the strict Aristotelian view that imaginative data come only from the external senses *and* the Neoplatonic view that such information comes only from the intellect but takes on imaginative form as a mere imitation of intellectual truths. Instead, it is suggested that prophecy's awesome forms are apprehended by something that is *close to being the imaginative faculty*, but not identical with it, in short, a higher order of imagination, called the "super-imagination," which is superior to the intellect.[51] This interpretation pays careful attention to the sage's use of the word "almost" and to the super-imagination's kinship with poetry, but it strangely omits any reference to Halevi's explicit stipulation that the "super-imagination" functions as the inner eye only "as long as it serves the intellectual faculty." Put differently, there would have to be a super-imagination *and* an intellectual faculty to which it is subject for the inner eye to exist and function as described. This does not mean that the super-imagination is reduced to merely imitating the intellectual overflow deriving from a perfected intellect. Halevi makes no such claim. More likely, it means that the intellectual faculty simply performs the indispensable critical function of ensuring that the super-imagination does not amount to or become just another name for unbridled imagining. Although this interpretation might appear to represent a purely philosophical concern extraneous to Halevi's empirically grounded thinking, it actually reflects an explicit and personal religious commitment of the sage himself, undertaken precisely when the empirical evidence relating to the divine world

seems overwhelming. It is he who says, "God forbid me from [accepting] what is impossible and anything that the intellect denies and posits as impossible!"[52]

V. JEWISH ARISTOTELIANISM: THE HARMONY OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY RECONSIDERED

Turning to Maimonides, we find that his discussions of prophecy are many and varied. They range from relatively brief pedagogical-dogmatic accounts to longer and more nuanced summaries in his legal compilations, and from short epistolary references and remarks to his extensive, multifaceted, and often cryptic treatment in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. As the richest of his discussions, it is natural to focus on the *Guide* as the primary point of reference. When statements that he makes elsewhere provide additional and necessary information or useful illustrations, they shall be noted as appropriate. Maimonides writes the *Guide* for his perplexed student, Joseph, whose accomplishments and educational deficiencies he describes in the Epistle Dedicatory, but also for others who are perplexed like him even though they are more advanced than he, especially in being familiar with the philosophical sciences and understanding what they signify. Because Maimonides addresses more than one audience, it is to be expected that he writes on more than one level and uses a variety of strategies to convey his points as needed at any given stage. Accordingly, regardless of whether one understands Maimonides to be an esoteric writer, trying to conceal, among other things, just how profound the conflict between revealed religion and philosophy really is, or a harmonistic writer, attempting to bridge as much as possible any perceived divide between the two traditions, or an eclectic writer, seeking to develop a comprehensive outlook by drawing on diverse and even discordant sources, as long as they help to complete the larger picture, the serious reader will want to take Maimonides' instructions for reading and understanding his work seriously.[53] Although there will certainly be disagreements about when, where, and how these instructions might apply to any given passage or larger unit within the *Guide*, they can hardly be ignored, bypassed, or dismissed as irrelevant to the understanding of his actual line of argument. (If he writes on more than one level, there may be more than one line to follow.) Any such dismissal would be tantamount to attempting to understand the *Guide* while refusing to be guided by its author.

Following Maimonides' explanation of the book's title and what he can and cannot be expected to say about the great secrets contained in the Account of the Beginning and the Account of the Chariot, he describes the situation he shares with his readers in his famous parable of the lightning flashes. In substantive terms,

it represents his first word on the subject of prophecy. Thus, he notes that we are like people on a dark night over whom lightning flashes out repeatedly. Within this parabolical context, he then sketches out the hierarchy of those who perceive or fail to perceive what is disclosed. At the top are those who perceive the lightning flashes directly, but at diverse intervals (i.e., Moses continuously, other prophets at diminishing levels of frequency, the seventy elders plus Eldad and Medad only once). Below them on the hierarchy are those who do not perceive the lightning flashes directly, but only their reflected light on polished bodies (i.e., natural scientists who study various kinds of intelligible phenomena within the material universe). The reflected light that they see both illuminates less than the lightning flashes and is soon hidden. Together, these two groups comprise the class of those who are perfect. Below them, in turn, are all those who never see light, but merely go about, groping in darkness. These, Maimonides says, are the vulgar, which is surely no surprise after he has just observed, "The truth, in spite of the strength of its manifestation, is entirely hidden from them." They are obviously the most imperfect of all those described.[54]

What does come as something of a surprise is that Maimonides does not explicitly identify any of the perfect, whom we have already identified parenthetically. At most, he cites appropriate biblical verses for the first group to indicate that what its members are about to receive or are actually receiving is prophecy. For example, to identify Moses, he cites Deut. 5:28, *But as for thee, stand thou here by Me*. He is silent about the identity of the second group, but hints at the identity of the third group through biblical verses and then declares it outright. These identifications constitute part of the explanation of the parable, but the most crucial element of the explanation is given neither within it *nor after it, at least not explicitly*. Rather, it appears in his introduction to the parable, when he says:

> You should not think that these great *secrets* are fully and completely known to anyone among us. They are not. But sometimes truth flashes out to us so that we think that it is day, and then matter and habit in their various forms conceal it so that we find ourselves again in an obscure night almost as we were at first.[55]

Here, the unidentified correlate of the lightning metaphor is plainly identified as truth. If we then ask what serves as the *biblical* correlate of the same metaphor in the verse cited to establish that Moses' apprehension is continuous, it just as plainly turns out to be God, for it is the deity who invites Moses *to remain and receive the entire instruction*. The importance that Maimonides attaches to this identification is evident from the fact that explanatory references to truth frame the parable both at the beginning and at the end. He confirms it in the paragraph following the

parable, where he speaks of the Sages who teach about the Beginning and the Chariot through parables and riddles as "possessing knowledge of God the Lord, knowers of the truth."[56] What these correlations and verbal parallels suggest is, at the very least, a close association between God and the truth or, as I think more likely, an identification of one with the other. It is a theme that reappears at many points throughout the *Guide*.[57] Regardless of how often the identification appears, it is both puzzling and problematic because it seems to confuse the truth value of what divinely chosen prophets say with the source of their saying it. Thus, to determine whether that is so, Maimonides would have to explain how such a manifestly impersonal conception accords with what the Bible says about God and about prophecy itself, which seems to be intensely personal and even supernaturally conferred. Does an abstraction choose some people to be prophets and reject others? On what basis or criteria, if any, does it do this? Is God "bound" by such criteria or unconstrained and able to act purely at will? How exactly does prophecy take place, when it does take place? Finally, how does an abstraction like "the truth" account for what, according to scripture, took place during the theophany at Sinai?

Even before Maimonides takes up these questions in a broadly systematic way in the middle of Part 2 of the *Guide*, there is much that he says on other topics earlier in the *Guide* that lays the groundwork for his treatment of prophecy later. Thus, in his discussion of idolatry, he begins by noting many scriptural verses asserting that God becomes furiously angry with idolaters. The reason for these statements is that idolatrous worship associates God with certain *false opinions* that *deviate from the truth* most egregiously. They amount to infidelity and ignorance about a great thing of well-established rank. He defines the former as "belief about a thing that is different from what the thing really is" and the latter as "ignorance of what it is possible to know."[58] Clearly, Maimonides understands idolatry to be predicated on both. This epistemic reorientation of what is at stake in idolatry from offending the deity to recognizing the fundamental opposition between truth and falsehood helps to explain the strong language used by scripture against idolatry and especially against infidelity and ignorance as he defines them, which are by no means limited to religious matters. Truth, as Maimonides understands it, may well be abstract, but it is no mere abstraction, and deviations from it come with consequences.

A second example of how Maimonides' understanding of the Bible's personalized discourse about God accords with the far more abstract philosophical conception of God as truth can be found in Maimonides' discussion of God's attributes of action. Following the incident of the Golden Calf and Israel's descent into idolatry, scripture describes Moses as seeking reassurances of divine favor. He specifically asks to be shown God's glory (understood here as God's essential nature) and also to

be shown God's goodness. The reply to the first request is negative; God's essence cannot be known by any living person. God's "no," however, turns out to be far richer than it seems, for Maimonides adds the following: "Yet He drew his attention to a subject of speculation through which he can apprehend to the furthest extent that is possible for man."[59] Apprehend what? Obviously, God, which is to say, the truth. The "subject of speculation," in turn, appears to be the famous theory of negative attributes through which one progressively achieves a more accurate understanding of God by learning more and more about what God is *not*. That is, one learns what is humanly possible about the truth as a whole, *which can never be known fully or directly*, by learning more and more about what it is not. This, however, can only be accomplished by learning more and more about *what is not God*, namely, creatures and their attributes, and then knowledgeably negating all claims and suppositions that maintain that those attributes characterize God's essence *as they characterize creatures*. Moses' second request, seeking knowledge of God's ways, is answered favorably by God's promise to cause all His goodness to pass before Moses. This goodness is identified with all existing things in creation (which God had pronounced "very good" at the end of creation) and understanding both their natures and how they are mutually interconnected. These things are not God, but rather God's effects, actions, or attributes of action. Because of what Moses already knew about them, he is said to be trusted in all God's house, that is, firmly grounded in his knowledge of the various kinds of creatures and creations that comprise the world. This implies that he also knows (or soon realizes) how to convey the import of God's actions in nature, *which are as natural as they are divine*,[60] to those whom he is charged with leading. Thus he expresses what the truth has made clear to him about natural processes in all that leads up to this dialogue by using ordinary human language to speak of God's graciousness, compassion, judgment, and wrath, even though he surely understands that God or the truth does not experience emotional states or aptitudes of soul, as human beings do. In sum, amidst the darkness of Israel's apostasy and Moses' gloomy anxiety, truth flashes out and Moses comes to apprehend more of it than ever before, including how to convey it effectively to others.[61]

However adept Maimonides might be as a philosophical exegete, it nonetheless remains for him to clarify whether prophecy actually expresses God's will and personal choice of the speaker and message or whether prophecy, too, is abstract and impersonal because it is the outcome of a long series of natural causes. Or, is there more to this question than meets the eye? He addresses this issue and what it implies in the course of surveying the three prevailing opinions on the subject.[62] He identifies the first opinion as that of the multitude of the *jāhiliyyah*,

signifying either the pre-Islamic pagans, or, more generally, the ignorant, or both alike, together with some of the common people professing our Law. Maimonides says nothing about what it is that the ignorant are ignorant of, but he describes their view clearly. They hold that God chooses whomever He wishes, turns him into a prophet, and sends him on a mission. No prerequisites or qualifications are specified, other than a certain moral goodness or soundness. Otherwise, the young, the old, the wise, and the ignorant may all prophesy.[63] On this view, prophecy is the result of a supernatural act of self-disclosure in which God personally chooses the speaker, the message, and the mission. The association of this opinion with the ignorant clearly amounts to a negative evaluation of the opinion itself. If, in addition, its proponents are ignorant of metaphysics and natural science, then many more than a few common people professing adherence to the Law would likely be among them.

The second opinion is ascribed to the philosophers, meaning primarily Islamic Aristotelians, such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Bāǧǧah, and presumably unnamed predecessors going back to Aristotle or even beyond. They maintain that prophecy is "a certain perfection in human nature," which can be realized in at least some individuals after appropriate training. Such training actualizes their innate potential, "provided that an obstacle due to temperament or some external cause does not hinder this."[64] When prophecy does occur, however, it occurs only in a superior individual within the species, who is perfect, that is, fully developed, in terms of his (1) rational qualities, (2) moral qualities, (3) imaginative faculty, and (4) preparation for the task. When these conditions are satisfied, he or she will *necessarily* prophesy because doing so belongs to the individual's very nature. Accordingly, it would not be possible for an ignoramus to prophesy or even for a capable person to become a prophet overnight. Conversely, it would not be possible for individuals who meet these conditions not to prophesy. By making prophecy a natural perfection, the philosophers, as Maimonides presents them, clearly eliminate any role for God's will or personal choice in selecting either the messenger or the message. Indeed, the second opinion does not mention God at all. Rather, it is the fully actualized intellect that grasps whatever truths the prophet expresses, his moral perfection that informs the message, and her imagination that gives it the particular images, metaphors, and reference points that make the message applicable and compelling. In sum, prophecy turns out to be a kind of natural intellectual discovery that is imaginatively experienced and imaginatively expressed, which *must* occur when the prerequisites are obviously fulfilled.

Maimonides presents the third opinion as "the opinion of our Law and the foundation of our doctrine," a formulation that implies that it is both widely shared

and officially espoused by the entire religious community. In expressing its content, however, he asserts that it is identical with the philosophical opinion, except for one thing. "We believe it may happen that one fit for prophecy and prepared for it should not become a prophet, namely, on account of the divine will."[65] Indeed, he goes on to say that when this occurs, it is like all of the miracles and follows their course, which he then illustrates with several biblical examples. Pious readers of the *Guide* not well versed in the sciences and philosophy would probably be surprised to find the opinion of the Law identified with that of philosophy. More advanced philosophical readers might or might not share that surprise, but they would almost certainly be surprised *and troubled* by the notion that someone could be both fit and prepared for a natural human perfection and yet be denied that perfection because of the willful and miraculous intervention of an arbitrary God. Maimonides seems to have sought a middle course between the first two opinions, but ended up with only antithetical claims. That, however, would be a serious misunderstanding based on failing to read carefully and thoroughly what he has said.

Readers of the first kind would be expected to notice that the moral and intellectual perfections associated with the philosophical opinion are, in fact, alluded to by the rabbis in epigrams such as, "Prophecy rests only upon a wise, strong, and rich man."[66] They would likewise be expected to recall that however much the philosophical opinion speaks of prophecy as the *necessary* consequence of actualized perfections and complete preparation, it also grants that external causes and temperamental obstacles may indeed hinder the anticipated outcome. Finally, they would be asked to examine closely and in context the three biblical passages that Maimonides cites to illustrate how God's will prevents the "natural" thing from occurring, and therefore what may count as a miracle. Thus, for example, Baruch ben Neriah is disqualified from becoming a prophet because of an unrecognized temperamental obstacle exposed only under unanticipated circumstances, but explained by the rabbinic maxim cited previously.[67] Similarly, Aramean soldiers who were sent to capture Elisha the prophet on his own territory are "miraculously" struck with "blinders" or "a blinding light" (*sanveirim*), just after he had prayed for this to happen. Then Elisha himself, while *hiding in plain sight*, helpfully, but anonymously, offers to take these soldiers to the man they seek – in the palace of Israel's king.[68]

The more advanced philosophical reader, in turn, needs to discover the limits of the philosophers' explanatory model. Although natural causation does involve necessary causal connections, the latter obtain between *types* of causes and their effects, all things being equal, but not necessarily between individual causes and their effects. There is always the possibility of an impediment preventing the expected

effect from occurring in individual cases. Indeed, were he to reexamine the sources of the philosophers' opinion, he would find that Aristotle acknowledges that nature acts in the same way always or for the most part, if there is no impediment.[69] Maimonides, too, seems to have impediments very much in mind when he stipulates that prophecy does not necessarily occur even when all of the requisite conditions have been met. Moreover, his attributing this outcome to the divine will by no means implies that God intervenes arbitrarily in natural processes. Arbitrariness suggests that the will operates in the same way as chance, but Maimonides maintains that God's will operates in a manner that is more akin to what willing beings achieve through purpose, order, and governance, insofar as it procures the existence of creatures and watches over their order as it should be watched over. In the end, God's will and God's wisdom, the two competing explanations for such order, both end up as identical with God's essence and by implication with each other.[70] Maimonides also takes pains to distinguish between the operation of the will in corporeal beings and its operation in incorporeal beings. The will is repeatedly subject to change among the former, but it is not subject to change in the latter. Indeed, in God, who is demonstrably incorporeal, the will is eternal. Additionally, even though it may will different outcomes in different cases, which might outwardly appear to be the same or similar, this does not imply any change, novel action, or intervention on God's part.[71] What all this implies is that miraculous events, however rare, are actually "in nature" as unexplained, but not necessarily inexplicable, natural anomalies, rather than innovative interventions *ab extra*. So understood, Maimonides' apparently unphilosophical qualification of the opinion of the Torah and its association with "all of the miracles" could itself qualify as a source, if not the source, of Spinoza's famous redefinition of a miracle as "simply an event whose natural cause we – or at any rate the writer or narrator of the miracle – cannot explain by comparison with any other normal event."[72]

To the question of how and under what circumstances prophecy comes about, Maimonides offers an unusually concise answer in what amounts to a formal definition of prophecy.

> Know that the true reality and quiddity of prophecy consist in its being an overflow overflowing from God, may He be cherished and honored, through the intermediation of the Active Intellect, toward the rational faculty in the first place and thereafter toward the imaginative faculty. This is the highest degree of man and the ultimate term of perfection that can exist for his species; and this state is the ultimate term of perfection for the imaginative faculty.[73]

His summary of the causes that explain the occurrence of prophecy represents one of two types of explanation already discussed early in Part 2 of the *Guide*. More

specifically, it is meant to clarify how incorporeal causes bring about their effects. Inasmuch as incorporeal causes are forms separate from matter, they produce their effects, not by contact or proximity to affected objects, but by bestowing forms that they contain or comprehend on suitably prepared recipients, which may be either corporeal or incorporeal in their own right. Although Maimonides admits that we cannot really find a term that corresponds to the true reality of incorporeal causation, "overflow" represents the most appropriate simile or metaphor already available because it suggests that (1) the cause gives its bounty to others; (2) this bounty or form extends beyond it in all directions; and (3) its action is constant and permanent.[74] Although this model of causation applies to God, the Active Intellect, and the rational faculty, in essentially the same way precisely because they are all understood to be forms separate from matter or simply incorporeal,[75] we soon learn that the imaginative faculty, unlike the aforementioned causes, is not described in the same way. Rather, Maimonides characterizes it as a bodily faculty, whose perfection is directly dependent on a variety of material and temperamental conditions directly associated with the body.[76] Still, as a prerequisite for prophecy, the imaginative faculty must have *the highest possible degree of perfection* by natural disposition, because any deficiencies it might have cannot be remedied by any corrective regimen. Given the fact that Maimonides also devotes considerable attention to describing its actions, it is natural to ask why he accords it such prominence in his discussion of prophecy and whether this prominence diminishes the importance of the rational faculty as a result. Such questions become even more salient when it is recalled that the imaginative faculty does not even appear in earlier discussions of prophecy in his legal writings.[77]

Surely, part of the answer to our query lies in the imaginative faculty's mimetic role in representing sense experience, intellectual truths, and moral norms in concrete, vivid, and arresting ways. Thus, Maimonides summarizes the imaginative faculty's basic activities as "retaining things perceived by the senses, combining these things, and imitating them," but in relation to the divine overflow these same activities culminate in veridical dreams and prophecy.[78] Indeed, this mimesis can be so complete that, when the imagination's natural activity reaches its most perfect state in vision prophecy, it sees what it depicts *as if it were an extramental reality* perceived by the external senses. By referring repeatedly to the *actions* of the imaginative faculty, Maimonides also calls attention to other important facts about it, namely, that it acts spontaneously during both sleep and wakefulness and can also combine images from prior sense experiences in ways that have no extramental correlates whatsoever. These considerations point to the second and ultimately more important reason for according it such prominence and attention in discussing prophecy and also for demanding such a high degree of perfection

from it. The imaginative faculty has an enormous and continuous capacity to distort one's apprehension of the truth and subvert one's adherence to the good.[79] It is no wonder, then, that Maimonides ultimately identifies it with the *evil impulse* and explains that "every deficiency of reason or character is due to the action of the imagination or consequent upon its action."[80] It does not follow, therefore, that the prominence Maimonides accords to the imagination in his discussion of prophecy diminishes the importance of the rational faculty. On the contrary, the more attention it receives, the better prepared the rational faculty will be to recognize both the harm it can do and the service it can perform, if it is informed and guided by the truth as this is apprehended by the fully developed rational faculty. Indeed, it would appear that the imaginative faculty cannot even reach its full perfection until it is situated within and subject to the causal series described in Maimonides' definition of prophecy. That, at least, seems to be the plain sense of Maimonides' claim that "*this state* [of receiving the overflow from God, the Active Intellect, and the rational faculty] is the ultimate term of perfection for the imaginative faculty"[81] (emphasis added).

Finally, several observations about the nature of Mosaic prophecy, especially as they relate to the theophany at Sinai, are in order. Maimonides, more than any of his predecessors, emphasizes the uniqueness of Moses' prophetic experience. In both his *Commentary on the Mishnah* and the *Code of Jewish Law* (*Mishneh Torah*), he identifies four major differences that distinguish Moses' prophecy from that of all other prophets, before and after him. (1) To all other prophets God spoke only through an angelic intermediary; with Moses, there was no such intermediary. (2) All other prophets received prophecy either in dreams, while asleep, or in trancelike visions while awake; Moses received prophecy while awake and completely lucid. (3) All other prophets were weakened, disturbed, and even terrified while prophesying; Moses retained his normal composure and spoke with God as friend with friend. (4) All other prophets had to wait for varying lengths of time until prophecy came to them; Moses prophesied at will.[82] Having noted these differences, Maimonides makes no effort to explain them or to account for any connections between them. He does however, point out in his *Mishnah* commentary that Moses actually attained the level of the angels with the result that his imaginative and sensible faculties became inactive, while he continued as pure intellect. Immediately afterward, he adds, "Because of this notion, they said of him allusively that he would speak with God without the intermediacy of the angels."[83] These prefatory comments suggest that Moses attained union with the Active Intellect and was able to do so *precisely because the spontaneous activity of the imagination and the senses had ceased*. They are surely among the angelic intermediaries that are absent

from Moses' prophecy, and Maimonides confirms this in the *Guide*.[84] The Active Intellect may also be included among them. The main point, however, is that the activity of the imaginative faculty can easily account for all of the characteristics ascribed to prophets in general, and its inactivity for all those ascribed to Moses. Ultimately, it is this difference that explains why Moses could directly apprehend the truth continuously flashing out to him in a calm, lucid, and comprehensive way whenever he wished.

Beyond this, Maimonides specifically indicates that the word "prophet" applies to Moses and to all other prophets in a purely amphibolous sense.[85] He defines an amphibolous term as one which is

> Applied to two or more objects because of something which they have in common, but which does not constitute the essence of each one of them. An example of this is the name 'man' given to Reuben, the rational animal, to a certain man who is dead, and to an image of man carved in wood or painted. This name is applied to them because of their having one thing in common, to wit, the figure and outline of a man; but the figure and outline do not constitute the meaning of man.[86]

Based on this analysis, the nonessential and incidental feature that Mosaic prophecy and prophecy in general have in common is their external expression in imaginative language (whether in law, narrative, parable, or exhortation), when the divine overflow that reaches these individuals is sufficient to produce expressions that perfect others. Conversely, what is essential to both holds nothing of substance in common. Thus, Maimonides' definition of prophecy in general identifies the genus as an overflow from the Active Intellect to the rational faculty. (The fact that this overflow ultimately derives from God is common to all things produced in time and therefore not unique to prophecy.) The specific difference distinguishing prophecy in general is the overflow from the rational faculty to the imaginative faculty. Although Maimonides declines to offer a definition of Mosaic prophecy and even to speak of it further in the *Guide*, the hints and explicit information he does provide allow for a possible, perhaps even plausible, reconstruction. Its genus would be the overflow from God to the Active Intellect. Its corresponding specific difference would be the overflow from the Active Intellect that brings the rational faculty into a state of union with it. Thus, the two definitions differ in both genus and specific difference in keeping with the conditions of amphiboly. Furthermore, the imagination plays no role in Moses' *prophetic apprehension* and certainly not in any active or spontaneous way. Moses could and evidently did use the imagination consciously and with complete lucidity whenever it was useful, not in expressing his own prior thoughts, but in expressing the truth that continuously overflowed

to his fully receptive intellect and qualified him as the only one who is "trusted in all My house."[87] The content of this overflow, in sum, turns out to be identical with Moses' knowledge of the attributes of action.

Accordingly, when Maimonides begins to discuss the theophany or gathering at Sinai in the *Guide*, it comes as no surprise that he distinguishes sharply between what reached Moses (i.e., articulate speech) and what reached all Israel (i.e., the miracle of the fire, the frightening sounds, noises, or "voices").[88] In between, "only those who were fit for it achieved the rank of prophecy, and even those in various degrees."[89] The fact that the Ten Commandments are formulated in the second person *singular* serves as proof for Maimonides that they were addressed to Moses alone. When he also suggests that Moses went to the foot of the mountain to communicate them to the people, he is indicating that he reads the concluding verse of Exodus 19 and the opening verses of Exodus 20 as a continuous narrative without any break. This means that until Moses comes to instruct them, the people hear no words at all.

Still, one cannot help but ask, what is the nature of the "articulations of speech" addressed to Moses? Pious readers with either limited knowledge of philosophy or limited interest in connecting dispersed parts of a single discussion are likely to think of it as audible speech. Saadia's "created voice" was thought to produce this very result miraculously, and Maimonides seems to refer to it late in the discussion.[90] It is equally possible, however, that such a reader would recall Maimonides' own analogy from the eighth of the Thirteen Principles. There he proposes that the whole Torah now in our hands was revealed to Moses by God, that it is metaphorically called "speech," and that "it was dictated to him while he was at the rank of a scribe."[91] The suggestion that Moses was like a scribe taking dictation has proved to be far more memorable to most readers than the suggestion that "speech" is a metaphor. It is, however, the latter suggestion that Maimonides wished to communicate to readers of the *Guide*, both those still in the process of learning the sciences and what they signify and those far more advanced in their philosophical knowledge and attuned to remembering his explanations of "speech" in other chapters. For Maimonides has already explained that ascribing speech to God is similar to ascribing all other actions resembling our own to Him, which is to say that speech is one of God's attributes of action. This means that human beings ascribe it to God whenever they are affected by natural actions in ways that resemble how they are affected when addressed by other human beings. Consequently, "the words *speaking* and *saying* are equivocal, applied both to the utterance of the tongue . . . and to *notions represented by the intellect without being uttered . . . The terms in question are also used to denote wishing*"[92] (emphasis added). From this, Maimonides concludes that

whenever "saying" and "speaking" are used with reference to God, they signify only the last two meanings, that is, either that some notion has been understood or that something willed or commanded has come into being.[93]

Significantly, both meanings help to clarify Maimonides' earlier suggestions that prophecy should be construed as equivalent to truth flashing out and being perceived and, subsequently, that it should be defined as an emanation of incorporeal forms from God that is understood and ultimately acted on. Insofar as this applies to prophets in general, it results, at most, in an imaginative mimesis of theoretical and/or practical truths that come to the prophet *ab extra* in visions or dreams, in keeping with Maimonides' definition of prophecy and the requisite conditions already noted. This, it seems, is what enables him to say that "the minds of people are rightly guided toward the view that there is a divine science apprehended by the prophets in consequence of God's speaking to them and telling it to them so that we should know that the notions transmitted by them from God to us are not . . . mere products of their thought and insight."[94] Moses, by contrast, apprehends the conceptual content of such "speech" even more clearly than others precisely because it comes without mediation by the imaginative faculty. Insofar as that content includes legal norms, it not only brings into being what is "willed" as Law, but also conveys practical truths that inform all of the commandments that collectively constitute the Law as something perfect in its species and genuinely divine. "For *the Laws are absolute truth* if they are understood in the way they ought to be"[95] (emphasis added).

Accordingly, if divine speech is identified as the *truth content* of God's attributes of action lucidly understood in terms of correct beliefs, necessary beliefs, and the Laws that are needed to guide the first and last generations of human beings, then Moses is uniquely qualified to be, as it were, the scribe who faithfully records it all. This is not because God utters audible words for his ears only, but rather because Moses alone exemplifies the kind of active intelligence that is able, in true Aristotelian fashion, to become one with the object of its knowledge in a comprehensive and immaterial way, as far as this is humanly possible. Still, the scope of what he *knows directly* is limited to the totality of divine actions that surrounds us every day. Thus, direct knowledge of God's essence is denied even to him, as Maimonides' discussion of Moses' two requests makes clear. Whatever he does know of this supreme metaphysical subject is known only *indirectly*, from the "back" rather than from the "face," which is to say, from acts or effects that are traced to their ultimate cause.[96] Indeed, the most that he is able to know with demonstrative certainty is limited to the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God. There may also be other limits. For example, despite Maimonides' portrayal of Moses as understanding this

truth content of divine speech completely, continuously, *and* permanently,[97] he also contradicts at least the last two claims when he notes that following the disastrous incident of the spies, revelation (*waḥy*) ceased coming to him until the entire generation of the desert passed away. The explanation for this and similar cases is that prophecy ceases when prophets become sad or angry, which also explains why prophecy disappears during the Exile.[98]

In identifying these limitations on Moses' ability to know the whole truth, Maimonides seems to be suggesting that if such constraints apply to the "Master of those who know," they must apply all the more so to the rest of humanity, individually and collectively. Consequently, to hope for complete knowledge of the truth in every domain, and especially metaphysical truth as a systematically organized Aristotelian science, is at best a vain hope, and perhaps even a dangerous one. It is surely reasonable to hope for individual acts of discovery and cognition of truth based on preparation, systematic study, and the cultivation of intellectual habits that lead to such acts. Knowledge, so conceived, is better understood as a cognitive state or activity than as a product, proof, or theoretical construct.[99] Such a view, in turn, helps to explain why the concluding chapters of the *Guide* repeatedly focus on intellectual *activities* designed to discover the truth rather than on the attainment or possession of *truth content* as the distinguishing mark of closeness to God and true human perfection. Such activities include examining beings to understand God's governance of them, setting one's thought to work on the first intelligible (i.e., God or the truth) and devoting oneself exclusively to this, apprehending the true realities (plural), engaging in continuous intellectual worship of God, and, underlying them all, acquiring the rational virtues (i.e., conceiving intelligibles that teach true opinions concerning divine things).[100] By thus identifying God with truth or the first intelligible at both the beginning and end of the *Guide*, Maimonides undertakes to place the *religious life* of loving God with all one's heart, soul, and might, and walking in His ways, and the *philosophical life* of discovering the truth by replacing opinions about all things with knowledge of all things, on a common or at least parallel course. In this way, he seeks to overcome both the conflicts, real and perceived, that arise between them as well as the often painful perplexity that results from such conflicts as far as this is possible.

From one or more of these four intellectual traditions (Neoplatonism, rationalistic theology, traditionalist theology informed by philosophy, and a selectively appropriated Neoplatonic–Aristotelianism placed in tandem with religious ends), all subsequent Jewish philosophical and theological writers from the Middle Ages to modernity take their bearings. Some endeavor to correct, elaborate, and extend

the work of their intellectual forbears. Others attempt to refine the insights that their predecessors developed within a given tradition, while highlighting the deficiencies of that tradition. Still others appropriate whatever they find useful and argue vigorously against the rest with a view to removing its teachings from the philosophical agenda.

Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) is unquestionably the most prominent and influential example of this last approach. His extensive reliance on the work of his medieval predecessors, especially that of Maimonides, is now widely noted among scholars, but his novel use of some of their ideas and vigorous, at times mocking, repudiation of still others is easily recognized by specialists and nonspecialists alike. On all of these counts, he is rightly regarded as the last of the medievals and the first of the moderns.[101]

If we focus briefly on what Spinoza shares with Maimonides concerning prophets and prophecy, we discover that both regard prophecy as a kind of sure knowledge revealed by God to human beings.[102] All such revelations, however, whether frequent or rare, are understood as natural events having natural causes because both thinkers maintain that divine acts are natural acts.[103] Central to their discussions of prophecy is the distinction and often opposition between intellect and imagination, which are thought to be among the natural causes of prophecy. They agree that the intellect is what allows us to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and the imagination, a corporeal faculty, is what enables us to make judgments about good and evil. They also agree, however, that the imagination is all too often the cause of error and misunderstanding.[104] Both thinkers understand truth in terms of what actually exists and, accordingly, each espouses a form of the correspondence theory of truth. Even more significant, both Spinoza and Maimonides speak of God as being identical with the truth.[105] They likewise place special emphasis on the unity and uniqueness of God but distinguish nonetheless between God as the active cause of all existing things and the actions or effects of God, that is, the aforementioned existents, which collectively comprise the material and "enacted" universe (First Cause/attributes of action; *Natura naturans/Natura naturata*).[106] In this connection, our two thinkers, respectively, note that the Bible and Jews generally attribute prophecy directly to God as a kind of pious shorthand that simply omits reference to the relevant intermediate or secondary causes of the phenomenon.[107] Love of God, however, in contrast to piety, is both consequent on and proportionate to one's knowledge of God and God's actions, and therefore it is ultimately an intellectual love.[108] Still, both thinkers hold that, in addition to true beliefs, necessary beliefs, which contain both truth *and* falsehood,

are needed to motivate proper actions and to ensure the welfare of the community. Not surprisingly, they agree that the imaginative faculty figures prominently in giving expression to such beliefs.[109]

Nevertheless, Spinoza decisively parts company with Maimonides and other medieval thinkers whom we have discussed on key points regarding prophecy and revelation. Starting with the latter, he rejects as alien to reason Saadia's idea of a created thing, that is, a voice, speaking the opening words of the Decalogue by which God introduces himself. A mere creature, like any other, hardly addresses the Israelites' request for *divine* assurance of God's existence, even if it is God who determines the words or manipulates a creature's lips.[110] He likewise dismisses as fantastic the view, associated with Halevi, that prophets have human bodies but nonhuman, that is, divine, minds, with the result that their sensations and awareness are of an order entirely different from our own.[111]

With respect to Maimonides, Spinoza either challenges his claims directly or turns them against Maimonides to support his own views. Thus, he makes clear that although prophecy may be sure knowledge of what God reveals to man, its status as knowledge has nothing to do with the prophets' attaining intellectual certainty, as typically occurs with those who acquire natural knowledge. Rather, the prophets take the words and appearances that come to them in God's (i.e., Nature's) revelations and both speak and *interpret* them to others who cannot attain certain knowledge about them, but must rely instead on simple faith. (Indeed, prophets must interpret these things to themselves before doing so for the benefit of others.) Natural knowledge, however, is common to all human beings and can be acquired by the natural light of reason, assuming that they use it, in the form of clear and distinct ideas, "not indeed in words," and such knowledge is in no way inferior to prophetic knowledge.[112]

The reason for this fundamental difference between prophetic knowledge and natural knowledge is that, contrary to Maimonides, *the prophets were not at all distinguished by having a more perfect intellect than others, but rather by having more vivid powers of imagination*. This means that *the prophets perceived God's revelations not through reason, but through the imagination alone*. Thus, the revelations came exclusively in the form of words and images – auditory, visual, and rhetorical, either real or imaginary – which were received in dreams or wakeful apparitions and commonly *expressed in parables and allegories*.[113] Spinoza challenges Maimonides yet again when he argues that precisely because the imagination is a corporeal faculty, its disclosures in prophecy must vary not only in accordance with the diverse temperaments of the prophets but also in accordance with the beliefs on which they were raised. In effect, these factors condition or, rather, determine all that the prophets perceive.

Accordingly, he concludes that prophecy never made the prophets more learned than they already were.[114] These considerations apply without exception to all prophets, including Moses, whose only distinction vis-à-vis other prophets seems to lie in his having heard a real voice rather than an imagined one. The unique intellectual perfection and direct relation to God that Maimonides ascribes to Moses, Spinoza reserves for Jesus instead.[115]

Because the imagination by itself does not carry certainty in what it discloses, unlike the clear and distinct ideas comprising natural knowledge, which do,[116] one cannot help but ask what the source of the prophets' certainty really is and in what their "sure knowledge" consists. Spinoza explains that their certainty is based on three things: (1) a kind of verisimilitude by which the things revealed to them were imagined so vividly that they were indistinguishable from objects perceived while fully awake; (2) the occurrence of a sign or token, suited to the prophet's beliefs about God, that functions as a credential verifying the prophecy's divine source; and, most important, (3) a common moral concern, because all of the prophets directed themselves exclusively to teaching what is right and good. From this, it becomes clear that their certainty derives from the conformity of their experiences with the beliefs and expectations they already had, and their "sure knowledge" lies in their common moral teaching. Still, each one of these factors is ultimately dependent on the imagination and its operations, and, as Spinoza is quick to point out, the prophets' certainty is, at best, moral rather than mathematical in character. Prophecy, therefore, remains inferior to natural knowledge *qua* knowledge.[117]

In the final analysis, what warrants this epistemic (and also political) demotion in the status of prophets and prophecy is Spinoza's expressed desire to differentiate philosophy from theology and, more broadly, to separate reason from faith, so that neither one is made ancillary to the other.[118] He undertakes this in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* to eliminate, to the fullest extent possible, the theo-political excesses of religion – dogmatism, fanaticism, inquisition, and persecution – from the life of civil society. In positive terms, he seeks to establish both freedom of thought and freedom of expression as natural and civil rights belonging to every individual. To realize these goals, he devotes the political portion of the *Tractatus* to laying out the theoretical foundations of the modern, secular, democratic–republican state that is to be based on reasoned discourse and civic virtue. Indeed, the ultimately political character of his concern is foreshadowed early on in his discussion of prophets, when he argues that those with a more powerful imagination are correspondingly less fit for purely intellectual activity, whereas those who cultivate the intellect take greater pains to restrain and control the imagination, "so that it should not invade the province of intellect."[119] So it is that Spinoza reduces the natural vehicle of

prophecy to the imaginative faculty alone, *the better to make the case for restraining and controlling it*.

Clearly, Spinoza's identification of the imagination as the only human faculty at work in prophecy truncates Maimonides' definition of prophecy, as expressed in the *Guide*, and reduces it to its lowest common denominator. Beyond this, Spinoza's claim that the prophets' exclusive concern is with the right and the good (in piety and morality) also seems to be at odds with Maimonides' view of who typically receives the divine overflow through the imaginative faculty alone, namely, rulers of cities, legislators, soothsayers, augurs, dreamers of veridical dreams, and wonder-workers who use occult arts.[120] Spinoza would hardly wish to see prophetic figures as rulers of cities, and he would not encourage those for whom he writes to wait upon either their or their adherents' imaginative prognostications. Still, by emphasizing the prophets' exclusive concern with piety and morality, he accords them at least a useful and perhaps even an indispensable role in communal life, despite its being epistemically deficient.

Ironically, Spinoza's conception of prophecy seems at first glance to resemble that of Halevi, in which the inner eye is apparently associated with the imaginative faculty, which is obviously in need of rational control. For Halevi, however, the super-imagination belongs to a much higher order than the ordinary imagination, and the fact that it must serve the rational faculty is stipulated as *part of the definition of the inner eye*, signifying that prophecy is *not reducible to the imagination alone*.[121] As we have seen, Spinoza rejects such claims in principle. In fact, his view comes closer to that of the Islamic philosophers, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, who speak of imaginative prophecy as a distinct phenomenon.[122] In the *Kuzari*, this view makes its appearance as the second of two alternate explanations of how Moses received the Decalogue, and both are rejected by Halevi's sage in *Kuzari* 1:87.[123] Nevertheless, Spinoza's description of the prophets does approximate that of Halevi in stressing that the central concern of the prophet is with actions deemed to be pleasing to God, namely, those that foster piety (obedience to law) and morality (justice and charity). They clearly differ, however, over whether a syllogistic, governmental religion (i.e., a rational, civil religion), such as Spinoza constructs in chapter 14 of the *Tractatus*, or a historically revealed religion, such as Judaism, is more appropriate to realizing the prophets' aim of inculcating both the love of God and of one's neighbor in communal life.[124]

In sum, Spinoza's account of prophecy in the *Tractatus* seeks to deny scripture, the surviving record of prophetic discourse, any rationally credible claim to truth. It is essentially the product of the imagination. As such, its teachings are, at best, a mix

of truth and falsehood, typically expressed in ambiguous, elliptical, or obscure language. It therefore occupies the lowest and least reliable level in Spinoza's typology of knowledge (*imaginatio*, *ratio*, and *scientia intuitiva*) and cannot be expected either to contain or convey matters of truth and falsehood in the form of clear and distinct ideas. Accordingly, scripture should be studied, not with a view to determining or establishing the truth of its claims, but rather with a view to understanding their plain sense meaning in linguistic, literary, and historical context. Insofar as that meaning endorses obedience to law and the practice of justice and charity, Spinoza accepts it unreservedly.[125] He accepts it, however, as a philosopher, not as a Jew. By 1656, the idea of "a Torah of truth" and prophetic discourse "spoken in truth" had neither truth nor meaning for him in the plain sense of those terms, and so, following his excommunication, he was content to stand outside of Judaism for the rest of his life.

Nevertheless, a great number of Spinoza's ideas, arguments, and proposals as well as his personal example of integrity and probity have continued to engage the minds of thoughtful people of every background – Jews and non-Jews, philosophers and nonphilosophers – ever since that time. Indeed, many of these subjects are and will, no doubt, continue to be reexamined and reworked precisely for what they can contribute to Jewish philosophy, not only because of their connections to earlier Jewish thinkers, but also, and I think preeminently, because of the unambiguous appeal of a rule formulated by the most accomplished philosopher to stand within Judaism, namely, Maimonides. That rule says simply, "Hear the truth from whoever speaks it." Its meaning, in turn, is admirably clear: Truth can be learned from many different sources and recognized in many different forms.

NOTES

1 Birnbaum 2002, pp. 369, 373; Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Soferim, XIII: 8–14.
2 Danby 1933, pp. 397–9.
3 E. I. J. Rosenthal 1948, pp. 29–91. See also Scheiber 1956, pp. 291–305; Fleischer 1967, pp. 1–23.
4 I. Davidson 1915, pp. 11–104.
5 Fakhry 1983, pp. 1–36; Pines 1970, pp. 780–7; Peters 1996, pp. 40–51; Haq 1996, pp. 52–70; Shayegan 1996, pp. 89–104; Gutas 1998; Kraemer 2003, pp. 38–68.
6 Altmann and Stern 1958, pp. xvii–xxiii; Rudavsky 1997, pp. 149–56.
7 Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 124.
8 Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 124.
9 Altmann and Stern 1958, pp. 97, 119, 127, 131, 159.
10 Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 124.
11 Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 135.
12 Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 136.

13 Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 138.
14 Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 139.
15 Altmann and Stern 1958, pp. xxii, n. 1 and 217.
16 Ben Shammai 1997, pp. 115–34; Kreisel 2001a, pp. 27–93.
17 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Introduction, Saadia 1948, pp. 16–8.
18 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, III, Exordium, Saadia 1948, pp. 137–8.
19 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, III.4, Saadia 1948, pp. 145–7.
20 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, II.Exordium, 1,5 Saadia 1948, pp. 87–96, 103; VII. 2, 4, pp. 265–6, 272; VII, Appendix, pp. 415, 424.
21 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, II.12, Saadia 1948, pp. 128–31. See also Altmann 1969c, pp. 140–60; Kreisel 2001c, pp. 56–93.
22 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, III.4, Saadia 1948, pp. 147–50.
23 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Introduction, 6, Saadia 1948, p. 29; II.7, 12, pp. 109, 129–31. Saadia finds the miracle of the manna more amazing than that of the theophany at Sinai because of the enduring nature of the former and the relative brevity of the latter.
24 Altmann and Stern 1958, pp. 25–6, 138.
25 Kreisel 2001, pp. 69–93.
26 *Kuzari*, I.1, Halevi 1968, pp. 36–9; IV.16-19, pp. 223–5; V.15–16, pp. 274–5. All quotations from the *Kuzari* appearing in the text of this essay are my own and based on the critical edition of the Judeo–Arabic text published by Baneth and Ben Shammai 1977. The complete translation, in progress, is to be part of the Yale Judaica Series.
27 Lerner and Mahdi 1963, pp. 27–30 and especially pp. 28–9. Cf. *Kuzari*, I.25, Halevi 1968, p. 47; V.14, p. 274.
28 *Kuzari*, I.4, 6, 8, Halevi 1968, pp. 39, 43.
29 *Kuzari*, I.1, 3, Halevi 1968, pp. 36–9.
30 *Kuzari*, I.4, Halevi 1968, p. 40.
31 In this connection, see Goldziher 1904, pp. 32–44; H. Wolfson 1977d, pp. 68–85; Efros 1974, pp. 141–54; H. Davidson 1972a, pp. 381–95; Pines 1980, pp. 172–92; L. Goodman 1997, pp. 215–6; Lobel 2000, pp. 29–30; Kreisel 2001a, pp. 136–40; Kogan 2003, pp. 122–3. In my discussion of what the *amr al-ilāhī* signifies, I am basically in agreement with Shlomo Pines' account noted above. I restrict myself as much as possible to explicit or explicated uses of the term in the *Kuzari* as the means of identifying its principal and derivative meanings.
32 *Kuzari*, I.4, Halevi 1968, p. 41.
33 *Kuzari*, I.31–43, Halevi 1968, pp. 47–9.
34 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, III.4, Saadia 1948, p. 149.
35 *Kuzari*, II.14, Halevi 1968, p. 92; V.20, pr. 4, p. 288.
36 *Kuzari*, I.25, 43, 95, 97, Halevi 1968, pp. 46, 48–9, 64–7, 67–8.
37 *Kuzari*, I.98, Halevi 1968, p. 70. Cf. I.87, p. 60; II.50, p. 113; III.11, pp. 146–7.
38 *Kuzari,* I.26-27, 63, 95-96, Halevi 1968, pp. 47, 53, 63–7.
39 *Kuzari*, IV3, Halevi 1968, p. 209.
40 *Kuzari*, II.2, Halevi 1968, p. 84.
41 *Kuzari*, I.95, Halevi 1968, p.65–6. See also II.9–24, pp. 88–101; V.22–28, pp. 293–5.
42 *Kuzari*,I.4, Halevi 1968, p. 40.
43 *Kuzari*, I.8, Halevi 1968, p. 43.
44 *Kuzari*, I.87, Halevi 1968, p. 61.
45 *Kuzari*, I.88-91, Halevi 1968, pp. 62–3.
46 *Kuzari*, I.87-91, Halevi 1968, pp. 60–3.

47 *Kuzari*, I.95, Halevi 1968, pp. 64–5.
48 *Kuzari*, IV.3, Halevi 1968, pp. 207, 208. On imagining prophecy and imagination in prophecy, see Cooper 1990, pp. 26–44, 188–98.
49 Motzkin 1980, pp. 116–7.
50 Lobel 2000, pp. 105–11, 115–6, 174–6, 223–4 n. 39. Cf. Kreisel 2001, pp. 127–32.
51 W. Harvey 1996, pp. 141–55; W. Harvey 2006b, pp. 288–93. See Pessin 2005a, pp. 254–8.
52 *Kuzari*, I.89, Halevi 1968, p. 62.
53 *Guide* I. Introduction, Maimonides 1963, pp. 5–20.
54 *Guide* I. Introduction, Maimonides 1963, pp. 7–8. Cf. Kreisel 2001a, pp. 211ff.
55 *Guide* I. Introduction, Maimonides 1963, p. 7.
56 *Guide* I. Introduction, Maimonides 1963, p. 8.
57 *Guide* I.36, 50, 54, 68, 69, Maimonides 1963, pp. 82–3, 112, 127, 163–6, 168–70. Cf. J. Stern 2005, pp. 105–33.
58 *Guide* I.36, Maimonides 1963, p. 83.
59 *Guide* I.54, Maimonides 1963, p. 123.
60 *Guide* III.32, Maimonides 1963, p. 525. Cf. I.66, p. 160.
61 *Guide* I.54, Maimonides 1963, pp. 123–8. Cf. III. 53, pp. 630–2.
62 *Guide* II.32, Maimonides 1963, pp. 360–3. Cf. Reines 1970a, pp. 1–27; L. Goodman 1999, pp. 102–18; Kreisel 2001a, pp 221–30; Manekin 2005, pp. 54–60.
63 *Guide* II.32, Maimonides 1963, pp. 360–1.
64 *Guide* II.32, Maimonides 1963, p. 361.
65 *Guide* II.32, Maimonides 1963, p. 361.
66 Babylonian Talmud, Tractates *Shabbat* 92a, *Nedarim* 38a.
67 Jer. 45:1-5. Cf. *Eight Chapters*, chap. 7 in Maimonides 1975, p. 81.
68 2 Kings 6: 8–23.
69 *Physics* II.5, Aristotle 196b 10–17; 197a 18–22, 32–35; 2.8, 199a 8–11, 199b 16–19. Cf. *Guide* II.20, pp. 312–3.
70 *Guide* I.58, 69, Maimonides 1963, pp. 136–7, 170.
71 *Guide* II.18, 29, Maimonides 1963, pp. 300–1, 344–6.
72 Spinoza 2001, pp. 73. Cf. Spinoza 2004, pp. 69, 314–6.
73 *Guide* II.36, p. 369. Cf. Reines 1970a, pp. 83–151; Kreisel 2001a, pp. 239–50; Manekin 2005, pp. 57ff.
74 *Guide* II.12, Maimonides 1963, pp. 279–80.
75 *Guide* I.69, Maimonides 1963, pp. 168–9. Cf. II. 4, pp. 257–8 and *Eight Chapters*, chap. 1 in Maimonides 1975, p. 64.
76 Avicenna's Psychology, Najat II.6, pp. 38–54, especially pp. 39, 41, 45. See also L. Goodman 1999, pp. 107–8.
77 *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Sanhedrin 10, pr. 6 in Kellner 1999, p. 146. *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah 7.1, Maimonides 1937, pp. 42a–42b.
78 *Guide* II.36, p. 370.
79 *Guide* I.2, pp. 23–6. See Berman 1980, pp. 1–17.
80 *Guide* II.12, Maimonides 1963, p. 280. Cf. III.22, p. 489. See also W. Harvey 2006b, pp. 299–302.
81 *Guide* II.36, p. 369.
82 *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Sanhedrin 10, pr. 7, Maimonides 1999, pp. 147–9; *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah 7.6, Maimonides 1937, p. 43a. Cf. *Guide* II.35, Maimonides 1963, p. 367.
83 *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Sanhedrin 10, pr. 7 (translation mine). Cf. Kellner 1999, p. 147.

84 *Guide* II.6, 45, Maimonides 1963, pp. 264–5, 403. In these passages Maimonides speaks about the imagination as an intermediary.
85 *Guide* II.35, Maimonides 1963, p. 367.
86 Maimonides 1938, p. 60.
87 Num. 12:7, *Guide* I.54, Maimonides 1963, p. 124.
88 *Guide* II.33, Maimonides 1963, pp. 363–4. Cf. Reines 1970a, pp. 28–48; Kreisel 2001a, pp. 230–9; Manekin 2005, pp. 59–60.
89 *Guide* II.32, Maimonides 1963, p. 363.
90 *Guide* II.33, Maimonides 1963, p. 365.
91 *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Sanhedrin 10, pr. 8, Maimonides 1999, p. 149. Maimonides' scribal metaphor is more often than not taken literally in keeping with the belief that the divine revelation itself was verbal. This is by no means the only way to understand the metaphor. Writers have often thought of literary inspiration and the welcome flow of words, thoughts, and ideas as the equivalent of "divine dictation" and as something all writers long for. There are some who construe this as the opposite of craft and making the effort to construct one's work, "word by laborious word." Others, however, reject this dichotomy and argue in a recognizably Maimonidean way, "Taking dictation requires skill: craft is what you hone so that you're ready for the inspiration when it comes . . . It doesn't preclude the hard work . . . it presumes it." Gary Miranda, "Divine Dictation," Letter to the Editor, *New York Times Book Review*, Sunday, May 7, 2006, p. 6.
92 *Guide* I.65, Maimonides 1963, p. 158.
93 *Guide* I.65, Maimonides 1963, p. 159. Cf. I.66; II.48, pp. 160–1, 409–12.
94 *Guide* I.65, Maimonides 1963, p. 158. See in this connection M. Greenberg 1995, pp. 405–18.
95 *Guide* II.47, Maimonides 1963, p. 409. Cf. I.62, 65, pp. 152, 158; 2.39–40, pp. 380–1, 382–4. Cf. Bland 1982b, pp. 49–66. For general background and specific applications, see Brague 2007, pp. 158–208; J. Stern 1998.
96 *Guide* I.21, 69, Maimonides 1963, pp. 49, 48–51, 166–71.
97 *Guide* I.54, Introduction, 62, Maimonides 1963, pp. 54, 7, 152.
98 *Guide* II.36, Maimonides 1963, pp. 372–3.
99 J. Stern 2005, pp. 127–9. Cf. Seeskin 2005c, pp. 82–3, 100–2; Kogan 1987a, 1987b, pp. 29–41, 143–60.
100 *Guide* III.51, 54, Maimonides 1963, pp. 620–1, 623, 635.
101 See, in general, H. Wolfson 1934, Strauss 1965; Kreisel 2001a, pp. 544–86; W. Harvey 1981b, pp. 151–72; and Ravven 2001, pp. 193–214, 385–406.
102 *Guide*, I. Introduction Maimonides 1963, p. 8; I.54, pp. 123–4; II.36, p. 369. Cf. Theological-Political Treatise, TTP 1, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, p. 15; Spinoza 2001, p. 9.
103 *Guide*, III.32, p. 525; TTP 1, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, p. 16; Spinoza 2001, p. 10. "Since, then, the human mind contains the nature of God within itself in concept, and partakes thereof, and is thereby enabled to form certain basic ideas that explain natural phenomena and inculcate morality, we are justified in asserting that the nature of mind, in so far as it is thus conceived, is the primary cause of divine revelation."
104 *Guide*, I.36, Maimonides 1963, p. 370. See also I.2, pp. 23–6; II.12, p. 280. Cf. TTP 1 and 2, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 16–8, 19–20, 28–29, 29–30; Spinoza 2001, pp. 10–11, 13, 19–20, 21–2. See also W. Harvey 1981b, pp. 157–61; Blair 1973, pp. 318–28; M. Rosenthal 2002, pp. 231–42.
105 *Guide*, I. Introduction, Maimonides 1963, pp. 7–8. See also I.36, 50, 54, 68, 69, pp. 82–3, 112, 127, 163–6, 168–70. Cf. TTP 12, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, p. 163; Spinoza

2001, p. 157, "To understand Scripture and the mind of the prophets is by no means the same thing as to understand the mind of God, that is, to understand truth itself." See also W. Harvey 1981a, p. 156, n. 21 and the sources listed there.

106 *Guide*, I.54, Maimonides 1963, pp. 123–8. See also I.69, pp. 168–70. Cf. IIP3s, IP18, and IP29s. On the distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, see also Savan 1979, pp. 83–94; Mason 1997, pp. 25–32, especially pp. 28–32.

107 *Guide*, II.48, Maimonides 1963, pp. 409–12. Cf. TTP 1 and 6, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 16–7, 23–4, 27–8, and 94; Spinoza 2001, pp. 10, 16, 19, 83.

108 *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Teshuvah 10.10, Maimonides 1937, p. 93a; *Guide*, III.52, Maimonides 1963, pp. 629–30. See also I.54, pp. 123ff. and III.54, pp. 635–6, 637–8. Cf. IVP26, VP29, VP32c, VP33 and TTP 12, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 164–6; Spinoza 2001, pp. 150–1. See also Savan 1979, pp. 99–102.

109 *Guide*, III.28, Maimonides 1963, pp. 512–4. Cf. TTP 6, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, p. 90; Spinoza 2001, p. 79. See also Ravven 2001, pp. 207–10, especially nn. 43 and 45; p. 390, n. 15, pp. 398–9.

110 TTP 1, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 18–9; Spinoza 2001, p. 12.

111 TTP 1, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, p. 16; Spinoza 2001, p. 9.

112 TTP 1, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 15–8, *passim*; Spinoza 2001, pp. 9–11, *passim*. See also Ravven 2001, pp. 387–90; Goetschel 2003, pp. 53–9.

113 TTP 1 and 2, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 19–20, 21, 28–30; Spinoza 2001, pp. 13, 14, 19–21.

114 TTP 2, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3. pp. 30, 42–3; Spinoza 2001, pp. 21, 32–3.

115 TTP 1, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 20–1; Spinoza 2001, p. 14.

116 TTP 2, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 30–1; Spinoza 2001, pp. 21–2.

117 TTP 2, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 29–31; Spinoza 2001, pp. 21–3.

118 TTP 2, 14, 15, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 44, 173–4, 180, 184–5; Spinoza 2001, pp. 34, 158–9, 165, 168–9.

119 TTP 2, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, p. 29; Spinoza 2001, p. 21.

120 *Guide* II.36, 37, Maimonides 1963, pp. 369, 374–5.

121 See *Kuzari* references in n. 48, *supra*. Cf. TTP 1, 2, and 17, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 16, 19–21, 28–30, 225; Spinoza 2001, pp. 9, 13, 14, 19–21, 208.

122 See Rahman 1958, pp. 36–45.

123 *Kuzari* I.87, Halevi 1968, pp. 61.

124 TTP 14, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 173–80; Spinoza 2001, pp. 158–64. Cf. *Kuzari* I.12–15, Halevi 1968, pp. 44–5.

125 Fraenkel 2007, pp. 115–7, 114.

16

SOUL AND INTELLECT

JAMES T. ROBINSON

Whether or not Judaism is carnal – as the ancient and medieval Christian polemicists would claim – already in antiquity Jews read out of and together with the Hebrew Bible a rich discourse on the soul. This is the case with Philo of Alexandria (first century CE), who produced a large corpus of philosophical-exegetical-allegorical texts uncovering the psychic and ethical underpinnings of Judaism. It is also true of rabbinic Judaism, which has much to say in Midrash and Talmud about the soul and its inner workings, even if its ideas and theories are presented mythically – as stories, parables, and homiletical exhortations – rather than straightforward scientific investigations.

During the Middle Ages, the biblical and rabbinic discussions of the soul combined with Greek, Arabic–Islamic, and scholastic philosophy to produce a complex and dynamic tradition of philosophical–theological psychology. This begins already with Saadia Gaon (882–942) – "the first to speak about every discipline of wisdom" – and continues into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when Jewish thinkers were especially focused on the soul and intellect, in the midst of contemporary debates about action versus contemplation and the possibility of attaining "salvation."

This chapter introduces and surveys the medieval tradition of Jewish philosophical–theological psychology, concentrating on the period from the ninth to the fifteenth century. It is divided into two parts: Judeo–Arabic philosophy in the Islamic–Arabic world (900–1200), and Hebrew philosophy in Christian Europe (1150–1500). In general, it presents first the philosophical background, identifying the main philosophical sources and traditions that influenced the Jews; it then details the Jewish responses to the non-Jewish traditions and challenges. Throughout the chapter, the focus is on philosophical thinkers and traditions, with special emphasis on Platonic, Neoplatonic, Aristotelian, anti-Aristotelian, and scholastic developments. Although there is a large literature in Jewish Kabbalah relating to the soul, which often overlaps with and expands or debates the philosophical traditions, this subject is not touched on in this chapter. It is deserving of a separate investigation in itself.

PART 1: JUDEO–ARABIC PHILOSOPHY IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD (900–1200)

I. HISTORICAL-LITERARY-CULTURAL SETTING

The Arabic tradition of philosophy – like the Hebrew and Latin – began with translation. As is now well known, in the eighth and ninth centuries dozens of philosophical works were translated from Greek into Syriac and Arabic.[1] These included texts representing a variety of schools and genres – Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic; original works and commentaries; straightforward dogmatic summas and literary texts; and works of demonstrative science and popular doxographies and gnomologia.

The most important texts translated relating to the soul – the texts that would provide foundation for the emergence of an original Arabic tradition – include the following: Plato's *Timaeus*, *Republic*, and *Laws*, as summarized and explained by Galen;[2] an adaptation of Plato's *Phaedo*, entitled *The Book of the Apple*, rewritten with Aristotle on his deathbed as the central character, discussing the soul and afterlife with his disciples and admirers;[3] Aristotle's *De Anima* and related works by the Stagirite;[4] and sections from Plotinus' *Enneads*, modified and transmitted in Arabic under the title *The Theology of Aristotle*.[5] In addition to these basic works, also translated were the Hellenistic commentaries on and treatises about *De Anima* by Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius;[6] medical works relating to the physiology of soul, spirit, and body by Hippocrates and Galen; and popular doxographies, such as Pseudo-Plutarch, *De Placitis Philosophorum*.[7]

In the Islamic and Christian tradition these translations stimulated a creative response. New and original commentaries and synthetic summaries were written, developing different parts or aspects of the transmitted corpus. Thus al-Kindī and his circle developed the teachings of Plotinus;[8] Qustā b. Lūqā the physiological–medical traditions of Hippocrates and Galen;[9] al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes the writings of Aristotle and the Aristotelians.[10] In response to the philosophical challenges and continuing existing Christian theological practices, an Islamic theology (*Kalām*) developed which used philosophical texts and ideas to defend Islam against the charge of irrationality.

It is against this background that the Jews of the Islamic East began to engage themselves in philosophy and systematic theology in general, and discussion of the soul in particular. This begins in the ninth and tenth centuries with the work of two near contemporaries: Saadia Gaon (influenced primarily by Mutazilite *Kalām* and Stoic/physiological theories of *pneuma*)[11] and Isaac Israeli (influenced by Neoplatonism). It continues into the twelfth century with the work of the Aristotelian

philosophers Abraham ibn Daud and Maimonides. In terms of space and time, this the formative period of Judeo–Arabic thought extends over three centuries and across three continents, from the Islamic East to North Africa and Spain.

II. EARLY ESCHATOLOGY

The first among the rabbinic Jews to respond to the new cultural–philosophical challenges was Saadia ben Joseph Gaon. Breaking with the Geonic tradition of Jewish law, in whose schools he became leader, Saadia began to write his works in Arabic rather than in Aramaic and to develop new genres of writing that focused on nontraditional themes. Although the rabbinic academics tended to concentrate their efforts on talmudic commentary and legal responses to contemporary issues, Saadia broke new ground in many areas. He wrote lengthy self-conscious commentaries on the Bible; systematic works of law and liturgy; formal poetry, patterned on the literary traditions of the Arabs; systematic works of Hebrew grammar and lexicography; and philosophy and theology, as represented primarily by his philosophical commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* and theological magnum opus *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*.[12]

In all of these works Saadia relates to the soul, but it is only in *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* where he develops ideas found in Arabic philosophy into a full-fledged theory. His discussion of soul, moreover – and this will be a common trend throughout the Jewish philosophical tradition – has largely religious practical implications: It is the introduction to and foundation of his eschatological theory. Indeed, the discussion of soul in *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* serves as prelude to the first attempt in the history of rabbinic Judaism to produce a systematic eschatology. Because of the importance of this text, for Saadia's work as well as later Jewish psychology and eschatology, I will briefly summarize the relevant chapters.

Book Six of *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* begins with a general statement of faith – that the soul is created in the heart when the body is completely formed, that it lives with the body for a fixed duration of time, separates from the body at death, and then is reconstituted with the body during the time of resurrection. This principle Saadia then defends through dialectical argumentation. He first refutes six incorrect theories of the soul, then states and defends his own view by means of rational argumentation, citation of scriptural proof-texts, and citation of rabbinic traditions. Five of the six incorrect opinions on the soul he seems to borrow, as shown by H. Davidson, from Pseudo-Plutarch, whereas the sixth he attributes to Anan ben David, reputed founder of Karaism.[13] The six opinions as Saadia

enumerates them are the following: that the soul is an accident, that is, it is not a substance but something attached to a substance in the way that color, sound, number, and so forth is attached to a body; the soul is air; the soul is fire; the soul is a duality, that is, an eternal rational soul that operates in the heart, and a generated and corruptible vital heat that courses through veins; the soul is two kinds of air, external and internal; and finally, the belief that the soul is the blood.[14]

Saadia's own (true) opinion he counts as seventh: the soul is a created substance. But what kind of substance is it? This is the question that exercises Saadia for the rest of the book. According to him, the soul is a luminescent substance akin to, but even finer than, the substance of the celestial spheres. It has its seat in the heart, works in the body through the veins and nerves, and possesses in general three faculties, which he associates with three biblical terms: *nefesh* refers to the appetitive faculty of the soul; *ruaḥ* to the irascible or passionate; and *neshamah* to the rational.[15]

In response to those who would maintain a soul–body duality, moreover, Saadia maintains that the soul cannot achieve its perfection without the body, and the body cannot exist without the soul. They work together to perfect both body and soul, to achieve the final reward saved up for both body and soul together. When death occurs, the body suffers corruption whereas the soul is stored in the celestial realm, according to rank of achievement during life with the body, until the end of time, when body and soul are reconstituted and judged together. Book Six ends with a refutation of those Jews who hold to the view of the transmigration of souls.[16]

Already in Book Six Saadia shows his primary concern to be not with abstract theories of the soul per se but with divine reward and punishment. In Books Seven through Nine this becomes the primary focus, as he presents there a detailed explication of his eschatological theories, that is, resurrection, immortality of the soul, and messianic redemption. In general these sections draw much more from biblical texts than rational inquiry. Nevertheless, some philosophical and theological ideas are worthy of note. For example, his discussion of resurrection confronts a basic problem of individuation found already in earlier Christian theology: What body exactly is reconstituted and in what state? Old or young? Sick or healthy? The problem also of how flesh is reconstituted when combined with other things is raised. Thus to cite one famous example: A man is eaten by a lion, the lion drowns and is eaten by a fish, the fish is caught and eaten by a fisherman, who is subsequently burned to ashes. How can the flesh of the original man be reconstituted once digested and incorporated physiologically into another being?[17]

These types of paradoxes are characteristic of Saadia's treatment of resurrection and redemption. Although they are not directly related to psychology, they are worthy of consideration in the history of the problem of individuation.

III. THE BEGINNINGS OF JEWISH NEOPLATONISM

Saadia was not the only Jew engaged in philosophy in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. He was rivaled by his contemporary, Isaac Israeli (ca. 855–955). Indeed, it seems that these two foundational figures of medieval Jewish thought knew each other personally, but were far from friends; in fact, they had little in common, as they represented completely different philosophical perspectives.

In contrast to Saadia – rabbinic leader and legal scholar in the east – Israeli is remembered as a retiring and contemplative philosopher and scientist. He served as court physician in Fatimid Kairouan, where he produced three medical works that would give him enduring fame: *Book of Fevers*, *Book on Nutrition*, and *Book on Urine*. He also wrote a philosophical–scientific discussion of the elements (based on the views of Hippocrates, Galen, and Aristotle) and penned several works with a Neoplatonic orientation, influenced primarily by the Arabic Plotinus and the writings of al-Kindī.[18]

Each of Israeli's surviving philosophical works include extended discussions of the soul; a brief discussion of each will be given here.

Israeli's *Book of Definitions* is Neoplatonic in form as well as content. Following the Alexandrian school tradition (and more directly its Arabic epigone al-Kindī), it presents a list of some fifty-seven philosophical terms that are organized not alphabetically but conceptually. Following the definitions and descriptions of "philosophy" itself, he presents terms from above to below, according to their place within the cosmos: wisdom, intellect, soul, celestial sphere, sublunar and celestial body.

The definitions given by Israeli are strongly metaphysical and generally fit into standard Neoplatonic emanationist cosmologies. Intellect is the first emanation or hypostasis, the specificality of all things and genus of genera – it knows itself and through knowing itself knows all other things; it is, however, of three types or stages: actual intellect; potential intellect; and a "second intellect" – which refers to the process of acquiring possible knowledge through sensation and experience, which can then be transformed into actual knowledge. Soul is second to intellect; it is a substance that perfects the body that possesses life potentially (according to Aristotle), or a substance connected with the celestial body (according to Plato).

After harmonizing these two views (following the standard Neoplatonic practice of harmonizing Plato and Aristotle), Israeli provides more detailed information about the different souls or types of soul, set in emanative order: The rational emanates from the intellect; it is highest in rank, is responsible for learning and knowledge in both the theoretical and practical spheres and it is because of the

rational soul that one can receive reward or punishment. The animal soul is lower than the rational, from whose shadow it emanates; it is possessed by animals, is concerned primarily with sensation and movement, rather than reason and understanding; and because animals cannot reason, they are not subject to reward and punishment. The lowest soul is the vegetative, which emanates from the shadow of the animal; it is concerned primarily with desire and governs the functions of nutrition, reproduction, growth, and decay. Contrary to humans and animals, vegetables are not in possession of reason, movement, or sensation.

The emanative scheme presented in the *Book of Definitions* is reproduced, with some variations, in the *Book of Substances* and the *Chapter on the Elements*, which are generally straightforward Neoplatonic treatises. More novel is *The Book on Spirit and Soul*, in which the same ideas about soul and spirit are explained in light of biblical terms and expressions. It is here where I Samuel 25:9 – "The soul of my Lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as from the hollow of a sling" – emerged as a popular biblical proof-text of both eternal reward and punishment for the soul,[19] and where a Jewish eschatology is first developed out of Neoplatonic ideas and images. Like Saadia, Israeli combines biblical and rabbinic images with philosophy – in this case Neoplatonic philosophy, to create a striking image of the hereafter. For him, the soul is purified through good acts that correspond with reason, and is sullied by bad acts that are governed by the appetites of the animal soul. The pure soul is released into the spiritual realm, whereas the dark turbid soul remains below, caught in the cosmological sphere of fire, revolving eternally in this literal hell-fire.[20]

IV. JEWISH NEOPLATONISM IN SPAIN

Israeli was the first, but certainly not the last, of the Jewish Neoplatonists. On the contrary, he is rightly considered the father of a long and noble tradition of Jewish Neoplatonism, which continued for more than 200 years, especially in Islamic Spain. Following him Jews produced straightforward works of Neoplatonic philosophy, written by some of the greatest names of Andalusi Jewry. Of special note are Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Improvement of Psychic Dispositions*, a psychological–ethical treatise governed by strong biological–physiological ideas;[21] Baḥya ibn Paquda's dialogue between soul and intellect;[22] Moses ibn Ezra's chapter on the three souls in *Kitāb al-ḥadīqa fī ma'na al-majāz wa-l-ḥaqīqa*;[23] and Joseph ibn Tzaddiq's *Microcosm*, which explains the soul and spirit, together with all parts of the body, in relation to the macrocosm.[24]

As in Israeli's *The Book on Spirit and Soul*, Neoplatonism also found a home in Jewish exegetical traditions in Islamic Spain. Neoplatonic ideas were seen as keys to explaining many biblical texts, including the "fall" from the Garden of Eden, understood as the descent of the soul into the physical realm; Jacob's ladder, representing the soul's spiritual ascent into the celestial realm; and Ecclesiastes, explained as a Neoplatonic manual of asceticism, directing the soul to purify itself of this world's vanities so that it might return to the God that gave it.[25] Neoplatonism penetrated the synagogue as well in the form of liturgical poems written about, or from the perspective of, the soul, with its longing to purify itself and return to the spiritual realm.[26]

All of these trends and ideas come together in an anonymous twelfth-century Judeo–Arabic text entitled *Kitāb ma'ānī al-nafs* ("*The Meanings of the Soul*").[27] To end this section on Jewish Neoplatonism in Spain, I briefly describe this interesting popular work of Jewish Neoplatonism.

Following a standard Arabic preface – with praise to God, justification for writing a book on the soul, and description of the contents – the anonymous author of *The Meanings of the Soul* presents a detailed twenty-one-chapter discourse on the soul, combining the explication of biblical terms and verses and rabbinic dicta with citations and explications of the philosophers, including not only Neoplatonic sources but also Avicenna. The author surveys different views of the soul, discusses spiritual and corporeal substance, briefly describes the four Platonic virtues, and provides a detailed account of creation and the cosmos – presented hierarchically – before developing his own ideas on the soul and its relationship to body. Setting common Platonic and Neoplatonic *topoi* within a Jewish biblical–exegetical context, he describes the descent of the soul, the loss of knowledge at birth, and the soul's attempt to recover or recollect native wisdom through purifying acts and contemplations. Following brief discourses on many of the well-known problems in this tradition of psychology – why the preexistent soul needs to descend at all, when and how does it enter the body – the book ends, as most Judeo–Arabic works on the soul do, with reference to reward and punishment, speculating on the hierarchy of rational souls in the hereafter according to rank in knowledge and action.

V. THE BEGINNINGS OF JEWISH ARISTOTELIANISM

Until the twelfth century, Jewish philosophy in the Arabic–Islamic world was influenced primarily by Mutazilite *Kalām* and Neoplatonism. Although there is some indication of interest in Aristotelianism, the evidence is rather limited: a tenth-century letter written by a Jew to the peripatetic Christian Yahyā ibn 'Adī,[28]

and the report by Sāʿid al-Andalusī that several Jews in Islamic Spain had a real interest in logic and physics.[29] To complicate the reception of Aristotle among the Jews, the first full Judeo–Arabic discussion of Aristotelian ideas is found in Judah Halevi's refutation of them! Nevertheless, by the end of the twelfth century, with the work of Abraham ibn Daud and especially Maimonides, Aristotelianism became the most important influence on Jewish philosophy, especially as it passed into Hebrew in Christian Europe during the following generations.

In this final section of Part 1 of the chapter, I characterize and summarize the work of Halevi, Ibn Daud, and Maimonides – the three foundational figures in both Jewish Aristotelianism and Jewish anti-Aristotelianism.

Judah Halevi (ca. 1075–1141)

Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*[30] is a polemical work, presented in the form of a (purportedly historical) dialogue between the king of the Kazars and several interlocutors. Plagued by a recurring dream, in which an angel informs him that his opinions are pleasing but his actions are not, the king questions, in succession, a philosopher, a Christian, and a Muslim. After quickly dismissing all three – the philosopher offers a system of beliefs rather than actions, whereas both Muslim and Christian point to Judaism as their authoritative source – the king turns to a Jewish rabbi, who becomes his sole interlocutor for the remainder of the work. Indeed, following the king's conversion to Judaism at the beginning of Book Two, the rabbi becomes something more: the king's spiritual master and religious guide.

Although philosophy is dismissed early in the dialogue, it remains present in indirect ways throughout. The rabbi uses philosophy to defend and promote his own positions, and often explains philosophical doctrines in order to refute them. In Book Five he gives the most detailed exposition of several speculative positions, including Aristotelian ideas about the soul – based on a short treatise by Avicenna – which he then proceeds to refute. His summary exposition, with refutation, runs as follows.[31]

All composite substances in the sublunar world are made of the four elements. Minerals are simply the combination of these elements and nothing more, whereas plants, animals, and humans possess also a soul, which is given by a celestial giver of forms. The soul in plants is responsible for growth, nutrition, and reproduction; the soul in animals is responsible for movement and sensation; and the soul in humans is responsible for reasoning. Only humans possess the capacity to reason, which differentiates them from all other beings in the sublunar world.

After giving this broad cosmological introduction to the soul and its relation to the body, the rabbi turns to the human soul in particular. Again following Avicenna,

he describes the different psychic faculties: nutritive, sensitive, appetitive, imaginative, and rational or intellectual. The internal senses (common sense, memory, retention, and recollection) are described, identifying their functions and locating their place within the brain; and this then leads to a discussion of cognition – based on a theory of apprehension. Sense objects are grasped by the sense faculties, processed by the common sense, stored in memory, and brought up by recollection for contemplation and cogitation by imagination and intellect. The intellect – with the assistance of the active intellect, the original giver of form – transforms all particular data into universal wisdom. When all things are known in a universal way, the intellect becomes actual, that is, it actualizes its potential for thinking, becomes one with the active intellect, and survives forever. This is what the philosophers call conjunction with the active intellect, or what in religious language is called eternal bliss or beatitude, final reward or immortality of the soul.

The king's enthusiasm for this newly explained doctrine – an enthusiasm shared, it seems, by many of Halevi's contemporaries – prompted the rabbi's immediate response. He attempts to expose the limitations of the philosophers who, working with mere human reason, cannot even agree among themselves, then focuses on problems of learning, forgetfulness, and individuation. His most important criticism – one which would be influential in late-medieval anti-Aristotelianism[32] – relates to the significance of conjunction itself. If any true belief can lead to conjunction with the active intellect, then conjunction seems trivial, whereas if conjunction requires complete knowledge of all truths, it would seem to be impossible. This important remark of his is worth citing in full.

> Which are the limits of metaphysical knowledge by means of which the human soul is separated from the body without perishing? If this is the complete knowledge of existing things, much remains of which philosophers are ignorant concerning heaven, earth, and ocean. If one, however must be satisfied with partial knowledge, then every rational soul exists separate, because primary notions are implanted in it. But if the isolated existence of the soul is based on the conception of the ten categories, or higher still, on the principles of intuition, in which all existing things are included ready to be grasped logically without following up all details, so is this a knowledge easily acquirable in one day. It would be strange if man could become an angel in one day. If it is incumbent to go the whole length and comprehend all these things in logical and scientific study, then the matter is unattainable and ends, in their opinion, infallibly in the death of the one who pursues it.[33]

In general the rabbi concludes that, although the philosophers ought to be commended for having achieved what little they have – working with reason alone – their theories are no better than, indeed far inferior to, the answers and explanations provided by revelation and tradition, as transmitted in scripture, rabbinic literature, and other traditional sources of wisdom, such as the cosmological *Sefer Yetzirah*.

Abraham ibn Daud (ca. 1110–1180)[34]

Judah Halevi was the first Jewish author to present Aristotelian ideas in detail and at length, but he was not systematic, and his interests lie in refuting rather than promoting the doctrines of Aristotle and the Arabic Aristotelians. The first positive and systemic Jewish Aristotelian synthesis was attempted some twenty to thirty years later by Abraham ibn Daud – fellow Andalusian of Halevi, refugee in Toledo, philosopher, historian, and defender of the faith.

Ibn Daud – most likely identical with Avendaut, who collaborated with Dominicus Gundissalinus on the translation of Avicenna's *De Anima* and other works into Latin – produced two major works: a history of rabbinic Judaism entitled the *Book of Tradition,* which was written in Hebrew, and a philosophical–theological summa entitled *The Exalted Faith*, which was written in Judeo–Arabic, but survives only in Hebrew translation.[35] The philosophical work, which will be our primary concern here, is influenced deeply by the Arabic Aristotelians – al-Fārābī and especially Avicenna – and is interested in exposing and refuting the Neoplatonic philosophy of Solomon ibn Gabirol. It is divided into three parts – philosophical, theological, and ethical – and all three are infused with discussions of the soul. Here I will give a brief summary of part I, chapters 6–7, which present his theories of soul and intellect, and consider the implications for his discussion of theological principles, especially immortality of the soul, prophecy, and providence, as found in part II, chapters 5–6. There will also be occasion to add a few remarks about part III.

Following Avicenna, primarily the same short treatise used by Halevi and the *De Anima* section of the *Shifā'*, Ibn Daud presents a detailed and systematic exposition of soul and intellect, working from the general to the specific. He begins with arguments for the existence of the soul – as something added to, not identical with, the mixture of elements – and describes the soul as an incorporeal substance, the form or perfection of a natural body potentially living. After discussing the different types of soul in general – vegetable, animal, rational – in relation to their material substrates, he focuses on the human soul in particular, describing its parts and functions. He gives lengthy discussion of everything Halevi had mentioned only briefly, such as the different faculties (nutritive, sensitive, appetitive), and the internal and external senses, before devoting a separate chapter to the intellect, in which he explains the hierarchical relations between body and soul, soul and intellect, and the stages of intellect: potential, actual, and acquired.

How exactly the intellect progresses through these stages, however, is never clearly explained; and what explanations Ibn Daud does provide often vary in different contexts. In general, he says that the intellect receives first intelligibles by inspiration and directly from the giver of forms and is dependent on the active

intellect to transform potential intelligibles into actual intelligibles. Yet the intellect is nevertheless dependent on the data collected by the senses – to verify and point toward universal truths. This complex theory – part abstractionist, part illuminationist – helps him sustain two somewhat uncomfortable positions: The soul comes into existence with the body and is in need of the body for its existence; and yet the intellect is separate, incorporeal, and capable of thinking independently, completely free from the body.

The section on psychology is by far the longest in the book. At the beginning of the chapter on soul, Ibn Daud says it is needed not only for its own sake but to help prove the existence of separate intelligences, which lead intellect from potentiality to actuality. He has another interest as well, more theological than philosophical: to help combat Muslim and Christian polemicists, who say Judaism offers no promise of spiritual salvation,[36] and to develop a philosophical–psychological doctrine of prophecy and providence. His ideas about the soul, finally, play an important role in the final section of *The Exalted Faith*, in which Ibn Daud presents the beginnings of a Jewish Aristotelian ethic: He discusses virtue and vice, and introduces the doctrine of the mean – all in relation to the psychic faculties. It is in the last chapter, moreover, where a problematic subject, which will become increasingly important in following generations, is first articulated: Is the final aim of human life active or contemplative, and what role do Jewish doctrine and Jewish law play in reaching the final perfection? For Ibn Daud it seems to be a combination of both: Moral virtue is a prerequisite of theoretical knowledge, which is needed to act properly. In religious terms, knowledge of God leads to love of God, which is expressed in divine service; it is the enlightened observance of the Law that is and leads to the truly happy life.

Moses Maimonides (1138–1204)

The most influential among the Judeo–Arabic Aristotelians was Maimonides, although he was of course an eccentric Aristotelian, who resists classification according to any school tradition. He was also a transitional figure: His work represents both the end and culmination of golden-age Judeo–Arabic culture and (through translation) the beginning of Jewish–Hebrew Aristotelianism. Although Maimonides did not write systematically about the soul or intellect – or, for that matter, about any philosophical subject – nevertheless he has much to say about them throughout his writings. Contrary to expectation, his nonsystematic approach and incomplete presentations did much to stimulate psychological discussion in later literature, as philosophers, theologians, exegetes, and enthusiasts struggled to make sense of and reconstruct the views of the authoritative sage from Cordoba. In

many ways, it is Maimonides' failure to present a complete doctrine of intellect and immortality that stimulated the explosion of psychological interest during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (as will be seen later).

Six texts of Maimonides are worth singling out and briefly describing: His preface to *Avot* and preface to *Sanhedrin*, chapter 10 (both in the commentary on Mishnah); his "Laws of Ethical Dispositions" and "Laws of Repentance" (both in *Mishneh Torah*); *the Guide of the Perplexed*; and the "Letter on Resurrection."

Maimonides' early commentary on Mishnah, like all his writings, was novel in many ways. It is comprehensive, providing explanation of all Mishnaic tractates, including those without talmudic explication, and it includes three systematic prefaces, two of which relate to the soul. As introduction to tractate *Avot*, a collection of Tannaitic wisdom sayings, Maimonides provides a synthetic primer in Aristotelian ethics, which would become the standard textbook in philosophical ethics used by Jews throughout the later Middle Ages.[37] In the first few chapters, as introduction to the doctrine of the mean, he presents a brief discourse on the soul and its faculties. Borrowing from al-Fārābī's *Select Aphorisms* (sometimes word for word),[38] he defends the unity of the soul, the uniqueness of the human soul (which is essentially different from animal and plant souls), and describes the soul's faculties and their functions: nutrition, sensation, appetite, imagination, and reason – both practical and theoretical. By knowing the soul, the physician of the soul, that is, the ethicist, can diagnose, treat, and cure the soul's sicknesses, leading it from extreme behavior to the mean and from a life of vice to a life of virtue. Yet the question remains: How does one determine what the mean is? Here Maimonides diverges from al-Fārābī (and Aristotle), identifying knowledge of God as the orienting ethical principle, toward which all actions should lead.

The other introduction relating to psychic matters prefaces an earlier chapter of the Mishnah, chapter 10 ("Ḥeleq") of *Sanhedrin*.[39] Working off the qualified first sentence of this chapter – all Jews have a share (*ḥeleq*) in the world to come, except – Maimonides presents a survey of different conceptions of the "world to come." He counts five: the Garden of Eden and Gehinnom construed as places of corporeal pleasure or pain; the messianic age, governed by an eternal king who rules an elite population of immortal giants; the time of resurrection, when all deserving souls are reconstituted with their bodies and live forever in peace; and a this-worldly "world to come," characterized by universal health, wealth, peace, and security. The final view, according to Maimonides, combines all the others: a messianic age, when the dead are resurrected, experience infinite pleasure in the Garden of Eden, and live forever in peace and security. Following a brief excursus on education and exegesis, in which the primarily rhetorical and heuristic character of any doctrine

of reward is exposed, he presents his own purely spiritualistic view: Knowledge of God is the highest goal and contemplation of God the greatest reward; this alone is true delight, and it has no share whatsoever in anything material.

Maimonides' ethics and eschatology are repeated in his comprehensive code of law, the *Mishneh Torah*. In the "Laws of Ethical Dispositions" Maimonides presents a complete ethical theory – in Jewish legal context – governed by the principles of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean (although there is constant tension between ethical moderation and intellectual extremism). In the "Laws of Repentance" the spiritualistic intellectualistic orientation of the Introduction to *Ḥeleq* is reproduced in striking form: true love of God results from knowledge of God ("according to the knowledge, will be the love"),[40] as exemplified by the single-minded passion of the lover in Song of Songs, who seeks conjunction with her beloved active intellect, or the rabbinic ideal in *Berakhot*: "In the world to come, there is no eating, drinking, or sexual relations, but rather the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads enjoying the radiance of the divine presence [*shekhinah*]."[41]

Guide of the Perplexed – Maimonides' philosophical–theological magnum opus – also includes significant material about the soul and intellect, although generally it is difficult to determine what his true opinion might have been on any particular subject. The text itself is framed by the noetic nature of man – created in the (intellectual) image of God, and directed toward intellectual perfection as his final end[42] – and has discussions of soul and intellect throughout. For example, in *Guide* I.72 and II.6–7 Maimonides presents a fairly standard Neoplatonized–Aristotelian emanationist cosmology, with the active intellect – the last of the celestial intelligences – construed as the cause of existence and final aim of knowledge. In *Guide* I.40–42 he lists various definitions – philosophical and nonphilosophical alike – of the equivocal terms "soul," "spirit," "life," and "death." In *Guide* I.68 he presents a summary of the Aristotelian doctrine of the identity of knower and thing known.[43] Many of the traditional theological doctrines in the *Guide* are understood with the help of the theory of the active intellect. Both prophecy and providence are explained as resulting from a divine overflow through the active intellect to individuals with properly prepared intellects.

There are other chapters in the *Guide,* however, which complicate matters, suggesting that cognition, for Maimonides, is far more difficult than it might first appear. In contemporary Maimonidean scholarship – thanks largely to a pioneering study by Shlomo Pines[44] – these chapters have led to a series of studies and counter-studies, arguing that Maimonides, who seems to place such great emphasis on intellectual perfection, conjunction, and knowledge of God, in fact believed that these designated goals could not possibly be achieved by any human being (except

perhaps Moses). Based on remarks about the limitations of the human intellect – incapable of apprehending even the celestial world, let alone God – recent scholars have suggested that Maimonides was a metaphysical critic (akin to Kant) or even a skeptic.[45]

In Maimonides' own time, in contrast, he was accused of exactly the opposite: being far too enamored with the intellectual life. Based mainly on his commentary on the Mishnah and *Mishneh Torah*, he was charged with denying the religious doctrine of resurrection, and of promoting a purely elitist noetic doctrine of eternal reward, based solely on intellectual accomplishment.[46] In response to these accusations, he wrote his "Letter on Resurrection,"[47] an apologetic tract, which might be considered his last philosophical–theological writing. Resurrection, he writes there, is rabbinic dogma, and he accepts it, just as others should; he does not deny it or explain it metaphorically. On the contrary, precisely because it is dogma and cannot be proved rationally, it should simply be accepted on faith; and moreover denying it affects belief in other related subjects, such as miracles. Nevertheless, he reaffirms what he stated in earlier works: The final reward, beyond any other reward, the "world to come" where one reaches true life without death, is incorporeal – made up of "souls without bodies, like angels."

Maimonides was the most important, and certainly the most influential, Jewish Aristotelian writing in Judeo–Arabic, but he was not the last. During his own time and in the following generations there were other Jewish thinkers in the Islamic world who are no less worthy of interest; they deserve brief notice here before turning to Hebrew philosophy in the Christian world.

Perhaps the most creative Jewish philosopher during Maimonides' generation was his older contemporary, Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. after 1164), who challenged traditional Aristotelian ideas with, among other things, his novel conceptions of human self-consciousness.[48] Joseph ben Judah ibn Shimon, famous disciple of Maimonides and addressee of the *Guide*, wrote a polemical "Silencing Epistle" during the Resurrection Controversy, aimed at defending his Master's eschatological doctrines against his critics.[49] The other Joseph ben Judah – Ibn ʿAqnin – includes extensive psychological material in his still unpublished *Tibb al-nufūs*, and reads Song of Songs as an allegory of the soul in his long Judeo–Arabic commentary on that work.[50] Among the many texts on the soul by Ibn Kammūna (d. 1284) – writing in the following generation and representing a new trend in Arabic–Islamic philosophy, Illuminationism – is his brief *Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul*.[51] Finally, mention should be made of the Yemenite tradition, which produced a long list of texts that relate in one way or another to the soul, from the early Neoplatonic

Bustān al-ʿuqūl by Netanel al-Fayyumi to the philosophical midrashic texts produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[52]

PART 2: HEBREW PHILOSOPHY IN CHRISTIAN EUROPE (1150–1500)

I. HISTORICAL-LITERARY-CULTURAL SETTING

Jewish philosophy in Islamic Spain came to a sudden end due to political causes: The conquest of Andalusia by the Almohads (1147–1150), who forced Jews (and Christians) to convert to Islam or flee. As is well known, many Jews fled south and east, including Maimonides and his family, who resettled in Egypt. Many more fled north into Christian territories: Castile, Aragon, Catalonia, southern France, and Italy. In general, they took with them their Arabic and Judeo–Arabic books, along with the desire to translate them into Hebrew and transmit them to the more traditional Jewish communities already existing in southern Europe. By 1300, most of the Judeo–Arabic texts discussed in Part 1, together with dozens of Arabic and Greco–Arabic works – including Aristotle and the Arabic Aristotelians – were rendered into Hebrew. These translations provided the foundation for the emergence of a Jewish–Hebrew tradition of philosophy, which developed its own distinctive language and peculiar ideas.

In this second part of the chapter, the focus is exclusively on this Hebrew tradition of philosophy: on the discussion of soul and intellect in Hebrew texts. It begins with a survey of what was translated into Hebrew, and then turns to the original developments among the Jews of Christian Europe during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries: from Jewish Kalām and Neoplatonism to Aristotelianism and anti-Aristotelianism.

II. TRANSLATIO STUDII 1: JUDEO–ARABIC, GRECO–ARABIC, AND ARABIC INTO HEBREW

The first works translated into Hebrew – after the Almohad conquest and Jewish resettlement in Christian Europe – were works of Jewish provenance. For example, Saadia's *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Improvement of Psychic Dispositions*, Baḥya ibn Paqudah's *Duties of the Heart*, and Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* were translated by Judah ibn Tibbon (ca. 1110–1190), the first major translator among the refugees from Islamic Spain, and the founder of a family dynasty of translators.[53]

A preoccupation with Judeo-Arabic works continued during the following generations. To stay focused on texts mentioned earlier: Moses ibn Ezra's *Kitāb al-ḥadīqa*

fī maʿna al-majāz wa-l-haqīqa was translated by Judah al-Harizi (in abridged form, as *Sefer ʿArugat ha-Bosem*),[54] Isaac Israeli's *Book on the Elements* was rendered by Abraham ibn Ḥasdai,[55] and, most importantly, the works of Maimonides – including his preface to *Ḥeleq, Eight Chapters, Guide of the Perplexed*, and "Letter on Resurrection" – were translated, sometimes in rival versions, by Samuel ibn Tibbon, Judah al-Harizi, and other translators.[56] Other Judeo–Arabic works were translated only later in the fourteenth century, including Joseph ibn Tzaddiq's *Microcosm* and Abraham ibn Daud's *The Exalted Faith*. Why these were left out of the initial translation program is a question that remains unanswered. That they were recovered in the fourteenth century, however, expresses, as we will see, an interest in rediscovering and rehabilitating alternative philosophies to those developed out of and in response to the works of Maimonides and Averroes.

In the Islamic world, all these works could be read, by any literate Jew, in light of their larger literary-linguistic context: the Arabic and Greco–Arabic works that influenced them. In Christian Europe, in contrast, to translate only these Judeo–Arabic works and nothing more would have created a peculiar vacuum of sorts, making available secondary works of Jewish philosophy–theology for readers who had no access to the texts on which they were based. Together with the translation of Jewish works, therefore, early on there began also the translation of non-Jewish works, primarily Greco–Arabic and Arabic texts of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophy.

In the area of philosophical psychology, the most important works rendered into Hebrew include *The Book of the Apple*,[57] Galen's "Dialogue on the Soul,"[58] texts related to the Arabic Plotinus – made available indirectly through Abraham ibn Hasdai's Hebrew adaptation of the Buddhist legend *Barlaam and Joasaph*,[59] and Qustā b. Lūqā's *On the Difference between Spirit and Soul*.[60] Most effort, however, was given to the works of Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition. In fact, although only a handful of non-Aristotelian works, of, for example, Platonic, Neoplatonic, or Stoic orientation, were rendered into Hebrew, dozens of Aristotelian works related to the soul were translated – from Greco–Arabic, Arabic, and, beginning in the later thirteenth century, from scholastic Latin. It is worth describing and cataloguing the Hebrew transmission of *De Anima* in particular in greater detail, to give a sense of how the Jewish–Hebrew discussion of the soul emerged in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Aristotle

In general, the Jews in Christian Europe learned Aristotle indirectly through the commentators, especially Averroes. Nevertheless, a small number of texts of

Aristotle were rendered directly, including *De Anima*, which was translated in 1283 by Zerahyah ben Isaac ben Shealtiel Ḥen.[61]

Alexander of Aphrodisias

The *De Intellectu*, attributed to Alexander, was translated into Hebrew together with Averroes' commentary on it, to which were added, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, supercommentaries by Moses Narboni and Joseph ben Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov.[62] In the fourteenth century, Alexander's *De Anima* was also translated into Hebrew by Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles.[63]

Al-Fārābī

Al-Fārābī's straightforward "*Treatise on Intellect*" was translated twice into Hebrew, in very different versions.[64] There was also a Neoplatonic work on the soul in Hebrew, *Mahut ha-Nefesh*, that circulated under his name.[65] His *Political Regimes*, which includes extensive material on the soul, was translated relatively early – by Moses ibn Tibbon in 1256[66] – whereas other works were not rendered until the fourteenth century, including the *Enumeration of the Sciences* (with classification of *De Anima*),[67] and the *Select Aphorisms*[68] – although the latter had considerable influence indirectly via the Hebrew translation of Maimonides' *Eight Chapters*.[69] *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, which includes a brief discussion of *De Anima* along with Aristotle's other writings, was not translated directly, but it was incorporated into Shem Tov ibn Falaquera's introduction to philosophy entitled *Reshit Ḥokhmah*.[70] Finally, although al-Fārābī's lost commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was not translated into Hebrew, its controversial thesis – that conjunction with the active intellect is nothing but an old wives' tale – was well known through other sources, especially Averroes' treatises on conjunction.[71]

Avicenna and al-Ghazālī

The transmission of Avicenna's ideas on the soul is more complicated. His medical writings, which include considerable discussion of the soul (especially the internal senses), were translated into Hebrew, and were read widely and commented upon;[72] but his main philosophical works, such as the *Shifā'* and *Najāt*, were not. Nevertheless, considerable material was made available indirectly. A few examples: Judah Halevi's *Kuzari,* which includes excerpts from Avicenna's short treatise on the soul, was translated into Hebrew circa 1166-7;[73] while Shem Tov ibn Falaquera made use of Avicenna's *Najāt* and *Shifā'* in his many Hebrew compendia and compilations.[74] More extensive material was available through two reworkings of Avicenna: al-Ghazālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers* was translated three times in

the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries;[75] and Ibn Daud's *The Exalted Faith* was translated twice in the late fourteenth.[76] More interesting is the Hebrew translation of the Latin *De Anima* by Dominicus Gundissalinus, which is an adaptation of Avicenna's *Shifā'* on the soul, rearranged and combined with other sources, including Augustine.[77] Gundassilinus' treatise, which was excerpted extensively by Gershom ben Solomon and Hillel of Verona,[78] includes ten chapters, organized around the following ten questions.

Does the soul exist? What is the soul? Is the soul created? Is it one or many? If it is many, were these many all created together at the beginning of the world, or are new souls created every day? Are they created from nothing or from something? If they are created from something, are they created from the souls of the parents, in the same way that the body comes from the bodies of the parents, or are they created from some substance of the body? Is the soul mortal or immortal? If immortal, does it retain, after its separation from the body, all the faculties it possessed while still in the body? If it does not retain all of them, which of them survive and which do not?

It was only in the 1330s that more extensive material was made available from the *Shifā'* and *Najāt* in the form of an anthology of texts translated by Todros Todrosi.[79]

Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl, and Averroes

The philosophical traditions of al-Andalus were especially receptive to translation into Hebrew. Some of the works of Ibn Bajja were rendered into Hebrew, although probably late, as was Ibn Tufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*; the translation of both authors survives only with the fourteenth-century commentaries on them by Narboni.[80] Far more important and influential were the works of Averroes. Indeed, it was primarily through Averroes that the Jews in Christian Europe developed their ideas about the soul, and because Averroes himself was not consistent in his psychology, especially in his ideas about knowledge and the possibility of conjunction with the active intellect, that the Jews learned psychology through him is one reason why there emerged a lively discourse on the soul in the thirteenth and especially fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The first texts of Averroes translated into Hebrew were his two short treatises on conjunction, translated by Samuel ibn Tibbon – together with a third treatise by Averroes' son, Abdallah – and appended to his commentary on Ecclesiastes.[81] Although these treatises do not, as one contemporary scholar has remarked, "exhibit Averroes . . . at his best,"[82] in the Middle Ages they would prove to be Averroes at his most popular. The treatises were transmitted far and wide and became something like the standard textbooks on conjunction. They circulated together with and

independently of Ibn Tibbon's commentary, were abridged and incorporated into Gershom ben Solomon's popular encyclopedia *Gate of Heaven*,[83] were excerpted at length in Hanokh al-Konstantini's *Marot Elohim*,[84] and received a full commentary by Gersonides, as part of his exegesis of Averroes' commentaries on and epitomes of Aristotle.[85] The Hebrew translation served as the basis for a Latin adaptation, translations of which were incorporated into Hillel of Verona's *Tagmulei ha-Nefesh*.[86]

Other short and occasional works of Averroes were translated as well, including his commentary on Alexander's *De intellectu*,[87] and a third dissertation on conjunction entitled *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect*.[88] The latter work survives with commentaries written by Narboni (in the fourteenth century) and Joseph ben Shem Tov (in the fifteenth century); in fact, the latter, following the example of Averroes himself, wrote both a short and a long commentary on this work.[89] Finally, Averroes' doctrines were transmitted more directly through his commentaries on Aristotle. The Epitome of *De Anima* was translated by Moses ibn Tibbon, and later received a detailed commentary by Gersonides.[90] The Middle Commentary was translated twice – by Moses ibn Tibbon and Isaac ben Shem Tov of Tortosa.[91] The Long Commentary, in contrast, was not translated into Hebrew until the fifteenth century, and then not directly from the Arabic original but from the Latin rendition.[92] This is one of several reasons for the differences between the Latin and the Hebrew traditions of philosophical psychology.

III. TRANSLATIO STUDII 2: GLOSSARIES, ENCYCLOPEDIAS, AND COMMENTARIES

Straight translation was not the only way to transmit the Arabic and Greco–Arabic tradition in Hebrew. Along with the dozens of translations, there emerged, starting already in the twelfth century, a cognate reference literature in the form of glossaries and lexicons, introductory primers and commentaries, compendia and encyclopedias. Sometimes these secondary works were based entirely on existing translations – they would collect, cut, and reorganize existing texts as they saw fit; others included newly translated excerpts or were even original compositions, based directly on the Arabic sources themselves or on material already available in Hebrew. This secondary literature, insofar as it relates to the soul, will be surveyed briefly here.

Lexicons and Glossaries

The philosophical dictionary was, by the thirteenth century, already an established genre, and Arabic exemplars were translated into Hebrew, including Isaac Israeli's

Book of Definitions.[93] Original Hebrew glossaries were produced as well, generally organized alphabetically rather than conceptually. The most widely read of these lexicographical aids was Samuel ibn Tibbon's *Perush ha-Millot ha-Zarot*, written as a glossary to his Hebrew translation of *Guide*. In it he presents some 190 definitions of technical or "unfamiliar" terms, including lengthy explanations of terms related to psychology:[94] the vegetative, animal, and rational souls; the imaginative, rational, and estimative faculties; sensation and the sense of touch; intellect – human and divine, acquired and active; separate intelligence and the tenth intelligence. Ibn Tibbon's definitions then served as the sources of and inspirations for other works, including the Hebrew–Italian glossary by Moses of Salerno, author of the first detailed commentary on the *Guide*.[95]

In addition to other glossaries or lexicons that relate to soul and intellect,[96] other more complex works were written: part lexicon, part primer or introduction to philosophy. The best example of this type of work, and the most popular, is the anonymous *Ruaḥ Ḥen*, which includes chapters on plant, animal, and rational souls; the psychic faculties; practical intellect, theoretical intellect, and the stages of intellect; the difference between human and animal faculties; and an investigation of imagination and intellect in relation to speech.[97]

Encyclopedias

The encyclopedia and encyclopedism, which began to develop in the twelfth century – among Jews and Christians alike – reached its apogee in the thirteenth century, generally considered the golden age of the medieval encyclopedia. The interest in collecting and classifying knowledge, aimed at both comprehensiveness and accessibility, developed at least partly in response to a growing need to assimilate and disseminate the new sciences, which were rapidly making their way into Hebrew (and Latin) through the dozens of straight translations. Although each encyclopedia was different in significant ways, in both form and content, it is impossible to find any such work without a section on the soul. Here I will just briefly single out and characterize three of the better known Hebrew encyclopedias.

The first comprehensive Hebrew encyclopedia of the thirteenth century is Judah ha-Kohen's *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah*, a work that he wrote first in Judeo–Arabic, in his native Toledo (probably in the 1230s), before reproducing it in Hebrew in Italy (ca. 1247), after he had resettled there.[98] The section on natural science in this work is based largely on Averroes' Middle Commentaries, and this applies also to the section on the soul. The Middle Commentary on the *De Anima* serves as its frame text, which it abridges and supplements with material drawn from other sources, including Averroes' Epitomes of *De Anima* and *Parva Naturalia*.

Judah's encyclopedia includes a section of biblical exegesis as well, in which he explains relevant scriptural texts in light of philosophical–psychological ideas and principles.

Some thirty years after Judah ha-Kohen reworked his encyclopedia in Hebrew, Shem Tov ibn Falaquera – the encyclopedist par excellence – produced yet another comprehensive introduction to philosophy, entitled *De'ot ha-Filosofim*. Like *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah*, Falaquera's work is based mainly on Averroes – he too used both the Middle Commentary on and Epitome of *De Anima* – together with some additions from Avicenna. In general he preserves the order of the Middle Commentary as follows: a survey of different (pre-Aristotelian) views on the soul, the definition of the soul, the nutritive faculty, the five senses and common sense, imagination, the existence of the rational faculty, the uniqueness of the rational faculty, the practical intellect and theoretical intellect, and ending with the appetitive faculty. The discussion of soul and intellect is followed immediately by a summary of *Parva Naturalia*. The active intellect is discussed later, after cosmology and celestial physics; it is the first section of "Book Two, On Divine Science."[99]

De'ot ha-Filosofim was but one of several introductory works written by Falaquera, although in many ways it marks the culmination of his work as philosophical popularizer.[100] Among his many other writings, most noteworthy is his *Sefer ha-Nefesh*.[101] In general it reproduces the doctrines of the larger work *in nuce*, but it also introduces several important modifications. Falaquera begins with a physiological discussion of the spirit, based on medical sources, and ends – following discussion of intellect – with chapters on the internal senses, which are drawn mostly from Avicenna's *Najāt*. In contrast to *De'ot*, moreover, the discussion of soul, intellect, and internal senses ends with the active intellect as cause of knowledge and final goal of cognition.

The third major work of thirteenth-century Hebrew encyclopedism – and by far the most popular (in style and influence) – was Gershom ben Solomon's *Gate of Heaven*.[102] Unlike his predecessors, Gershom – who seems not to have known Arabic – based his work entirely on texts already available in Hebrew, which he would collect, abridge, rearrange, and modify to produce a single synthetic whole. This is especially the case with the section on the soul. It begins with a brief definition of the soul and its faculties, based on Maimonides' *Eight Chapters* (which was itself adapted from al-Fārābī's *Select Aphorisms*), continues with selections from the Hebrew version of Dominicus Gundissalinus' *De Anima* (which was based mainly on Avicenna's *Shifā'*), and ends with the two treatises on conjunction with the active intellect by Averroes.

Commentaries and Supercommentaries[103]

In terms of philosophical activity among the Jews, the thirteenth century was primarily a century of transmission. In other words, the most creative philosophical work done by Jews was in the realm of reception: creating a philosophical terminology in Hebrew, producing a Hebrew library of philosophical texts, and teaching and defending philosophical ideas through reference works and secondary forms, including biblical commentaries, commentaries on rabbinic literature, and sermons.[104] It was only in the fourteenth century that a real, mature Hebrew tradition of philosophy started to emerge, as evidenced by the development of yet another instrument of absorbing, teaching, and transmitting the Greco–Arabic tradition: the commentary. Only in the fourteenth century did the philosophical commentary emerge as a major genre in Hebrew, yet once the Jews discovered it, they embraced it with enthusiasm.

The most prolific commentators on philosophical works were Gersonides, Moses Narboni, Isaac ben Shem Tov, Joseph ben Shem Tov, and Shem Tov ben Joseph ben Shem Tov. Their work will be briefly surveyed here.

Levi ben Gershom/Gersonides (1288–1344)[105]

In addition to his *Wars of the Lord* (which will be discussed later), Gersonides wrote detailed commentaries and supercommentaries on most of the Averroean corpus, including the Epitome of Aristotle's *De Anima*, the three treatises on conjunction – two by Averroes and one by his son ʿAbdallah – and the Epitomes of *Parva Naturalia* and *De Animalibus*. His commentaries, which generally follow the order of Averroes' works, paraphrasing and adding brief remarks and explanations, also include (sometimes) lengthy digressions, introduced by the standard incipit: "Levi says." It is in these digressions in which Gersonides develops his own opinions, including his idea that the active intellect is the pattern, order, or "nomos" of the world, possessing all forms in all their varied and complex relations.

Moses Narboni (d. ca. 1362)[106]

Narboni, like many a fourteenth-century thinker, thought best through commentary and supercommentary. Like Gersonides, he wrote on Averroes, but he focused his exegetical skills on many other authors as well. Indeed, several Hebrew versions of Arabic philosophical texts survive only with his commentary on them. The texts in psychology he commented on include the following: al-Ghazālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers;* Ibn Bājja's *Epistle of Farewell* and *Governance of the Solitary*; Ibn Tufayl's

Hayy ibn Yaqzān; and Averroes' *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect* and Commentary on Alexander's *De Intellectu*. He also published a work under his own name, entitled *Ma'amar bi-Shelemut ha-Nefesh*, which is in fact a compendium of texts borrowed from Averroes' Middle Commentary on *De Anima* and *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect*, along with material from Averroes' *Epitome*, al-Ghazālī's *Intentions*, and other writings.[107]

The Shem Tov Family (Fifteenth Century)[108]

Three of the most prolific philosophers in the fifteenth century were all members of the same family: the brothers Isaac (ca. 1380–1440) and Joseph ibn Shem Tov (ca. 1400–1460), and Joseph's son Shem Tov (fl. 1480s). Among their many writings are commentaries on works of psychology. Isaac wrote a commentary on al-Ghazālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers* and Supercommentary on Averroes' Middle *De Anima*. Joseph, like Narboni, wrote on al-Ghazālī's *Intentions,* Averroes' *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction*, and Averroes' commentary on Alexander's *De Intellectu*. He also seems to have commented on sections of the *De Anima* itself, along with *Guide* I.68, which presents, as already noted, a synopsis of the theory of the identity between intellect and object of intellectual cognition. Shem Tov ben Joseph, finally, wrote on Averroes' Middle Commentary on *De Anima*. It is worth adding that all three authors also wrote biblical commentaries, sermons, and original theological–exegetical works in which the philosophical ideas found in the Arabic works they commented on were used to expound and defend traditional Jewish life and literature.

IV. THE BEGINNINGS OF HEBREW SCHOLASTICISM

Spain and southern France ("Provence") were the main centers of the translation and transmission of Greco–Arabic, Judeo–Arabic, and Arabic philosophy into Hebrew; most of the figures and developments discussed thus far were located there. In the thirteenth century there emerged yet another major center of Jewish philosophy: Italy. Although the Italian–Jewish tradition of philosophy began as a satellite of Spain and Provence – the first major figures were Judah ha-Kohen of Toledo, Jacob Anatoli of Marseilles, and Zeraḥyah ben Isaac ben Shealtiel Ḥen of Barcelona – it quickly developed its own peculiar style and characteristics. Most notable is the openness to contemporary Latin–scholastic philosophy. In fact, it is first in Italy where we find significant translation activity from Latin into Hebrew and the first attempts at a Jewish–scholastic synthesis, what one recent scholar has termed "Hebrew Scholasticism."[109]

Two formative thinkers in this tradition, both of whom dealt at length with the soul, were Hillel of Verona and Judah Romano.

Hillel ben Samuel of Verona (ca. 1220–1295)[110]

Hillel of Verona – physician, translator, and philosopher-theologian – was one of the first Jewish philosophers to make significant use of Latin material. He produced direct translations from the Latin, including a Hebrew version of *Liber de Causis*. His major original work on the soul and final reward, entitled *Tagmulei ha-Nefesh* (1291), is composed largely of material translated or adapted from Latin sources, including Dominicus Gundissalinus' *De Anima*, Averroes' *De Beatitudine Animae*, and Thomas Aquinas' *On the Unity of the Intellect*.

Tagmulei ha-Nefesh is composed of an introduction and two parts. Part I is philosophical and is focused mainly on surveying different and sometimes competing ideas about soul and intellect. The first four chapters – based on Avicenna and Gundissalinus – are organized according to the four philosophical questions: "whether the soul exists"; "what is the soul" (according to Hillel it is not body, property, or accident but rather the substantial form of the body); "how the soul exists" (which Hillel understands in relation to change, the soul is not moved, changed or divisible in any way; it is an unmoved mover); and finally "why is the soul" (which Hillel explains in light of emanationist doctrines, the soul emanates from God through the intermediary of the active intellect, which is both giver of form and cause of knowledge). The final three chapters of part I introduce additional source material needed to address a more pressing matter of contemporary concern: Averroist monopsychism. Hillel explains first in brief the Averroistic doctrine that there is one intellect for all mankind, based on Thomas Aquinas' *On the Unity of the Intellect*; elaborates Averroes' theory in light of the Latin *De Beatitudine Animae* (an adaptation of the two treatises on conjunction by Averroes translated into Hebrew by Samuel ibn Tibbon); and finally responds to Averroes and the Averroists by returning to Thomas Aquinas.

Part II of *Tagmulei ha-Nefesh* is part philosophy and part theology; it frequently combines philosophical sources with biblical verses and rabbinic dicta to defend a spiritual eschatology. Both reward and punishment, he argues, are spiritual, even though both do depend on the way one conducts one's life in the body; and one's share in reward ultimately depends on contributions of all the psychic faculties. In detail Hillel relates how both moral virtue, which requires action and obedience to the law, and intellectual virtue are required to develop the intellect and achieve conjunction with the active intellect, which can take place even during one's lifetime – resulting in extrahuman powers, allowing the changing of nature through

miracles (as attested by the biblical prophets).[111] After death virtue contributes to a higher spiritual bliss, whereas vice leads to an eternal hell, which Hillel construes as the eternal contemplation of the bliss one has failed to achieve, together with repeated sufferings imagined by the imaginative faculty (which, together with the intellect, perdures). The book ends with exegesis: a survey of and explanation of rabbinic sources on reward and punishment. With this survey Hillel continues and advances a long history of apologetic perush aggadah.

Judah ben Moses ben Daniel Romano (ca. 1292–after 1330)

Much more creative and original was Judah Romano, who devoted himself to the simultaneous and related (in his view) tasks of translating contemporary scholastic philosophy into Hebrew and interpreting the Bible in light of it. Most of his writings remain in manuscript; the following is based on the articles written about them by J. Sermoneta and C. Rigo.[112]

According to Judah Romano, biblical exegesis is truly an inspired art, for each verse is like an active intellect, which overflows wisdom and causes the intellect to grasp it. Yet the human mind must first prepare itself to receive this wisdom, and this is where philosophy comes in. By studying philosophy, and always the latest philosophy, the exegete prepares his mind to receive the true doctrines of scripture as emanated through its verses. This hermeneutical theory does much to explain the peculiar character of Romano's writings. He would continually translate the most recent philosophical texts on any subject – from Albertus Magnus to Thomas Aquinas to Giles of Rome[113] – and then reread scripture in light of them. This is why he often explains the same verse several times: each successive translation prepares him to read more out of, or discover more in, the verses of the Hebrew Bible.

An example of his method are his various explanations of Genesis 1:26. As described by C. Rigo, Romano interprets this verse in light of several translated texts from scholastic philosophy – including Albertus' *Liber de Natura et Origine Animae* and a *Short Treatise on the Soul* attributed to Giles of Rome – and in relation to a series of philosophical questions regarding the origin of the soul, the origin of the intellect, and the nature of the active intellect. After surveying the different views – whether the soul is one or many; whether the intellect comes from outside, thus constituting a second form; and whether the active intellect is intrinsic (as many scholastics argued) or external, the last of the celestial intelligences – Judah returns to the verse. "God said: Let us make man in our image after our likeness," means: God said to the earth that man should come into existence from the earth, with the material disposition to receive the primary psychic faculties, and from the active

intellect, which is the external giver of intellect and cause of its movement from potentiality to actuality.

Moving from the nature of man to his final end, Judah explains that the final goal of human beings is to rise up from the temporal life of generation and corruption to the eternal life of cognition, through abstracting universal concepts from real things, and by actualizing intellect – with the assistance of the active intellect – such that one cognize separate intellects and conjoin with them. The highest goal is conjunction with the active intellect. After the intellect has separated from the body, perhaps it can rise still higher; yet when it is still connected with body, it cannot reach beyond the active intellect; it can get a taste of the active intellect by ascending from physical forms to their "intentions" – to the true eternal and immutable objects of knowledge.

V. FROM ARISTOTELIANISM TO ANTI-ARISTOTELIANISM

The thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries were not only a period of transmission; it was also a time of controversy. Three communal controversies broke out during this period, which all focused on the permissibility of the study of philosophy within Judaism. Although the controversies did not help settle the main subjects of dispute – on the contrary, they tended to polarize the opposing factions – nevertheless they did much to raise the level of discourse, increasing sensitivity to the issues at stake. Thus in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries both enthusiasts of philosophy and their opponents spoke with an extraordinarily high degree of knowledge of the philosophical, especially Aristotelian, sources. This helped lead to the emergence, in Hebrew, in late-medieval Europe, of a very sophisticated and mature Jewish Aristotelianism, and a very sophisticated and mature Jewish anti-Aristotelianism.

This last section of the chapter will focus on the psychological discussions of the leading exponent of each group: Gersonides the Aristotelian and Ḥasdai Crescas the anti-Aristotelian.

Gersonides[114]

Gersonides – often considered the most creative and original of the medieval Jewish philosophers – was a prolific writer and researcher, who had broad interests: astrology and astronomy; geometry and music; and the full range of the Aristotelian curriculum, from logic to physics to metaphysics. Still, perhaps no subjects exercised him more deeply and more continuously than the intellect, intellectual cognition, and the possibility of conjunction with the active intellect. He discusses these subjects at length in his commentaries on Averroes, in his biblical commentaries,

and especially in Book 1 of his theological summa *Wars of the Lord*. In the latter (which will be our main focus here) he presents his most thorough, sustained, and systematic discussion of the different theories of intellect and intellection: He explains them in detail, exposes their deficiencies, and presents and defends his own opinions. It is here as well where one of his main motivating factors comes out most clearly: the defense of a doctrine of individual immortality.

Gersonides' discussion of intellect and immortality in the *Wars* is framed by Aristotle's *De Anima*, especially the notoriously ambiguous text at III.5; there Aristotle introduced the notion of a passive (or potential) intellect, which can "become all things," and an active intellect, which causes or "makes" all things; the latter is "separate, impassible, unmixed . . . it alone is immortal and eternal." Gersonides does not engage Aristotle directly. For him the study of Aristotle means the study of the commentators, who developed different and incompatible interpretations of Aristotle and inconsistent theories of intellect and intellection. Gersonides' aim in the *Wars* is to explain clearly the different views, show their weaknesses, and develop his own position out of and in contradistinction to theirs. His opinion, he claims, will emerge as superior in terms of philosophical argumentation. It will also help support the traditional doctrine of individual immortality, at least in some degree.

The way that Gersonides proceeds is dialectical, which means that his own opinion only emerges out of his critique of the others. To appreciate his innovations, therefore, it is best to briefly characterize the alternative opinions of his predecessors, as he understood them. His main interlocutors were Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, and Averroes, with occasional reference to al-Fārābī and Avicenna (primarily indirectly through Averroes), along with contemporary (possibly Christian scholastic) opinions.

According to Alexander of Aphrodisias (as Gersonides construes his position), the material or potential or human intellect is a disposition in the soul that comes to be with the body; it is the capacity to know, and nothing more. It knows through a process of abstraction: The senses provide material forms to the imagination, and the imagination intelligible forms to the intellect, which can see them with the help of an agent or active intellect – an external celestial incorporeal cause of thinking which shines light (as it were) on a potentially intelligible substance in the same way that the sun shines light on a potentially sensible substance. When the intellect is thinking an intelligible, it is actually thinking; when it is thinking an intelligible substance completely separate from matter, it can become one with this separate intelligible and survive eternally through it. The sum total of its thoughts is called acquired intellect; when these acquired thoughts are separate intelligibles,

they survive, having achieved some sort of union with the eternal thoughts the mind is thinking.

Themistius, according to Gersonides, defends a completely contrary – largely Platonizing – reading of Aristotle, a view that Averroes then develops in detail (as Gersonides understands him). According to this view, the material or potential or human intellect is not a disposition that comes to be with the body, but rather a separate substance, which is incorporeal, one, and eternal by nature. It itself possesses universal knowledge; in contrast, it can know individual particular things only through the individual body or soul. As with Alexander, Themistius (as developed by Averroes) considers the agent or active intellect an external cosmic intelligence, but it is identical with the material intellect. In other words, the potential or material or human intellect is an individual instantiation of the universal active intellect. Although the material intellect can acquire particular knowledge with the help of sense and imagination, this knowledge does not perdure. Only the material intellect, with the death of the body, when it returns, as it were, to its original state in the active intellect, survives the destruction of the body.

Gersonides presents also a "recent" view regarding the material intellect which seems to be a compromise between Themistius and religious dogma: The material intellect is separate but created *ex nihilo*. Most scholars would identify this position with contemporary scholastic views, although the exact background has not yet been determined.

This is the Aristotelian debate about the material intellect, the active intellect, and the possibility of knowledge, as Gersonides presents it. In his opinion, all these views are deficient in some way and through his criticism of them he develops his own view, which for him answers all the problems of the others. To sum up his criticism: In Gersonides' opinion Alexander can account for particular knowledge – through abstraction – but seems incapable of explaining universal knowledge; for if the material intellect comes to be with the body, it is also subject to destruction (following a basic principle of Aristotelian science), yet universal knowledge, in Alexander's acquired intellect, is eternal. Themistius, for his part, cannot account for particular knowledge, for the only way a separate intellect can know individuals is by mixing with the body, but if it mixes with the body, it is no longer separate. That the material and active intellects are one in essence, different in accident, is given the lengthiest discussion by Gersonides. He focuses on problems of individuation: If the active intellect is really one, then the material intellect in all humans should be one, but there is a manifest difference between individuals; and if the material intellect, on the other hand, is many, then one would conclude that a single thing is both one and many at the same time.

What then is Gersonides' own view? For him, the material intellect is a disposition or capacity created in the imagination. It is created, but can become eternal – for the principle that nothing that comes to be can become eternal is false (he argues this in Book 5). Here, for the most part, he agrees with Alexander, and rejects the view of Themistius and Averroes. With the active intellect, however, Gersonides begins to break new ground. He agrees that the active intellect is a separate external incorporeal cosmic intelligence, which is a cause of existence and knowledge, but the way he defines it is different. For Gersonides, this active intellect is the cause of all existence in the lower world, insofar as it possesses all forms that prime matter is capable of receiving and in their myriad relations. For the same reason, it is the cause of thought, because in it are all the possible intelligible forms, in all their myriad relations – it provides the grounds, as it were, for all thinking. In this sense the active intellect is, to use Gersonides' terminology, the order, justice, pattern, or "nomos" of the sublunar world.

One question remains: If the active intellect is the pattern of the world, can an individual human intellect know it completely and conjoin with it, and what would conjunction mean? For Gersonides, all knowledge comes through experience of the world; all knowledge is scientific or inductive, and it is always the result of learning. In his opinion, there is no innate knowledge or illumination from above; even first principles are learned. Therefore any sort of complete cognition or union with the active intellect is impossible; human beings, through rational study, cannot possibly acquire complete understanding of all forms in the world in all their complex relations; they cannot possibly see the world from the perspective of the active intellect. Yet precisely because the active intellect is the pattern of the world, and the world is a reflection of it, the knowledge gained through empirical study provides some share in or taste of this universal pattern.

It is this combination of ideas, perhaps born of Gersonides' own inclination toward the empirical, that led him to a remarkable conclusion: Immortality consists in the little knowledge one acquires through the rational scientific empirical investigation of the world, and this little knowledge is different, and unique, for each individual intellect. In this way does Gersonides – the staunch Aristotelian, the sturdy empiricist – defend the doctrine of an individual immortality.

Ḥasdai Crescas (ca. 1340–1410/11)[115]

Although Gersonides was critical of his Aristotelian forebears and often worked hard to undermine their theories, he was nevertheless committed to constructing a positive scientific understanding of the world. Ḥasdai Crescas, in contrast – chief rabbi of the Jews of Aragon, legal scholar, polemicist, and theologian – mastered

Aristotelianism for a different reason: to topple it from within. Through his careful study of the massive corpus of philosophical texts available in Hebrew, including some new translations he seems to have encouraged – such as al-Ghazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers* and Ibn Daud's *The Exalted Faith* – he set out, in his *Light of the Lord*, to free Judaism from the doctrines of Aristotle and his Jewish epigones. In particular, he focused his attention on philosophical proofs for the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God (and the Aristotelian principles on which they were based), philosophical ideas about the origin of the world, divine knowledge of individuals, prophecy as a natural perfection, providence as consequent on the intellect, and – most important for our purposes – the noetic doctrine of immortality, achieved through conjunction with the active intellect.

The main discussion of intellect and immortality in *Light of the Lord* is found in book 2, part 6, where Crescas first presents a summary of the Aristotelian theory of knowledge and conjunction, based mainly on Jewish adaptations, followed by a refutation of it. The ideas of the philosophers, as Crescas understands them, are as follows: Through the acquiring of true knowledge, the human or potential or material intellect can become constituted as an incorporeal substance, called the "acquired intellect," which will exist forever. This state of existence, this achieving of knowledge, is considered by them the final aim of human existence. The intellect's eternal contemplation of universal truths after death is what it means to be truly happy: It brings with it true beatitude and leads to the highest form of pleasure.

How one can achieve this state of intellectual bliss, however, is not entirely clear. For Crescas, there are two different ways of understanding it. First, there is the view that knowledge of any truth whatsoever will lead to some degree of acquired intellect and some level of immortality. This idea, which Crescas seems to draw from Gersonides, is dependent on the view that intelligible forms in the sublunar world are part of the plan or order or "nomos" in the active intellect; thus, to know any part of the plan is to know a part of the active intellect. According to this opinion, the more knowledge one attains the greater one's pleasure and larger one's share in eternal bliss. The second view, which Crescas seems to draw from Maimonides, is that the intellect can become constituted as an incorporeal eternal substance only when it contemplates an incorporeal separate intelligence, such as God, the angels, or the active intellect; conjunction requires knowledge of the intelligence itself, not any part or instantiation of it.

The philosophical theory of conjunction – no matter which way it is construed – is, for Crescas, not only incoherent but also dangerous. First, if one achieves some share in immortality simply by knowing any rational truth, then

anyone can attain it. Reason and philosophy, moreover, would seem to be superior to revelation and law, for it is through thinking, not through acting and obeying, that final reward is achieved. The second theory is no less problematic, albeit on different grounds. The problem is that, according to Maimonides, knowledge of God (and apparently all incorporeal substances) is possible only through negation, and negative knowledge, knowing what God, the angels, or the active intellect is not, cannot lead to any positive identification between knower and known. By knowing what is not the active intellect one is not led to any union with the active intellect. If conjunction with the active intellect requires complete and positive knowledge of the active intellect, and knowledge of the active intellect is impossible, then conjunction is impossible. To modify slightly al-Fārābī's infamous injunction (mentioned previously): Immortality of the soul is nothing but an old wives' tale.

Crescas has another argument as well, which is more creative, and which, in many ways, leads more directly to his own opinion on the subject. If the final aim of human existence, he argues, is knowledge and intellectual cognition, which constitutes the intellect as a separate incorporeal substance, then the final aim of man is to become not-man. That is, the final aim of man as composite of form and matter is to become pure intellect, completely separate from matter. Not only is this incoherent, he concludes, but it is in violation of divine justice, for how can the intellect alone, existing eternally, joyfully contemplating universal truths, receive this reward for what was accomplished by the human being during life, as body and soul.

What then is the final aim of human existence, according to Crescas? If immortality is possible, and not trivial, what is it and how is it achieved? Here Crescas draws more from scripture and tradition to present a theory contrary to that of the philosophers. For him the soul is a self-subsisting spiritual substance disposed toward thinking. That is, the soul is not a substrate, which serves and is subordinate to intellect; rather thinking or intellectual cognition is just one of several things that contribute to the happiness of the soul, which is the final perfection. In fact, thinking is itself subordinate to action, to obedience to the law, and observance of the commandments, by which love – the highest ideal and truest happiness – is achieved. As the rabbis say: "Which is better, study or action? Study, because it leads to action." This is why eternal reward is achieved even by the minor child who does nothing more than say amen after the communal prayers.

Crescas' critique of the Aristotelian ideas of acquired intellect and conjunction with the active intellect had varying success. It was used, borrowed, modified, and developed by a host of students and followers during the fifteenth century,

including Joseph Albo,[116] and it was rejected by others, such as Abraham Shalom, who attempted to defend Maimonides and Gersonides against Crescas' attacks.[117] As in other areas of Crescas' philosophy, perhaps here also it was only in Renaissance and early-modern times when his ideas were fully appreciated – for example in the philosophy of love of Judah Abrabanel or the intellectual love of God of Spinoza.

NOTES

1 For a synthetic study of the translations, see most recently Gutas 1998.
2 For Plato in Arabic, see most recently the general survey by Walbridge 2000, pp. 83–126, with extensive bibliography.
3 See Bielawski 1974, pp. 120–34; and see in general Rousseau 1968, with primary focus on the Latin version.
4 For Aristotle's *De Anima* in Arabic, see the brief discussion, with bibliography, in Bos 1994, pp. 9–12.
5 On this work, see most recently Adamson 2002, especially pp. 49–83 (on psychology and ethics).
6 See Finnegan 1956, pp. 159–202; Lyons 1973.
7 See Daiber 1980, pp. 191–3.
8 See most recently Adamson 2007, pp. 3–20, 106–43.
9 Especially his *On the Difference between Spirit and Soul*. For the Arabic, Latin, and Hebrew versions of this treatise, together with an English translation, see Wilcox 1985.
10 See especially H. Davidson 1992a, and further discussion later.
11 For possible Stoic influences, which will not be emphasized later, see especially Freudenthal 1996a, pp. 113–36; Langermann 1999a, Essay II.
12 For background on Saadia, Malter's biography and bibliography (see Malter 1921), although outdated in many ways, remains indispensable.
13 See H. Davidson 1967, pp. 75–94.
14 See Saadia 1948, pp. 235–41. Saadia also refers to five additional theories that he had mentioned earlier.
15 Following Saadia, these three terms will be used in most Jewish texts on psychology, although not always with the same meaning. See the discussion later regarding *Kitāb ma'ānī al-nafs* and Ibn Daud. See also, among others, Abraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Eccl. 7:9, and the discussion of David ibn Shoshan and his predecessors in Langermann 2007, pp. 63–86.
16 See Saadia 1948, pp. 259–63. For a history of the doctrine of the transmigration of souls in Judaism, see Verman 2005, pp. 399–426.
17 See Saadia 1948, pp. 277–89. For similar Christian discussions of resurrection, see Bynum Walker 1995.
18 For biography, history, sources, translations, and commentary, see Altmann and Stern 1958, which remains the standard work. For Plotinus Arabus and al-Kindī's psychology, see again Adamson 2002, 2007.
19 See Altmann and Stern 1958, pp. 107–8, 117; Tanenbaum 2002, pp. 74–5. For Maimonides' use of the same verse, see in general W. Harvey 1973, p. 43, n. 37.
20 See Altmann and Stern 1958, pp. 193–4.
21 For Ibn Gabirol's psychology, see in general Schlanger 1968.
22 Found in Book Three of his *Duties of the Heart*; see Ibn Paquda 1973a, pp. 198–220. For background on the text and the genre, see Tanenbaum 2002, pp. 215–7.

23 See Fenton 1997, pp. 157–84.
24 See Haberman 2003, pp. 53–105.
25 See, e.g., Ibn Gabirol's interpretation of the garden of Eden and Jacob's ladder, as cited by Ibn Ezra. About the latter, along with later interpretations of the ladder, see also Altmann 1967, pp. 1–32. For Neoplatonic readings of Ecclesiastes, see especially the Judeo–Arabic commentary by Isaac ibn Ghiyath, in Kafih 1962, pp. 155–296.
26 About this trend and tradition, see especially Tanenbaum 2002.
27 See the edition by Goldziher 1907 and the Hebrew translation by Broydé 1896, together with discussion by Plessner 1972–1973, pp. 491–8; Halkin 1973, pp. 81–94; Regev 1987, pp. 67–77.
28 See Pines 1955, pp. 103–36.
29 See Finkel 1927, pp. 45–54.
30 For Halevi on the soul, see especially *Kuzari* 5:10-14 (and 1:1, 101-117); together with H. Davidson 1972a, pp. 351–96.
31 See *Kuzari* 5:10-14. For the text of Avicenna, and its influence on Halevi, see Landauer 1875, pp. 335–418.
32 See W. Harvey 1973, p. 46, for the possibility that this passage influenced Crescas.
33 See *Kuzari* 5:14, trans. Hirschfeld 1964, pp. 271–2.
34 The discussion below is based on *Sefer ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* 1:6-7, 2:4-6, 3, together with Fontaine 1990, pp. 49–82, 111–92, 223–36; Eran 1998, pp. 58–75. For the latest on Ibn Daud in general, with updated bibliography, see also Fontaine 2006b.
35 In two versions, one by Solomon ben Lavi, and a second by Samuel ibn Motot. For the two versions and their relation to one another, see Eran 1990, Eran 1996, pp. 97–107.
36 About his polemics, see Fontaine 1990, p. 81, Fontaine 2005, pp. 19–34.
37 See Gorfinkle 1912; Maimonides 1975.
38 See H. Davidson 1963a, pp. 33–50.
39 See Wolf 1972, pp. 401–23.
40 See *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Repentance," 10:10.
41 See *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Repentance," 8:3–4.
42 See *Guide* I.1-2, III.51-54.
43 On this chapter, see the recent studies by Stern (forthcoming) and W. Harvey 2006a, pp. 253–62.
44 See Pines 1979a, pp. 82–109.
45 See W. Harvey 1998a, pp. 149–62; J. Stern 2004, pp. 143–91; and the contrary views of Altmann 1987, pp. 60–129; H. Davidson 1992–1993, pp. 49–103; H. Davidson 2000, pp. 1–14; and Kraemer 2006, pp. 350–409.
46 On the "Resurrection Controversy" in the east, see Stroumsa 1999; Langermann 2001, pp. 39–94. For the second "Resurrection Controversy," which broke out in the west only a decade later (in Spain and southern France), see Septimus 1982.
47 See Halkin and Hartman 1985, pp. 211–92.
48 See Pines 1964, pp. 198–213; Pines 1979b. See also Stroumsa 1993, pp. 415–22.
49 See Stroumsa 1999, along with Stroumsa 1998a, pp. 313–34.
50 The first chapter, devoted especially to the soul, was published in Hebrew translation by Lichtenberg 1859, vol. 2, pp. 44b–45b. The commentary was edited and translated by Halkin 1964. See also Halkin 1950, pp. 389–424.
51 See Nemoy 1944; Nemoy 1958, vol. 2, pp. 83–99. For Ibn Kammūna's work in general, including the "Treatise on Immortality," see Pourjavady and Schmidtke 2006.
52 See Levine 1908; Langermann 1996.

53 For the translations, with special emphasis on southern France (the center of the translation activity), see Twersky 1968, pp. 185–207; Freudenthal 1993a, pp. 29–136; Zonta 1996. For the Ibn Tibbon family in particular, see Robinson 2005, pp. 193–224.
54 See Fenton 1997, pp. 47–61.
55 See Altmann and Stern 1958, p. 133.
56 For the translations by Samuel ibn Tibbon, see Robinson 2007, pp. 7–12.
57 See Kalisch 1885; Gollancz 1908.
58 See Jellinek 1852.
59 See S.M. Stern 1961, pp. 58–120.
60 See Wilcox 1985, pp. 252–69.
61 See Bos 1994.
62 See Zonta 2001a, pp. 17–35; H. Davidson 1988b, pp. 205–18.
63 See Berman 1967, pp. 289–320.
64 See Freudenthal 2002b, pp. 29–115.
65 See Freudenthal 2003, pp. 173–237.
66 In Hebrew: *Hathalot ha-Nimtsa'ot* (Principles of Beings). See Filipowski 1849, pp. 1–64.
67 See Zonta 1992a.
68 See Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Poc. 280 (IMHM 22084); Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Mich. 370 (IMHM 22448); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms héb. 1341 (IMHM 15639).
69 Which is based largely on al-Fārābī's work. See note 38.
70 See S. Harvey 2002, pp. 97–112.
71 For discussion of this, with summary of existing literature on the subject, see Robinson 2007, pp. 93–9.
72 See Richler 1982, pp. 145–68.
73 See note 31.
74 See notes 99–100.
75 About these, see Chertoff 1952; Vajda 1960b; S. Harvey 2001, pp. 359–76.
76 See note 35.
77 For Gundissalinus' work, see Muckle 1940, pp. 23–103; Hasse 2000, pp. 13–18. The anonymous Hebrew translation survives in a single manuscript Cambridge, University Library Add. 1858 (IMHM 17522), about which see Reif 1997, p. 379. It was identified by Teicher 1956, pp. 416–22.
78 For Gershom's use of it, see Robinson 2000, pp. 261–3; for Hillel's, see Sermoneta 1962.
79 See S. Harvey 1992, p. 56, n. 17, pp. 57–8, n. 22.
80 See note 105.
81 See Hercz 1869.
82 See H. Davidson 1988a, p. 58.
83 See Robinson 2000, pp. 261–3.
84 See Sirat 1976.
85 I am currently preparing an edition and translation of this commentary.
86 See Geoffroy and Steel 2001; Sermoneta 1962; H. Davidson 1988a, pp. 57–73.
87 See Zonta 2001, pp. 17–35; H. Davidson 1988b, vol. 1, pp. 205–18.
88 See Bland 1982a.
89 For Narboni's commentary, see ibid. For Joseph b. Shem Tov, see Regev 1982, pp. 38–93.
90 See Mashbaum 1981.
91 See Ivry 2004; See also Ivry's edition and translation of the Arabic original: Ivry 2002.
92 See H. Wolfson 1973a, pp. 445–54.

93 For background on the Arabic tradition, see in general Kennedy-Day 2003.
94 See Even-Shemuel 1987, pp. 42, 50, 59–60, 67–8, 70–1.
95 See Sermoneta 1969, pp. 87–90, 130, 166, 195–6, 204, 213, 286–7, 303, 309–18.
96 For a thorough exploration of lexicographical materials in Hebrew, see Rothschild 2001, pp. 51–88.
97 See *Ruaḥ Ḥen* 1826, chaps. 1–5; with discussion by Sirat 1977, vol. III, pp. 117–23; Zwiep 2001, pp. 363–7.
98 For all things related to *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah,* including his psychology, see Fontaine 2000, pp. 191–210; Fontaine 2006, vol. 1, pp. 605–13.
99 See Jospe 1988, pp. 48–61; S. Harvey 2000b, pp. 211–47; Ivry 2000, pp. 390–413.
100 For his work in general, see Jospe 1988, along with S. Harvey 2007.
101 See the edition, translation, and exhaustive commentary by Jospe 1988, pp. 265–415.
102 See Robinson 2000, pp. 248–74.
103 For a full survey of the Hebrew commentaries on Aristotle, including *De Anima*, see Tamani and Zonta 1997. See also Zonta 2006, pp. 155–163, for discussion of, and select translations from, Baruch b. Ya'ish's commentary, which will not be included in the survey below.
104 In this chapter, I have intentionally avoided discussion of Jewish exegesis, because I have written a separate survey of this literature. See Robinson (forthcoming). For philosophy in rabbinic commentary and sermons, see Saperstein 1980, 1989.
105 See Altmann 1980, pp 1–31; Mashbaum 1981. See also Glasner 1995, pp. 51–90.
106 See Holzman 1996.
107 See Ivry 1967, pp. 271–97; Ivry 1977a, 1977b.
108 For background, see in general Regev 1983; Schwartzmann 1990; Tamani and Zonta 1997, p. 45.
109 See Zonta 2000, pp. 127–40; and Zonta 2006.
110 See especially Sermoneta 1962; Sermoneta 1974, pp. 155–203; along with the brief summary in Rigo 1998b. For Hillel's *Tagmulei ha-Nefesh*, see the critical edition, with extensive source annotation, by Sermoneta 1981. See also the earlier edition by Halberstam (Hillel of Verona 1874), which includes also Hillel's commentary on the 25 propositions of the *Guide*, and an appendix with "three additional matters," or perhaps, "three disputed questions:" the nature of human choice; the reason for death as punishment for original sin; and the fallen angels.
111 For background, see Ravitsky 1984, pp. 231–72 (pp. 247–8 on Hillel).
112 See especially Sermoneta 1984, pp. 337–74; Sermoneta 1990, pp. 77–113; Sermoneta 1994, pp. 343–60; Rigo 1996; Rigo 1998, pp. 181–222; Rigo 1998c.
113 For Romano's translations, see Rigo 1993a, pp. 73–104; Rigo 1993b, pp. 65–91; Rigo 1993c, pp. 1073–95; Rigo 1994, pp. 397–437; Rigo 1995, pp. 141–70.
114 There is a large and growing literature on Gersonides in general, and his discussions of soul and intellect in particular. See especially Feldman 1978, pp. 99–120; Gersonides 1984, pp. 71–84; Feldman 1992, pp. 255–77; Mashbaum 1981; Ivry 1991, pp. 235–51; Freudenthal 1989, pp. 55–72; Freudenthal 1996a, pp. 739–54; H. Davidson 1992b, pp. 195–265; Kellner 1994a, pp. 1–21; Kellner 1994b, pp. 233–59; Kellner 1995, pp. 275–96; Hyman 2002, pp. 106–19; Manekin 2003, pp. 306–10.
115 The following summary discussion is based on W. Harvey 1973. See also W. Harvey 1986, pp. 141–54; W. Harvey 1988, pp. 113–23.
116 See W. Harvey 1973, pp. 52–8.
117 See H. Davidson 1963b, pp. 78–91.

PART V

METAPHYSICS AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

17

GOD'S EXISTENCE AND ATTRIBUTES

CARLOS FRAENKEL

INTRODUCTION[1]

The question whether God exists and what his attributes are is not a philosophical concern in either the Hebrew Bible or in the classical rabbinic texts from the Mishnah to the Talmud. To be sure, the Bible includes texts bearing witness to a deep crisis of the conception of a providential God interacting with human beings, most importantly the books of Job and Ecclesiastes. It even reports that "the fool says in his heart: 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1). Whereas the Athenian in Plato's *Laws* responds to such a denial with the first extant proof for the existence of the Divine, no such attempt is recorded in the Bible however.[2] Passages abound, moreover, which taken literally contradict crucial features of the conception of God held by medieval Jewish philosophers – God's incorporeality, for example, or God's internal unity.

Jewish philosophical discussions of God usually arise at those intellectual intersections where natural theology – starting with the speculations of the pre-Socratics about the *archē* of nature – encounters the representations of God contained in the Jewish sources. It is important to stress that this encounter would be decidedly misconstrued as an encounter between the God of philosophy and the God of religion. Aristotle, for example, takes both the worship *and* the contemplation of God to be the highest human good.[3] Conversely, for Jewish philosophers like Philo of Alexandria in late antiquity, Maimonides in the Middle Ages, and Spinoza in the early-modern period, the ideal of philosophy and the ideal of religion coincide in the intellectual love of God, much of which consists in reflecting on the issues discussed in the present chapter.

In a narrower sense it is useful to distinguish between the technical–philosophical and the religious aspects of the topic. The former include ontological and epistemological questions: whether and what God is and what we can know and say about him. The latter refer to the relation of the philosophical conception of God to the conception of God articulated in the Jewish sources. Let me make three general observations concerning this relation. First, it gives rise to a number of

strategies that for philosophers like Philo and Maimonides are central to the program of interpreting Judaism as a philosophical religion. On the one hand they use figurative exegesis to solve the problem of passages and expressions in the Jewish sources that describe God in ways perceived as inadequate from a philosophical perspective (most importantly anthropomorphic representations). This solution, in turn, goes hand in hand with a pedagogical-political justification of the literal meaning of the texts: The utility of philosophically inadequate descriptions of God lies in that they provide a concept of God accessible to nonphilosophers. On the other hand a number of passages in the Jewish sources are singled out for philosophical appropriation. Maimonides, for instance, takes the verses "I am the Lord your God" (Exodus 20:2), "I am He who is" (Exodus 3:14), and "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4) to express, respectively, the philosophical doctrines of God's existence, God's necessary being, and God's unity.

Second, the way Jewish philosophers understood God was arguably not only shaped by their philosophical commitments, but by their Jewish commitments as well. Let me emphasize that this by no means implies a fideistic attitude. The issues they were interested in and the way they worked them out, to some extent can be usefully related to their religious background. For Plato, for example, the realm of the Divine is broad and diverse, and in the dialogues he never systematically discusses the relationship between the highest entities in this realm: the Good itself, the Forms, and the Intellect ordering the universe. Philo, by contrast, integrates these three into a framework that is compatible with his strictly monotheistic conception of God. A similar case can be made for medieval philosophers. Plotinus' three divine hypostases, for example, are reworked from a monotheistic perspective: The "One" and Intellect are combined into one entity and the functions of the Soul are delegated to the celestial spheres.

Finally, Jewish philosophers had to contend with the charge that their God lacks fundamental features of the God of the Jewish tradition. Thus Judah Halevi, echoing the critique set forth by the Muslim theologian al-Ghazālī, presents the God of the philosophers as one who does not know particulars and hence cannot interact with individual human beings.[4] In light of criticisms such as this, the God of Aristotle, who according to *Metaphysics* XII.9 cognizes only himself, must seem particularly unsuited for performing the role of the God of the Bible. This difficulty certainly helped to motivate the broad interest of medieval philosophers in the Paraphrase of *Metaphysics* XII by Aristotle's fourth-century Byzantine commentator Themistius. For Themistius shows on the basis of Aristotelian premises that God's knowledge

of all things caused by him can be derived from his knowledge of himself.[5] In conclusion, although most Jewish philosophers deny that the philosophical conception of God differs from the conception of God articulated in the Jewish sources, *in fact* the Jewish legacy arguably did shape their theology to some extent.

As philosophers, medieval Jewish thinkers are interested in finding out the truth, which they take to coincide with the true content of the Jewish sources. It is thus not surprising that their philosophical conception of God is for the most part best understood as a creative contribution to the philosophical debates of their time: from the attempts to systematize Plato's metaphysics to the problems arising from Descartes' ontological dualism of thought and extension. A number of general lines can be discerned in their argumentation. Most proofs adduced for God's existence are a posteriori, that is, take observable features of the universe as their starting point. They establish God as a first cause that is numerically and internally one. As a consequence no feature of objects that are caused and partake in any form of multiplicity can be predicated of God: "To Thee silence is praise" Maimonides quotes Psalm 65:2. On the other hand, the order of the universe caused by God leads to positing a number of things that God must have and do to account for that order. Naturally tensions arise between these two lines of reasoning. Maimonides' God, for instance, is utterly transcendent according to the first, whereas all things are inscribed in his essence according to the second.

In the following survey I focus on four representative contributions that illustrate, but certainly do not exhaust, the spectrum of intellectual currents in medieval Jewish thought. My consideration is that providing a sense for the complexity of the discussion of God and for the creative interaction of Jewish philosophers with their non-Jewish intellectual contexts is more useful than a catalogue of technical position.

I first discuss the conception of God by Philo of Alexandria as a representative of Hellenistic–Jewish thought. Philo's philosophical theology is the most important Jewish contribution to the discussion of Plato's metaphysics. Then I turn to two Judeo–Arabic thinkers: Saadia Gaon as a representative of Jewish *Kalām* and Maimonides as a representative of Jewish Aristotelianism. Maimonides' argumentation, as we will see, is partly motivated by what he considered the failure of *Kalām* to provide a valid proof for God's existence, incorporeality, and unity. Finally, I turn to Spinoza whose discussion of God's existence and attributes is in significant ways indebted to medieval Jewish philosophy, although he appears to break with the fundamental premise of its exegetical program: that the God of the philosophers is the same as the God of the Jewish sources.

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA (ca. 20 B.C.E.–ca. 50 C.E.)

Tensions between natural theology and popular notions of the Divine, as well as attempts to solve these tensions accompany philosophy from its inception. Xenophanes (sixth–fifth century BCE), for example, rejects the anthropomorphic representation of the gods in Greek poetry as incompatible with the philosophical conception of the Divine.[6] At the same time his contemporary, Theagenes of Rhegion, tries to reconcile the two through allegorical interpretation.[7] The latter approach is adopted by Hellenistic–Jewish thinkers, most importantly by Philo of Alexandria whose work represents the culmination of the encounter between Greek culture and Judaism in the Hellenistic period. As is the case with most other topics, also Philo's views on philosophical theology must be gathered from his commentaries on the Bible. What these views precisely are and to what extent they are consistent are matters of considerable scholarly debate. The systematic reconstruction that I will attempt herein can, therefore, at best lay claim to a plausible hypothesis.

Although Moses, according to Philo, attained the highest degree of intellectual perfection, as a political leader he addressed an entire nation and not a select group of philosophers.[8] For this reason he did not openly teach philosophical doctrines, in particular not the doctrine God, which is the focal point of Philo's intellectual project. Philosophical doctrines can only be discerned as the allegorical content of Moses' teachings by someone who received the appropriate philosophical training.[9] Philo certainly saw himself in this position and his writings indeed show him familiar with the entire range of Greek intellectual debates.[10] As a philosopher his main commitment is to Platonism.[11] With respect to the conception of God, Philo, much like other Platonists of the period, had two main concerns: constructing a systematic metaphysics from the scattered doctrines that Plato had alluded to or sketched in his dialogues, and reconciling this metaphysics with or defending it against claims of competing philosophical schools.[12] The conception of God that Philo attributes to Moses is to a large extent shaped by these concerns.

Although for Philo human beings cannot fully apprehend the "Father and Ruler of all" (*Spec.* I.32), this must nonetheless be the goal of all our effort, because "to know Him who truly is" constitutes "the first and highest good" (*Dec.* 81). Philo interprets Moses' dialogue with God in Exodus 33:13–23 as the paradigmatic expression of the intellectual love informing the "search for the true God" (*Spec.* I.41–50). This search gives rise to "two principal questions on which the genuine philosopher must reflect. One is whether the Divine exists [*ei esti to theion*] . . . The other is what the Divine essentially is [*ti esti to theion kata tēn ousian*]" (ibid. 32).[13] Whereas the answer to the first question is within the scope of what human

beings can know, the second allows for no more than "reasonable probability" (ibid. 38).

Of the four proofs for God's existence presented by Philo, three are a posteriori proofs, or as Philo puts it, proofs that lead "from down to up" (*Praem.* 41). The fourth proof can in a qualified way be described as a priori. The first and second proof lead to a notion of God as the first cause that is both numerically and internally one. The third and fourth proof teach us something about God's nature as the first principle of the world's rational order. From the characteristics thus established follows what can and what cannot be known and said about him.

The first a posteriori proof is modeled on an argument set forth in Plato's *Timeaus*. Moses infers the world's coming into being from the empirical observation that it is an object of sense perception and from the claim that all objects of sense perception are subject to "generation." God's existence follows as that of the cause who brought the world into being (*Op.* 12).[14] God thus is known as the "cause of the universe [*to tōn holōn aition*]" (*Post.* 168). Although Philo does not explicitly say so, his Moses clearly rules out the possibility of an infinite causal regress. The universe depends on God who in turn does not depend on a cause other than himself. As we will see later, the conception of God as a first cause is crucial for understanding Philo's philosophical theology.

A second a posteriori proof builds on the "dynamics of the universe" and "the continuous and ceaseless motion" of God's works. Although the proof is not spelled out in detail, the inference from "continuous and ceaseless motion" to God's existence clearly recalls Aristotle's proof of an unmoved mover from the eternal motion of the universe. A number of similar references corroborate this suggestion.[15] Aristotle's view that motion is eternal must thereby not be taken to contradict the premise – required for the Platonic proof – that the world is created.[16] For Philo, like most Platonists, explicitly speaks of *eternal* creation in both his philosophical and exegetical treatises (cf. *Prov.* I.7; *LA* I.5–7).[17] By opposing God as uncreated to the created world, Philo thus asserts that God is causally, but not necessarily temporally, prior to the world.[18]

It is on account of not being dependent on an external cause that God is said by Philo to have "true being." All things "posterior" to God, by contrast, lack "true being" because their existence depends on God. Moses referred to this doctrine, according to Philo, in Exodus 3:14 where God presents himself as "I am He who is [*ho ōn*]" (*Det.* 160). Because of this biblical verse Philo sometimes uses "*ho ontōs ōn*," that is, the masculine participle of "to be," to speak of God's being, instead of the neuter "*to ontōs on*," through which the realm of things that truly are is designated by Plato.[19] The difference, however, is more than merely terminological: Plato's

realm of true being – the Forms – for Philo is part of the realm of caused, and hence derivative being. The reason for this difference may already be sketched. It seems that the distinction between uncaused and caused being is for Philo conceptually related to the distinction between simple and composite being. According to *LA* II.1–3 God is both numerically and internally one whereby "internally one" means that he is simple. The universe, by contrast, is only numerically one, but contains many things each of which in turn is composite. Whereas the realm of Forms has greater unity than the realm of physical things, it is not simple. On the assumption that only a simple thing can be uncaused and hence have true being, it follows that true being cannot be claimed for the realm of Forms. Philo may well have reasoned that composite things depend on their components and require a cause to account for their composition and thus cannot be uncaused in the strict sense of the word.[20] If this is the case, God can only be the first cause and have true being if he is simple.

God's internal unity for Philo seems to presuppose his numerical unity. He argues that God is simple in the sense of "not being mixed [*amigēs*]."[21] If he were "mixed" with something else, the latter would have to be either superior, or equal, or inferior to God; however, nothing superior or equal to God exists according to Philo. In other words, God is numerically one – there is no divine being above or besides him. The rejection of the "idea that gods are many [*polytheos*]" is a fundamental Jewish doctrine for Philo. It is the content of "the first and most sacred of commandments:" the commandment opening the *Decalogue* (*Dec.* 65). How does Philo argue for this doctrine? That nothing superior to God can exist seems to follow simply from God's status as the first cause. That nothing equal to God can exist, that is, a plurality of first causes, follows from God's self-sufficiency: "there is absolutely nothing which He needs" (*LA* II.2). The argument seems to assume implicitly something like the principle of sufficient reason: If more than one first cause existed, this would require a reason, for example, that one first cause could not exist or perform the role of first cause on its own. Such a "need" for assistance contradicts the very notion of a first cause, for being a first cause entails not being dependent on anything else. Whereas God's numerical unity thus rules out that God is "mixed" with something superior or equal to him, Philo also needs to show that God cannot be "mixed" with something inferior. If that were possible, Philo argues, God would be "lessened," and if he could be lessened, he would be capable of destruction. Here again he seems to assume implicitly the principle of sufficient reason: If God can in principle lose his status as supreme being, there is no reason why the process of "lessening" could not continue, ultimately leading to God's destruction. As first cause God exists necessarily, for if to be God did not entail existence, God's existence would require an external cause. Hence it is

impossible for God not to exist, and hence also impossible for him to be mixed with something inferior.

A third a posteriori proof for God's existence adduced by Philo is the one commonly referred to as the "teleological proof." This proof can be traced back to the pre-Socratics, but Philo's version appears to rely primarily on Stoic sources.[22] *Telos* in this context is best translated as "purpose." The proof's main point is that the order of nature cannot be the result of blind chance, but reflects a rational plan conceived in view to a purpose. From this observation the inference is drawn that God exists as the ordering principle of nature.

> If someone were to see a house carefully constructed . . . he will not believe that the house was completed without art and a craftsman. . . . Just so anyone coming into this world, as into an immense house or city, and beholding the sky circling round and comprehending everything within it, and planets and fixed stars without any deviation moving in rhythmical harmony, useful to the whole, and earth that has been allotted the central place, with streams of water and air arrayed between, and in addition living creatures mortal and immortal, varieties of plants and fruits, will surely infer that these have not been fashioned without consummate art, but that the craftsman [*dēmiourgos*] of this whole universe was and is God (*LA* III.97–99).

At first view the teleological proof seems not only to prove God's existence, but also disclose God's nature as a "craftsman," that is, as an intelligent agent executing a purposeful plan. Two aspects of the order of nature are important in this context: for one thing the recurrent patterns of nature which Philo, following Plato, explains as physical instantiations of a realm of incorporeal Forms (see *Spec.* I.45–50; 327–9). Although the Form of, for example, an animal species serves to explain the recurrent instantiation of that species, it does not explain the place of that species in relation to other classes of objects. In other words, the rational order of nature itself requires explanation. Precisely for this purpose Plato in his late theology introduces God as *Nous*, described as Divine Craftsman in the *Timaeus*, whose activity consists in ordering the physical world in view to what is best.[23] Philo, however – like other later Platonists – makes the existence and order of the Forms themselves dependent on the Divine Intellect by interpreting them as his *intellecta*. Note that Philo calls this Intellect *Logos* instead of *Nous*, the term commonly used by pagan Platonists. Because *Logos* also means "word," this choice may reflect the biblical account of creation through God's speech.[24] Comparing God's creative activity to that of an architect who first conceives the city's different buildings in his mind, then puts the city's plan together, and finally executes the plan "in stone and timber," Philo writes: "Similarly must we think about God. When he was minded to found the Great City, he first conceived the forms of its parts, out of which he

put together the intelligible world, and, using that as a model, he also brought to completion the sensible world" (*Op.* 19). The analogy, it must be stressed, illustrates a causal, not a temporal sequence, because God, according to Philo, "does all things simultaneously" (*Op.* 13).

Has the inference from the rational order of nature to the rational plan constituting the Divine *Logos* in fact disclosed to us something about God's nature? Given the simplicity requirement for the first cause and the complexity of the Divine *Logos*, this must be denied. Indeed, Philo takes the Divine *Logos* to be the first stage of creation, the "intelligible world," created on the first day, which relates to God as an image to a model and in turn becomes the model of the "sensible world." Yet the transition from an internally one first cause to a rationally ordered set of intelligible Forms does at least teach us something about the structure of the first cause's activity. For both stages of creation are the result of the collaboration of two divine "powers" that are causally prior to the *Logos*. One Philo calls "goodness" or "creative power" and associates it with the biblical notion of "God [*theos*]." The other he calls "sovereignty" or "kingly power" and associates it with the biblical notion of "Lord [*kyrios*]." Whereas the former accounts for the being of that which is created – and hence is "conceptually prior" – the latter accounts for its division and order. The designation "goodness" comes to explain the motivation of a supremely perfect being for acting and bestowing existence on things other than itself. Like Plato in the *Timaeus* Philo claims that God's creative activity bears witness to his goodness in the sense of generosity: He "did not begrudge [to other things] the excellence of his own nature" (*Op.* 21). Because God as the "most generic" (*LA* II.86) contains all things in undifferentiated unity, that which is generated by his causal activity is at first undetermined. Dividing and determining it is the role of the "kingly power" that takes care "that nothing either exceed or be robbed of its due, all being arbitrated by the laws of equality" (*QE* II.64). Ultimately, however, the distinction between God and his two powers is a logical, and not a real distinction for Philo. For "according to a higher principle" that which appears to the human mind as three is truly one (*QG* IV.2). This claim is not surprising, because unlike the *Logos*, Philo cannot place the two powers in the class of created things. This would lead to an infinite regress, for their creation would in turn require two powers to account for their existence and determination. Thus to preserve God's internal unity, Philo must deny that the three principles are really distinct. The *Logos* is the first synthesis of this twofold process of creation, being "in between" the two powers and "uniting [*synagōgon*]" them. Through the intermediary of the *Logos*, Philo proceeds, "God is both ruler and good" (*Cher.* 27–28), which suggests that the triadic structure is repeated on the level of the *Logos*, leading to a second

synthesis: the physical world. This would imply that both the sensible world's matter and its form originate in the *Logos* and hence ultimately in the first cause. Although the ontological status of matter is notoriously unclear in Philo, and although he only expressly credits the *Logos* with the role of the form dividing and ordering matter (cf. *Her.* 134; 140), there are good reasons to take the *Logos* to be the source of matter as well. For Philo denies both that matter is an independent principle existing besides God (*Prov.* I.6–7) and that creation out of nothing is possible (*Aet.* 6; *Spec.* I.266).[25] He affirms, moreover, that not only the Forms of the four physical elements are part of the *Logos*, but also the Form of space, that is, of the "receptacle" of the *Timaeus* (49a ff.), identified by Philo with the "abyss" of Genesis 1 which he takes to be part of the creation of the intelligible world on the first day (*Op.* 29). All components constituting Plato's preexistent matter – and most importantly the "receptacle" that for Plato exists independently of the Forms and the Demiurge – in Philo thus are causally dependent on the *Logos*.[26] As we saw earlier, Philo's uncompromising monotheism led him to place entities such as the *Logos* into the class of created beings on account of their composite nature, and to deny that the apparent multiplicity of God and his powers – which followed from the analysis of God's causal activity – is real. With the rejection of preexistent matter as an independent ontological principle, Philo's monotheism now turns into monism. All principles of reality, including space – "the universal being without form and quality" (*Her.* 140) situated at the lowest level of the ontological hierarchy – originate in God and are folded into his absolute unity. In this context it is worth pointing out that although Philo strictly denies that God is corporeal in the way that created things are corporeal, he also denies that we are "capable of asserting" with certainty whether God is "incorporeal or corporeal" (*LA* III.206). It is on account of the total dependence of existing things on God that Philo calls God "place [*topos*]," for "He contains all things and is contained by nothing whatsoever" (*Somn.* I.63). This description was adopted in rabbinic literature and the rabbinic formula in turn was interpreted by Hasdai Crescas in a way that, as we will see later, influenced Spinoza's conception of God as *res extensa*.

The fourth proof adduced by Philo allows apprehending God's existence a priori and is set forth at length in *Praem.* 36–46. It is used by "the pursuers of truth . . . who form an image of God through God, light through light" and who are expressly said to be superior to those using a posteriori proofs. The proof is associated with Jacob, the "man of practice [*askēsis*]" and hence also with Israel, the name Jacob receives after his struggle "with both men and God" in Genesis 32:28 and that Philo translates into Greek as "God-seer." After having "evaded no toil or danger" in his effort "to track down the truth . . . an incorporeal beam purer than ether

suddenly flashed over [Jacob] and disclosed the intelligible world [*kosmos noētos*] led by its Charioteer." Of the Charioteer Jacob apprehends "only that he is," but "not what he is." Philo gives no further explanation of how the proof works. Allusions to several passages in Plato may help to clarify what he has in mind. The metaphor of light evokes Plato's comparison of the first principle to the sun in the *Republic* (506d ff.) and Jacob's effort and the suddenness of the experience evoke Plato's account of how "wisdom" and "intellect" arise "in the soul suddenly, as light that is kindled by a leaping spark" in *Letter VII* (344b; 341c). The reference to the "intelligible world" and the "Charioteer," moreover, evoke the dialectical assent through the world of Forms to a first principle, which in virtue of being first is said by Plato to be "without assumption [*anhypotheton*]" and which grounds both the being and knowledge of all Forms following it (*Republic*, 510b–511e). These contexts suggest that Philo has neither a purely conceptual proof in mind nor a divine revelation bypassing human modes of understanding. In *Mut.* 5–6 Philo expressly compares the apprehension of God to the "learning of the sciences" in which "the intellect [*nous*] applies its eye . . . to the principles and conclusions set before it and sees them by no borrowed light but a genuine light which shines forth from itself." Perhaps the "pursuer of truth" who reflects about the rational order of the world, finally intuiting the existence of its first principle can thus be compared to a mathematician who after spending much time thinking about the properties of geometrical figures suddenly intuits the first principles on which these depend.[27]

God's being the first cause and internally one in turn accounts for a number of additional features of Philo's philosophical theology. First and foremost, God is utterly transcendent.[28] He is "ineffable [*arrētos*] . . . inconceivable [*aperinoētos*] and incomprehensible [*akatalēptos*]" (*Mut.* 15). God is "ineffable" because if a feature were to be nonredundantly predicated of God, the "utterance" would be "twofold." Because this presupposes God's composition it is ruled out by his "indivisible unity." God must be contemplated in silence (*Gig.* 52). As the first cause, moreover, God encompasses the reality of all things and hence is the "most generic [*to genikōtaton*]" (*LA* II.86). As a consequence no predicate applies to him that would identify him as the member of a genus or species or as the member of a class defined by one of the accidental properties. *A fortiori* the predication of anthropomorphic attributes referring to body parts or emotions is ruled out. The purpose of the anthropomorphic language used in scripture is the education and political guidance of nonphilosophers (cf. *Deus* 51–69). God is "inconceivable and incomprehensible" because for Philo, as we saw, he is not only the first cause of the being of things but also of their apprehension. Hence he cannot be deduced from a principle logically

prior to him. The conception of his essence as defined through genus and specific difference is in turn ruled out by his internal unity.

The one feature that can be predicated of God is "acting [*to poiein*]" (*Cher.* 77–78) which refers, of course, to God's causal activity. Because in the same passage Philo denies that "acting" can be predicated of "any created being," he must mean that only God acts essentially whereas all other things act by virtue of God and hence *per accidens*. God's activity, however, cannot be infinite in an unqualified manner. We saw previously that Philo assigns to God's "kingly power" the role of dividing and ordering the being that the "creative power" brought forth on account of God's goodness. In addition, however, he assigns a second function to the "kingly power" that, as far as I can see, is an intriguingly original trait in Philo's conception of God that has no parallel in other Greek authors. For God, to prevent his goodness from destroying the things on which he bestows it, is in need of a principle of self-limitation.

> For creation is unable in its nature to receive the good in the same way that it is the nature of God to bestow it, since his powers exceed all bounds, whereas creation, being too feeble to take in their abundance, would have broken down under the effort to do so, had not God weighed and appropriately measured out the portion which is due to each (*Op.* 23).

The ontological principle underlying this argument also provides a key to Philo's understanding of the peculiarity of the theology set forth by Moses. Why did Moses, despite his supreme intellectual accomplishments, teach so many things that are at odds with the philosophical doctrine of God? In *Post.* 143–5 Philo expressly compares Moses' role as a mediator of God's word to the necessity of limiting God's goodness bestowed on his creation. Because although "true and authentic philosophy" – identified by Philo with "God's utterance and word" (*Post.* 101–2) – is in itself good, it can become destructive if disclosed to nonphilosophers lacking the capacity to understand it. Thus the description of God as judging, rewarding, and punishing the actions chosen by human beings is from an educational point of view more useful to nonphilosophers than the doctrine considered true by Philo, namely, the total causal dependence of all things on God. The latter doctrine, which rules out that human beings freely choose what they do, must be concealed, according to Philo, from those "who have not yet been initiated into the great mysteries about the sovereignty and authority of the Uncreated and the exceeding nothingness of the created."[29] Finally, also the difficulty of uncovering Philo's philosophical theology from his biblical commentaries can be explained in light of the ontological principle in question. The fact that Philo alludes to rather than

systematically develops his views about God's existence and attributes is in my opinion just a further application of the principle of self-limitation for the benefit of his readers. Philo's commentaries encourage *all* readers to imitate Moses and pursue a philosophical understanding of God and they contain sufficient hints for the few philosophers among his readers to reconstruct the philosophical doctrine of God that he took to be true.[30]

SAADIA BEN JOSEPH AL-FAYYŪMĪ (882–942)

Philo's philosophy had no demonstrable impact on the development of pagan Platonism and his interpretation of the Law of Moses as a philosophical religion was not adopted by rabbinic Judaism. His work did, on the other hand, significantly shape the way Greek philosophy was integrated into Christian thought. The use of philosophy by Christian theologians to explicate and defend the Christian conception of God – in particular the attempts to reconcile metaphysical and doctrinal requirements such as God's internal unity and the trinity of divine persons – in turn was one of several important factors that gave rise to what became known as *ʿilm al-kalām* in the Islamic world. The best-known Jewish contribution to this discipline was made by Saadia ben Joseph al-Fayyūmī, Judaism's most prominent intellectual in the tenth century.[31] *Kalām* literally means "speech" and refers to theological debates concerned "with firmly establishing religious beliefs by adducing proofs and with banishing doubts."[32] Of the two main schools of *Kalām*, the Muʿatazila and the Ashʿariyya, only the former had a significant influence on Jewish thought. Its distinctive feature is the stress put on rational argument.

The question of how to correctly conceive God stood at the very center of the discussions conducted by the *Mutakallimūn*. In fact, the members of the Mutazilite school were designated as the "people of justice and unity [*ahl al-ʿadl wa-al-tawhīd*]" because demonstrating God's justice and unity was their main concern. Why would issues like God's existence, justice, or unity become a matter of debate to medieval Islamic and Jewish intellectuals in the first place? Do the religious sources – the Qur'an, the Mosaic Law – not provide authoritative answers to such questions? Philo had conceived Moses as a supreme philosopher and claimed that only philosophy could provide access to Moses' allegorical teachings. The case of *Kalām* is different however. First, the awareness of inconsistencies in the religious sources must be mentioned. On a question as crucial as assessing what it means to transgress a divine commandment, for instance, different verses in the Qur'an as well as in the Hebrew Bible appear to support mutually exclusive positions. On the one hand God's will is said to determine human actions; on the other hand

human actions are said to arise from free will.[33] Surely such a conflict can be solved exegetically. In deciding what to take literally and what to interpret, the appeal to reason as arbiter seems a plausible solution, and once the debate started, its far-reaching implications for the conception of God become apparent. How can God be called "just" if he rewards and punishes actions that he determined? Conversely, how can he be called "omnipotent" if he has no power over what human beings do?

Turning from God's justice to God's unity, a second context should briefly be mentioned: the theological debates between Muslim intellectuals and intellectuals of other religious communities who came under the dominion of Islam, most importantly Christians who sought to reconcile God's internal unity with the trinity of divine persons, and also Persian dualists who argued for two antagonistic first principles. Consider a debate between a Christian and a Muslim on the question whether Christ is God and whether he incarnated in a human body. The gospel of John affirms it, the Qur'an denies it, but if the debate's participants do not recognize the authority of each other's scripture, the appeal to reason as arbiter seems again a way out of the impasse.[34]

It is not difficult to see how discussions of this kind concerning fundamental religious issues would lead to doubts and confusion, which in turn would give rise to the wish to put systematic order into one's beliefs and provide them with a rational foundation. Saadia's chief theological work, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (*Kitāb al-Amānāt wa'l-'Itiqādāt*) is presented precisely as such a rescue from confusion.[35] This rescue project has two aspects: to understand the true content of what has been transmitted by the prophets and to refute the views contradicting what has been verified by prophecy and reason. With respect to God this means demonstrating that he is and what he is and refuting the trinitarian and dualist views of Christians and Persians.

If rescue is to come from knowledge, the first question must be what the sources of knowledge are. Scientific knowledge for Saadia derives from three sources: sense perception, intellect, and necessary inferences derived from the first two sources according to a set of logical rules. To these he adds a fourth source: "true tradition [*al-khabar al-sādiq*]."[36] Tradition's veracity is grounded on miracles that God performs to confirm his revelation. For the veracity of miracles Saadia in turn offers an empirical argument: not only were they heard and seen, but often witnessed by the entire Jewish nation. Such a testimony cannot be called into question.[37] Although the doctrine of God and other religious doctrines known through revelation do not depend on rational inquiry, they cannot conflict with rational inquiry either. If there appears to be a conflict, the authority of reason prevails over the literal

sense of scripture.[38] Thus the second treatise of Saadia's work, which is devoted to God's unity, not only demonstrates that God is internally one, but also reinterprets everything in scripture that in its literal sense contradicts it. If we asked earlier why rational inquiry into God's existence and attributes is necessary for someone who accepts the authority of scripture, we may now ask if scripture serves any purpose at all if these doctrines can be apprehended through rational inquiry. Like Philo, Saadia sees scripture's main purpose in providing nonphilosophers with access to knowledge, both those who have not yet completed the process of rational inquiry and those unable to undertake it.[39] Unlike Philo, however, he does not interpret the biblical representation of God insofar as it conflicts with reason as part of a pedagogical–political program designed for nonphilosophers. Because Saadia also holds that nothing can be literally predicated of God "except the fact of His existence," the alternatives are either not to characterize God at all or to characterize him in terms derived from human agency that are inadequate when applied to God.[40] Saadia does not share the elitist distinction between philosophers and nonphilosophers that is part of the Platonic legacy in Philo. Indeed, a systematic exposition of the doctrine of God that is central to Saadia's project would have been judged destructive by Philo. Miracles, then, serve to democratize religious knowledge for Saadia. He accepts them on empirical grounds, but does not explicitly consider what they imply for the conception of God's nature. Like a number of other distinctive doctrines set forth by Saadia, such as God's "created speech" and God's "created glory," they can surely be derived from the *creatio ex nihilo* doctrine. A God who can bring the world into existence out of nothing, must *a fortiori* be able to change its regular course and thus to create the voice heard by the prophets or the appearances that they saw. The doctrines of God's "created speech" and God's "created glory" allowed Saadia to integrate a number of Jewish traditions concerning the prophetic apprehension of God without having to compromise on God's nonanthropomorphic nature.[41]

In his discussion of God Saadia sets out to accomplish two main goals: the first is to establish the existence of a Creator who is incorporeal and one, and the second is to clarify what God's unity entails for the "attributes [*sifāt*]" predicated of him. The creation of the world is the main proposition for the proof of God's existence to which the first treatise of *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* is devoted. This a posteriori proof has two main steps. First Saadia offers four arguments for the world's creation that have observable features of the world as their starting point.[42] Let us take a closer look at the first: The finiteness of the world follows from the finiteness of its two main components, earth and heaven, which must be finite because the former is at the world's center and the latter revolves around it. A finite body, however,

cannot contain an infinite force. Because the force sustaining the world is thus finite, "it follows necessarily," Saadia concludes, that the world "must have a beginning and an end."[43] The argument's main premise, that a finite body cannot contain an infinite force, was originally set forth by Aristotle as part of his proof that the eternal motion of the universe must stem from an incorporeal first mover.[44] The Christian philosopher John Philoponus (d. ca. 570) turned the premise on its head by making it part of an argument for the world's creation. Saadia's version can in turn be traced back to Philoponus, although he omits several steps leading from the Aristotelian premise that a finite body cannot contain an infinite force to the conclusion that the world is created.[45] As Saadia's argument stands, the obvious alternative to his conclusion is that the world is eternally sustained by an infinite force outside itself, for instance Aristotle's first mover. In Philoponus' version, however, this alternative is ruled out. This suggests that Saadia either did not carefully think through the argument or did not take the time to carefully restate it. I will come back to what this in my opinion implies at the end of this section. The following arguments I will only sketch insofar as they affect Saadia's conception of God: The second claims that both individual bodies and the world as a whole are composite and concludes from this that they were composed by a "skillful Maker [*sāni'*]."[46] The third argument claims that both individual bodies and the world as a whole cannot exist without accidents and concludes that because the accidents were created the substances in which they inhere must be created as well. The final argument states that an infinite period of time cannot be traversed and hence also not an infinite chain of causes and effects in which the causes temporally precede the effects. The fact that we and the things around us exist thus entails that the world must have had a beginning.

Returning to the proof for God's existence, the second step is intended to rule out that the world has created itself. For this Saadia offers three arguments, of which I will briefly restate the third as an example: Because the world is created (as taken to be established in step one) it does not exist necessarily and hence can both exist and not exist. If, therefore, it created itself, it must also have been capable of not creating itself. "To be capable of doing or not doing X" can be predicated only of an existing thing. Because we assume the world to be nonexisting when we predicate of it that it is capable of not creating itself, it follows that we attribute to it both nonexistence and existence at the same time. This, Saadia concludes, is impossible. Having shown that the world did not create itself and given that it must have either created itself or have been created by something other than itself, Saadia is "led to the necessary conclusion" that the world must have been created by "an external Creator." The proof is completed by four arguments showing that the

world must have been created out of nothing. Saadia then proceeds to the second part of his project: refuting the views that disagree with what he determined to be the Jewish position. These are no less than twelve cosmological theories ranging from Plato and Aristotle to the Upanishads and the Manicheans.

At the end of the first treatise Saadia addresses the question what God's motivation was to create the world. Of the two reasons he suggests, one is the intention to benefit his creatures. The asymmetry between Creator and creation, which in Philo made generosity the only possible motive for God's activity, seems less pronounced in Saadia. For the second reason he mentions is God's intention to make his wisdom manifest in the order of creation, although he does not explain what benefit God derives from this. More revealing, however, of Saadia's conception of God is his response to the question why God did not create the world before he created it. It is, asserts Saadia, "of the very nature of him who acts by free choice to do what he wants when he wants."[47]

God's existence having been established, Saadia turns to a discussion of God's unity and of what this unity implies for what God is and what we can know about him. The second treatise falls significantly short of a systematic treatment of the issue. Indeed, in many cases we can only try to guess what the arguments were that inform Saadia's claims. The long introduction examines the nature of a scientific investigation itself. Saadia's purpose is twofold: showing that God can be the object of a scientific investigation and showing that someone who holds that God is corporeal cannot have investigated the matter in a scientific way. Saadia insists, for instance, that a scientific investigation necessarily leads from a concrete starting point, namely, sense perceptible objects, to an abstract end point, namely, an object that can only be apprehended intellectually. This shows on the one hand that God's invisibility and subtlety do not preclude making him an object of investigation, and on the other that someone who conceives God as a body cannot have conducted a scientific investigation at all. God's incorporeality is, in fact, already assumed here, and surprisingly Saadia feels no need to provide a formal proof for it. He does, however, suggest that it follows from God's being the Creator of the world, for "as the Creator of bodies, He cannot be of their kind."[48] Let me suggest a tentative reconstruction of what I take to be the main step of Saadia's argument. Given his proofs for creation Saadia must have held that being corporeal entails being created. If the world's cause were both Creator and created, we would either be led into an infinite regress or reach a Creator who is not created and hence incorporeal. In the fourth proof for creation Saadia has ruled out the possibility of an infinite regress of causes and effects. There must, therefore, be an incorporeal first cause.

Of Saadia's three arguments for God's unity, only the first can be taken to prove both God's numerical and internal unity. Taking for granted that God is incorporeal, Saadia concludes that God "must necessarily be one, for if He were more than one, the category of number would apply to Him and He would enter the realm of the corporeal world." This means that God is numerically one, because multiple objects belonging to the same species – be they trees or gods – can be distinct only on account of their corporeal accidents. It also means that God is not composed and hence internally one, for multiple components for Saadia entail corporeality which, as we will see, is his main argument against the Christian doctrine of the trinity. Thus God's internal unity follows from his incorporeality, which in turn follows from his being the Creator of the world. The possibility of an entity that is both incorporeal and composite such as Plato's world of Forms and Philo's *Logos* is not considered by Saadia. God's numerical unity is then defended both systematically and exegetically against dualist doctrines.[49]

Having established God's existence, incorporeality, and unity, Saadia now turns to the issue of God's "attributes [*sifāt*]." The discussion focuses mainly on three attributes that according to Saadia follow analytically from the notion of "Creator."

> By means of our intellectual faculty it becomes clear to us that creation is impossible without power, and that power is impossible without life, and that a well-ordered creation presupposes an intelligence which knows in advance the result of its activities. Our reason discovers these three aspects of the notion of a Creator in a single flash of intuition [*badīha*].[50]

Although Saadia claims that the notions of power, life, and wisdom are logically entailed in the notion of Creator, the selection of precisely these attributes can ultimately be traced back to Christian discussions of the trinity and the repercussions of these discussions in Muslim intellectual circles.[51] Saadia, in fact, devotes considerably more space to refuting Christian conceptions of the trinity than to clarifying his own concept of God's unity. The stress he lays on the grasp of all three attributes "in a single flash" I take to mean that the concepts do not depend on each other in the sense of one being logically prior to another, because even this would mean too much complexity in God for Saadia. Saadia's view is that the three terms, when applied to God, are in truth coextensive and that the use of three terms to denote the same thing is due to the limitations of our language: "We must express them by three different words, but it should be well understood that reason conceives them as one single idea. Let nobody assume that the Eternal, blessed be He, contains a plurality of attributes."[52] Life, power, and wisdom thus simply explicate God's causal activity inadequately in terms of the activity of human beings concerning whom the three notions indeed denote distinct and contingent features. This

consideration also provides the key to Saadia's refutation of the doctrine of the trinity: Christians have correctly recognized that God cannot be a Creator without having a number of attributes, but they have failed to realize that these attributes only appear multiple because of the anthropomorphic nature of our language. For this reason they were led to hypostasize features in God that in truth are distinct only in human beings. Because they also claim that God is incorporeal their position turns out to be logically inconsistent, for any form of composition in God, according to Saadia, entails corporeality. Saadia devotes three chapters to a refutation of various trinitarian and christological doctrines and of Christian exegetical appropriations of verses in the Hebrew Bible to support these doctrines (*The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.5–7). Although these chapters do not shed additional light on Saadia's systematic position, they are important to understand the intellectual context and the polemical project that at least in part seems to have motivated the development of this position in the first place.

According to Saadia all mistaken views about God can be traced back to two sources: the conception of God in analogy to his creatures and a literal understanding of what scripture predicates of God.[53] We just saw how the former was one reason for the mistaken conceptions of the Christians. The remainder of the second treatise is devoted to a systematic discussion of all classes of scriptural predications of God whose literal meaning must be rejected. It is here that the radicality of Saadia's position from the point of view of popular religion comes to the fore. As we saw, the only thing that for Saadia can be literally predicated of God is his existence. It follows that nothing said of God in scripture truly means what it says. The rationale behind this program is what Saadia describes as the fundamental unlikeness of God and the world: "that there is nothing resembling Him and that He does not resemble any of His works."[54] This unlikeness in turn follows from God's being the world's Creator. The world and all its components belong to the class of created things and as such they are from the outset unlike the Creator. Thus predicates denoting them or the features distinguishing them from one another – for example positions in space and time, height, weight, and so forth – cannot be applied to God. For the systematic classification of scriptural predicates that require interpretation Saadia uses Aristotle's ten categories, that is, substance and the nine categories of accidents: quality, quantity, and so forth. There are two main ways of understanding these predicates. First, they can be taken as figurative anthropomorphic representations of God and of his relation to the world. Thus the attribution of a "head" to God (cf. Isaiah 59:17) denotes his ontological rank as the first cause.[55] The attribution of anger, pleasure, love, and hate to him are anthropomorphic explanations of his causal activity: since punishment by a human being, for instance, is motivated by anger, God's punishment of those who do evil is described as an expression

of anger as well.[56] Attributes of this last kind which refer to the effects of God's causal activity and not to his essence are called "attributes of action" by Saadia.[57] Second, they can be understood literally, but as referring to an entity created by God. Thus the prophetic accounts of divine manifestations such as the one given in Ezekiel 1 and 10 must be taken literally, but refer to "God's glory," an entity which God miraculously creates in order to assure the prophet that he is indeed receiving a divine revelation.[58]

Let me pose a general question in conclusion: Is Saadia's God the God of a polemical theologian or the God of a philosopher? In my view Saadia, unlike Philo and Maimonides, does not try to transform Judaism in a fundamental way by interpreting it as a philosophical religion. Saadia is certainly fond of reason, but he seems on the whole optimistic that reason confirms the basic traits of traditional Judaism. As a philosopher, Saadia is most consistent where the polemical context forces him to think through an issue thoroughly. A good example is God's unity, which he felt called on to defend against the arguments for a dualistic and a trinitarian God set forth by Persian and Christian theologians. Noncontroversial features, on the other hand, such as God's incorporeality, receive much less attention. In the case of Saadia's restatement of Philoponus' proof for creation he omits so many steps that the proof loses most of its force. Other issues are not addressed at all: How is God's will related to his wisdom? Can God decide to create the world without changing? Despite the radically antianthropomorphic implications of the view that God is incorporeal and internally one, Saadia ultimately preserves most features of the traditional Jewish conception of God. His God creates the world in time out of nothing, communicates with humankind through prophets, performs miracles to democratically authenticate his revelation, rewards the obedient and punishes the disobedient, and so forth. Although Saadia claims that true knowledge of God fills the soul with joy and longing,[59] it does not seem to be the outcome of a comprehensive scientific project culminating in the apprehension of the first principle of nature's rational order. Saadia, in fact, has little interest in exploring how the order of nature is related to God's wisdom. His prophets are also not philosophers who concealed their true views about God behind parables and metaphors. Isaiah, Saadia explains, only attributed the creation of light and darkness to God (45:7) "in order to refute the view of those who proclaim dualism."[60] Saadia's prophets, it seems, are polemicists as well.

MAIMONIDES (1138–1204)

We turn now to the medieval Muslim and Jewish *falāsifa* (philosophers) who saw themselves as continuing the project of Greek philosophy that in their view had

culminated in the work of Aristotle. Although in their self-perception they were Aristotelians, three additional sources need to be taken into account for understanding their conception of God. First, their political thought was shaped by Plato, which partly explains how they conceived the relationship between the philosophical doctrine of God and the representations of God in the religious sources. Second, a number of Neoplatonic texts had been translated into Arabic and for reasons that still elude scholars were ascribed to Aristotle, most prominently the *Theology of Aristotle*, which in fact is a compilation derived from Plotinus' *Enneads*. The medieval authors either did not recognize the pseudo-Aristotelian character of these texts or simply found them philosophically useful. In any case they worked out a philosophical theology that integrates genuine Aristotelian doctrines with doctrines of Neoplatonic origin. Finally, despite their generally critical attitude toward *Kalām*, their conception of God's unity is to some extent shaped by the traditional discussion of God's "attributes [*sifāt*]."

In light of what we learned about Saadia it is not altogether surprising that for the *falāsifa,* the *Mutakallimūn* were primarily apologists who used dialectical methods to defend the doctrine of God of their respective religious tradition. Although this portrait is in part the result of polemical exaggeration, it serves to highlight an important difference between Saadia and the *falāsifa*. For Saadia the role of philosophy is instrumental: With respect to God its twofold purpose is to clarify the prophetic conception of God whose truth has been established independently through miracles, and to refute every conception of God that contradicts it. For the *falāsifa*, like for Philo, the prophet is himself first of all an accomplished philosopher who conceived God philosophically. The representation of God in the religious sources, by contrast, is an "imitation" of the philosophical conception that by means of parables and metaphors aims at conveying an approximate idea of God to nonphilosophers. Although the philosophical conception of God thus coincides with the allegorical content of the parables and metaphors representing God in the religious sources, only philosophy can conceive God as he truly is and as he was conceived by the prophets. Philosophy, therefore, constitutes itself the highest form of worship and not an instrument serving to confirm and defend independently existing religious doctrines.

Maimonides' philosophical–religious project in many ways can be seen as an interpretation of Judaism in terms of the relationship between philosophy and religion as it was conceived by the *falāsifa*. God as the first cause of the existence and order of all things is the ultimate goal of the philosophical quest. The correct conception of God for Maimonides is thus the very foundation of the Mosaic Law. It includes three things: God's existence, incorporeality, and unity. One of

the main goals of Maimonides' project in his chief philosophical–theological work, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, is to show that *Kalām* fails and philosophy succeeds in establishing this conception of God and that this is how it was established by the prophets, most importantly Moses. Being at least in part unfair to Saadia and the *Mu'tazilah*, Maimonides portrays the *Mutakallimūn* as bending the facts to make them conform to their preconceived religious beliefs instead of grounding these beliefs on a scientific examination of the facts.[61] To show this, he first gives a systematic summary of the premises on which the *Mutakallimūn* built their doctrinal system (*Guide* I.73). He then explains how these premises are used to establish the existence of the Creator from the creation of the world and then God's unity and incorporeality (*Guide* I.74–6).

Unlike the early *falāsifa*, Maimonides could no longer simply equate the philosophical conception of God with the allegorical content of the representation of God in the religious sources. The *falāsifa* found a most astute critic in al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) who argued that the philosophical conception of God was in fundamental ways incompatible with the conception of God of the religious sources. Al-Ghazālī's attack focused on two main issues. For one thing the God of the philosophers was not an agent endowed with will who had the power to create the world out of nothing and to intervene and perform miracles in it. Instead this God was a first cause compelled by its nature to eternally emanate the world and determine its structure. In addition, the God of the philosophers did not know particulars and hence could not interact with individual human beings, such as exercise individual providence or communicate with prophets. Both points were reiterated by the Jewish intellectual and poet Judah Halevi (d. 1141). As we will see, the philosophers were able to respond from within their system to the second point. Turning the Divine Intellect into a voluntary agent, however, proved to be impossible. In this respect al-Ghazālī's and Judah Halevi's challenge posed a fundamental problem. Maimonides and his Muslim colleague Averroes – the last two important representatives of the *falsafa* movement in *al-Andalus* – were both keenly aware of this problem. Whereas Averroes attempted to refute al-Ghazālī on philosophical grounds, scholars are divided in their assessment of Maimonides' response. Some scholars think that he took up al-Ghazālī's project and attempted to defend philosophically what they consider a "Jewish" conception of God against the philosophers by arguing for the creation of the world and a conception of God as voluntary agent (cf. *Guide* II.25). Other scholars think that Maimonides, like the *falāsifa* in general, took the true religious conception of God to be the conception of the philosophers, but avoided openly disclosing it because of its potentially destructive effect on nonphilosophers. I agree on the whole with the second interpretation, although I will draw attention to a

number of additional complications with regard to Maimonides' position. In my view Maimonides, like Averroes, took al-Ghazālī's criticism seriously, but thought it possible to respond philosophically to it. Maimonides expressly says that the prophets concealed their true views for the protection of nonphilosophers (cf. *Guide* I.33) and that he has imitated the prophets, although not by using parables and metaphors, but by inserting deliberate contradictions into the *Guide*. He may thus appear to be elaborately arguing for a certain doctrine, but then make a statement derived from a premise that implicitly contradicts it, bearing witness to the doctrine that he truly holds.[62] We will see a clear example of this esoteric writing practice in Maimonides' proofs for God's existence, unity, and incorporeality. My interpretation of Maimonides' conception of God thus assumes that he is one of the *falāsifa* and that his defense of creation and the corresponding conception of God is an exoteric argument set forth for the protection of nonphilosophers.

After his presentation of what he considers to be the failed attempt of the *Mutakallimūn* to demonstrate God's existence, incorporeality, and unity, Maimonides proceeds to establishing the same three principles on the basis of the premises of the philosophers. In the introduction to *Guide* II he presents twenty-five premises, all of which he declares to be "demonstrated" beyond doubt.[63] They amount to a summary of the core propositions of medieval Aristotelian physics and metaphysics. To these premises he adds a twenty-sixth: The controversial premise that the world is eternal – a premise, which according to Maimonides has neither been demonstrated nor refuted and which, therefore, "is possible."[64] With these twenty-six premises Maimonides then constructs four main proofs for God's existence, incorporeality, and unity in *Guide* II.1, followed by what he presents as "our own method" in *Guide* II.2. Of the four proofs the first and the third are crucial because they serve in turn as the basis for Maimonides' own proof. The first proof infers the existence of an unmoved mover who is incorporeal and hence numerically and internally one from the eternal motion of the celestial spheres. This is the physical proof for God's existence, set forth by Aristotle in *Physics* VII–VIII and *Metaphysics* XII. Elsewhere Maimonides refers to this proof as "the greatest proof through which one can know the existence of the deity."[65] He also uses it twice in *The Book of Knowledge*, the first book of his code of Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah*,[66] and suggests that Abraham used it too for inferring God's existence.[67] This proof, whose main premise is the eternal motion of the celestial spheres, is thus estimated very highly by Maimonides.

The third proof is a version of what is commonly referred to as the metaphysical proof for God's existence that had first been fully articulated by Avicenna.[68] The proof is called "metaphysical" because it is built on the ontological distinction

between necessary and contingent existents. Because it is crucial for understanding Maimonides' entire argumentation, I will examine it in some more detail. The basic inference is elegantly simple: With respect to any object we can pose the question whether it exists contingently, that is, dependent on a cause, or necessarily, that is, dependent only on itself. If its existence is contingent we repeat the question with respect to its cause and because an infinite regress of causes is impossible we must arrive at an object whose existence is necessary. That necessary existent is God. Because we observe many contingently existing things, it follows that God exists. From necessary existence follows internal unity, because if the necessary existent were composed, it would be dependent on its components and their composition for its existence. From internal unity in turn follows incorporeality as well as numerical unity: incorporeality, because every body is at a minimum composed of matter and form; numerical unity, because if there were multiple necessary existents, they would be members of the species "necessary existent" and require a differentiating feature. This would entail internal composition, which has already been ruled out. Let me add that the requirement of strict internal unity for necessary existence leads Maimonides to make a distinction between the first cause and the unmoved mover. For the latter has in common with all other movers the generic feature of "causing bodies to move," and hence must have an additional distinguishing feature.[69] Strictly speaking, therefore, the physical proof yields only the existence of the first caused entity whereas the metaphysical proof yields the existence of the first cause.

Although Maimonides follows Avicenna in the inference of unity and incorporeality from the concept of necessary existence, he construes the first step of the argument – the inference of God's existence – in a way that significantly differs from Avicenna.[70] Maimonides' starting point is the following threefold division: All things exist either necessarily or contingently, or some necessarily and some contingently. The first alternative is obviously false for any object subject to generation and corruption is contingent. The crucial point is Maimonides' argument for ruling out the second alternative: If all things were contingent, it would not only be the case that each individually could not exist, but it would also be the case that all at once could cease to exist. According to an Aristotelian premise every possibility must eventually be realized.[71] Hence, Maimonides concludes, it would follow "necessarily that there would be no existent at all." Because, however, "we perceive things that are existent," the second alternative is false too.[72] As a consequence the third possibility must be true.

At first view this proof does not seem to require the controversial premise that the world is eternal. Implicitly, however, Maimonides' restatement of Avicenna's

proof relies on it. For the Aristotelian rule that every possibility must eventually be realized holds only for an *infinite* period of time. Hence the inference from "things exist now" to "not all things exist contingently" is only valid if the world is eternal *a parte ante*. With this in mind let us turn to the proof that Maimonides introduces as "our method" in *Guide* II.2. Maimonides begins by stating that the world must be either eternal or created. If eternal, the three fundamental principles of the Mosaic Law follow from Aristotle's physical proof based on the eternal motion of the celestial spheres. If created, the world necessarily requires a cause that brought it into existence. Although Maimonides denies that the *Mutakallimūn* have a valid proof for the world's creation he concedes the conditional that if the world is created it must have a Creator. Because, however, none of the *Mutakallimūn*'s proofs for God's unity and incorporeality are considered valid by Maimonides, the question arises how these attributes can be inferred as well. Maimonides claims the following: "For the demonstration that He is one and not a body is valid, regardless of whether the world has come into being in time after having been nonexistent or not – as we have made clear by means of the third philosophic method."[73] If God's incorporeality and unity depend on the metaphysical proof and Maimonides' version of the metaphysical proof presupposes the world's eternity, it follows that Maimonides has no proof for the three fundamental principles of the Mosaic Law that is independent of the twenty-sixth premise. From Samuel ibn Tibbon (d. ca. 1230) – the translator of the *Guide* from Arabic to Hebrew – to Hasdai Crescas (d. 1410/11) many of the *Guide*'s most perspicacious medieval readers were aware of this inconsistency in Maimonides' argumentation and identified it as a deliberate contradiction that Maimonides inserted to conceal his true view from nonphilosophers.[74] On this interpretation, Maimonides' case for the world's creation and the corresponding conception of God as a voluntary agent is indeed part of the exoteric argumentation of the *Guide*.

There is, however, an additional complication. Although the evidence just examined clearly suggests that Maimonides construed all proofs for God's existence, incorporeality, and unity either openly or by implication on the premise of the eternal motion of the celestial spheres, there is no less compelling evidence that Maimonides did not consider this premise as demonstrated. In *Guide* II.24 Maimonides discusses at length what for the *falāsifa* became the greatest "*skandalon* of science:"[75] the incompatibility of Ptolemy's astronomy with Aristotle's astrophysics. Maimonides is keenly aware of the fact that if Ptolemy's account of the motion of the celestial spheres is correct, the physical conditions stipulated by Aristotle for their eternal circular motion cannot be fulfilled. As long as this scientific conflict is not resolved, Maimonides concludes, the celestial spheres do not "prove the

existence of their Mover."[76] If my earlier argument holds that Maimonides has no proof independent of the eternal motion of the celestial spheres, the implication is that he did not think that he had a valid demonstration of the three fundamental principles of the Mosaic Law at all. The conclusion I suggest is that Maimonides accepted the proofs based on the world's eternity because he considered them *more plausible* than the *Kalām* proofs based on the world's creation.[77]

I turn now to Maimonides' celebrated *via negativa* concerning God's "attributes [*sifāt*]," culminating in the recommendation that "silence is praise to Thee" (Psalm 65:2).[78] As we have seen, both Philo and Saadia had earlier reached the same conclusion. Like Saadia, Maimonides makes mental habits shaped by a literal understanding of scripture responsible for both the belief that God is corporeal and that he has attributes.[79] The philosophically inadequate representation of God in scripture in turn he explains like Philo as part of a pedagogical–political program conceived for nonphilosophers. This program is summarized for Maimonides in the talmudic dictum that "the Torah speaks in the language of human beings."[80]

In *Guide* I.50–60 Maimonides systematically restates the traditional discussion of God's *sifāt* and draws out its most radical implications. Most of what he says follows from the conception of God as necessary existent, which entailed, as we saw, that he is the first cause and that he is numerically and internally one. Although for Maimonides the polemical context has no longer the importance it had for Saadia, he still makes reference to the debates over the Christian trinity, which were part of the original setting of this discussion. Also the four essential attributes discussed in *Guide* I.53 – God's life, power, knowledge, and will – clearly recall the *Kalām* context. Like Saadia, moreover, Maimonides derives these attributes from the notion of God as the Creator.

In *Guide* I.51 Maimonides argues that every attribute denoting a feature that is "different from the thing of which it is predicated" entails that thing's composition and hence cannot be predicated of God on account of his internal unity.[81] In *Guide* I.52 he examines a list of predicables with respect to their applicability to God: definitions, parts of definitions, qualities, relations, and actions.[82] Because according to Aristotle the real definition of a thing indicates the cause of its existence, a definition cannot be predicated of God on account of his being the first cause.[83] Parts of a definition can only be predicated of things composed of parts and hence not of God on account of his internal unity. The same holds for qualities. God's internal unity, however, does not rule out all categories of accidents. Maimonides pays particular attention to attributes of relation. Because a thing's multiple relations do not affect its unity at first view, attributes of relation seem admissible with respect to God. Of the four classes of relations discussed, three are

easily dismissed: God cannot have spatial or temporal relations with other things, because being incorporeal he has no spatial and temporal coordinates. God can also not be part of a "correlation" like that of father and son, because being a father depends on having a son and vice versa whereas God as necessary existent cannot depend on a thing other than himself. Most important are relations of the type "X is the partner [*sharīk*] of Y."[84] By partnership Maimonides means relations predicated of two things in virtue of a shared feature with respect to which they are equal or unequal (e.g., X is as intelligent as Y or X is taller than Y).[85] The term *sharīk* is no doubt meant to recall the uncompromising rejection of *shirk* – usually translated as "polytheism" – in Muslim theology to safeguard "God's unity [*tawhīd*]." That no such relation between God and created things can exist follows, according to Maimonides, from God's necessary existence. For existence is predicated of a thing existing necessarily and a thing existing contingently by "absolute equivocation [*ishtirāq mahd*]" and the same holds *a fortiori* of all other features of necessary and contingent things: "There is, in truth, no relation in any respect between Him and any of His creatures."[86] The *Kalām* doctrine of the "unlikeness" of Creator and creation is pushed by Maimonides to its ultimate conclusion. For "absolute equivocation" means that when the same term is predicated of God and his creatures it has no common referent whatsoever in the two propositions. To say that God is alive, knowing, powerful, and willing tells us absolutely nothing about God, and the same holds for God's existence, unity, and eternity.[87] Maimonides is virtually alone among medieval Muslim and Jewish philosophers in claiming that God's attributes are equivocal terms. The standard position was to take attributes predicated of both God and created things as neither univocal, nor equivocal, but as "ambiguous [*mushakkaka*]."[88] Thus according to Gersonides (d. 1344) who is the first Jewish philosopher to systematically criticize Maimonides on this issue, attributes are predicated of God and creatures "ambiguously" according to priority and posteriority.[89] Maimonides' conception of God's attributes in turn motivates the *via negativa*, set forth in *Guide* I.58–60. If all positive predications are meaningless, the only way to learn something about God, Maimonides claims, is by denying of him privations by a double negation. To say that God knows, for instance, is uninformative, but to say that God does not not know tells us that God does not lack knowledge, even though we do not understand what this positively means.

The fifth group of attributes, however, can be positively predicated of God: These are attributes of "action [*fi'l*]," which refer to the actions performed (e.g., the act of building, not the condition of being a builder) and hence reveal nothing about the agent.[90] Attributes of action, of course, follow from God's causal activity.

Some attributes can be predicated of God both negatively and as actions, for instance, life, power, knowledge, and will, which mean either that God is not dead, not impotent, and so on, or characterize God's causal activity.[91] From facts such as that the same fire bleaches, blackens, burns, cooks, hardens, and melts it follows, according to Maimonides, that a plurality of actions does not necessarily entail a plurality in the agent.[92] The attributes of action are also used in *Guide* I.54 to explain what in rabbinic literature is referred to as God's "thirteen characteristics [*middot*]," traditionally derived from Exodus 34:6–7. Thus God's "graciousness," for instance, refers to God's activity in nature by which he brings living beings into existence and provides them with the organs and faculties required for their preservation. God's "wrath," on the other hand, refers to God as the cause of natural calamities such as earthquakes. Already Saadia had explained these biblical attributes as an anthropomorphic representation of God's causal activity. Ultimately, God's actions are the causal activity that governs the nature of "all existing things . . . and the way they are mutually connected," that is, they are the formal component in an Aristotelian universe composed of matter and form.[93]

Maimonides thus appears to cut radically every connection between God and the world. The one thing left to say about God is that he is active. God's activity, however, seems to provide the key to a conception of God that some scholars found so strikingly different that they claimed it to be incompatible with Maimonides' negative theology. In *Guide* I.68 Maimonides explains at length that God's essence is intellectual activity. Like Aristotle's God, Maimonides' God turns out to be *Nous*.[94] Because God's intellectual activity is the act of self-intellection in which the cognizing subject and the cognized object are identical, it does not, Maimonides claims, contradict God's unity. Note, however, that Maimonides' God is not Aristotle's first mover. As we saw, the metaphysical proof for God's existence led Maimonides to distinguish between the first cause and the first mover. Neither the Muslim *falāsifa* nor Maimonides made the first cause of the world's rational order into a superrational entity like the Plotinian "One." Instead they superimposed features of the "One" on *Nous*. In the chapters devoted to the *via negativa* Maimonides, in fact, explicitly refers to the act of self-intellection to explain the identity of life and knowledge in God.[95] This suggests that for Maimonides the God of the *via negativa* is the same as the God conceived as *Nous*.

This is not all, however. Recall that the second crucial problem pointed out in al-Ghazālī's critique of the philosophical conception of God was God's alleged ignorance of particulars. To this issue, however, Averroes and Maimonides were able to give a philosophical response. Although Aristotle stresses that God knows only himself, Themistius, Aristotle's fourth-century Byzantine commentator, had shown

that God's self-intellection must comprehend knowledge of everything that follows from him because knowledge of the cause entails knowledge of the effects. This is precisely how Maimonides argues in *Guide* III.21: Unlike human beings who know particulars a posteriori, God knows them a priori because he knows his essence and his essence is their cause. This argument has an additional implication that Maimonides avoids to openly disclose. Because the act of divine self-intellection comprises both God's essence and everything that is caused by God's essence, and because intellect, subject, and object of intellection are identical in God, it follows that "all the existents are inscribed in God's essence," as Profiat Duran, one of the medieval commentators on the *Guide*, aptly summarizes Maimonides' position.[96] We seem thus to have come full circle. We started with a God who had no connection whatsoever to existents outside himself and we end up with a God into whose essence all existents are folded in absolute undifferentiated unity. The world is not only "inscribed in God's essence." God's essence is also the form of the world as Maimonides expressly says when he describes God as the world's efficient, formal, and final cause in *Guide* I.69. The same activity that determines God's intellect is apprehended as God's "actions" in nature. Whereas in the Aristotelian universe every object in the physical world may be described as a "composite" of matter and form, the realm of God and of the separate intelligences moving the celestial spheres is pure form, whereby "pure" means "without matter."[97] The Aristotelian universe thus contains two types of things: things composed of matter and form and things that are pure form. What Maimonides appears to suggest, when he describes God as the form of the world, is that God's intellectual activity constitutes not only the realm of pure form but also the formal component of the physical world. The rational order of the physical world preserves God's unity for Maimonides because despite its composite nature it has the unity of an organism.[98] Maimonides presumably conceived this unity in analogy to a deductive scientific system: All things necessarily follow from the first cause in the same way as all scientific propositions necessarily follow from self-evident first axioms. As the content of the propositions is entailed in the axioms, the rational order of the world is entailed in the first cause. What prevents Maimonides from making the final step to a monistic ontology is the fact that he can find no place for the material component of physical objects in God. Matter for Maimonides remains finite, divisible, and passive, and hence clearly outside of what he could attribute to God. Whereas God is the world's efficient, formal, and final cause, he cannot be the world's material cause, according to *Guide* I.69. Maimonides was aware of the fact that identifying God with the rational order of nature and at the same time radically separating him from the corporeal world made his ontology inconsistent:

For the demonstration is valid that He, may He be praised, is separate from the world and free from it, and the demonstration is valid that the acts of His governance and providence exist in every one of the parts of the world, however small and contemptible. May He whose perfection has defeated us be glorified![99]

A solution to this problem was proposed only 450 years later by Spinoza.

SPINOZA (1632–1677)

Although Judaism's intellectual center shifted from the Muslim world to Christian Europe after Maimonides, his work was used as a conceptual framework for justifying the pursuit of science and philosophy in the Jewish world. But while Maimonides showed how one could reconcile Jewish and philosophical commitments, it did not contain a systematic exposition of philosophy itself. Thus the main source for studying God and nature became Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle. Because Averroes' authority in philosophical matters was by and large undisputed, his criticism of central features of Avicenna's metaphysics had the consequence that Jewish intellectuals turned away from the Avicennian features in Maimonides' metaphysics, most importantly from the metaphysical proof for God as a necessary existent and from the concomitant distinction between the first cause and the first mover.[100]

Spinoza is normally said to have broken with the view of the *falāsifa*, according to which the philosophical conception of God coincides with the allegorical content of scripture. In the *Theological-Political Treatise* (*TTP*), Spinoza, in fact, subjects Maimonides' approach to scripture to a sharp critique, first restating its fundamental premises and then refuting them as unfounded. Of these premises the most important is that the "prophets . . . were outstanding philosophers," a premise used to justify the pursuit of philosophy in a Jewish context from Philo to early-modern times. Spinoza's hermeneutical rule in the *TTP* is to not "admit anything as [scripture's] teaching which I did not most clearly derive from it."[101] This approach unsurprisingly yields no evidence that the premise in question is true. Instead Spinoza finds that the biblical conception of God bears witness to a vivid imagination and must be explained by the historian of religion in light of the relevant historical and sociocultural contexts of the prophets.

When we turn to Spinoza's early writings we find him advocating precisely the position later refuted in the *TTP*:

But when we say that God hates certain things and loves certain things, this is said in the same way as Scripture says that the earth will spit out human beings and other things of this

kind. That God, however, is not angry at anyone, nor loves things as the multitude [*vulgus*] believes, can be sufficiently derived from Scripture itself.

With respect to all doctrines, Spinoza continues, which we "grasp in the most certain way through natural reason," we can rest assured "that Scripture must . . . teach the same things, because the truth does not contradict the truth [*veritas veritati non repugnat*]."[102] Like Philo and Maimonides, Spinoza takes humankind to be divided into philosophers and nonphilosophers, and there are passages in all his writings in which the parables and metaphors representing God in scripture are interpreted as part of a pedagogical–political program for nonphilosophers whose allegorical content coincides with the philosophical conception of God.

I cannot further explore here the reasons for the inconsistency in Spinoza's approach to popular religion.[103] What he considered the true doctrine of God, he set forth in the *Ethics*. Let us now examine whether this doctrine conflicts any more with the traditional Jewish conception of God than the philosophical theology of medieval Jewish rationalists such as Maimonides. The *Ethics* begins with a part entitled "On God" [*De Deo*] and ends with a proof that the "intellectual love of God [*Amor Dei intellectualis*]" is the highest human perfection (VP32c–VP42). This structure, which proceeds from God and returns to God, had first been established in the Platonic tradition and informs a wide range of medieval philosophical works. Showing in what human perfection consists, requires understanding human nature and its place in the order of existents. This in turn requires understanding the nature and order of existents themselves. The first part of the *Ethics* is thus devoted to ontology. The title "On God" follows from the fact that for Spinoza "everything that is, is in God" (IP15). Ontology and theology, therefore, coincide. Spinoza's ontology has two components: "substances" and "modes." A substance is defined as "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself" (ID3). A mode is defined as "that which is in something else and is conceived through something else" (ID5). A third important ontological concept defined by Spinoza is the notion of attribute: "By attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence" (ID4). In the course of the first fourteen propositions of the *Ethics* Spinoza demonstrates that only one substance exists and that this substance is God. The main steps leading to this conclusion can be summarized as follows: God is defined as "an absolutely infinitely being, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence" (ID6). In IP10s Spinoza claims that the coexistence of a plurality of "really distinct" attributes in one substance is possible. That God as defined in ID6 "necessarily exists" is demonstrated in IP11. Because according to IP5 "in nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute," and because God

possesses all attributes, Spinoza can conclude in IP14 that only God exists: "Besides God, no substance can be or be conceived." God, therefore, is said to be "unique [*unicum*]" by Spinoza.[104] Is this conception of God Jewish? It is, at any rate, the conception to which, according to Spinoza, the Tetragrammaton refers, because exactly like Maimonides in *Guide* I.61 he takes the Tetragrammaton to "indicate the absolute essence of God."[105]

Let us turn from God to modes that replace the created things of Spinoza's medieval predecessors. Because modes are in another and conceived through another and because the only other thing besides modes is God, it follows that "whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God" (IP15). In IP16 and 18 Spinoza explains the manner in which the modes depend on God as causal dependence and thus concludes that "God is absolutely the first cause" (IP16c). Because God as absolutely infinite encompasses all reality, He cannot cause things outside Himself, and thus is not a "transient cause," but an "immanent cause," that is, a cause that causes things inside itself (IP18). God is "absolutely" the first cause, because He is not only the cause of the modes, but also the cause of Himself – *causa sui* – a concept that Spinoza defines as "that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature can be conceived only as existing" (ID1). That God must be *causa sui* is for Spinoza obvious: if His existence were dependent on something causally prior to Him, He could not be conceived through Himself, which contradicts the definition of substance (IP6d2). The definition of *causa sui* corresponds almost literally to Maimonides' interpretation of "I am He Who is" (Exodus 3:14), which already Philo understood as referring to God's true being as first cause. For Maimonides it indicates the "necessarily existent," that is, a thing whose essence entails its existence and that thus "has never been, or ever will be, nonexistent."[106] Spinoza's conception of God as first cause and modes as causally dependent on God thus turns out to be quite similar to Maimonides' conception of God as existing necessarily and the world as existing contingently. One might object that Spinoza could not infer the existence of God from contingently existing objects, because he expressly makes God the first cause of an infinite chain of causes and effects (cf. IP16), whereas Maimonides' metaphysical proof for God's existence assumes the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes. Spinoza was not only familiar with, but approvingly quotes the version of the metaphysical proof of a "certain Jew called Rabbi Hasdai [Crescas]," which does not depend on this assumption. As restated by Spinoza Crescas shows:

> The force of this argument does not lie in the impossibility of there being an actual infinite or an infinite regress of causes, but only in [the absurdity of] the supposition that things which do not exist necessarily by their own nature are not determined to exist by a thing which does necessarily exist by its own nature, and which is a cause, not something caused.[107]

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza uses a version of the ontological proof for God's existence that had been set forth by St. Anselm and taken up by Descartes (cf. IP11). He presumably preferred this proof because it is completely a priori, inferring God's existence simply from the concept of God, and perhaps also because it was more familiar to the readers whom he was addressing in the *Ethics*.

Spinoza does, however, use a version of the a posteriori metaphysical proof to infer God's existence as conceived under a certain attribute. As *ens absolute infinitum* God comprises all reality, which according to Spinoza is expressed in the infinite number of his attributes (cf. IP10s). Human beings apprehend only two segments of this reality: modes of thought and modes of extension. Modes, as we saw, are caused by substance and modes of a certain kind by substance only insofar as it is conceived under the attribute of this same kind (cf. IIP5 and P6). We can, therefore, infer from our apprehension of modes of thought that "thought [*cogitatio*] is an attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing," and from our apprehension of modes of extension "that extension [*extensio*] is an attribute of God, or God is an extended thing" (IIP1 and P2).[108] God for Spinoza has not only two, but an infinite number of attributes, "each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence" (ID6). These infinite attributes all have the same ontological status as the attributes of thought and extension. The step leading from two attributes to an infinite number of attributes appears to rely on the principle of sufficient reason: if God has two attributes, he can also have more than two. If nothing prevents this, he necessarily has more than two. Given God's absolute infinity "more than two" must, therefore, mean an infinite number (cf. I10s).

From the medieval perspective this further step is of minor importance. What we would expect a philosopher like Maimonides to object to Spinoza are two things: that he allows more than one attribute in God and that he claims God to be extended. For any plurality of attributes would seem to imply God's composition, which is incompatible with God's internal unity required by his necessary existence. To identify God with the physical world would seem to make him finite, divisible, and passive. How would Spinoza reply to these objections? With respect to the first, Spinoza's stance appears at first to be inconsistent for he claims on the one hand that God's attributes are "really distinct" (IP10s) and insists on the other that God is indivisible (cf. IP12; IP13; IP15s). The latter clearly implies that God's attributes cannot be conceived as an aggregate of parts. In IIP7s Spinoza stresses the unity of substance in even more explicit terms. Referring back to the first part of the *Ethics* he writes: "here we must recall . . . that whatever can be perceived as constituting the essence of substance pertains to one substance only and consequently that the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance."

This does not mean, however, that Spinoza takes thought and extension to be merely subjective representations that do not correspond to what God truly is. God's being can be reduced neither to thought nor to extension, but God is both as absolute unity. For Spinoza "all the attributes . . . have always been in [substance] together and one could not be produced by another" (IP10s). By "really distinct" Spinoza thus only means that no attribute causally or conceptually depends on another and not that they constitute distinct ontological realms. Spinoza does not discuss why human beings represent them as such. He also does not discuss why human beings apprehend only two of God's infinite attributes. In both cases metaphysical arguments overrule our way of representing God. On this interpretation Spinoza remains as much committed to God's internal unity as his medieval predecessors. It is important to note that in the same *scholium* in which Spinoza stresses the unity of substance, he explicitly signals the affinity of his own doctrine to the conception of God of medieval Jewish philosophers. The unity of extension and thought, he suggests, "some of the Hebrews appear to have seen as if through a cloud [*quasi per nebulam*], who maintain that God, God's intellect, and the things by him intellectually cognized are one and the same" (IIP7s).

Spinoza's God of "some of the Hebrews" is, of course, no other than the God of the Greeks – more precisely the divine *Nous* of Aristotle's Metaphysics as interpreted by Themistius, who had been transformed into the God of the Bible by Maimonides and other medieval Jewish philosophers. Two questions arise: What is the affinity that Spinoza suggests exists between his and Maimonides' concept of God, and what is the "cloud" that he thought prevented Maimonides from apprehending God clearly and distinctly?[109] We saw that Maimonides conceives God's essence as intellectual activity and that he takes the form of all existents to be inscribed in God's essence. The intellectual activity of Maimonides' God recurs as the "active essence [*essentia actuosa*]" of Spinoza's God with the difference, however, that the activity of Spinoza's God comprises not only thought, but also extension, as well as an infinite number of other things corresponding to his infinite attributes. As *res cogitans* Spinoza's God has precisely the structure of Maimonides' God: He produces "an idea both of his essence and of all things necessarily following from his essence" in himself (IIP3), and because "a true idea must agree with the thing it represents" (IA6) the relationship between God as thinking substance and the modes of thought closely corresponds to the relationship between the subject and object of intellection of Maimonides' God. Maimonides' God is not only *res cogitans*, however. As we saw, he is also the formal component of the physical world: The same activity that constitutes the essence of God's intellect is apprehended as God's "actions" in nature. It is this aspect of Maimonides' God that arguably contributed to the

conception of Spinoza's attribute of extension. First Spinoza needed to disperse the conceptual "cloud" that obscured Maimonides' perception of God: the doctrine of God's incorporeality. From the point of view of the physical world, Maimonides' God mysteriously is immanent and transcendent because as incorporeal, he could be identified only with its form but not with its matter. Maimonides could not resolve this inconsistency within the conceptual framework of his ontology of matter and form. Spinoza replaces this ontology through a version of Descartes' ontology of thought and extension. Because thought and extension are neither conceptually nor causally related to each other, physical objects become mere extension instead of composites of extension and thought in the way they were composites of matter and form in the Aristotelian tradition. More important, however, is the integration of the attribute of extension into the "active essence" of God's infinite being. Spinoza expands the ontological scope of God's activity: God is no longer confined to intellectual activity, but God is "extending" activity as well. Because these activities in reality are one activity perceived under different attributes, this move does not compromise God's unity. Here Maimonides would surely object: How can God, who is infinite, indivisible, and active, be identified with the physical world, which is finite, divisible, and passive? This misconception of the physical world, Spinoza would reply, is precisely the cloud. Extension, correctly conceived, has none of the features that prevented Maimonides from identifying it with God. The concept of infinite extension was no longer controversial in Spinoza's time.[110] The assumption that infinite extension is divisible derives, according to Spinoza, from a category mistake: Divisibility is a feature of modes, whereas no substance, including extended substance, can be conceived as divisible (cf. IP12 and IP13c). Hence the objection stems from a confusion of extended substance with modes of extension.

The most important problem was that of matter's alleged passivity. Both Maimonides and Descartes conceived matter as passive, excluded it from God and as a consequence failed to explain in Spinoza's view the causal relationship between God, conceived as active but immaterial, and matter, conceived as passive in itself. To the best of my knowledge the only author who suggests conceiving infinite extension as active is Hasdai Crescas:[111]

> For this reason, because God, may He be blessed, is the form of reality as a whole, having produced, individuated and determined it, He is metaphorically called Place, as in their . . . saying . . . :"He is the Place of the world" [e.g., *Genesis Rabbah* 68:9]. This last metaphor is admirable, for as the dimensions of the void permeate through the dimensions of the body and its fullness, so His glory, blessed be He, is present in all parts of the world and the fullness thereof.[112]

Crescas had argued against the Aristotelians that an infinitely extended void exists. The crucial point in the previously quoted passage is that metaphorically God's activity as infinite extension produces, individuates, and determines bodies in the same way as God's activity literally produces, individuates, and determines the form of the world. Crescas shares with Maimonides the view that God is the form of the world. This view, as we saw, did not prove useful to Spinoza. By taking the metaphor in Crescas' account literally, active infinite extension assumes the role of God as the form of the world, thus becoming the immanent cause of what may be described as the world's body. Unlike Spinoza, however, Crescas could not make this additional step because of ontological commitments similar to those of Maimonides.

As I have suggested, the rabbinic dictum about God as "the Place of the world" is ultimately derived from Philo's view that God can be said to be the world's *topos* because all things are causally dependent on him. It seems, therefore, that even where Spinoza sets out to disperse the cloud that prevented medieval Jewish thinkers from conceiving God clearly and distinctly, he remains indebted to the Jewish intellectual tradition. The integration of extension into God's infinite being is for Spinoza the solution of a philosophical problem and not a break with Judaism, as it has sometimes been described.

NOTES

1 For an overview of proofs for God's existence, see H. Davidson 1987; for an overview of the discussion of God's attributes, see Kaufmann 1877.
2 See *Laws* X.
3 See *Eudemian Ethics* VIII.3, 1249 b20–21.
4 See *Kuzari* I.1.
5 On the impact of Themistius, see Pines 1996.
6 See Diels and Kranz 1960, 21 B10–17.
7 Diels and Kranz 1960, 8.2.
8 The following abbreviations are used for Philo's works:

Aet. = *De Aeternitate Mundi* [*On the Eternity of the World*]
Cher. = *De Cherubim* [*On the Cherubim*]
Conf. = *De Confusione Linguarum* [*On the Confusion of Tongues*]
Congr. = *De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia* [*On the Preliminary Studies*]
Dec. = *De Decalogo* [*On the Decalogue*]
Det. = *Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat* [*The Worse Attacks the Better*]
Deus = *Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis* [*On the Unchangeableness of God*]
Gig. = *De Gigantibus* [*On the Giants*]
Her. = *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit* [*Who is the Heir*]
LA = *Legum Allegoriarum* [*Allegorical Interpretations*]
Mut. = *De Mutatione Nominum* [*On the Change of Names*]
Op. = *De Opificio Mundi* [*On the Creation*]

Post. = *De Posteritate Caini* [*On the Posterity and Exile of Cain*]
Praem. = *De Praemiis et Poenis* [*On Rewards and Punishments*]
Prob. = *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* [*Every Good Man is Free*]
Prov. = *De Providentia* [*On Providence*]
QE = *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Exodum* [*Questions and Answers on Exodus*]
QG = *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesim* [*Questions and Answers on Genesis*]
Somn. = *De Somniis* [*On Dreams*]
Spec. = *De Specialibus Legibus* [*On the Special Laws*]

9 Moses had "attained the summit of philosophy" (*Op.* 8). For the different audiences to which Moses speaks about God, see *Deus* 51–69. For the two levels of meaning of the Mosaic Law, see *Conf.* 190.
10 See the account Philo gives of his scientific education in *Congr.* 74–6 and of how he turned from philosophy to exegesis of the Mosaic Law in *Spec.* III.1–6.
11 See his reference to "the most holy Plato" in *Prob.* 13. For Philo's place in what scholars now call "Middle Platonism," see Dillon 1996.
12 For an example of systematization, see Dodds 1928. Plato needed to be defended, for example, against the Stoic denial of a realm of true being separate from the physical world.
13 For a comprehensive but problematic account of Philo's views on God's existence and essence, see Wolfson 1947, vol. 2, chaps. 10 and 11. For a sustained engagement with Wolfson, see Winston 1985, and the section on Philo in Winston 2001. I generally agree with Winston *contra* Wolfson, that Philo's conception of God is primarily informed by his philosophical commitments.
14 Compare *Timaeus* 27d–28c. In *Aet.* 13–19 Philo identifies Plato's and Moses' positions on the creation of the world.
15 Cf. *Op.* 7–9. For a summary of Aristotle's proof, see H. Davidson 1987, pp. 237–40.
16 Philo's criticism of those who hold the world to be "uncreated and eternal" (*Op.* 7) is in my view only directed against the claim that the world is not dependent on a cause.
17 For this interpretation of the *Timaeus,* cf. already Aristotle, *De Caelo* 279b30.
18 On this issue, see Winston 2001, chap. 8.
19 See, e.g., *Phaedrus* 247e.
20 This is the argument used by Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* X.7.
21 The main text interpreted in the following paragraph is *LA* II.1–3.
22 See, e.g., Cicero, *De natura deorum* II.87–88.
23 Cf. Menn 1995.
24 Note that the *Septuagint* uses *eipein* and not *legein* in Genesis 1. See *Sapientia Salomonis* 9:1–2.
25 On the difficulties relating to *Prov.* I.6–7, see Winston 2001, chap. 8.
26 One could ask, of course, why God causes the elements in the receptacle to be in a state of disorder. But as we saw, also in the case of the Forms, their division and ordering logically followed their creation. In the *Logos* the Forms have, moreover, a logical-mathematical, but not a spatial order. The determination of the appropriate place of their reflections in space thus requires an ordering cause.
27 Note that Plato both compares and contrasts the assent to the "unhypothetical First Principle" to what geometers do (510c ff.).
28 See Wolfson 1947, vol. 2, chap. 11.
29 Fragment of *LA* IV in Harris 1886, 8. For Philo's determinism, see *Cher.* 128 and Winston 2001, chap. 10.

30 Cf. Winston 1985, p. 14.
31 For a survey of Jewish *Kalām*, see Ben-Shammai 1997, pp. 115–48; for an introduction to Saadia, see Stroumsa 2003, pp. 71–90. On Saadia's doctrine of attributes, see Kaufmann 1877, chap. 1.
32 Al-Iji 1907, p. 97.
33 See Wolfson 1976, pp. 601–2 and the biblical passages discussed in *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* IV.3 and IV.6.
34 Cf. the *Dispute between a Saracen and a Christian*, written by John of Damascus in the eighth century, in Sahas 1972.
35 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Introduction, 2.
36 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Introduction. Saadia 1948, p. 18; 1960, p. 15.
37 See *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Introduction, 6 and III.4.
38 See the explicit statement of this rule in *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.3. Saadia 1948, p. 100; 1960, p. 87.
39 See *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* Introduction, 6 and III.4.
40 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.10; Saadia 1948, p. 118; 1960, p. 101.
41 On these two doctrines, see Altmann 1943.
42 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* I.1.
43 Saadia 1948, p. 41; 1960, p. 35.
44 See *Physics* VIII.10.
45 On Philoponus' arguments, their transmission, and their influence on Saadia, see H. Davidson 1987, chaps. 4.1 and 4.2.
46 Saadia 1948, p. 42; 1960, p. 37.
47 Saadia 1948, p. 86; 1960, p. 75.
48 Saadia 1948, p. 96; 1960, p. 84.
49 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.2–3.
50 Saadia 1948, p. 101; 1960, p. 88.
51 See Wolfson 1976, chap. 2; 1979, pp. 8–18.
52 Saadia 1948, p. 102; 1960, p. 89.
53 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.1. Saadia 1948, p. 95; 1960, p. 83.
54 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.10. Saadia 1948, p. 94; 1960, p. 83.
55 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.10. Saadia 1948, pp. 116 and 118; 1960, pp. 100 and 101.
56 Cf. Psalm 34:17 quoted in *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.11. Saadia 1948, p. 123; 1960, p. 105.
57 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.12. Saadia 1948, p. 129; 1960, p. 110.
58 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.10. Saadia 1948, p. 121; 1960, pp. 103–4.
59 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* II.13.
60 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* I.3. Saadia 1948, p. 66; 1960, pp. 57–8.
61 Cf. Stroumsa 2003, pp. 75–6.
62 Cf. the seventh cause of contradictions mentioned in *Guide* I, Introduction.
63 Maimonides 1963, p. 235; 1930–1931, p. 165.
64 Maimonides 1963, p. 240; 1930–1931, p. 168.
65 *Guide* I.70. Maimonides 1963, p. 175; 1930–1931, p. 121.
66 *Laws Concerning the Foundations of the Torah* I.5 and II.7.
67 *Laws Concerning Idolatry* I.3
68 See H. Davidson 1987, chap. 9.
69 *Guide* II.4. Maimonides 1963, p. 259; 1930–1931, p. 180.
70 See H. Davidson 1987, pp. 378–3.

71 See, e.g., *Physics* III.4, 203b 30.
72 Maimonides 1963, p. 247; 1930–1931, p. 172.
73 Maimonides 1963, p. 252; 1930–1931, p. 175.
74 Cf. W. Harvey 1998a, chap. 3; Fraenkel 2007, pp. 165–76.
75 Maimonides 1963, p. lxiii.
76 Maimonides 1963, p. 327; 1930–1931, p. 228.
77 On probability, see *Guide* II.16. On the entire issue, see W. Harvey 1998a; Fraenkel 2007a, pp. 194–204.
78 *Guide* I.59, p. 139; 1930–1931, p. 95.
79 See *Guide* I.53 and the fourth cause of disagreement mentioned in *Guide* I.31.
80 Cf. *Guide* I.26.
81 Maimonides 1963, p. 113; 1930–1931, p. 76.
82 On Maimonides' peculiar list, see H. Wolfson 1977b, chap. 4.
83 *Analytica Posteriora* II.10, 93 b39.
84 Maimonides 1963, p. 117; 1930–1931, p. 79.
85 Cf. H. Wolfson 1977b, pp. 181–6.
86 Maimonides 1963, p. 118; 1930–1931, p. 79.
87 Cf. *Guide* I.56–57.
88 Cf. *Guide* I, Introduction. Maimonides 1963, p. 5; 1930–1931, p. 2.
89 On the uniqueness of Maimonides' position and on Gersonides' criticism, see Wolfson 1977, chap. 6.
90 Maimonides 1963, p. 118; 1930–1931, p. 80.
91 See *Guide* I.56 for the former and *Guide* I.52 and 53 for the latter.
92 See *Guide* I.53.
93 *Guide* I.54. Maimonides 1963, p. 124; 1930–1931, p. 84.
94 On Maimonides' conception of God as *Nous* and its implications, see Fraenkel 2006.
95 *Guide* I.53.
96 Duran 1872 on *Guide* III.21.
97 See, e.g., *Physics* I.7, 190b 11 and *Metaphysics* XII.6, 1071b 21.
98 Cf. *Guide* I.72.
99 *Guide* I.72. Maimonides 1963, p. 193; 1930–1931, p. 134.
100 Cf. H. Davidson 1987, chap. 10; Fraenkel 2007b.
101 *TTP* Pref.; Spinoza 2001, p. 5; 1972, vol. 3, p. 9.
102 "Metaphysical Thoughts," II.7; Spinoza 1985, pp. 330–1; 1972, vol. 2, pp. 264–5.
103 For a detailed examination of this issue, see Fraenkel forthcoming a.
104 For an explanation of the steps leading to IP14, see, e.g., Della Rocca 2002.
105 *TTP* 13. Spinoza 2001, p. 154; 1999, p. 452.
106 *Guide* I.63. Maimonides 1963, p. 155; 1930–1931, p. 106.
107 Letter 12. Spinoza 1985, p. 205; 1972, vol. 4, p. 62.
108 On the a posteriori character of this proof, cf. Gueroult 1974, vol. 2, pp. 38–40.
109 On this connection, see Fraenkel 2006.
110 Cf. Koyré 1957.
111 On this issue, cf. Fraenkel forthcoming b.
112 Crescas 1929, p. 200.

18

CREATION AND EMANATION

LENN E. GOODMAN

Consider the varied ways in which existence in general and human existence specifically are conceptualized – the colorful stories that support those conceptualizations, give them birth, or put flesh on their bare bones. For positivists existence is a given, raising no great questions about its being as it is. For theists existence is a given in a profoundly different sense, a gift that need not have been made. That nature is and how it is are marks of divine generosity. Hindus sometimes picture existence as an endless yet fleeting cycle. Buddhists may retort that the cycle of rebirths and sufferings mirrors and mocks the moral logic of our choices, and those of our former selves, a carousel of lives to be escaped only by dismounting, letting go. Heideggerians may speak of our throwness; existentialists, of forlornness, an inevitable consequence of our moral dilemma: forced to choose for all humanity, yet incompetent to make any such choice. For the Stoic, we (and all of nature) are not thrown but cast, assigned a role and a nesting series of responsibilities, to ourselves, our fellows, and nature at large. Creation is the narrative that situates humanity and nature at large among such options, making nature the sign and argument of the unseen: Goodness *here* bespeaks a larger goodness elsewhere. The energy and thought we admire are arguments, in monotheism, of a higher energy and deeper thought, pointing toward the Unconditioned. Nature's bounty is both evidence and gift, manifesting interest, grace, and love from a God who stands apart, beyond the system that the act of creation bestows, inexplicable in its categories, irreducible to its terms. Explicit or implicit, the reasoning is that there is no good or light or wisdom of the sort that theists celebrate without a source that is not just beyond, but infinite and absolute.

The monotheist, like his God, is zealous in his piety and jealous of his worship, finding no finite value worthy of celebration on its own. All empiric worth points beyond itself, to a common source. Values that conflict or wane are unworthy of worship, impermanent, partial in both senses of the word – thus always pointing toward that higher unity and abiding goodness which is eternal where they are evanescent, simplex where they conflict. Unity in nature argues unity in God, and God's unity in turn proclaims a law for humankind, an integrated moral system

that seeks coherence among values and invites its adherents to personal and social harmony.

Tragedy, in monotheism, is not inevitable. For real goods are consistent with one another, consilient, mutually supportive. Destiny is not the enemy but a divine vocation. Freedom is not hubris but a rational and joyous acceptance of responsibility. It is not wrong in monotheism to reach for the stars. God himself anchors and steadies the ladder and sends his messengers to escort those who pursue paths to transcendence. What is mad and self-defeating is only the specious, incoherent desire to build a way to heaven in the clay of the earth, vainly hoping to reach skyward without God's help, and then oust Him with our human, godgiven powers.

Monotheism is not about fate. Its theme is freedom, part of God's gift in making room for us alongside his infinitude. Freedom imparts the separateness that may leave us feeling isolated in the cosmos, until we discover one another and the small and great signs of God's handiwork in nature's beauty and brilliance. Freedom makes us responsible, and the law of being, for the monotheist, is a law of life, affirming and upholding the triumph of life and peace over dissolution and disorder, emulating God's generosity and pursuing our implicit likeness to divinity by unfolding the possibilities for perfection we are given as beings capable, in our own small ways, of goodness, beauty, creativity, and truth.

These are the themes implicit in Genesis, ready to be opened and elaborated. Themes are not theses, and philosophy is not a vision but a dialectic that finds stability through argument and the resolution of difficulties. What difficulties await the idea of creation? The greatest challenge, historically, came not from far afield but from the kindred idea of emanation, itself a way of tracing all finite reality to a single, absolute source, but an idea on the face of it at odds with core elements of the idea of creation: the symmetry of divine and human freedom and the asymmetry of God's eternity and the world's origination. As the biblical narrative resolved itself into theses and arguments, creation and emanation struggled for the same ground. The sagest Jewish philosophers sought out the challenger, seeking an ally and aiming to forge an alloy of creation and emanation, strengthening each element with the distinctive contributions of the other. That alchemy of the synthesizers left many to wonder if the alloy would hold or one part or both would rust and fall away.

PHILO (ca. 25 B.C.E. – ca. 40 C.E.)

The first Jewish philosopher of note was Philo of Alexandria, leader of Alexandrian Jewry's embassy to Caligula, subtle exegete of Plato, the Stoics, and the Greek

Septuagint. Philo's problematic of creation reflects Greek philosophical discomfort with the very idea of creation. Parmenides had founded Greek metaphysics, discovering that being must be, precluding its origination. Nonbeing, as the goddess insisted in the theophany reported in Parmenides' poem, is unthinkable and cannot be, a sheer violation of the law of contradiction. So the becoming of being is unthinkable as well: "For what creation wilt thou seek for it? How and whence did it grow?" If being did begin, it must have come from nothing. That, however, the goddess reminds Parmenides, has already been rejected as unthinkable. Besides, she argues, if being began, why would it take its origin at one time rather than another?[1]

Here, at the birth of western metaphysics, Parmenides lays out the basis of centuries of challenges to the idea of creation: telling questions as to its how and why, broaching the seeming paradox of nothing becoming something, and scoring the seeming arbitrariness of the act. Parmenides drew a zealous monism from the goddess' premises. Richly overinterpreting the law of contradiction, he denies time and change, and multiplicity and diversity.

Aristotle saw through the fallacy: Failure to see that negation of a predicate (required in any affirmation of change or difference) is not the absolute negation that Parmenides' muse rejects. Aristotle was also grateful. Parmenides had opened the question of being and sought leverage for his answer in the first principle of logic. He had disentangled the mythical confusion of tales of origin with accounts essence. Aristotle will never forget this liberative moment. Still there was a price to pay: A lasting bias against the mythical idiom regularly blinds Aristotle to the explanatory powers of narrative and leaves his philosophical heirs to look askance at all accounts of origin as philosophically jejune. Cuttings from the arguments planted by Parmenides convince those followers that creation is impossible.

Philo's brilliant achievement here was to reach back beyond Aristotle to Plato's own creation narrative, framing answers to the Greek challenges as to the how and why of creation. The why was generosity, as Genesis and Plato[2] made crystal clear: Creation was a gift, not an imposition, accident, or tragic fall – a wonder and a world of opportunity, a blessing and a source of joy. *Why now?* was a tougher nut to crack. This may explain Philo's expatiating on the marvelous properties of the numbers six and seven: Perhaps the beauties of the number scheme will warrant God's hexaemeron and his blessing of the Sabbath day. It was in explaining how creation was possible that Philo rose to the occasion as a philosopher.

The Stoics, being materialists, spoke not of ideas, like Plato, but of words. Philo seized on the thought of words as ideas made manifest and introduced the *Logos*, God's word, mediating Transcendence into nature. The *Logos* is God's idea,

wisdom, and plan. It is also nature's rational pattern, divinely imparted, implicit in things, and bespeaking God's authorship. The *Logos* is the articulate wisdom of revelation and the unspoken wisdom of nature.

Philo is no materialist. Embracing Plato's reasoning that the divine must transcend time and change and matter and passivity, Philo sidesteps Stoic dilemmas over the divine presence in the cosmos. The *Logos* permeates nature and inspires human minds not physically but as an idea. Its presence makes clear not how something comes from nothing (for no monotheist understands creation in those stark terms) but how God's transcendence reaches a temporal world.

Even the seeming arbitrariness of God's linkage to the world dissolves. God *does* create eternally, in the *Logos*, which faithfully mirrors his eternal creativity. The mutable world is originate, as Plato's *Timaeus* argues temporality must be. Small wonder that the Gospel of John, written not long after Philo's heyday, opens by answering the doubters in Philo's terms: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word was God."

SAADIA GAON (882–942)

Problematics stimulate philosophy; critique sharpens it. Genesis teems with subtexts and barbs aimed at pagan cosmologies. It will not even name the sun and moon, calling them just the greater and lesser light, eclipsing their pagan names, because they too are God's handiwork; their dominion, delegated, each confined to its own watch, by night or day. Neither has comprehensive rule nor sway. The whole starry array that will so inspire Kant is swept into an afterthought: "*and the stars too*" (Genesis 1:16). Later these will be God's hosts, but always they are ancillary – splendid, but still creatures.

Philo forgoes glancing shots at pagan myth, focusing his gaze on philosophers' doubts of the coherence of the creation idea. Saadia's agenda is twofold: to find creation credible and to explain that a first cause must be transcendent. God, to be ultimate, cannot be an element in the very system his act explains – lest He too need explanation and prove not ultimate at all but unworthy of worship.

The theme is biblical; but, in making it explicit, Saadia pursues the goal announced in the title of his great summa[3] – one the very first: identifying convictions worthy of critical commitment amidst the welter of competing doctrines. The quest for ultimates, he argues, must be metaphysical. The first cause cannot be reached by the senses. Reason must discover Him – and not reduce Him once again to an item in the familiar inventory that a transcendent creativity was invoked to explain.

Scripture, Saadia argues, vouches for creation. Reason, however, confirms it: The world is finite, and its force is finite. So it is not everlasting but must be originate – thus created. For things cannot initiate themselves. Again, the world is composite (as are the heavenly bodies, *pace* the Aristotelians). So the cosmos is not eternal, nor is anything requiring temporal accidents, nor is time – or it would never have reached the present.

The heavens are not eternal, Saadia argues (retracing the reasoning of Christian critics like John Philoponus). If they were, they could not vary in excellence (as pagan philosophers presumed they do); and their revolutions could not increase (because nothing can add to infinity); and those revolutions could not have diverse periods (for infinity has no multiples or divisors). If a fifth element were the matter of the stars, they would be invisible, having nothing in common with our bodies.

Eternalists assume the world has always been as we observe; however, experience warrants no such remote conjecture. Sophists may take refuge in subjectivity, as if the whole issue were subjective. Belief, Saadia insists, must follow reality, not vice versa, and those who take cover in utter skepticism refute themselves if they venture any opinion – and condemn themselves to silence if they do not.

It is wrongheaded to say that creation derives something from nothing, ignoring its transcendent Source. True, creation gives the world a definite age. It had to begin somewhere, but choosing his moment does not lessen God's majesty. Scripture states his purpose plainly: "to make known to the sons of man his mighty acts" (Psalms 145:12). God created what sufficed to that end.

THE IDEA OF EMANATION

Emanation is the central idea of Neoplatonism, a theory and imagery linking Plato's Forms with the natural world. Students of Jewish thought will know the idea under the name *atzelut*.

Plato saw the world of changeable things as too unstable and evanescent to warrant full title to reality. All particulars were pale copies, flickering images of unchanging archetypes, the Ideas or Forms. Aristotle, Plato's student for nineteen years, agreed that universal and eternal forms are the ultimate realities and true subject matter of the sciences, but he found these essences in the species of things and rejected Plato's view that they exist independently. He argued: (1) Neither science nor ethics can proceed from sheer intuitions of innate ideas. Both demand recourse to experience. (2) Plato's Forms cannot be counted, as any real substance would be. Are "dog" and "cat," the ideas expected to explain Fido and Felix, the same or different, one idea or two? The answer is equivocal: They are one in genus ("animal"),

but distinct in species. So how many ideas are there? Should not real things have an identity and thus a number? Any substance should be "a this." Plato's Ideas seem to have no firm arithmetic. (3) If any two particulars (Achilles and Ulysses) that have something in common require another, here, the Idea "man" – "man itself," as Plato phrases it – to explain their natures, Forms proliferate uncontrollably. For Plato seems to make Forms self-predicable. (Would not "justice" itself be just? – although that seems to permit the strange idea that "humanity" itself is human!) On that account, making Achilles and Ulysses expressions of "man," demands that they and "man" itself are united and explained by some higher principle (man^n?) – and so ad infinitum! (4) Besides, how can changeless Forms explain a world so manifestly changeable?

Still, Plato's Forms retain their appeal, as pure objects of knowledge and eternal realities, the patterns and sources of all unity, stability, and value in the sensory realm, "becoming," as Plato calls it, marking it off from the realm of "Being." Here in the sensory world error and illusion are endemic. Mathematics and the realm of ideas allow certainty, because pure "Being" is uncompromised by matter.

Besides, Aristotle faces problems too. He pursued that quest for ultimates that Saadia mentions (indeed, that language is Aristotle's), and, like Saadia, Aristotle saw that the ultimate should not be allowed to sink back into the world it was invoked to explain. Searching for the ultimate cause of all change or motion, Aristotle saw that this cause must not itself be subject to motion. It must move all things not by pushing or pulling but as a goal or end motivates pursuit. If so, Aristotle reasoned, the highest god must be an object of love, drawing lesser movers toward it – not physically, of course, if it is beyond the realm of matter in motion, but by expressing their love of its perfection. This the supernal minds that animate the heavenly bodies must do (as the soul moves the body) by imparting motion to the celestial spheres in which the stars and planets are embedded and by which the world below is governed.

The celestial motions, Aristotle reasoned, have no opposite (being circular, not upward or downward like the motions of the terrestrial elements, fire, water, earth, and air). Celestial bodies are not composite but simple, unassailed by any opposing nature (as fire is by water). So their vast choric dance is eternal. The highest god, Mind (*Nous*) moves all things but abides untouched by change or motion. Its life is the highest, most self-sufficient activity: pure thought, directed to the highest, most perfect actuality, itself.

Would so self-absorbed a god relate to the world below? Does the pursuit of actuality in our nether world derive merely mechanically from the revolutions of

the spheres, bringing on new seasons and cycles of natural change – or is natural motion properly motivated from within? Is the divine adequately conceived as utterly wrapt in self-contemplation? Does Aristotle's god even know, let alone govern the natural world?

Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, followed earlier Platonists in finding a place for Plato's Forms as thoughts of *Nous* – which thus became equivalent to Being, the realm of Forms. As Aristotle had seen, a mind that thinks, just *is* the act and object of its thinking. The god, then, did know the world, through the ideas that impart reality to things.

The nexus of the Forms to nature was not merely a static question of class membership or "participation," as Plato called it. *Nous* actively projects its ideas on the world, giving things their essences, and thus, their reality. The good of all things, their aim and actuality, truth, unity, and substantial identity, flow forth as life giving water flows from a spring, or light from the sun. The imagery was physical, but the nexus was not material, as in the Stoics, but intellectual: The divine imparts reality by imparting an idea, bridging the chasm between changeable natures and the transcendent and eternal.

Students of *Kabbalah* will recognize the imagery: A candle is undiminished by lighting another. The object of the imagery is knowledge: Knowledge is undiminished when shared. Idea is the substance of Being, transcending the physical, imparted without loss to its source.[4]

Plotinus was no monotheist. Like Aristotle he revered a hierarchy of gods with a single highest at the summit. Like Plato he called that god the One and the Good. Indeed, he called it infinite, overcoming Aristotle's inhibitions about infinity, as if infinite meant indefinite. Plotinus could speak of the god's power, assigning *dynamis* a new meaning, no longer tied to mere potentiality (as contrasted with actuality).

This highest god, the Good or the One, Plotinus argued, was above *Nous*. For Mind, he reasoned, is not the best of things. Indeed, the One was above being. Definiteness, the clearest mark of being, was found in *Nous*, the Forms, as Plato held. Forms were a one/many, as Aristotle saw. Pure unity was higher, in the Good. Time began lower, as Mind gave rise to Soul. For (as our experience reveals) Soul thinks discursively. That is how it gives rise to nature.

"Gives rise to" – not generates. Plotinus retains Aristotle's bias against creation.[5] The Plotinian "hypostases" are not temporal. Their "procession" (*prohodos*) from higher to lower is not temporal, lest divinity be compromised. Each hypostasis reflects the divinity of its source. The world is temporal. Even in nature, it is the timeless essence that holds reality and truth. Temporality needs no temporal

beginning or end: The world has always been and will always be as we know it now, its pattern unchanging. For the cosmos too is divine.

IBN GABIROL (ca. 1021–ca.1058)

Two Hebrew poets address creation in philosophical works of stature equal to their poetry. Ibn Gabirol accommodates creation to emanation. Halevi will reject that accommodation.

Cliché has it that Ibn Gabirol's philosophical tome, known to Latin scholastics in John of Spain's translation as the *Fons Vitae* of "*Albenzubron*," bears no sign of Jewish authorship, lacking biblical citations or other marks of Hebrew piety. Christians took "Avicebron" or "Avicebrol" for an Arab. Moses ibn Ezra (1055–post 1135) knew the original Arabic, and Shem Tov ibn Falaquera translated selections, allowing Salomon Munk (1846)[6] to identify the well-loved sacred and secular poet Solomon ibn Gabirol as the author. Yet, beyond occasional citations of the *Sefer Yetzirah,* a mystical Neopythagorean work on creation fancifully ascribed to Abraham, the *Fons Vitae* announces its program in its title, taken from the Psalms, where God's law is the fountain of life: *"For with Thee is the fountain of life; by Thy light do we see light"* (Psalms 36:9).

Much as kabbalists will adopt a biblical name for emanation,[7] Ibn Gabirol's metaphysics sails under well-won biblical colors. The splendid mixed metaphor of a fountain of life and light brilliantly captures and authentically parallels in Hebrew cast the Neoplatonic thesis that beauty and goodness, truth and insight, flow from the divine. God's gift here is not just unity or stability, but existence, and specifically the Torah's paradigm case, the exuberant gift of life.

Written in dialogue form, the *Meqor Ḥayyim* (as Ibn Falaquera retranslated its title), tackles head on the eternalist bias of emanation. Neoplatonists in late antiquity had fought long and losing battles against Christian monotheism. Elaborating Aristotle's arguments, they made cosmic eternity the hallmark not just of Aristotelian naturalism and rationalism (How and why would the train of causes abruptly start or finish?) but also of pagan piety (Why would not the world reflect the undying reality of its source? Why would divine creation arbitrarily start, or end?).

Like many a later monotheist, Ibn Gabirol saw in emanation a threat and rival to divine grace. Neoplatonists like Proclus (ca. 410–485) had feared divine entanglement in temporality if nature were assigned a temporal origin. He mounted eighteen arguments against creation. Scriptural monotheists feared transcendence would be lost if God became an eternal fount of being. Emanation would make creation automatic, stripping freedom from God, and his creatures too, if they fell

into the vortex of overflowing bounty. For sunlight and the fountain's flow were only metaphors. Emanation, as Proclus made clear, was in fact a flow of entailments from axioms.

Seizing control of the machinery that powered the emanative fountain, Ibn Gabirol saw the lever monotheists needed: the first turning of otherness – the intelligible matter that made for difference beneath the unity of the One. "Will" must be emanation's first product, identical with the Godhead, yet distinct from it, cleaving the darkness and creating light, and being. Will forged the union of matter with form in nature. Will in Ibn Gabirol mediates between God and nature, just as the human soul mediates between reason and the body, imposing the order and organization that make life possible. If God acts by will, God can create, not just emanate; and humans too will be free, not caught in the emanative current but capable of independent acts – thus responsible, able (and obligated) to govern their natural temperaments.[8]

JUDAH HALEVI (BEFORE 1075–1140+)

His imagination fired by reports of the eighth-century conversion to Judaism of the powerful king of the Khazars in the Crimea, far from his own Iberian home "in the farthest west,"[9] Halevi envisions a dialogue (best known as *Kuzari,* ca. 1130–1140) between a rabbi and the Khazar king, whose recurrent dreams prompt him to seek a way of life that God approves. Strikingly, Halevi opens their interview not with creation, like the Christian and Muslim speakers in the dialogue, but with the Exodus, manna, Sinai, and other marks of God's providence over Israel. Halevi favors the particular and historical over the universal and metaphysical. Adapting Ibn Gabirol's gambit, he brings Will to the fore: Creation is but one of God's acts. Miracles and revelation go further. Providence is a constant reenactment of creation.

Slicing through the storeys of the emanative cosmos, Halevi asks, with earthy common sense, why God would need Neopythagorean numbers, spheres, or angels to create. The Neoplatonists' edifice only casts them back into the polytheism from which it arose. God requires no intermediary beyond his will, his commanding Word. Making the spheres precipitate from disembodied intellects is "sheer supposition, without a shred of cogency." How does simplicity become complex if the Neoplatonists are right that the simple gives rise only to what is simple?[10] Why does emanation end just where it does? Why should awareness imply intellects into existence – let alone spheres? Why did not Aristotle's self-knowledge give birth to a sphere?

BAḤYA IBN PAQUDA (ca. 1050–ca. 1156)

Baḥya couches his treatment of creation within the pietist premise of his *Guidance to the Duties of the Heart:* Mere service of the limbs is insufficient, ultimately empty. Purer intent and a more spiritual and devotional outlook demand intellectual commitment.

Baḥya assumes the world to be God's work. He soft-pedals the dispute between creation and emanation, focusing on God's wisdom, as Aristotle had (*De Partibus Animalium* I 5), and Plato before him. Citing Galen's stoicizing treatment of the biological hallmarks of providence (*De Usu Partium*), Baḥya reads Job 19:26, "*from my flesh shall I see God,*" not as a prayer for surcease and vindication but as confident affirmation of the wisdom visible in the body's design.[11]

God's grace, Baḥya argues, is discovered ever anew in the wisdom of nature's plan and profusion of his works, great and small. Meditation, then, should turn not only inward but upward (Isaiah 40:26) and outward, lest we neglect our potential for understanding. One who fails to study astronomy, if capable, is remiss (Isaiah 5:12, Shabbat 75a, at *Ḥovot* 2.2). The rhythms of the heavens, days, nights, seasons, animal and plant adaptations, even death, all have a wisdom that raises our thoughts to contemplation of their Maker and our destiny. Our talents must be cultivated like inherited fields, finding the value of all creatures to nature's plan, and the preciousness of the arts and sciences that allow us to prosper and pursue our higher end.

For man is creation's main purpose, albeit not its sole end. Coddled in the womb, endowed with the soul's supernal light, babes are parented with instinctual kindness. Tears wring excess moisture from the brain; new teeth replace children's worn dentition. Hands permit giving as well as taking. We have feet to walk, tongues to speak, genitals to procreate. Hearts sustain life, and brains sustain the spirit. With memory we recall our obligations. Even forgetting is a precious balm, healing our hurts. Shame supports our civility. Yet we are unashamed before an everpresent God, lest obedience become forced and so, unworthy.

Mind is God's greatest gift, distinguishing humankind, rendering us accountable, and aware of nature and the stars. Speech is our social bond and mark of excellence. Writing preserves the lessons of the past. It can make our thoughts eternal. Ancient monuments recall the powers and boasts of bygone days, humbling our pride in human doings and witnessing, as modest yardsticks, to God's vast work.

A single grain may yield a thousand; a seed grows to a mighty tree. Even the color of the sky accommodates our delicate eyes. God's most universal act is movement,

"the spirit of all nature" and constant vehicle of providence, from the rains that fructify the earth to the seemingly trivial accidents may bring fortune or disaster.

God's grace is manifest in revelation and the Exodus. Even in dispersion, He cares for his people. Society and economy provide for human needs, and all that is most needed is most abundant. For God's mercies are on all his works (Psalms 145:9).

MAIMONIDES (1138–1204)

Born in Cordova, rising to influence in Egypt as a *halakhic* authority, codifier, and physician, after his family's flight from the Almohades in the west, Maimonides confronts questions of creation both directly, in his critique of Neoplatonic Aristotelianism, and obliquely, in his voluntaristic recasting of emanation as the vehicle of creation, revelation, and providence.

The *Kalām* dialectical theologians (*loquentes* to the Latins) and the *falāsifa*, philosophers in the Greek tradition, who prided themselves on their rigor, shared, in supposing creation a matter of demonstration. The *Mutakallimūn*, practioners of *Kalām*, deduced creation from the radical contingency of (finite) being. The logic of existence, they urged (as Maimonides summarized their case) does not reach beyond the immediacy of the given. So the existence of one thing does not imply the existence of another – or even that the first extends beyond its slender arrow slit of being, or the immediacy of its moment. Existence, then, is an array of dimensionless atoms, each dependent on an act of God. None endures of itself or entails anything more, not even its own possession of any specific properties. All attributes are accidents. None are essential.

Pressing the contingency of all that is determinate, the *Mutakallimūn* shattered finite being into disparate fragments, shivered the causal nexus, atomized time and space, robbing nature of continuity. If all events depend on God's immediate act, not only is nature lost but human freedom and responsibility are obliterated.

As for the Philosophers, so convinced were they by Aristotle's case against creation that they overlooked what Saadia saw: that eternalism projects the familiar shapes of time, causality, potentiality, and matter far beyond the reach of our experience. Aristotle, Maimonides argues, had no proof of the world's eternity, and he knew it.[12] It was he, Aristotle, who taught us to distinguish rigor from mere persuasion. Aristotle would never have resorted to persuasive language, as he does in urging the world's eternity, had he thought his arguments here had apodeictic force.

A bright youth might readily deny accounts of his own birth and gestation if he knew only males. Human beings, he would insist, need air and food, space to move about in, an outlet for bodily wastes. How could one live and grow, trapped in a tiny, airless space? Eternalists, in the same way, force familiar notions onto the unknown processes of the world's origination: They presume that every possibility needs a material substrate, that no event or cause can be the first, that every moment must succeed some prior moment. They simply project a limited experience onto times and phases of the world's history far beyond their ken.

The *Mutakallimūn* tried to demonstrate creation but succeeded only in making every moment a new creation. The stress they laid on God's act and on the radical contingency of all things sprang from honest piety. Yet by destroying nature's continuities these occasionalists robbed God's gift of its worth. For creation, on their account, no longer imparted robust existence, or even room for natural action or human freedom.

The refutations of the *falāsifa* similarly misfired. Their arguments, if pressed, made not just creation but all change and diversity impossible, making all things necessary entailments of God's ultimate unity. Ironically, that made creation a necessity. For emanation, the Neoplatonists' atemporal substitute for creation, was a continuous outpouring, a legato counterpoint to the pizzicato creation of the *Kalām*, untrammeled but also unchanneled by any determinant beyond the inner logic of the (fixed) essences of things. Everything that could exist did exist. Nothing remained to be chosen or determined by man, or chance, or God.

Genesis proclaims that the world was created. If that were disproved, Maimonides writes, we would allegorize the text, just as we read the Torah's bold anthropomorphisms as poetry. But creation is not disproved. It cannot be.

If all attempts at demonstration recoil here, whether creationist or eternalist, how can Maimonides frame a position of his own? He finds two good reasons to take Genesis seriously: First, on eternalist assumptions, the nexus between God and nature seems dangerously etiolated, leaving us to wonder what difference God makes, if the world is eternal and thus necessary even without God's act. Second, the idea of creation, unlike emanation, does not try to derive a colorful world of change and diversity from God's sheer unity. The creation idea conceptualizes God in terms of will, not just wisdom – a richer, more appealing basis for theology. These thoughts do not amount to demonstrations. They do, however, show that creation is more probable, and theologically preferable to eternity.

Revisiting *falsafa* and *Kalām*, Maimonides finds much of enduring value in each. In *falsafa* he esteems the commitment to nature and its (relative) independence,

undercut by the school's necessitarianism but cherished in their philosophy nonetheless. In the *Mutakallimūn*, he prizes the recognition that possibility is not determined by familiarity. These theologians may fail to see that imagination is no adequate arbiter of possibility and impossibility. Not everything imaginable is possible. They do, however, suggest the value of distinguishing natural from logical possibility and necessity. Nature does have real boundaries, Maimonides reasons, not set by the laws of logic alone but ordained in the act of creation, of a piece with the gift of being.

In *falsafa* Maimonides prizes the idea that God's goodness shines through in the essences of all things. He denies that all creatures were made for man and man that he might worship God – a notion that seems to him to pile hubris atop rank anthropomorphism. Rather, one must recognize, with the Neoplatonists, that God made all things for their own sakes (although plants do serve the needs of animals). Scripture itself, as Maimonides reads it, affirms the local worth of each created being when it says that God made all things for his glory. God's glory is not the mere magnificence of his work but rather his commitment to his creatures' flourishing.[13]

Maimonides finds in creation a stronger, more appealing option than eternalism, because God makes a clearer difference to *and in* a created than an everlasting world. Maimonides does not follow his Muslim predecessor al-Ghazālī (1058–1111) into branding Neoplatonic eternalists atheists in spite of themselves. For in emanation too being is God's gift; all essences and insights stem from above.

Emanation, indeed, remains too precious to discard. Like al-Ghazālī, Maimonides preserves it, voluntaristically revised, to anchor his conceptions of creation, providence, and revelation. We know God not in himself (for man cannot see God's face and live) but through his works. In nature we encounter his act. What we understand we ascribe to God's wisdom. What we fail to understand, we can equally ascribe, in the biblical idiom, to God's will. In God's utter simplicity, of course, will and wisdom are one. They are distinguished only as a reflex of our finitude.

We encounter God within as well, in the workings of our minds. For all sound ideas reflect God's perfect wisdom. Even prophetic insights are the thoughts of a philosophical mind blessed by the earthier gifts of an imagination that fleshes them out in language, imagery, laws and symbols, rituals and institutions, making them transmissible, accessible to belief, suitable to be lived by.

Maimonides' scale of being is intellectual: God at the summit; sheer matter, mere otherness, obduracy, potentiality, and lack, at the base. All beings have their places on

this scale, the ladder of Jacob's dream.[14] None are merely static. Angels (Neoplatonic forms and Aristotelian forces[15]) ascend and descend, opening opportunities for realization – insight in the human case, as reason becomes self-conscious and explicit.

Insight allows us (if we sustain our bodies and make our character a suitable seat of inspiration) to realize our inner affinity to God. For emanation remains a two way street. It makes us responsive to the call of perfection and responsible for one another, materially, morally, and spiritually/intellectually. Insight opens up to us that connectedness to God that good laws and sound morals make way for in every Israelite, and every righteous human being. It leads us to our goal: the connectedness that mystics seek and that every philosopher with a healthy appetite for truth and self-fulfillment can win, through moral and intellectual self-discipline.

GERSONIDES (1288–1344)

Astronomer, exegete, and philosopher, in touch with the Christian scholars of the Papal court at Avignon, Gersonides invented Jacob's staff, long used to measure angular distances between the heavenly bodies. One of the few medieval astronomers to perform his own observations (as if sensitive to Bahya's talmudic admonition), Gersonides brings a distinctively cosmological perspective to questions of creation.

We may not know God well enough to judge whether creation is compatible with divinity, Gersonides argues in the *Wars of the Lord*.[16] Study of ordinary objects may leave us still in the dark. The heavens can settle the question. Aristotelians deem them eternal. Consider what is eternal and what is not: Geometrical laws are timeless. They have no why or wherefor. They just are as they must be. If someone draws a triangle, we can always ask why. Similarly with the world, only objects with an origin have a purpose; the heavenly bodies do serve a purpose, holding the world in equilibrium by an order and system that cannot arise by hazard.

The teleology confirms Gersonides' deep loyalty to the biblical convictions that the world is not divine and was not made as a waste but created to be dwelt in (Isaiah 45:18). If its order were eternal, as Neoplatonists suppose, cosmos and cause would be indissoluble, neither possible without the other. There is no logical necessity in the world's existence.

Gersonides looks back to the contingency arguments of the *Kalām* and Avicenna, forward to scholastic nominalism, empiricism, and voluntarism. He does not expect

reason to deduce what God must do or how the world must be, as if its laws and very existence were sheer geometrical deductions.

An emanated cosmos, as Gersonides sees, is not uncreated but continually created. So the Neoplatonists did not free God from temporality. The heavens the astronomer scans so closely are far from the incomposite, indestructible bodies that emanationists imagine. Each celestial body has its own contingent size and movement; all must be products of a higher will and choice. Time, moreover, cannot be eternal. For Aristotle himself showed that every magnitude must be bounded. Why would time be exempt?

Yet, on *ex nihilo* creation, Gersonides seeks a compromise, positing a primordial fluid medium for the revolving spheres. Lacking form, this proto-matter *is* nothing because only form gives things an identity and nature. That expedient helps Gersonides save creation and preserve God's will, allowing him in turn to preserve God's active role in history and sustain the possibility of miracles. Still Gersonides counsels caution here: Moses, the greatest prophet, was not outshone by Joshua. Indeed, to halt the sun at Gibeon (Joshua 10:12) would have been wasted effort. For Israel already trusted God, and no other nation is recorded to have turned to God in awe when the sun stood still.

ḤASDAI CRESCAS (d. 1412)

Favored by John II of Aragon but devastated by his son's death in the anti-Jewish violence of 1391, Crescas labored to rebuild the shattered communities and their faith. His *Light of the Lord* (1410) argued in elegant Hebrew against Maimonidean rationalism, as if finding piety weakened by Maimonides' confident intellectualism. Crescas' radical critique aims for the Aristotelian roots of Maimonides' cosmology. Like Nicole Bonet (d. ca. 1343), Thomas Bradwardine (1290–1349), and Nicole Oresme (ca. 1320–1382), Crescas presages a Renaissance physics.[17]

His key cosmological target is the Aristotelian bias against infinity. For Aristotle, time could stretch infinitely into the past and future, being never wholly actual. The spatial or temporal continuum was infinitely divisible – *potentially*. The division would never be completed. Yet Aristotle's cosmos was finite in size. To ask what lay beyond it was meaningless. Place, *by definition*, was a body's location. Avicenna, following Aristotle's lead, reasoned that no causal series extends to infinity. A line of begats might be infinite, being uncompleted. The train of supernal intellects was bounded by God above and material nature below.

All this, Crescas saw, was suppositious. Space, for openers, is not coextensive with body and not identical with place. Space can be empty, without fear of

Parmenidean paradox. Space, indeed, predates the world, which still lies in infinite space. In calling God *ha-Maqom*, the Place, the talmudic rabbis framed an insightful metaphor: For God, as it were, encompasses the world and permeates it, much as space does.

All things, Crescas argues, move by their own natures – not because they have a natural place: Heavy objects fall by their weight; light ones rise when pressed upward by the rest. Even the spheres rotate by nature. They are not steered by the disembodied intelligences.

Time is not the measure of motion but the duration of motion *or rest* between moments, an *experiential,* not purely physical span. There is no reason why time cannot be infinite, and, being distinct from motion, time is not divorced from God or the intelligences. So God is everlasting, but not above or apart from time.

We cannot rule out an infinite causal series, especially because one cause may have multiple effects. That possibility dissolves Aristotelian prime mover arguments. God's existence, in fact, cannot be proved. For infinite time, space, and causal power – even the infinite worlds Aristotle tried to exclude – all point to God's infinitude, utterly beyond our ken.

Crescas evinces shock that Maimonides read Moses' request to see God's glory as a veiled petition for proof of God's reality.[18] Any philosophical tyro knows that God's essence is beyond us. So the greatest prophet would hardly expect to confirm God's existence from a glimpse of his essence!

Nature reflects (but inverts) God's infinitude (as if in a mirror). Even an infinite cosmos is contingent, as Avicenna saw that any determinacy must be. God depends on nothing. Even infinite attributes are one within his infinite goodness. The act of creation, grounded in love, does not compromise God's unity. His joy (revising a thought of Gersonides' and echoing Philo[19]) springs not from discovery, self-absorption, or acquisition but from giving: Love was showered on the Patriarchs and is reciprocated by Israel, here and in the hereafter.

Our coverage in the present volume extends only to the seventeeth century. It would create a false impression to suggest that the ideas of creation and emanation, clashing or resolving into harmony, did not continue to resonate in Jewish philosophy down to the present moment – as if the biblical, rabbinic, or philosophical texts and insights of prior ages were no longer studied, pondered, answered, and addressed. That kind of curtailment would falsify the very nature of Judaic thought. For what is, perhaps, most characteristic of this tradition is that the ideas broached within it are never merely and simply finished. Rather, they are taken up, reinterpreted, rebutted, reworked, and reconceived in an ongoing dialogue that refuses to treat the past as merely past.

SPINOZA (1632–1677)

Where Philo wrote in Greek, addressing Plato and the Stoics, and helped found the great tradition of monotheistic philosophy, Spinoza wrote in Latin, answering Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes, and Machiavelli, and helped found the republican liberalism that took flight under Locke's colors in Anglo-American thought.[20] Crescas' defense of infinity,[21] the uninhibited kabbalistic language that calls God the Infinite, and Maimonides' making Form and Matter expressions of the ultimate unity of God's will and wisdom, all help Spinoza escape scholastic trammels – just as Leone-Ebreo (Judah Abrabanel, 1460–1521) helps him explain how God can return our love, through our own intellectual love of Him.[22]

Spinoza spurns creation, for opening an unbridgeable chasm between God and nature. As he does so often,[23] he rehabilitates a radically redefined version of the rejected idea, treating thought and extension, the Cartesian counterparts of Form and Matter, as God's attributes: God, infinite being, expressed in infinite ways, becomes not the mere Author of nature but its entirety.

Clearly the linkage of creation with miracles did not sit well with Spinoza, nor did creation's connection with notions of an arbitrary will, which Spinoza took to be inconsistent with causal determination – and logical determinacy. Will is a specious reification in psychology, pretending to locate a cause but only renaming the effect. Free will, if that means undetermined acts, is utterly illogical, because determinacy is a condition of existence, as much in God as in anything. Still God enjoys freedom in a more real sense, being self-determined. Human beings too are free, insofar as we gain autonomy and act rather than just bow to externals and their internalized effects, the passions.

Creation truncates time and the causal series, Spinoza reasoned, following Aristotle and Averroes. By setting God and the world apart (just as dualism sunders mind from body), it makes God's power a mystery. Descartes' proposed symphysis of mind and body in the pineal gland reveals only his ingenuity. That outcome parodies in small the issue of God's connection to the world.

Spinoza's bold answer to the conundrum of creation: Matter must no longer be divorced from God. It will be eternal and infinite, as Crescas suggested; and an attribute of God, as Maimonides suggested when he wrote that the fullest monotheism sees God in all things and observed that biblically all that we comprehend is ascribed to God's wisdom, and all that eludes our understanding, to God's will. For Maimonides these attributes are what we apprehend of God's work in nature. Spinoza will define them as what intellect apprehends of God's essence. Intellect is not mistaken: The attributes are real; only their ultimate diversity is

subjective – prompting the illusion that they are substances and leaving matter as an indigestible residue, somehow, mysteriously, to be created and governed by a spiritual God.

Descartes was right in holding thought and extension mutually irreducible. We *cannot* know any third kind they would reduce or relate to. We have nothing in common with anything beyond thought and extension, but the two are not substances. For a substance, by Aristotle's standard, exists in itself – and is conceived through itself, as Descartes stipulates. Only what is infinite *in every way* fills that description. So God is the only substance. Infinite thought and infinite extension are two of the infinite attributes in which God's absolute perfection is expressed.

The idea of expression recaptures what Spinoza finds compelling in the idea of creation,[24] assimilating creation to its inveterate rival, emanation, but retaining the contrast between derived and intrinsic necessity that Avicenna found at the core of the scriptural creation idea. Spinoza holds onto the Neoplatonic equation of natural with logical necessity but reverses its ancient sense, taking logical necessity causally[25] rather than reading natural laws as axioms and events as their implications. Spinoza's rationalism is thus robustly empiricist. It melts the block universe in which Maimonides warned that stringent Neoplatonic and Averroist intellectualists would be frozen.

Discarded as exuviae of an overactive imagination are all notions of cosmic origin, all arbitrary volitions, all disruptions of nature's order, all purposes *beyond local aims*. Conatus, each thing's striving to preserve and promote its own being,[26] replaces Aristotelian essence, renamed, because essences now are individual not universal, and dynamic not unchanging. It is in dynamism, not stasis, that each thing uniquely expresses God's reality and pursues perfection.

Thematizing the tradition, we find an abiding commitment to the worth and beauty of nature, whose goodness manifests God's bounty. Creation speaks for God's transcendent perfection. Transcendence becomes immanent through emanation, or in nature's own ebullience, and strikingly, in human freedom, creativity, and inspiration – in Spinoza's terms, drawn from the tradition, conatus and the intellectual love of God.

The values spoken for by the idea of creation frame the idea that the world is new – fresh when created, or new in each new moment. Beyond that, creation is seen as a gift: Existence in general and life specifically are things of precious value, not mere facts and not of objects of their own devising. Each being is something to be cherished, and each human person is cherished all the more for his or her uniqueness.

The world, as viewed through the lens of Genesis, is welcoming. It is not a bed of roses but neither is it hobbled by fate nor condemned by sin. Nature is open to inquiry and exploration, receptive to improvement and care, conducive to life, responsive to human generosity, and amenable, given effort, to human flourishing. These are the abiding themes of creation as construed in the history and tradition of Jewish philosophical thinking.

NOTES

1 Parmenides, in Kirk and Raven 1963, pp. 269–73, §§ 344–7.
2 Plato, *Timaeus* 29E.
3 Saadia titled his summa not *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* but, as Kafih shows from the manuscripts, *The Book of Critically Chosen Beliefs and Convictions*.
4 See Plato *Timaeus* 42E as read by Plotinus at *Enneads* V 4.2, III 8.10, IV 8.6, V 1.3, and Proclus, *Platonic Theology* V 18. Commenting on 25–26 of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, E. R. Dodds cites the stoicizing *Sophia Salamonis* 7.27 for the doctrine, as well as Philo, *Legum Allegoriae* I 5 and later writers like Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Numenius ap. Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* XI 18. See Proclus 1964, p. 214.
5 See, e.g., Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 8.6, where creation is essential to the Good.
6 Extracts from the work were published by Munk 1859.
7 Kabbalists take their term for emanation from Numbers 11:25, where the root *'-tz-l* is applied to prophetic inspiration.
8 See Ibn Gabirol 1902.
9 To Halevi, the west was the land of exile, not just physically but also spiritually; see L. Goodman 1997.
10 See Hyman 1992.
11 Ibn Paquda 1973a, p. 160; Altmann 1975.
12 Cf. Aristotle, *Topics* I.11, 104b 13–18.
13 See *Guide* III.13 (Maimonides 1963, p. 453), glossing Genesis 1:31, Exodus 33:18, Isaiah 43:7, Proverbs 16:4.
14 *Guide* I.15 (Maimonides 1963, pp. 40–1), citing Genesis 28:12–13.
15 See L. Goodman 2000.
16 Gersonides 1999; Staub 1982.
17 See H. Wolfson 1929a; W. Harvey 1998b; Pines 1967.
18 *Guide* I.54 (Maimonides 1963, p. 124), citing Exodus 33:18.
19 Philo adapts the Stoic notion of *eupatheiai*, good emotions, making will, caring, and joy applicable to God. See Winston 1992, pp. 24–30; cf. Spinoza's conception of active as opposed to passive emotions.
20 See H. Wolfson 1961; H. Wolfson 1934.
21 Crescas is among the few medieval philosophers Spinoza cites by name, calling him Rab Ghasdaj (Letter 12, to Lodewijk Meyer), explaining that the argument from contingency need not assume the impossibility of an infinite causal series but only that even an infinite sequence of causes and effects is not to be deemed self-sufficing.
22 See Saadia 1988, pp. 256–7, citing Isaiah 40:10, 49:4, and Psalms 104:31, arguing that God does not yearn, desire, or crave; see ad Job 14:15. Such emotions are more properly our own. Yet God does "rejoice in the righteous"; thus they "rejoice in Him";

cf. Shaharit liturgy: *she-me-ahavatkha she-ahavta 'oto u-mi-simḥatkha she-samakhta bo'* and Spinoza, *Ethics* VP20, 32, 35–36.

23 See L. Goodman 2002.

24 See Deleuze 1990.

25 See Mason 1997, pp. 55–60.

26 See Spinoza, *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-being*, V: "Providence . . . according to us is nothing other than that striving we find both in the whole of Nature and in individual things to sustain and preserve their being. For it is evident that no thing, through its own nature, could strive for its own destruction. Rather, each thing has within it a striving to preserve itself in its state and bring itself to a better one." As Edwin Curley remarks, ad loc., "Note that in this, its first appearance in Spinoza's writings, the striving is not merely a conservative tendency, but a progressive one" (Spinoza 1985, p. 84). I suspect that it is only because Nature as a whole on Spinoza's view does not progress that he omits mention of the progressive tendency of individual things when he speaks of conatus in general terms.

19

THEODICY AND PROVIDENCE

STEVEN NADLER

We are told that Job is a blameless and upright man (*tam ve-yashar*), that he fears God and turns away from wrongdoing. When his tribulations begin, he accepts them unshaken in his faith and unwilling to speak ill of God. "If we accept good from God, shall we not accept evil?" (Job 2:10). Ultimately, however, it is all too much even for him. When Job is finally overcome by his suffering, when he has been robbed of everything that was dear to him, when all seems lost, he raises his voice to complain to God about the way he, a righteous individual, has been treated. While Job recognizes God's wisdom and power, he nonetheless questions God's justice. God, he insists, "rains blows on me without cause . . . He destroys blameless and wicked alike" (Job 9:17–22).

The Book of Job offers the first real presentation in Jewish literature of what has come to be known as "the problem of evil." To generate this problem, a number of conceptual and empirical ingredients are required. First, of course, there is the claim that there is a God and that God is the Creator (or, at least, the causal source) of the world we inhabit. Second, there is the claim that there is evil (either real or apparent) in God's creation. Whether we want to focus on what might be called physical evil, metaphysical evil, or moral evil, there must nonetheless be some order of imperfection in the world, especially relative to human beings. Sometimes the imperfection at issue will be the sins committed by moral agents. At other times, it will consist in the suffering of the innocent and the flourishing of the wicked. Birth defects, natural disasters, and undeserved punishment are all undeniable features of the world. In and of itself, this is troubling but not philosophically problematic. It becomes problematic – and generates the set of questions that constitute the problem of evil – only when taken in conjunction with a number of claims about God, claims that also prevent any kind of simplistic solution to those questions. First, God is omnipotent; that is, God can do whatever God wills to do, and God's will is, at least absolutely speaking, of infinite scope. This prevents one from saying that God cannot do anything about the evils in his creation. Second, God is omniscient; God knows everything, including the alleged defects in his work. This

prevents one from saying that God could (and would) do something about the evils in his creation, if only he knew about them; because he obviously has not done anything about them, he must not know about them. Third, God is benevolent and just; God wills only what is good. This prevents one from resolving the conundrum simply by saying that God knows about the evils, and is capable of preventing them, but simply does not care to do so. How, then, can we reconcile the existence of pain, evil, and undeserved suffering in the world with the claim that the world was created by a just, wise, good, omniscient, omnipotent, and free God?

The seventeenth-century philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz coined a word to refer to the philosophical attempt to answer this question. A theodicy – from the ancient Greek words *theos* (God) and *diké* (justice) – takes seriously the tension between these various metaphysical, moral, and theological claims and seeks to provide a justification of God's ways. Job's friends engage in theodicy when they come to him to offer rationalizations for why he has been visited with such disaster. There must be a sufficient and satisfying explanation for Job's situation, they argue, either because of his or his relations' iniquities or because God has, in his wisdom, some other reason that transcends our cognitive powers. Eliphaz suggests that if Job is suffering, it must be because he has sinned somewhere along the way. God is just, he claims, and a just God does not inflict undeserved punishment. Eliphaz also insists that the metaphysical distance between the human being and God implies that the human being is essentially corrupt and therefore deserving of whatever evils God brings his way.

> What is frail man that he should be innocent, or any child of woman that he should be justified? If God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not innocent in his sight, how much less so is man, who is loathsome and rotten? (Job 15:14–16)

Another one of Job's friends, foreshadowing a type of theodicy that will become quite prominent in Jewish philosophical thinking about evil, believes that our judgments about God's justice should not be limited to what we see in some narrow slice of this life, in which it often happens that the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. If Job is truly innocent, Bildad suggests, then he should consider that he will be rewarded in the long term – not just in this life, which for the righteous is long and eventually prosperous, but especially in what will come to him after his death.

> It is the wicked whose light is extinguished, from whose fire no flame will rekindle; the light fades in his tent, and his lamp dies down and fails him . . . He roots beneath dry up, and above, his branches wither. His memory vanishes from the face of the earth, and he leaves no name in the world. He is driven from light into darkness and banished from the land of the living. He leaves no issue or offspring among his people, no survivor in his earthly home. (Job 18:5–20)

The ultimate fate of the wicked, despite their temporary flourishing, is oblivion. The implication is that the righteous person, on the other hand, although he may suffer for a time in this life, should enjoy the knowledge that the fruits and rewards of his virtue will be great in the end and will persist long after he is gone from this world. As Zophar insists, "the triumph of the wicked is short-lived, the glee of the godless lasts but a moment. Though he stands high as heaven, and his head touches the clouds, he will be swept away utterly, like his own dung" (Job 20:5-7).

From the perspective of theodicy, the Book of Job ends on an ambiguous and, ultimately, unsatisfying note. Elihu's speech, after the other friends are done, seems at first to represent a supreme defense of God's justice – a justice, in fact, couched in simple, comprehensible, even human terms. "Far be it from God to do evil or the Almighty to play false! For he pays a man according to his work and sees that he gets what his conduct deserves. The truth is, God does no wrong, the Almighty does not pervert justice" (Job 34:10–12). Yet, he ends by appealing to God's metaphysical and epistemological transcendence, and (by implication) the inscrutability of his ways: "God is so great that we cannot know him" (36:26). One must have faith that God is just, but with a justice that is beyond our understanding and such that he cannot be called to account. God's final speech seems only to confirm Elihu's sentiments. After pointing out the majesty and wonder of creation and the ultimate mystery and incomprehensibility of the world, God puts a simple end to the discussion: "Can you deny that I am just or put me in the wrong that you may be right?" (40:8). God is just, but with a justice that cannot be explained in terms drawn from human justice.[1]

Despite this final antirationalism about divine justice, the Book of Job was the spur for a long rationalist tradition in Jewish thought on the problem of evil.[2] The first section of this chapter contains a brief discussion of Philo of Alexandria, who (although certainly not a rationalist) offers some important reflections on the problem of evil and its relationship to divine providence that are echoed in later rationalist thinking. Subsequent sections are devoted to a number of theodicean strategies adopted by rationalist Jewish philosophers (primarily Saadia ben Joseph, Maimonides, and Gersonides – all of whom, it is worth noting, offered extensive commentary on the Book of Job), and especially to the ways in which some of them incorporate into their theodicies views on divine providence to help resolve the puzzle. The final section highlights the culmination of this rationalist tradition in the heterodox thought of Spinoza. Although there are other philosophers who made significant contributions to the analysis of providence and evil in medieval Jewish philosophy – including, most notably, Samuel ibn Tibbon in the twelfth century and Joseph Albo in the fifteenth[3] – the discussion here will be limited to those contributions that are arguably the most original and important.

I. PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

The question addressed by Philo in the fragment *On Providence* (*De Providentia*, II) concerns the charge that, given the "vast confusion and disorder of affairs" in the world, there is no divine providence. "Which of the circumstances and occurrences of human life is regulated by any principle or order, which of them is not full of all kinds of irregularity and destruction?" Most troubling, in Philo's eyes, one finds that wicked people prosper and virtuous people suffer at their hands. He takes note of the fact:

> Blessings in complete abundance are heaped upon the most wicked and worthless of mankind, such as wealth, a high reputation, honor in the eyes of the multitude, authority, health, a good condition of the outward senses, beauty, strength and an unimpeded enjoyment of all good things . . . While all the lovers of wisdom and practisers of wisdom and prudence, and every kind of virtue, everyone of them I may almost say are poor, unknown, inglorious, and in a mean condition.[4]

At one point, Philo suggests that the whole question is based on ignorance. Those whom we believe to be righteous may not really be so; thus, their suffering is not necessarily undeserved. "It does not follow that if some persons are reckoned virtuous among men, they are so in real truth; since the criteria by which God judges are far more accurate than any of the test by which the human mind is guided."[5] Nonetheless, Philo recognizes that the problem cannot be so quickly dismissed. Thus, he offers a two-part reply to the charge against divine providence grounded in the apparent disorder in the distribution of goods in the world. Both aspects of his theodicy are designed to show that God is "a sovereign invested with a humane and lawful authority, and as such he governs all the heaven and the whole world in accordance with justice."[6]

First, in an answer that will become a classic theodicean model in later philosophical and religious thought, Philo argues that in fact the wicked are not truly flourishing, despite appearances. The goods from which we see them benefiting are not true goods. Wealth, honor, and health are at best dubious achievements. Given their fleeting and mutable nature, their possession is short-lived and highly dependent on many factors beyond one's control; it is, therefore, the cause of great anxiety. The life of the wicked is full of insecurity, fear, and danger; it may contain many resources and supplies, but never any enjoyment of them.

> Do not ever be so deceived and wander from the truth to such a degree as to think any wicked man happy, even though he may be richer than Croesus and more sharp-sighted than Lyceus, and more powerful than Milo of Crotena, and more beautiful than Ganymede . . . [Because]

such a man [is] the slave of ten thousand different masters, such as love, appetite, pleasure, fear, pain, folly, intemperance, cowardice, injustice, he can never possibly be happy, even if the multitude, being utterly misled and deprived of their judgement, were to think him so.[7]

The wicked person and his admirers are not the real judges of what is good. Only the virtuous person knows that the true end is the one he enjoys: virtue itself, "the only good, the only beautiful thing."[8] Philo's first strategy is thus to reject the premise on which the challenge to God's justice rests. "No wicked man is happy."[9]

Philo's second strategy addresses the suffering of the virtuous by appealing directly to the modus operandi of divine providence. This approach, too, will manifest itself in later Jewish and Christian thought on evil. The resolution of the prima facie tension between God's justice and apparent disorder in the distribution of flourishing is to be found in the generality of God's ways – or, more particularly, in the universal and lawlike order that God has established in nature. When we see a virtuous person suffer, it is not because God has directly chosen to inflict punishment on this individual, with an ad hoc intention; his suffering is not the result of what Philo calls "immediate providence" (*kata pronoian*). Rather, his suffering is a result of the general manner in which nature works. God's providential ways are not directed toward the well-being of particular individuals but to the overall well-being of the system and the general welfare of creatures. Thus, it may sometimes happen that an operation of nature that is, on the whole, for the best (and was chosen by God for that reason) has consequences that, from the perspective of one individual or another, are not optimal. God looks to the goodness of the whole, not its particular constituents, some of whom may (unjustly, it seems) get swept along by the course of events.

In pestilential diseases, it is necessary that some of those who are not guilty should be involved in the destruction . . . It is inevitable that those who are exposed to a pestilential atmosphere must become diseased just as all persons who are exposed to a storm on board a ship must all be exposed to equal danger.[10]

God does not intend for the virtuous individual to suffer; his suffering is, in this sense, "accidental," one of "the results and consquences of the operations of nature."[11] Indeed, it is the person himself who is to blame for his suffering, because it is his responsibility to take care within the course of nature and be on guard against any disasters that may be coming his way. Later Jewish thinkers will demonstrate how the pursuit of virtue does, in fact, afford one some relief and protections from the vicissitudes of nature.

II. SAADIA BEN JOSEPH (SAADIA GAON)

The Book of Job, like most of Hebrew scripture, bears no explicit mention or even implication of an immortal soul or an afterlife. Nonetheless, as the speeches by Bildad and Zophar testify, the work does suggest a theodicy that has the following general structure: Do not judge God's justice without taking an extended perspective on a person's fate, including their death and what happens afterward. In the end, everyone receives his just deserts: In the long run, the righteous are rewarded and the wicked are punished. When any of the more robust rabbinic Jewish traditions on immortality is, later, added to this idea – which may initially have been merely a simplistic statement about the length of a person's life or the reputation that will persist after he is gone – there emerges, quite naturally, a particular solution to the problem of evil. The true domain of divine justice, according to this form of theodicy, is not this world, but the world-to-come, *'olam ha-ba*. It is in the world-to-come that real reward and punishment are allocated to the righteous and wicked. Good people may suffer in this life, they may undergo pain and misfortune, perhaps because of their few sins, but they will be more than compensated for their sufferings by the rewards that await them in the hereafter. Conversely, the wicked may flourish in this world, usually at the expense of the righteous; but whatever gains they acquire in the here and now are nothing in comparison to the suffering to be inflicted on them either after their death or at the end of days. When we take all of this into account, we can understand the larger context of the suffering of the virtuous and the innocent, and, more importantly, realize the true justice of God's ways. When we adopt a long-term perspective, we see how everyone ultimately receives their due, and we will no longer be tempted to question God's goodness, wisdom, and power.[12] There are even figures in the Talmud and the *midrashim* for whom suffering in this life appears to be a welcome prelude to blessedness in the world-to-come. Thus, we are told that Rabbi Nehemiah insisted: "Which is the way which brings a man to the life of the world to come? Sufferings."[13] This may not be *the* dominant theodicean strain in Jewish thought. Many rabbis, believing that divine justice manifests itself not in the world-to-come but in the world we live in, stressed the importance of punishment for sin and reward for righteousness in *this* life. Nonetheless, it is a theodicy that holds a powerful attraction for some important Jewish thinkers.

The tenth-century philosopher, and head (or *gaon*) of the rabbinic academy in Babylonia, Saadia ben Joseph, presents this kind of theodicy in particularly clear and systematic terms. Like Philo, he is especially concerned to account for the suffering experienced by the righteous and the flourishing experienced by the wicked.

In his philosophical masterpiece, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (in Arabic: *Kitāb al-Amānāt wa'l-'Itiqādāt*), Saadia begins his discussion of the problem of evil by noting that God not only discerns the sins and inequities in the souls of human beings, but keeps a tally of each person's balance. Saadia defines a righteous or pious person as a person for whom the number of his merits or good deeds exceeds the number of his demerits. "When merits predominate in the soul, the latter is thereby purified and luminous." An impious person, conversely, is someone for whom the demerits or sins outnumber the merits. "When the demerits are in the majority in it, the soul becomes turbid and darkened."[14] "He is to be called 'pious' in whose conduct the good deeds predominate, and he is to be designated as 'impious' in whose conduct evil deeds are predominant."[15] A just God, then, will reward and punish a person accordingly, as determined by whether he is, on balance, pious or impious.

The true reward and punishment for one's deeds, however, takes place not in this world but in the world-to-come.

> God has also informed us that during our entire sojourn in this workaday world He keeps a record of everyone's deeds. The recompense for them, however, has been reserved by Him for the second world, which is the world of compensation. This latter world will be brought into being by Him when the entire number of rational beings, the creation of which has been decided upon by His wisdom, will have been fulfilled. There will He requite all of them according to their deeds.[16]

Like the Mutazilites before him (by whom he was influenced),[17] Saadia offers two main arguments for the claim that the true reward for virtue and the true punishment for sin occur in the world-to-come, both of which rely on a premise about God's essential justice and the assertion that, were the distribution of reward and punishment not so organized, one could reasonably question that justice. First, it is "incompatible with [God's] character" that the happiness deserved by the pious should be merely the mundane well-being and pleasures found in this life, none of which last very long or comes unaccompanied by hardship and sorrow. Second, experience shows that in this life, the virtuous often suffer at the hands of the vicious. "A further proof is presented by the violence which we see men committing against each other resulting in the well-being of the one who committed the wrong and the misery of the wronged respectively. Then they die." Because God is just, Saadia argues, "He must perforce have reserved for them a second abode in which justice would be restored in their relationship to each other . . . We see the godless prospering in this world while believers are in misery therein. There can, therefore, be no escaping the belief that there exists for the former, as well as for the latter, a

second world in which they will be recompensed in justice and righteousness."[18] Clearly there must be a second domain in which divine justice properly plays itself out.

Saadia does not leave it at that, however. Suffering and flourishing in this world are not merely a prelude to justice in the world-to-come. Even the distribution of good and evil in this world, as haphazard as it may seem to us, is governed by principles of divine justice and wisdom. It is not just that the suffering of the virtuous is compensated for by an eternal prosperity. Often the suffering of a virtuous person is indeed punishment for sins that that individual (unless he is perfectly virtuous) has committed. God would not be just if the iniquities of the pious person and the good deeds of the wicked person – that is, the minority of the deeds, respectively, in each person's total – were simply ignored and not dealt with in some way. Thus, God provides in this world the short-lived rewards and punishments for the minority of a person's deeds, and in the world-to-come the eternal rewards and punishments for the majority of a person's deeds.

> It is furthermore a [general] rule laid down in this matter by the All-Wise to requite His servants in this world for the minority of their deeds and leave the majority for the next world, since it would not be seemly to transfer them in that other world from one status to another . . . He therefore instituted recompense in this world only for the lesser [portion of man's conduct], as He also explained that the totality of his merits is reserved for a far-off time, whereas the small proportion of his demerits is dealt with in this world.[19]

Why, then, do we see in this world virtuous individuals suffering and vicious individuals flourishing? One answer is that the virtuous individual is being punished and the vicious individual rewarded for the minority of their respective deeds.

> On the basis of this principle it often happens that a generally virtuous person may be afflicted with many failings, on account of which he deserves to be in torment for the greater part of his life. On the other hand, a generally impious individual may have to his credit many good deeds, for the sake of which he deserves to enjoy well-being for the greater part of his earthly existence.[20]

All of this holds, however, only on the important assumption that neither the virtuous individual nor the vicious individual regrets his good deeds or repents his evil deeds. If the vicious individual repents his evil deeds then he no longer deserves to be punished in the next world for them; if he regrets his good deeds, then he forfeits his right subsequently to be rewarded in this world for them and will henceforth experience torment in this world as well as the next. If the virtuous person repents his few iniquities, then he no longer carries the obligation subsequently to be punished for them in this world and will henceforth experience

well-being here and in the afterlife; if he regrets his good deeds, then he forfeits his right to be rewarded for them in the world-to-come.[21]

Sometimes, however, a perfectly virtuous (or "completely righteous") individual suffers in this life without having committed any sins whatsoever. Saadia insists that his suffering, although related to the question of divine justice, does not fall under the class of punishments but constitutes another category altogether: trials. Although this issue is broached in *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*,[22] it receives a fuller treatment in Saadia's analysis of the case of Job, the *Book of Theodicy* (in Arabic, *Kitāb al-Tādil*).[23]

In his commentary on Job, Saadia says that the sufferings meted out by God to righteous individuals can fall under one of three categories. First, there is the suffering involved in discipline and instruction. This kind of suffering "is for our own good," much as a father may painfully instill a lesson in a child so that he will remember it or the wise person burdens himself with hard work to come to a deeper understanding of some matter. This kind of suffering requires no prior wrongdoing from the individual. The second form of suffering, as discussed in the theodicy of *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, is that of punishment. The third kind, however, is that involved in "trial and testing." In this instance, a pious person may undergo certain torments not because he deserves them for some sin he has committed (in this respect it resembles the first case), but because God (who nevertheless knows the outcome of the exercise) is testing him to increase the reward ultimately due this person for his greater (and now proven) fortitude.

> An upright servant, whose Lord knows that he will bear sufferings loosed upon him and hold steadfast in his uprightness, is subjected to certain sufferings, so that when he steadfastly bears them, his Lord may reward him and bless him.[24]

Despite the fact that the suffering is undeserved, this testing does not undermine God's justice ("This is not unjust on God's part"). On the contrary, Saadia insists that such sufferings are "an act of generosity and benevolence," because they give the tested person an opportunity to assure his eternal bliss in the world-to-come and obtain more than he had hoped for in this life. Such are the rewards for the righteous who endure these trials.[25]

This, of course, is Job's situation. On Saadia's reading, Job complains (wrongly) that God is afflicting him despite his being guilty of no sin just because "it pleases him." The friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are offended by this and respond that if Job is being punished, then, because God is just, it must be that he has somehow sinned. According to Saadia, this, too, is wrong. Only Elihu, he believes, gets it right. Elihu alone sees that, without undermining divine justice, one need

not accept that the only legitimate occasion for God to cause suffering is to punish wrongdoing.

> When sufferings and calamities befall us . . . they must be of one of two classes: either they occur on account of prior sins of ours, in which case they are to be called punishments, and we must search out the relevant shortcomings and remove them and improve our actions . . . Or they are a trial from the Allwise, which we must bear steadfastly, after which He will reward us . . . In neither case do we ascribe any injustice to the Creator.[26]

Job, a perfectly righteous man, is being tested, Saadia concludes. God, he insists, confirms this both in his own speech and in the compensation that Job receives at the end of the story.

The remarkable feature of Saadia's theodicy is the rationalist assumption at its core. God's justice is explicable in terms drawn from human conceptions of justice: either justice as punishment or justice as compensation. The lesson that Saadia takes from the Book of Job is not that God, while essentially just, operates by ways that are inscrutable. On the contrary, God's justice is governed by rational principles. When all is said and done, everyone gets exactly what they deserve: Everyone receives reward and punishment, both in this world and the next, that is perfectly proportionate to their deeds.

Later medieval Jewish philosophers, such as Maimonides and Gersonides, agree with Saadia that the true reward for virtue is not freedom from pain or suffering in this life – although a life of true virtue will, because of the nature of virtue, grant one some relief and protection from many of life's vicissitudes. Rather, the virtuous find their real reward in a greater happiness in the world-to-come. This is, of course, also a standard feature of many a Christian theodicy. What is particularly important, however, is the intellectualist character that the rationalists Maimonides and Gersonides give this doctrine.

III. MAIMONIDES

In *Guide of the Perplexed* (in Arabic, *Dalālat al-Ḥa'irin*; in Hebrew, *Moreh Nevukhim*) Maimonides, like many other medieval thinkers, rejects Manicheanism and argues that evil is not a real and positive being.[27] Whatever is real and caused by God is good. "All evils are privations," he insists, and are constituted by the lack of some goodness or perfection.

> With respect to man, for instance, his death is an evil, since death is his nonbeing. Similarly, his illness, his poverty, or his ignorance are evils with regard to him, and all of them are privations of habitus.[28]

At one point, in fact, Maimonides seems close to dismissing evil altogether as an illusion due to our anthropocentric way of looking at the world.[29] Still, he recognizes that no ontological sleight of hand will really make evil as a phenomenon disappear and obviate the need for a theodicy.

With respect to human beings, all evils/privations are grounded in our matter. Our material element is the source of wicked impulses, base desires, and ignorance.

> The nature and the true reality of matter are such that it never ceases to be joined to privation . . . All man's acts of disobedience and sins are consequent upon his matter and not upon his form, whereas all his virtues are consequent upon his form . . . It was necessary that man's very noble form, which, as we have explained, is the *image of God and His likeness*, should be bound to earthy, turbid, and dark matter, which calls down upon man every imperfection and corruption.[30]

Maimonides divides human evil into three categories. First, there are the evils that happen to us in the ordinary course of nature just because, as material beings, we are subject to the elements. "The first species of evil is that which befalls man because of the nature of coming-to-be and passing-away, I mean to say because of his being endowed with matter." Bodily infirmities, injuries, even death itself are unavoidable in our human condition. Second, there are the evils that human beings inflict on one another: deceit, tyrannical domination, physical harm. Third, there are the evils that an individual brings on himself through his own action. "This kind is consequent upon all vices," Maimonides says, and includes intemperate eating and drinking as well as excessive copulation. This species of evil brings harm not only to the body, but to the soul as well, as its moral qualities are affected by the temperament of the body.[31] Regardless of whether or not evil is categorized as something real and positive, there can be no denying that these three kinds of evil (whatever their ontological status) occur.

Maimonides' preferred solution to the problem of evil involves what might be labeled the "consider the whole" strategy. According to this strategy, any concerns about divine justice generated by evil in the world are due to one's having adopted too narrow a focus – for example, by looking only at certain features of the world and not others. One can therefore alleviate those concerns by broadening one's perspective and considering more or different aspects of creation. One will then see that the world is, on the whole, good. This strategy can take two forms, depending on just how one is supposed to broaden one's perspective and regard the world holistically. One variety asks for a quantitative expansion of vision; the other requires a qualitative reorientation.

Maimonides initially takes up the theodicean challenge by responding to the complaint, "which often occurs to the imagination of the multitude," that the three species of evil are ubiquitous, that the world created by God is predominantly bad and "there are more evils in the world than there are good things." Understood in this way, the problem of evil is a quantitative problem, and thus its solution is to be found in a proper reckoning of the number of good things versus the number of evil things. "Consider the whole," on this reading, means look at a greater sampling of the world's phenomena and you will see that, as a matter of fact, the premise of the complaint is false and the number of good things is greater than the number of evil things. Thus, with respect to the first two species of evil, at least, Maimonides argues that a true accounting reveals that they do not occur as often as the multitude believe. The evils that we suffer because of our material nature "are very few and occur only seldom. For you will find cities existing for thousands of years that have never been flooded or burned. Also, thousands of people are born in perfect health whereas the birth of an infirm human being is an anomaly, or at least . . . such an individual is very rare; for they do not form a hundredth or even a thousandth part of those born in good health." Similarly, with respect to the evils that we inflict on one another, he argues that although they may be more numerous than those of the first variety, they nonetheless "do not form the majority of occurrences upon the earth taken as a whole," rather, they become common only in extreme circumstances, such as war.[32]

Although this version of the "consider the whole" strategy could, in theory, afford a reply to the charge that the world created by God is *predominantly* evil and that the bad things outnumber the good, it is ultimately an unsatisfying theodicy. First, it can lead to a potentially unresolvable numbers game, with endless disputes about how many good things there are versus how many bad things there are, fueled by disagreements about which things are in fact good and which are bad. Second, even if the quantitative approach does answer the charge that the world is mostly evil, it leaves unanswered the primary question of the problem of evil: Why is there *any* evil at all in a world created by a wise, benevolent, and all-powerful God?

The qualitative version of the "consider the whole" strategy is more effective in responding to this challenge. It is not concerned with the relative quantities of good and evil things. Rather, the broadening of perspective demanded is either a kind of utilitarian or aesthetic consideration of the contribution that evils make to the overall goodness of the world, or an acknowledgment of the qualitative (and not merely quantitative) insignificance of the evils that plague human beings. Like Leibniz's theodicy 500 years later, which points to the necessary role that various evils play in making this the best of all possible worlds, Maimonides asks

us to look more broadly at the universe as the overall context in which human sin and suffering occur. What we will then see is the "wisdom manifested in that which exists" and "the excellence and the true reality of the whole," including the contribution that the so-called evils make to it.[33] Moreover, when one moves beyond the narrow confines of human needs and desires and expands one's vision to take in the spheres of the heavens and the separate intellects related to them, one will recognize that not everything exists for our own sake. "Man and nothing else is the most perfect and the most noble thing that has been generated from this inferior matter; but if his being is compared to that of the spheres and all the more to that of the separate beings, it is very, very contemptible."[34] Thus, just because something is evil or inconvenient for a human being, or even for human beings generally, and regardless of how often it occurs, it does not follow that it holds any significance for the overall qualitative determination of the character of the world. Dropping the anthropocentric perspective will relieve the urge to complain that God's creation is evil and will do so without the problematic numbers game generated by the quantitative version of the "consider the whole" strategy.

There is still one question left unanswered by this theodicean strategy in both of its versions, namely, the central question of the problem of evil: Why do virtuous people sometimes suffer and why do wicked people seem so often to prosper? To be satisfied that such phenomena are compatible with divine justice, one wants to know more than simply that such things do not really happen very often, that they are relatively insignificant in the cosmic scheme of things, or that they make some vague and unspecified contribution to the overall goodness of the universe. Even if God is not the cause of such evils, why does he allow them at all? It is in replying to these specific questions around the relationship between virtue and flourishing that Maimonides finally appeals directly to the nature and mechanics of divine providence.[35]

Maimonides rejects four different views on providence.[36]

The Epicurean view that there is no providence and that everything happens as a result of the random permutations of matter is, for Maimonides, a non-starter, because it is inconsistent with demonstrated metaphysical and theological principles.

The Aristotelian view is that divine governance extends only to the everlasting and immutable elements of nature. The celestial spheres and their contents, as well as the species of things, are provided by God with what is necessary for their preservation. Individual existents in this sublunar realm, however, are watched over by providence only to the extent that they are provided with certain essential attributes by the species to which they belong. Thus, a human being is endowed

with reason and a variety of instincts, all of which aid his preservation, by virtue of the species "human being." Everything else that happens to a human being that does not flow from its species, however – everything, that is, that does not belong to it essentially and by virtue of its being a human being – is due to chance. Maimonides believes that there is indeed an element of truth to the Aristotelian view, one that he will incorporate in his own account.

According to the Asharite theory of providence, nothing in the universe is due to chance. Rather, everything is brought about through the will of God. Providence thus extends to every aspect of every event in nature, from the punishment of a sinner to the falling of a leaf from a tree. Maimonides insists that this account is unacceptable because it renders divine law useless, because no human being has any freedom to do or refrain from doing what the law commands or proscribes. It thus makes a mockery of divine justice.

The fourth opinion also states that divine providence watches over all things, but adds that human beings are free in their actions. Moreover, God is responsible for distributing rewards and punishments to all beings not by sheer acts of will (as the Asharite view implies) but through wisdom and justice. Maimonides objects to this view on the ground that it is absurd to extend divine justice beyond the sphere of human agency. Just as the partisans of this view say that when a blameless person suffers, divine justice will provide him with a greater reward in the world-to-come, so they must say that when a particular animal is killed it was better for it to be so and it will receive a recompense in the hereafter. "They say in the same way that if this mouse, which has not sinned, is devoured by a cat or a hawk, His wisdom has required this with regard to the mouse and that the latter will receive compensation in the other world for what has happened to it."[37] To Maimonides, this view is "disgraceful."

Maimonides' own view is that in this sublunar world the only individuals to whom God's providence extends are human beings. For all other creatures, providence covers only the species and their preservation; everything else is left to chance (as the Aristotelian view claims). Moreover, *all* of the events and activities of a human life, without exception, are a matter of divine justice and therefore fall under providence. "I for one believe that in this lowly world . . . divine providence watches only over the individuals belonging to the human species and that in this species alone all the circumstances of the individuals and the good and evil that befall them are consequent upon the deserts, just as it says: 'For all his ways are judgment.'"[38] Thus, if a ship at sea is sunk by a storm or a hard wind blows a house down, this is due to "pure chance" – or, more properly, the regular but

(from the perspective of human expectations) unforeseen and uncontrollable causal order of nature[39] – no less than the fact that a particular leaf has fallen off a tree at a particular moment. The fact that certain people had gone on board the ship that sunk or had been sitting in the house that was blown down is due not to chance but to "divine will in accordance with the deserts of those people as determined in His judgments."[40]

One possible, even natural way of conceiving the divine modus operandi in providence for Maimonides needs to be ruled out from the start. There are passages in which Maimonides speaks as if God, seeing the virtues and vices of particular human beings, actively and intentionally chooses to reward and punish them as individuals – perhaps in just the way that the multitude think of providence, with God sending a thunder bolt against one person while snatching another person from the jaws of death (e.g., in the lions' den). Thus, just as Maimonides insists that the people are on board the ship because of the "divine will in accordance with the deserts of those people as determined in His judgments," so he elsewhere notes how the fate met by many people is "due not to neglect and the withdrawal of providence, but was a punishment for those men because they deserved what befell them."[41] It is clear that this anthropomorphic way of acting, with God intervening to save or punish a person as if through a miracle, is inconsistent with what Maimonides considers the proper conception of God; such language may be only an element of Maimonides' exoteric (vs. esoteric) writing, geared for the philosophically unsophisticated reader.

Rather, God's role in providence is, so to speak, much more passive. God has put a system in place that is there for individual human beings to take advantage of or not, as they choose. It is the virtuous – understood as those who pursue intellectual virtue, and not merely moral virtue – who choose to do so, whereas all others are left without its protection.

Maimonides distinguishes between general providence (in Samuel ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation, *hashgaḥah minit*, or providence of the kind), which is constituted by the species' characteristics oriented to its preservation and is (barring unusual circumstances) provided equally to all members of the species, and individual providence (*hashgaḥah 'ishit*), which is particularized to individuals and distributed only according to merits. Both varieties of providence are understood in highly naturalistic and Aristotelian terms. The latter, however, comes into play only in the realm of human agency.

Individual providence, Maimonides says, is a function of the overflow of knowledge from God through the separate intellects (including, penultimately, the Agent

Intellect whose domain is the sublunar realm) to the human intellect. To the extent that a person receives this overflow, he is under the protection of providence.

> Divine providence is consequent upon the divine overflow . . . 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.[42]

Individual providence is not an all or nothing affair, but proportionate to the degree to which a person is virtuous – that is, proportionate to the degree to which he has turned toward God, directed his attention to the knowledge flowing from God and thereby perfected his intellect.

> When any individual has obtained, because of the disposition of his matter and his training, a greater proportion of this overflow than others, providence will of necessity watch more carefully over him than over others – if, that is to say, providence is, as I have mentioned, consequent upon the intellect. Accordingly, divine providence does not watch in an equal manner over all the individuals of the human species, but providence is graded as their human perfection is graded.[43]

In this sense, providence is a reward for (intellectual) virtue and the perfection of our highest faculties. (It is important to note that the intellectually virtuous person is necessarily a morally virtuous person, because for Maimonides the attainment of moral virtue or the perfection of character is a necessary condition for the higher, intellectual virtue;[44] it is not a sufficient condition, however, and there is no guarantee that the morally virtuous person will have achieved intellectual perfection. It would seem to follow from this that the person who is only morally virtuous will not enjoy divine providence.)

Despite Maimonides' claim that the suffering of many is "due not to neglect and the withdrawal of providence, but was a punishment for those men because they deserved what befell them," it seems clear that it is precisely through approach and withdrawal – that is, the human being's willful approaching to and withdrawing from the overflow – that providence operates. As long as one is actively enjoying the epistemic connection to the divine overflow, one is ipso facto protected; providence is watching over such a person. On the other hand, when one is not attending to God (either because one has never made the effort or because, having achieved the connection, one has temporarily become distracted, perhaps by the pleasures of the senses), one is abandoned to chance and left to one's own devices. The person who is not experiencing the overflow is not enjoying its benefits. He is at the mercy of nature's elements and his well-being is subject to whatever may or may not come

his way. Providence is no longer watching over him – not because God is actively punishing him, but because through his own actions he has taken himself outside of the care that providence (the overflow) offers.

> With regard to providence watching over excellent men and neglecting the ignorant, it is said: "He will keep the feet of his holy ones, but the wicked shall be put to silence in darkness; for not by strength shall man prevail." It says thereby that the fact that some individuals are preserved from calamities, whereas those befall others, is due not to their bodily forces and their natural dispositions . . . but to their perfection and deficiency, I mean their nearness to or remoteness from God. For this reason, those who are near to Him are exceedingly well protected . . . whereas those who are far from Him are given over to whatever may happen to befall them. For there is nothing to protect them against whatever may occur; for they are like one walking in darkness, whose destruction is assured.[45]

Those who do not strive for perfection have no more providential protection than nonhuman animals. They enjoy only general providence and whatever tools for survival the species confers on them.

There is some ambiguity as to just what is the nature of the protection that, according to Maimonides, divine providence provides. Commentators, from Maimonides' time onward, have found a tension between two ways of reading his account.[46] On one reading, what the knowledge brought to the human intellect by the divine overflow gives to the righteous person is a way actually to escape the evils around him. The overflow carries information about nature, among other things, just the kind of understanding that allows an individual to successfully navigate his way around the obstacles to his well-being that the world presents. Thus, a person who has perfected his intellect in the proper way will know not to get on the doomed ship (e.g., because he knows a storm is coming). At one point Maimonides says of the intellectually perfected person that "no evil at all will befall him." If he should find himself in the midst of a pitched battle, then "even if one thousand were killed to your left and ten thousand to your right, no evil at all would befall you."[47]

On another reading, however, the person who attends to God, while not literally avoiding the evils that naturally come his way – especially the physical evils of the first kind and the moral evils of the second kind, which tend to be due to circumstances well beyond one's control – will be less troubled by them. His mind is fixated on the true and lasting good, and he becomes immune to the lure of mutable goods and inured to the travails of his body. He has achieved a lasting state of spiritual well-being and happiness, one that is not subject to the vagaries of chance. Maimonides says that this is the condition of Job at the end of the story. In his first speech, as Maimonides reads it, Job adopts the Aristotelian view:

God is not watching over individuals and is causing suffering for no good reason at all, "because of his contempt for the human species and abandonment of it."[48] After God has spoken, however, Job achieves a state of understanding: "He knew God with a certain knowledge, he admitted that true happiness, which is the knowledge of the deity, is guaranteed to all who know Him and that a human being cannot be troubled in it by any of all the misfortunes in question."[49] It is not that the good person experiences no loss or harm in his life; after all, Job lost practically everything. Rather, consumed with his bond with God and possessing true happiness, he cares less about those losses. He may see evils in his lifetime, but they will not constitute an "affliction" for him. The lesson Maimonides sees here is a Stoic one.

On either reading, providence does not consist in the active and willful intervention of God in human affairs; it is not that God chooses in particular to reward the person who has united himself to the overflow. Rather, somewhat naturalistically, the knowledge acquired by the virtuous person through the overflow affords him an advantage in the world. "The overflow of the divine intellect . . . guides the actions of righteous men, and perfects the knowledge of excellent men with regard to what they know."[50]

Returning, finally, to the problem of evil, why then do innocent people suffer? Maimonides' response is that, in essence, they do not. If a person suffers misfortune, it is because he deserves it.[51] If a virtuous person suffers, it is, regardless of appearances, because he has done something that has taken him outside the protection of providence, if only for a short time. The bond to God and the overflow can be broken, by a lapse in attention or redirection of the mind to lesser things.

> The providence of God, may he be exalted, is constantly watching over those who have obtained this overflow, which is permitted to everyone who makes efforts with a view to obtaining it. If a man's thought is free from distraction, if he apprehends Him, may He be exalted, in the right way and rejoices in what he apprehends, that individual can never be afflicted with evil of any kind. For he is with God and God is with him. When, however, he abandons Him, may he be exalted, and is thus separated from God and God separated from him, he becomes in consequence of this a target for every evil that may happen to befall him. For the thing that necessarily brings about providence and deliverance from the sea of chance consists in that intellectual overflow.

When the bond with the overflow is broken, the virtuous person is no better off than the wicked person. They are both on their own, abandoned to the world, come what may.

> Yet an impediment may prevent from some time [the overflow] reaching the excellent and good man in question, or again it was not obtained at all by such and such imperfect and wicked man, and therefore the chance occurrences that befell them happened.

Full responsibility for the disconnection from the divine overlow lies with the individual, not God: "It is clear that we are the cause of this 'hiding of the face,' and we are the agents who produce this separation."[52]

Similarly, the prosperity of the wicked person is not a true flourishing, because this person is not enjoying the highest good, intellectual perfection. Moreover, the prosperity that has come his way is totally undeserved and does not represent a reward from God for anything he has done. Rather, being unprotected and at the mercy of nature, it so happens that chance has brought some apparently fine things his way. His possession and enjoyment of them is equally subject to fortune and certain to be short-lived.

IV. GERSONIDES

Gersonides' account of providence and the concomitant solution to the problem of evil is, as he explicitly notes, much like that of Maimonides, in many ways his mentor.[53] There is, however, an important and radical restriction that Gersonides places on any theory of providence, one that represents Gersonides' rejection of one of the primary theological assumptions that, as we have seen, generate the problem of evil in the first place. For Gersonides, there is a certain domain of events in the world of which God has no particularized knowledge, namely, the free choices of human beings.[54] God has knowledge of particular events only to the extent to which they are "ordered in a determinate and certain way" by the laws of nature. God knows the general patterns of things, but these patterns can be disrupted by human volitions. For this reason, Gersonides denies that "God knows this affair with respect to this particular man as a definite individual."[55] Thus, any explanation of how divine providence works must be consistent with the claim that God has no knowledge of free human actions. This would seem to rule out a priori an account according to which God actively intervenes to reward and punish individuals because of his acquaintance with their particular virtuous or sinful actions. "God does not judge men according to their actions" if this implies that "He knows their actions as particulars."[56]

In the discussion of providence in his philosophical masterpiece, *Wars of the Lord* (in Hebrew, *Sefer Milḥamot Adonai*), Gersonides, like Maimonides, begins with the question of whether divine providence extends to individuals or is it (as Aristotle claims) limited only to eternal and unchanging things? The phenomenon of prophecy, evidence of God's communication with particular individuals, rules out the Aristotelian option (a position that, he insists in his *Commentary on the Book of Job*, also represents Job's view[57]). So now the question is simply whether providence extends to all individuals (and at all times) or only to some individuals. Gersonides

argues against providence being connected to all the actions of all individuals – the view he attributes to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar[58] – on the grounds that (a) this would involve God in actively causing evils, for we frequently see people suffer; and (b) it is clearly falsified by experience, which seems to present a good deal of disorder and a lack of justice in the distribution of the world's goods. "This view is actually refutable by observation, for we often observe much evil befalling the righteous and good accruing to the sinful . . . We see many righteous people suffering great evils most of their lives and receiving very few benefits, while [we see] many sinners enjoying great happiness and suffering no perceptible evils."[59] The challenge for Gersonides, then, is to explain how divine providence extends to some but not all individuals (the view he attributes to Elihu[60]) even though God has no knowledge of particulars as particulars, and to do so in a way that accounts for the suffering of the righteous and the prospering of the wicked in this world. His solution is to place immediate responsibility for human flourishing on individual human beings themselves. "God has endowed man with reason so that he can avoid these evils as far as possible."[61]

Gersonides, again like Maimonides, is concerned with two species of providence, both of which are explained in naturalistic terms within an Aristotelian framework. First, there is a general providence (*hashgaḥah kolelet*) that extends across all of nature and, thereby, to all human beings. Second, there is what he calls "special" or "individual" providence (*hashgaḥah peratit*). This is the protection that, as on Maimonides's account, comes only to a certain class of human beings, namely, those who, through the use of their intellects, achieve a union with the Active or Agent Intellect – the separate intellect of the sublunar realm, a kind of quasidivine governing spirit, that embodies a full knowledge of the world it rules – and a consequent insight into the ways of nature.

The source of evil, Gersonides says, is never God, and it does not come from the (immaterial) forms of things. Rather, evil has its origins either in matter or in chance. By "matter," he means the mixture of elements in material nature (including human bodies) and the human choices that may be influenced by this. By "chance," Gersonides understands the unfortunate effects on human beings of occurrences of nature ("land upheavals, earthquakes, fires from the heavens, and so forth"). These occurrences are as causally ordered as anything else in the sublunar realm: They are "the evils that befall man from the patterns determined by the arrangements of the heavenly bodies." What is "accidental" and a matter of "chance [*keri*]" is the *evilness* of their results relative to human beings and their ends; it is an evil that is unforseen and unintended by the natural causes of such things, and bears no relationship to peoples' deserts. As Gersonides notes, it is the "*evil* resulting from these events [for human beings] that is due to chance."[62]

Now nature has provided in a general way for all creatures through the endowments of the species. Each type of animal has been given the appropriate means necessary for its survival, and the more noble the creature, the greater its capacities for self-preservation.

> Induction shows that the Agent Intellect provides for existing things in giving them either bodily organs or instinctual powers, by virtue of which the possessors of these faculties can preserve their individual existence and ward off or avoid harm. For example, it endows some animals with horns, cloven hooves, or beaks to keep them from harm or to enable predatory animals to obtain prey. In some animals the Agent Intellect bestows only instinctual desires or skills. An example of an instinctual desire is the natural instinct of a lamb to run away from a wolf upon seeing it, even though it does not know that the wolf will harm it, and [indeed] it has not even seen a wolf previously. Similarly, many birds flee from predatory birds, although they have never seen them previously . . . This kind of providence is exhibited in man in a much more perfect form. For man is endowed with a practical intellect from which many kinds of useful arts are derived for his preservation. He is also given an intellect from which are derived the tendencies to flee from harmful things and to obtain advantageous things.[63]

This "general providence" derives, like all the determined aspects of nature, from the ordinary causal course of nature as this is driven by celestial bodies and through the Agent Intellect. All individual human beings are thus endowed by nature with the faculties and instincts that they need for survival in a world governed by laws that themselves derive from the same celestial influences. The heavenly spheres provide us with desires, thoughts, and intentions for action that are to our benefit. The general celestial providence thus takes care of all individuals *qua* members of the human species, but not *qua* particulars. It extends to all humans as humans in their interactions both with material nature and with each other, without taking any account of their particularities, especially their moral differences, their virtues, and vices. Naturally, although this general ordering of nature aims for the best, and generally results in good, sometimes it brings about evil. "Sometimes there necessarily results from these patterns some accidental misfortunes." Although we have, by general providence, the wherewithal to deal for the most part with what fortune brings our way, we are not, by nature alone, prepared to deal with all the threats to our well-being. Nature is still a risky environment, full of potential harm and obstacles to our flourishing.

This is where special providence comes in. Although God has not ordered the patterns [*siddurim*] of the heavens such that no evil is to occur, nonetheless "he has given man an instrument whereby these evils can be avoided – reason [*sekhel*]."[64] Thus, in addition to the astral-based (general) providence, there is also an intellect-based providence available to human beings, through the achievement of which

they can escape (or at least limit) the occasional unfortunate effects of general providence.

Because the Agent Intellect is an intelligent cause, it possesses full knowledge – the "maker's knowledge" – of the order it imposes on the world.

> Since the agent responsible for the [existence] of all beings in the sublunar world must possess the knowledge of the order [obtaining in this world] – just as the craftsman must have an idea of the order obtaining among the things he is to create – and since . . . this agent is the Agent Intellect . . . it follows that the Agent Intellect possesses the knowledge of the order obtaining in the sublunary world.[65]

By generating the natural sublunar forms, the Agent Intellect is the cause of substances; and because it emanates from even higher intellects and ultimately from God, it knows fully the plan it is thereby carrying out. "The separate agent responsible for all these things [substances] should know the law, order and rightness inherent in these sublunar phenomena, since these things acquire their very existence from the intelligible order of them in the soul of this separate agent."[66] The Agent Intellect contains the concepts of all beings, organized comprehensively and systematically, such that the totality of what the Agent Intellect knows constitutes an exhaustive body of science. Its knowledge is thus a kind of complete and archetypal blueprint for the world it governs. "The Agent Intellect . . . possesses [the knowledge] of the plan and order [of the terrestrial domain]." Gersonides, in fact, calls it "the rational order of the terrestrial world," although its science also includes knowledge of all celestial phenomena. It is an eternal and incorruptible order, in contrast to the changing, corruptible, and temporal procession of things and events in the world that instantiates and dynamically exemplifies it. This knowledge in the Agent Intellect exists in "a perfect and unified manner."[67]

Through the proper use of his intellect, an individual human being perfects himself and becomes "closer" to the Agent Intellect, discerns that Intellect's "maker's knowledge" of the essences of things and of the patterns and laws[68] of nature, and thereby attains a higher degree of "protection" from nature's vicissitudes. The person enjoying special providence is a person who, through the actualization of his intellect and the acquisition of higher knowledge, is better equipped to obtain what is good and avoid any evils impending from the ordinary course of nature. As the human mind comes to an understanding of the true order of the world, its knowledge grows, in fact, to mirror (as much as possible for human beings) the knowledge that is in the Agent Intellect itself. One thereby becomes "enlightened." Unlike the general run of people, "who are not within the scope of divine providence except in a general way as members of the human species," this person

knows how nature operates; he can predict what, according to nature's laws, the future will bring and generally be able to put nature's ways to his own use. "His providence with respect to individual men consists [precisely] in informing them of the good or evil that is to come upon them, so that they will avoid the evil and pursue the good."[69]

This kind of "communication" between the Agent Intellect (and, ultimately, God, from whom its knowledge derives) and a particular human being does not require any knowledge of or action on particulars *as* particulars on God's or the Agent Intellect's part. The knowledge acquired by the person who has developed his intellect is neither itself particular nor aimed at anyone in particular. It is general information – perhaps best captured by a system of conditional propositions (if *x* occurs, then *y* occurs) – that is there for anyone to pursue and tap into. Still, as a matter of fact, only the truly righteous – those who are guided by reason – will attain it.

> Our theory is compatible with the admission that God (may he be blessed) does not know particulars as particulars. For the kind of providence that guides the righteous by means of the communication given them concerning the benefits or evils that are to befall them can occur even though the giver of this communication does not know the particular individual receiving this communication, and despite the fact that the giver of this communciation does not know the particular events, concerning which this communication is given, as particulars.[70]

If virtue is the pursuit of intellectual perfection – as Gersonides believes – then this special providence is the natural product and reward of virtue. The truly righteous person will, for the most part and just *because* of his intellectual achievements, obtain the goods that this world has to offer and avoid its evils. Sinners, on the other hand, will in general be punished – not directly, through some particular directive from God (because God cannot be the cause of evil, nor can he know particulars *as* particulars), but by being left out in the cold. Those who do not pursue virtue, who do not perfect their intellects, will be subject to the vicissitudes of nature.

> When the Torah warns men of evil because of their great sins, it states clearly that this evil will be that God will not look upon them and then He will abandon them to the contingencies of time . . . The punishment of sinners consists in God's hiding and indifference. God leaves them to the contingencies of time, and whatever happens to them is determined by the patterns of the heavenly bodies. Nor does God save them from the evil that is to befall them.[71]

> [Sinners] are left and abandoned to those accidents that are ordered by the heavenly bodies and . . . are not protected by God from the evils that are to befall them, for they are not at the level of perfection such that this kind of divine providence could extend to them.[72]

Without the knowledge possessed by the virtuous, sinners cannot properly navigate their way through nature and guard themselves accordingly. They are unprotected in the face of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Why, then, is it the case that evil things *do* sometimes happen to righteous people and good things to sinners? Why do we see the virtuous suffer while the wicked prosper? In Gersonides' own words, a righteous person occasionally *does* "become the target of the arrows of fortune [*ḥatzi ha-miqrim*],"[73] as these are ordered by the heavenly bodies, that is, by nature. Is this not a counterexample to Gersonides' theory of providence?

Gersonides is, of course, sensitive to this question.

> It is not impossible for tremendous benefits to accrue to the sinners because of the arrangements of the heavenly bodies, and for evils to happen to the righteous . . . Accordingly, someone might argue that the order with which God (may He be blessed) endowed the heavenly bodies concerning individual men and from which is derived the lack of order with respect to the occurrence of good and evil among men . . . must be attributed to either divine evil or impotence.[74]

Gersonides has a two-pronged response to this objection. First, he focuses on the impersonal universal and deterministic forces that bring the goods and evils in question to individuals independently of their deserts. He notes that just because the wicked person is abandoned to chance, to whatever nature may bring his way, there should be little wonder that sometimes nature will bring along things that benefit him. What is important is that his acquisition of these benefits is due entirely to accident, and not to any judgment about what he is due in terms of reward and punishment.[75] Similarly, Gersonides concedes that in this life no one, not even the most virtuous, can completely escape nature's inconveniences. Reason does indeed afford the righteous a relatively high degree of well-being in this world, but the protection is not complete. As Spinoza will later say, a human being can never not be a part of nature.

Gersonides then downgrades the importance of those alleged goods that sinners seem to enjoy and the alleged evils that afflict the righteous. When we examine the nature of the goods and afflictions in question, we should realize that these are almost always material benefits and evils, affections of one's body and one's material well-being. In the ultimate scheme of things, these are not the true goods for a human being; when it comes to our proper happiness, they are of little consequence.

> *True* reward and punishment do not consist of these benefits and evils that we observe. For the reward and punishment that occur to man insofar as he is a man have to be good and evil that are [truly] human, not good and evil that are not human. Now, human good

consists of the acquisition of spiritual happiness, for this good concerns man as man, and not of the pursuit of good food and of other sensual objects, for nutrition and sensation are not uniquely human [faculties]. Moreover, since human evil consists of the absence of this spiritual happiness, i.e., in its imperfection, it is evident that true reward and punishment in man as man consists of the achievement or lack of achievement of spiritual happiness, not of these sensuous goods or evils that are ordered by the heavenly bodies.[76]

The righteous, through their virtue – their intellectual perfection – *do* in fact succeed in obtaining the true good; the wicked, on the other hand, never fail to fall short of proper human happiness (although they may not realize this). The celestially determined distribution of material benefits in this world is not necessarily governed by justice in all of its details; that is why sometimes the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper with respect to these "goods." The distribution of the true good necessarily is just and right: "Since the acquisition of spiritual happiness depends essentially upon good and proper actions, whereas its absence results from bad actions, it is clear that true reward and punishment, which consist of the good and evil that pertain to man as man, exemplify order and justice in every respect."[77]

Ultimately, Gersonides grants, even this supreme spiritual condition is achieved only imperfectly in this world, given the persistent demands of the body. True happiness, an undisturbed state of perfection, is attained only in the world-to-come, the afterlife wherein the intellect experiences pure spiritual joy unencumbered by the inconveniences of the body. "True reward and punishment occur in the world-to-come."[78]

Gersonides' second approach to the objection is to go beyond the generalities of nature and explain why, in fact, the virtuous are sometimes afflicted with even these lesser evils. He offers three specific reasons for this phenomenon. First, and most important, not even righteous individuals are immune to the pleasures of the senses, and thus sometimes the union between a person's intellect and God through which providence is conveyed is loosened, even broken. In this case, the individual, although generally virtuous, enjoys no more protection than the wicked. "In such an eventuality [these righteous people] are forsaken and abandoned to the evil deriving by accident from the patterns determined by the heavenly bodies."[79] They, of course, are responsible for their own misfortunes. Second, God may dispense evils to a person to prevent greater evils that would come by the ordinary course of nature. Finally, God sometimes brings evils on a good person for the purpose of edification, to save him from some minor sin he is about to commit.

Still, there will be many cases that cannot be so rationalized, and one can then ask why God does not act directly to prevent all such "injustices," to keep evil things from happening to righteous people and good things from happening to

wicked people, especially the ones that occur simply by the ordinary course of nature? Or, because Gersonides' God does not really "act" at all once the moment of creation has passed, why did not God institute a different plan, one that does not result in any natural but accidental and undeserved evils (or fewer evils) for righteous individuals nor any benefits for sinners? Does not this situation serve to undermine God's justice?

Gersonides argues that although there are indeed "infrequently occurring evils" as a result of the celestial patterns – general providence – nonetheless the ordering imposed by these patterns and directed by the Agent Intellect is, on the whole, for the best.

> When the various patterns determined by the heavenly bodies (in terms of which the sensuous good and evil that befalls men are ordered) are examined, it will be found that they do not exhibit anything that can be attributed to divine evil or divine weakness. Rather, they exhibit the best possible providential ordering and beneficence for sublunar things; for by virtue of these patterns arranged by the heavenly bodies, this sublunar world, whose perfection cannot be completely fathomed by the human mind, is preserved. The heavenly bodies preserve the contrary elements, of which all compound bodies consist, in the best possible manner. They also preserve the elemental heat of every existing thing for the longest possible time, so that if it were imagined that the activity of these heavenly bodies on the sublunar world were to cease even for a short while, the perfection and good that are present in them would disappear and all living creatures would perish.[80]

In other words, the ordinary course of events, as embedded in the general and providential laws of nature, represents the best of all possible worlds (to use a somewhat later phrase). Yes, sometimes these laws do have unfortunate consequences. "There necessarily results from these patterns some accidental misfortunes – because in preserving the contrary elements from which compound bodies are established, such that one element is dominant at one time and another element at another time, some evil falls upon men from this [cycle of] dominance."[81] It is important to realize that whatever goods accrue to sinners does not come to them *because* they are sinners (that is, as an intended reward for their sin). Lacking the special providence belonging to the virtuous, sinners are abandoned to the "accidents that are ordered by the heavenly bodies"; they are left to their own rather meager devices. Sometimes what that order brings along to them is, in fact, bad fortune; but sometimes what it brings happens to contribute to their worldly prosperity. Such are the (ordered) accidents of nature. These consequences do not represent an intended "evil" in nature, because its arrangements are, on the whole, the best possible.

> That the occurrence of benefits to the sinners through the heavenly bodies is not an evil can be shown as follows. These benefits received by the sinners are due to general providence, i.e., are from those patterns that are concerned with man as man [i.e., as a species]. Therefore,

the benefits they receive result from the fact that they are born at a time when the heavenly bodies are in that position which [determines] that condition; these benefits do not occur because these people are sinners.[82]

The generality of the course of nature will sometimes have unfortunate but unintended consequences in individual cases. If the general order is truly the best, then it must not be changed or contravened for the sake of achieving or avoiding some particular effects.

Not all medieval Jewish philosophers were willing to follow the intellectualist model of providence described by Maimonides and Gersonides. Antirationalists found the emphasis on knowledge alone, to the exclusion of action, contrary to rabbinic tradition. Ḥasdai Crescas, for one, in his major work *'Or ha-Shem* (*The Light of God*, 1410), took issue with the Maimonidean and Gersonidean picture of God as an eternal intellect and sought to replace it with a more personal God, a being endowed, above all, with will and love.

Crescas distinguishes between three kinds of providence: natural providence, which is the governance of the world by the heavenly bodies and is the same for all individuals; special providence, which is equally distributed among all the people of Israel (and is represented by the giving of the Torah); and personal providence, the spiritual and bodily rewards and punishments that are tailored to the merits of each individual within Israel. In his anti-Maimonidean account, Crescas denies that personal providence is obtained merely by cognitive achievement or having true beliefs. Rather, he insists that what is important is one's attitude toward the true and one's volition or choice to pursue what is good and do what is right. What matters with respect to desert is what one intends to do, regardless of whether or not such intentions are informed by knowledge or result successfully in action. Crescas thereby hopes to supplant an intellect-centered view of individual providence with an agent- or will-centered view.

The culmination of this story, however, lies not in the antiintellectualism of Crescas, but in the arch-rationalism of a Jewish philosopher who not only rejected Judaism, but also found himself in turn excluded from Judaism when he was expelled in 1656 by the leaders of Amsterdam's Portuguese Jews with the harshest writ of *ḥerem*, or ostracism, ever issued by that community.

V. SPINOZA

It might seem inappropriate to include Spinoza in a discussion of theodicy and providence, except perhaps to explain how he rejects both.[83] There can be nothing

further from the standard notion of a providential deity than the God of Spinoza's *Ethics* (in Latin, *Ethica*). In no uncertain terms, Spinoza rejects the traditional Judeo–Christian conception of God; indeed, he believes it to be a potentially pernicious fiction. To attribute will, rationality, and ethical purposiveness to God is to open the way to superstition and psychological and political bondage. With the belief in an omnipotent being who stands in judgment over us, our lives become governed by the passions of hope and fear. As Spinoza insists in the powerful appendix to part one of the work, to anthropomorphize God in this way is to fall prey to a strong but dangerous temptation.

> All the prejudices I here undertake to expose depend on this one: that men commonly suppose that all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end; indeed, they maintain as certain that God himself directs all things to some certain end.[84]

Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura* stands in stark contrast to the providential God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Spinoza's God is not a wise, beneficent, intelligent, willful judge. In fact, Spinoza's God lacks all psychological and moral characteristics. The God of *Ethics* just is the most universal and causally active principles of nature from which everything else follows with an absolute necessity. God is *Natura Naturans*, eternal substance and its infinite attributes, nothing more. There is no true will in God's being, no purposiveness in God's actions, and no goodness to God's achievements. Consequently, there is, for Spinoza, no teleology either within nature (with the exception of the goals that finite rational agents set for themselves) or for nature as a whole. Things in nature do not exist to serve any ends, and nature does not as a whole exist for some overarching purpose. Whatever happens comes about because it is determined with necessity by the laws of nature and the antecedent sequence of events. Nothing takes place "for the sake of" anything else. "Nature has no end set before it, and . . . all final ends are nothing but human fictions."[85]

It seems, then, that there is and can be no room in Spinoza's system for divine providence. He insists that those who say that "God has created all things in order" are guided by the imagination, not reason.[86] The notion of a providential God is apparently refuted on a posteriori grounds as well. "Daily experience" itself provides "infinitely many examples [to] show that conveniences and inconveniences happen indiscriminately to the pious and the impious alike."[87] To believe that God actually provides things for the benefit (or detriment) of human beings – that God, acting as an intentional agent, rewards the virtuous and punishes the wicked – is to fail miserably to understand the true nature of God and the real modus operandi of nature.

Without a providential God, moreover, it would seem that the problem of evil cannot even be raised. There should be no puzzle over the existence and distribution

of suffering and disaster in the world, because there is no wise and providential God watching over and caring for the world, all of whose events are necessitated simply by the laws of nature. Spinoza at times seems to evince nothing but scorn for those who (like Job's friends) would waste their time engaged in trying to resolve the problem of evil with a theodicy.

> See, I ask you, how the matter has turned out in the end! Among so many conveniences in nature they had to find many inconveniences: storms, earthquakes, diseases, etc. These, they maintain, happen because the Gods (whom they judge to be of the same nature as themselves) are angry on account of wrongs done to them by men, or on account of sins committed in their worship. And though their daily experience contradicted this, and though infinitely many examples showed that conveniences and inconveniences happen indiscriminately to the pious and the impious alike, they did not on that account give up their longstanding prejudice. It was easier for them to put this among the other unknown things, whose use they were ignorant of, and so remain in the state of ignorance in which they had been born, than to destroy that whole construction, and think up a new one. So they maintained it as certain that the judgments of the Gods far surpass man's grasp.[88]

Engaging in theodician speculation is the way only to superstition, not enlightenment.

Spinoza holds an especially deep contempt for a particular kind of theodicy – namely, just that which figures so prominently in Saadia, Maimonides, and Gersonides. By denying the traditional doctrine of the immortality of the soul,[89] Spinoza rules out any solution to the problem of evil that relies on an appeal to what may come our way (as recompense or "true reward") in the world-to-come. At one point, Spinoza derisively describes the foolish beliefs of the multitude, who are often motivated to act virtuously only by their hope for an eternal reward and their fear of an eternal punishment. If they were not convinced that the soul lived on after the body, then morality – difficult as it is – would, in their eyes, not be a burden worth bearing. Such an opinion, he notes:

> Seems no less absurd to me than if someone, because he does not believe he can nourish his body with good food to eternity, should prefer to fill himself with poisons and other deadly things, or because he sees that the Mind is not eternal, *or* immortal, should prefer to be mindless, and to live without reason.[90]

Now it is true that if what is meant by "divine providence" is a plan being carried out by an intelligent agent, then there is and can be no such thing in Spinoza's world, and one might think that this should be the end of the story. Yet, as is so often the case with *res Spinozana*, things are not quite as simple as they first appear. There is indeed a theory of divine providence in Spinoza's system – one, in fact,

that serves well to bring out the highly naturalistic and intellectualist tendencies of the Jewish rationalist tradition to which he so clearly belongs.

There is a fairly superficial way to find in Spinoza a theory of divine providence. It is the nominal one that he offers in the *Theological-Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*). Spinoza first reminds the reader that the word "God" is to be understood to mean nothing but nature and its lawlike, exceptionless operations. All things come about in and by nature. All bodily things and their states follow from the attribute of extension and its infinite modes; all mental things and their states follow from the attribute of thought and its infinite modes. But this means that "God's providence" just *is* the universal causal efficacy of nature. Providence extends to *all* things, just because there is nothing that is outside nature's dominion. Everything that happens, whether it is beneficial or harmful to an individual, is the effect of "divine providence." The phrase is thereby rendered morally neutral and, from a Spinozistic perspective, theologically harmless.

> God's decrees and commandments, and consequently God's providence, are in truth nothing but Nature's order; that is to say, when Scripture tells us that this or that was accomplished by God or by God's will, nothing more is intended than that it came about by accordance with Nature's law and order, and not, as the common people believe, that Nature for that time suspended her action, or that her order was temporarily interrupted.[91]

This approach allows Spinoza at least to use the language of divine providence with little cost. As long as one is aware that such language is really only talk about nature's necessary ways, it is empty and does not commit one to any substantive claims about God or Nature providing rewards to the virtuous and punishments to the wicked or taking any special care for individuals. It is a reductive providentialism with no moral implications. To adopt the phrase used by Maimonides and Gersonides, this can be called the "general providence" of nature.

There is, however, an ethically more interesting (but equally reductive and naturalistic) conception of divine providence in Spinoza's thought. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza shows that the virtuous person pursues and acquires true and adequate ideas, a deep understanding of nature and its ways that is embedded in what he calls "knowledge of the second kind" (reason, *ratio*) and "knowledge the third kind" (intuition, *scientia intuitiva*). Unlike knowledge of the first kind (sensation and imagination), these forms of intellectual cognition afford one an insight into the essences of things and especially the ways in which they depend necessarily on their causes. Spinoza insists that this knowledge of God or Nature and its modes is of the greatest benefit to a human being.

There is a relatively trivial sense in which this is true. Just as Gersonides insisted on the utility (in terms of avoiding evils) of perfecting the intellect, so Spinoza suggests that an understanding of nature's essences and laws provides the virtuous person with the tools he needs to navigate life's obstacle course. Nature's ways are transparent to him, not opaque. His capacity to manipulate things and avoid dangers is greater than that of the person who is governed by the senses and imagination. A deep knowledge of things benefits one in this simple manner.

More importantly, however, knowledge of the second and third kinds is, for the virtuous person, the source of an abiding happiness and peace of mind that is resistant to the vicissitudes of fortune. When a person sees the necessity of all things, and especially the fact that the objects that he values are, in their comings and goings, not under his control, that person is less likely to be overwhelmed with emotions at their arrival and passing away. The resulting life will be tranquil, and not given to sudden disturbances of the passions. Herein lie the true natural benefits of virtue.

The title of part four of the *Ethics* sums up very well Spinoza's view of the ordinary human life: "On Human Bondage, or the Powers of the Affects." We are, he claims, slaves to the passions. "Man's lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects I call Bondage. For the man who is subject to affects is under the control, not of himself, but of fortune, in whose power he so greatly is that often, though he sees the better for himself, he is still forced to follow the worse."[92]

The passions, or "passive affects," are in effect those changes in our condition the causes of which lie outside of our own nature; we feel passions when we are being acted on by the world around us. The spectrum of human emotions are all functions of the ways in which external things affect our powers or capacities. Love, for example, is simply our awareness of a thing that brings about some improvement in our constitution. We love the external object that benefits us and causes us joy. Hate, on the other hand, is nothing but "sadness with the accompanying idea of an external cause." We hate the object that harms us and makes us unhappy.[93] Thus all of the human emotions, insofar as they are passions, are constantly directed outward, toward things and their tendencies to affect us one way or another. Aroused by our passions and desires, we seek or flee those things that we believe cause joy or sadness. "We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to Joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to Sadness."[94] Our hopes and fears fluctuate depending on whether we regard the objects of our desires or aversions as remote, near, necessary, possible, or unlikely.

What we so often fail to keep in mind, however, is the fact that the things that stir our emotions, being external to us, do not answer to our wills. I have no real power over whether what I hate is near me or distant, whether the person I love lives or dies. The objects of our passions are completely beyond our control. (This is, of course, all the more so in the absolutely deterministic universe that Spinoza describes.) Thus, the more we allow ourselves to be controlled by these objects – by their comings and goings – the more we are subject to fluctuating passions and the less active and free (that is, self-controlled) we are. The upshot is a fairly pathetic picture of a life mired in the passions and pursuing and fleeing the changeable and fleeting objects that occasion them: "We are driven about in many ways by external causes, and . . . like waves on the sea, driven by contrary winds, we toss about, not knowing our outcome and fate."[95] It is, he says, a kind of disease to suffer too much love for a thing that is mutable and never fully under our power, even when we do, for a time, have it within our possession.

> Sickness of the mind and misfortunes take their origin especially from too much love toward a thing which is liable to many variations and which we can never fully possess. For no one is disturbed or anxious concerning anything unless he loves it, nor do wrongs, suspicions and enmities arise except from love for a thing which no one can really fully possess.[96]

The solution to this predicament is an ancient one, hearkening back to Seneca and other Stoics. Because we cannot control the objects that we tend to value and that we allow to influence our well-being, we ought instead to try to control our evaluations and responses themselves and thereby minimize the sway that external objects and the passions have over us. We can never eliminate the passive affects entirely. We are essentially a part of nature and can never fully remove ourselves from the causal series that link us to the world of external things. "It is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause . . . From this it follows that man is necessarily always subject to passions, that he follows and obeys the common order of Nature, and accommodates himself to it as much as the nature of things requires."[97] We can, ultimately, counteract the passions, understand and control them, and thereby achieve a certain degree of relief from their turmoil.

The path to restraining and moderating the passions is through virtue, that is, the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. When we perceive things through adequate ideas and achieve an intellectual intuition of the essences of things – that is, when we perceive things *sub specie aeternitatis*, through the second and third

kinds of knowledge and in relation to God or Nature – what we apprehend is the deterministic necessity of all that happens.

IIP44c2: It is of the nature of reason to perceive things under a certain species of eternity. Dem.: It is of the nature of reason to regard things as necessary and not as contingent. And it perceives this necessity of things truly, that is, as it is in itself. But this necessity of things is the very necessity of God's eternal nature. Therefore, it is of the nature of reason to regard things under this species of eternity.

In this epistemic condition, we see that all bodies and their states and relationships – including the condition of our own body – follow necessarily from the essence of matter and the universal laws of physics, and we see that all ideas, including all the properties of minds, follow necessarily from the essence of thought and its universal laws. Such insight can only weaken the power that the passions have over us. When we come to this level of understanding and realize that we cannot control what nature brings our way or takes from us, we are no longer anxious over what may come to pass, and no longer obsessed with or despondent over the loss of our possessions. We regard all things with equanimity, and we are not inordinately and irrationally affected in different ways by past, present, or future events. The result is self-control and a calmness of mind.

The more this knowledge that things are necessary is concerned with singular things, which we imagine more distinctly and vividly, the greater is this power of the Mind over the affects, as experience itself also testifies. We see that Sadness over some good that has perished is lessened as soon as the man who has lost it realizes that this good could not, in any way, have been kept. Similarly, we see that [because we regard infancy as a natural and necessary thing], no one pities infants because of their inability to speak, to walk, or to reason, or because they live so many years, as it were, unconscious of themselves.[98]

The third kind of knowledge, by revealing how all things ultimately depend on God or Nature and its attributes, puts one in an intellectual union with the highest possible object of human knowledge. As this state of knowing represents our *summum bonum*, the virtuous person strives to maintain it; and because its object is eternal and unchanging, he can do so. What, in the end, replaces the passionate, unstable love for ephemeral "goods" is an abiding intellectual love for an eternal, immutable good that we can fully and stablely possess, God.

VP32: Whatever we understand by the third kind of knowledge we take pleasure in, and our pleasure is accompanied by the idea of God as a cause . . .

Corollary: From the third kind of knowledge, there necessarily arises an intellectual love of God. For from this kind of knowledge there arises Joy, accompanied by the idea of God

as its cause, i.e., Love of God, not insofar as we imagine him as present, but insofar as we understand God to be eternal. And this is what I call intellectual love of God.

It follows from this, Spinoza argues, that

VP33: The intellectual love of God, which arises from the third kind of knowledge, is eternal.

Because the third kind of knowledge is eternal, the joy it involves (because such knowledge represents an increase in our active powers) is likewise eternal. So then must be the resulting love for the object which is that joy's (eternal) cause. The third kind of knowledge generates an eternal love for its eternal object, and this love consists in not a passion, but blessedness itself.[99]

Echoing Maimonides's view of human *eudaimonia*, Spinoza argues that the mind's intellectual love of God *is* our understanding of the universe, our virtue, our happiness, our well-being and our "salvation."[100] It is also our freedom and autonomy, as we approach the condition wherein what happens to us (especially in our states of mind) follows from our own, intrinsic nature as thinking beings and not as a result of the ways external things affect us. Spinoza's "free person" – "one who lives according to the dictate of reason alone"[101] – bears the gifts and losses of fortune with equanimity, does only those things that he believes to be "the most important in life," takes care for the well-being of others (doing what he can to ensure that they, too, acheive some relief from the disturbances of the passions through understanding), and is not anxious about death. His understanding of his place in the natural scheme of things brings to the free individual happiness and true peace of mind.

Virtue, then, has its rewards. There are certain supreme benefits that it brings, by nature, to the virtuous person. The striving for and acquisition of understanding and the third kind of knowledge confers happiness and well-being.[102] Our freedom, our physical and psychological well-being, indeed our flourishing are directly dependent on our knowledge of nature, including our understanding both of the necessity of all things and of our place in the world. Virtue is a source of abiding happiness and of freedom from the vicissitudes of chance and fortune. This, if anything, constitutes "special providence" within Spinoza's system.

Of course, for Spinoza there is an important sense in which *everything* is the result of divine providence. There is nothing that happens in nature – and whatever happens must happen in nature, for there is nothing that is outside of nature – that is not brought about by God or Nature. Therefore, *all* benefits and *all* harms that come to a person, indeed, all the benefits and all the harms that come to anything,

and not just the blessedness that is the natural byproduct of virtue, are the result of divine providence. When a virtuous person suffers or a vicious person prospers, this too is providence at work. So the question naturally arises as to why this tiny little corner of nature – the benefits enjoyed by the virtuous person because of his virtue – should be singled out as "divine providence" when *any* naturally good[103] effect, or any effect whatsoever of anything, is equally an illustration of providence? Why distinguish "special providence" from "general providence?" What difference can there be between the two, because all things happen by the same laws and within the same infinite causal nexus?

From the point of view of human agents, however, it makes all the difference in the world whether benefits come haphazardly (as judged from the agent's perspective) and according to the various but all-natural ways in which he is buffeted back and forth by external things, on the one hand, or, on the other hand, are possessed in a deliberate and controlled manner. This is the distinction that appears in the *Theological-Political Treatise* between God's "external help [*auxilium externum*]" and God's "internal help [*auxilium internum*]."

> Whatever human nature can effect solely by its own power to preserve its own being can rightly be called God's internal help, and whatever falls to a man's advantage from the power of external causes can rightly be called God's external help.[104]

The "external help" is simply the circumstances in which we find ourselves through the operation of external causes; it is, Spinoza says, often a matter of "fortune" and causes beyond our control: "general providence." The "internal help" can be called "special providence," and under it Spinoza clearly intends to include the knowledge we acquire and that increases our well-being.

It is true that for Spinoza everything that happens to a human being is, like everything that happens to anything, the result of divine providence understood as general providence or the overall causal order of nature. It is just *because* of the causal connections of general providence that a moral agent can, through virtue, experience special providence and reap its benefits. There is a well-defined subset of the overall causal order of nature that is of particular interest to moral agents, namely, the cause–effect relationship that obtains between (a) virtue and knowledge, and (b) happiness and well-being. This is the domain of special providence. Any rational agent, to the extent that he is acting rationally, will strive to participate in and take advantage of this providence, because he will want to minimize the degree to which his happiness is at the mercy of nature's external forces. Through the pursuit of virtue, a person can increase the extent to which his well-being is

unaffected by the vagaries of fortune. The more an agent secures of knowledge, the greater and more stable will be his share of happiness.

From the impersonal point of view of general providence, the rewards of virtue are just like any other effects of natural causes. From the point of view of a moral agent, however, there is a special providence in sight – an increase in one's deliberate and secure possession of nature's benefits through the pursuit of virtue. For Spinoza, God (or Nature) rewards the virtuous. It does so not because there is a plan that it conceives and then willfully carries out, but simply because that is how nature necessarily works. It is a theory of divine providence without teleology. As Spinoza says to one of his correspondents,

> Our disagreement is located in this alone: whether God as God – i.e., absolutely, ascribing no human attributes to him – communicates to the pious the perfections they receive (which is what I understand), or whether he does this as a judge (which is what you maintain) . . . I do not introduce God as a judge. And therefore I value works by their quality, and not by the power of the workman, and the wages which follow the work follow it as necessarily as from the nature of a triangle it follows that its three angles must equal two right angles.[105]

Providence is the inviolable causal order of nature, as this is determined by God/Substance, and built into that order is a system of rewards and punishments – not by intention or purpose, but by natural causes. The pursuit of virtue brings benefits *by nature*; correspondingly, the life of vice is attended by the lack of such benefits. The virtuous person, through his knowledge, naturally enjoys a kind of protection from nature's unpredictable influences and the psychological turmoil they bring. The vicious person, on the other hand, is at the mercy of the elements, living the life of bondage and "tossed about" by the passions.

Far from rejecting the approach to providence and evil that characterizes medieval Jewish rationalism, Spinoza's naturalistic and intellectualist account represents, in some important respects, its logical culmination.

NOTES

1 There are, of course, an enormous number of studies of the Book of Job as theodicy; for a recent philosophical account, see Leaman 1995, chap. 1.

2 For a discussion of some aspects of the commentary tradition on Job in Jewish philosophy, see Eisen 2004, and Lenn Goodman's essay in Saadia 1988, pp. 28–92.

3 For example, Ibn Tibbon's commentary on Job, *Ma'amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayim* (discussed in Eisen 2004, chap. 4) and Albo's *Sefer ha-Iqqarim*.

4 *De Providentia* II.1. For discussions of Philo on providence and evil, see Frick 1999; Wolfson 1947, vol. 2, pp. 292–4.

5 *De Providentia* II.54.

6 *De Providentia* II.2.
7 *De Providentia* II.7–8.
8 *De Providentia* II.21.
9 *De Providentia* II.42.
10 *De Providentia* II.55.
11 *De Providentia* II.47.
12 See, for example, Babylonian Talmud, *'Avot d'Rabbi Natan*, chap. 39 (33a): "The wicked are paid outright, while the righteous are given credit. 'The wicked are paid outright': they are those who performed the precepts of the Torah with ill grace, and otherwise no good deed is found with them. 'The righteous are given credit': these are they who fulfilled the precepts of the Torah with good grace and with whom no evil deed is found. Both are paid a little [here], but the remainder is held for them [for the hereafter]." For a discussion of theodicy in rabbinic literature, see Urbach 1975, pp. 511–23.
13 *Sifre Deuteronomy*, sect. 32, f. 73b.
14 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* V.1, Saadia 1948, p. 207.
15 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* V.2, Saadia 1948, p. 209. A single act is enough to tip the balance one way or the other: "Thus if a servant of God were to have to his credit two hundred and one acts, one hundred of which are good and another hundred evil, which would render his record evenly balanced, then, if the additional single act be good, he would on its account be called 'virtuous', whereas if it be evil, he would be called 'impious'" (V.3, p. 216).
16 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* V.2, Saadia 1948, p. 208.
17 The Mutazilites, philosophers of the *Kalām*, in their opposition to their Asharite opponents' claim that God is not bound by any objective standards of justice, argued that it would be unjust for God not to arrange rewards and punishments according to the deserts of individuals. They granted, however, that the true and just distribution of rewards and punishments may take place beyond this world.
18 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* IX.1, Saadia 1948, pp. 324–6.
19 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* V.2, Saadia 1948, pp. 210–11.
20 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* V.2, Saadia 1948, p. 211.
21 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* V.2, Saadia 1948, p. 212.
22 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* V.3, Saadia 1948, p. 213.
23 This is the title that Saadia gives to the Book of Job itself; Goodman translates *tādil* as "theodicy." For a discussion of Saadia's reading of Job, see Eisen 2004, chap. 2; Goodman's essay in Saadia 1988, pp. 93–119; E. I. J. Rosenthal 1943. See also Leaman 1995, chap. 3, for a discussion of Saadia's theodicy generally.
24 *The Book of Theodicy*, Introduction [by Saadia], Saadia 1988, pp. 125–6.
25 *The Book of Theodicy*, Introduction, Saadia 1988, p. 127.
26 *The Book of Theodicy*, Introduction, Saadia 1988, p. 130; see also his notes to Job, chap. 35, p. 366.
27 For a general discussion of Maimonides on the problem of evil, see Leaman 1995, chap. 4.
28 *Guide of the Perplexed* (henceforth, *Guide*) III.10, Maimonides 1963, p. 439.
29 *Guide* III.12, Maimonides 1963, pp. 442–3.
30 *Guide* III.8, Maimonides 1963, pp. 431–2.
31 *Guide* III.12, Maimonides 1963, pp. 443–5.
32 *Guide* III.12, Maimonides 1963, p. 444.
33 *Guide* III.12, Maimonides 1963, p. 446.

34 *Guide* III.13, Maimonides 1963, p. 455.
35 For a general discussion of Maimonides on providence, see Touati 1990a. See also Reines 1972; Nuriel 1980; Raffel 1987; Nehorai 1988.
36 He actually considers five views before presenting what he calls his own. It has been argued by many commentators that Maimonides' view is substantially identical with the fifth view – "the opinion of our law," the view of Torah – and constitutes only a more sophisticated, philosophical understanding of it; see Touati 1990a, pp. 149–50.
37 *Guide* III.17, Maimonides 1963, p. 468.
38 *Guide* III.17, Maimonides 1963, p. 471.
39 The events are not a matter of "chance" in the sense of being uncaused and random. The sinking of the ship or the blowing down of the house is no less determined by nature's causal order than any other event. Chance enters into the picture only from the perspective of human plans. What is a matter of "chance" or "accident" is the fact that these events are uncontrollable, unforseen, unfortunate, and inconvenient with respect to human endeavors, as well as unrelated to human deserts.
40 *Guide* III.17, Maimonides 1963, p. 472.
41 *Guide* III.17, Maimonides 1963, p. 473.
42 *Guide* III.17, Maimonides 1963, pp. 471–2, 474.
43 *Guide* III.18, Maimonides 1963, p. 475.
44 See *Guide* III.54, Maimonides 1963, p. 635.
45 *Guide* III.18, Maimonides 1963, pp. 475–6.
46 Both Samuel and Moses ibn Tibbon, for example, the translator of Maimonides' *Guide* and his son, remark upon this tension; see Diesenbruck 1936. For an attempt to resolve the ambiguity, see Touati 1990a, 1990b. There are other ambiguities and tensions in Maimonides' account; see, for example, Curley 2002.
47 *Guide* III.51, Maimonides 1963, pp. 626–7.
48 Maimonides identifies each of the speakers in the Book of Job with one of the philosophical views on providence (excepting the Epicurean view): Job = Aristotelian theory, Eliphaz = Torah theory, Bildad = Mutazilite theory, Zophar = Asharite theory, and Elihu = Maimonidean theory; see *Guide* III.23. For a discussion of Maimonides' reading of Job, see Eisen 2004, chap. 3.
49 *Guide* III.23, Maimonides 1963, pp. 492–3.
50 *Guide* III.18, Maimonides 1963, p. 475.
51 Maimonides thus rejects the suggestion that a truly virtuous person might experience undeserved suffering as part of a "trial"; see *Guide* III.24.
52 *Guide* III.51, Maimonides 1963, pp. 625–6.
53 For comparative studies, see Burrell 1972 and Dobbs-Weinstein 1991. For discussions of Gersonides' views on theodicy and providence, see Bleich 1973; Touati 1973, part five; Kellner 1974; Eisen 1995; Leaman 1995, chap. 5; Nadler 2001a, and 2001b, chap. 4; and Manekin 2003, pp. 310–5. Eisen 2004 (chap. 6) discusses Gersonides' reading of Job.
54 *Wars of the Lord* (henceforth, *Wars*), Book III.
55 *Wars* III.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 136.
56 *Wars* IV.3, Gersonides 1987, p. 167.
57 Gersonides 1946, p. 21.
58 Gersonides 1946, pp. 37–55.
59 *Wars* IV.3, Gersonides 1987, p. 171.
60 Gersonides 1946, pp. 199–202.
61 *Wars* IV.3, Gersonides 1987, p. 173.
62 *Wars* IV.3, Gersonides 1987, pp. 168–9 (emphasis added).

63 *Wars* IV.3, Gersonides 1987, pp. 176–7.
64 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 184. The possession of reason is itself a product of general (species) providence. It is only the actual employment of reason to the highest degree that constitutes special providence.
65 *Wars* I.6, Gersonides 1984, p. 151.
66 *Wars* V.3.iv, Gersonides 1999, p. 135.
67 *Wars* I.13, Gersonides 1984, p. 224. See H. Davidson 1992; Touati 1973, VI.1.
68 Gersonides uses a Hebrew transliteration of the Greek word *nomos*; see *Wars* V.3.xiii, Gersonides 1999, p. 186 (Gersonides 1866, p. 286).
69 *Wars* IV.5, Gersonides 1987, p. 178.
70 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 180.
71 *Wars* IV.3, Gersonides 1987, p. 172–3.
72 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 181.
73 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 182 (Gersonides 1866, p. 169).
74 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 182.
75 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 185.
76 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, pp. 182–3.
77 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 183. Kellner 1974 argues that in his claim that the distribution of material goods in this world is not always governed by justice, Gersonides goes against rabbinic tradition.
78 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 197. See also the discussion of immortality in *Wars* I, especially I.13. Samuel ibn Tiqqon, in his *Ma'amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayim* (15-18), takes this position one step further and claims that providence does not function in this world at all but only in the world-to-come; see Eisen 2004, chap. 4.
79 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 186.
80 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 183.
81 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 184.
82 *Wars* IV.6, Gersonides 1987, p. 185.
83 For comparative studies, see W. Harvey 1978, 1981b, and Curley 2002.
84 *Ethics*, part I, Appendix, Spinoza 1972, vol. 2, p. 78 (Spinoza 1985, vol. 1, p. 439). All citations from *Ethics* will follow the standard method of indicating part (by Roman numeral), proposition (P), scholium (s), and corollary (c).
85 Part I, Appendix, Spinoza 1972, vol. 2, p. 80 (Spinoza 1985, vol. 1, p. 442).
86 Part I, Appendix, Spinoza 1972, vol. 2, p. 82 (Spinoza 1985, vol. 1, p. 444).
87 Part I, Appendix, Spinoza 1972, vol. 2, p. 79 (Spinoza 1985, vol. 1, p. 441).
88 Part I, Appendix.
89 The doctrine of the eternity of the mind in VP21-42 of *Ethics* represents a rejection of personal immortality. For a discussion of Spinoza and the question of immortality, see Nadler 2002.
90 VP41s. For a discussion of Spinoza and this kind of theodicy, see Nadler 2001b.
91 Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, p. 89 (Spinoza 2001, p. 78).
92 *Ethics* IV, Preface.
93 IIIP13s.
94 IIIP28.
95 IIIP59s.
96 VP20s
97 IVP4.
98 VP6s.
99 VP42.

100 See Maimonides, *Guide* III.51. For a discussion of the agreement between Maimonides and Spinoza on this, see W. Harvey 1981b, pp. 161–2.
101 IVP67.
102 At one point, Spinoza says that human virtue just *is* happiness: "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself" (VP42).
103 It must be borne in mind that for Spinoza, "good" is always a relative term, and means only what is useful to its possesser and brings it closer to some goal; see IVd1.
104 *Theological-Political Treatise*, chap. 3, Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, p. 46 (Spinoza 2001, p. 36).
105 Letter 21 (to Blijenburgh), Spinoza 1972, vol. 4, p. 127 (Spinoza 1985, p. 376–7).

20

DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE, OMNISCIENCE, AND HUMAN FREEDOM

SEYMOUR FELDMAN

Is anything impossible for the Lord? (Genesis 18:14)

Know this for a certain, that your descendants will be aliens living in a land that is not theirs; they will be slaves, and will be held in oppression there for four hundred years. (Genesis 15:13)

Choose life. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

I. INTRODUCTION

The religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all seem to require belief in God's unlimited power, all-encompassing knowledge, and human choice. The Bible is full of stories about miracles, but how would miracles be possible if God is not omnipotent? Prophecy is an essential component of scripture, but would prophecy be possible if God did not know the future? Man is commanded to perform all kinds of commandments. If he obeys, he is rewarded; if he disobeys, he is punished. This presupposes that he has the choice to obey or disobey, and thus is responsible for his choices. Once we begin to reflect on these religious dogmas, we realize that things may not be so clear. Is God's power really unlimited? Can He do the impossible? Moreover, if God is truly omniscient and knows the future, are the outcomes of the future so fixed that no alternatives are possible? If so, it would seem that man is not really free when he appears to be making a choice. It is thus no surprise that the philosophical and theological literature of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are replete with discussions of these perplexing problems.

These issues were often framed within a philosophical context established by Aristotle. Although he did not explicitly discuss divine omnipotence or omniscience, he laid down several fundamental principles that either directly or indirectly influenced later discussions of these theological topics. For example, in discussing the nature of choice and volition, Aristotle quotes in passing a passage from the Greek poet Agathon: "it is not possible for what has happened not to have happened – so Agathon was right: 'For even from god this power is kept, this

power alone: to make it true that what's been done had never been done.'"[1] Thus, Aristotle implies, even if the gods are all-powerful, there are limits to what they can do: they cannot undo the past. The past is forever fixed and settled, even for the gods.

Although in this passage Aristotle does not provide any argument for this thesis, his formulation and discussion of the most fundamental principle in his philosophy, indeed philosophy itself as he conceives it – the Law of Non-Contradiction – underlies Agathon's dictum. Whether this law be construed as a law of thought, or logic, or as a principle of reality, it lays down a restriction on what is possible or what can be the case: If two conditions are genuinely opposed to each other, either as contradictories or as contraries, they cannot be simultaneously asserted of the same thing in the same respect.[2] Accordingly, if there is an all-powerful god, it would be "bound" by this law. If some putative state of affairs is such that it asserts or implies a violation of this principle, it is not genuinely possible. Not even a god can bring it about. Logical possibility then defines the domain of divine power. The logically impossible is not doable for anyone.

If the question of omnipotence is located within the context of Aristotle's law of noncontradiction, the issue of omniscience can be framed within his second fundamental law, the Law of the Excluded Middle. After formulating this law in *On Interpretation* 7, in chapter 9 Aristotle proceeds to consider a problem that this law appears to elicit: If a proposition must either be true or false, what about propositions concerning future contingent events, that is, events that we believe to be "iffy," and in the case of those pertaining to human affairs, subject to human choice? If their truth value is fixed by the Law of the Excluded Middle such that one or the other of the alternatives is true (or false), then deliberation and choice seem to be precluded. Aristotle is deeply vexed by this problem, and he tries to find a way whereby his law can be saved and choice preserved. Although Aristotle did not mention divine omniscience, his authoritative commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias explicitly extended what he took to be Aristotle's solution to the dilemma to the problem of divine omniscience. In his treatise *On Fate* Alexander clearly takes Aristotle's conclusion in *On Interpretation* 9 to imply the thesis that genuinely future contingent events have no truth value, although they will have one. Accordingly, the gods do not know such events.[3] This apparent restriction on the domain of the gods' knowledge did not worry the ancient pagan philosophers who were not committed to the strong claim of divine omniscience as understood by believers in the Bible and in the Qu'ran.

Before we travel to the Middle Ages let us take a departing look at two post-biblical, rabbinic statements that nicely, if not conclusively, formulate the issues

under consideration and which will resurface in some of the medieval discussions we shall investigate. In the *Mishnah*, *Tractate Berakhot* (Blessings) 9 certain types of prayers are prohibited, that is, vain prayers. Two examples are given, both implying that the petitioner is seeking from God a change in what has already happened: (a) someone requesting that a catastrophe that has already occurred be undone if it has happened to him; or, (b) a request that one's newly born child be a son. In both cases, something is already a fact and the petitioner wants God to undo it if it is not to his liking. This is a vain prayer. For as the sixteenth-century commentator Obadiah Bertinoro comments, "What is past is past!" Here Jewish law agrees with Agathon and Aristotle. There are limits to God's power.

On the other hand, when it came to omniscience a different attitude is expressed by one of the most important figures in rabbinic literature and legend – Rabbi Aqiba. In *Mishnah* Avot 3.15, Rabbi Aqiba tersely formulates the Aristotelian–Alexandrian dilemma between foreknowledge and freedom: "Everything is foreseen; yet freedom is given." Unfortunately, Rabbi Aqiba says nothing more about this topic, and later rabbinic literature does not offer any commentary on it. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the medieval Jewish philosophers are not silent. Aware that Rabbi Aqiba's dictum just states the dilemma and acquiesces in its apparent incoherence, they will attempt to provide explanations for how these seemingly contradictory alternatives can be reconciled.

II. DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE

I know that Thou can do everything. (Job 42:2)

For God everything is possible. (Philo of Alexandria, On the Creation of the World, 14.46)

Saadia Gaon

Our investigation will begin with Saadia ben Joseph (882–942), commonly referred to as Saadia Gaon, the latter term connoting the title of the Dean of one of the main higher academies in medieval Mesopotamia. Although one can make a case for Jewish philosophy beginning with Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.E.–ca. 40 C.E.), we shall not consider him in this story; he was unknown to Jewish thought before the sixteenth century and thus had no influence on medieval Jewish thinkers. With Saadia, however, a tradition of philosophical analysis and formulation of Jewish theological topics is established that continues to exert its influence on later theologians and philosophers in the Jewish world. As has been amply documented by many specialists, Saadia's reflections reveal his debt to contemporary Islamic discussions of religious dogmas known as *Kalām*.[4] *Kalām* thinkers, both Muslim and Jewish,

attempted to provide philosophical understanding and defense of religious beliefs central to their revealed traditions. In this enterprise they utilized philosophical concepts and arguments of the Greek philosophers, sometimes systematically but more often haphazardly. In his major philosophical–theological work, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Saadia systematically discusses what he takes to be the central theological beliefs of Judaism. His goal is to make these beliefs understandable and plausible and thus worthy of acceptance. To this end he uses philosophical arguments to show that these beliefs are rationally warranted.

Although divine omnipotence is not singled out for separate treatment, as are the topics of creation and the soul, Saadia does discuss this subject when he deals with the general issue of the divine attributes. Already in Muslim *Kalām* the topic of divine power had become a major problem: All agreed that God is all-powerful; this is one of the primary attributes of God. Does this power annul human power? Does it imply that God can do everything, even the impossible? (The former question will occupy us when we turn to the question of divine omniscience.) Most *Kalām* thinkers maintained, following Aristotle, that the Law of Non-Contradiction defines the domain of the possible, and hence God's power encompasses only that that is logically possible. There were some, however, who found this limitation to be insulting to God and thus were prepared to say that although this law necessarily governs human thought and action, it does not apply to God. The Muslim theologian Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) seems to have subscribed to this radical position, although he moderates it somewhat by saying that this unrestricted power of God is not exercised in this world.[5] Saadia's view, however, is clearly the dominant Aristotelian position that power is defined by the possible and the possible is determined by logic.

At the outset of his discussion Saadia quotes the passage from Job 42:2: Along with omniscience and life, power is a divine attribute. How are we to understand this attribute? Saadia makes it quite clear that he does not approve of excessive glorifications of divine power. He singles out three such exaggerations. Two of them are cases in which the overzealous believer ascribes to God the power to violate mathematical truths, one arithmetical, and the other geometrical. Saadia rejects such ascriptions: These truths are logically necessary; hence, to say that God can, for example, make the number five equal the number eight without adding to former or subtracting from the latter is absurd, that is, logically impossible. The third example is the case previously cited from the *Mishnah*: It is logically absurd to ask God to undo the past. In all these instances the alleged action that God is asked to perform is not a genuine act; it is, in Saadia's language, a "nothing." So the zealous believer is really asking whether or not God can do nothing, and this

question can be answered either way. If by nothing he means a thing, then the answer is No, because nothing is no thing; if by nothing he means, can God refrain from doing anything or some particular thing, the answer is Yes. A question of this sort is idle or meaningless. In short, a putative state of affairs that turns out to be logically impossible is not a doable. No one then can be said to be impotent or inadequate if he or she cannot do it. It is not a real *it*.

Before we leave Saadia, let us take a brief look at an interesting application of his notion of divine omnipotence because it reveals the general tenor of his mind. In addressing the issue of resurrection of the dead – a fundamental belief of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but one that raises philosophical problems – Saadia attempts to allay these problems first by appealing to scripture and then providing a philosophical defense of this belief. Someone might reply to Saadia by saying that the scriptural passages that support the idea of resurrection are just metaphorical. Because Saadia is not averse to appealing to metaphorical interpretation, he has to provide some criteria for introducing nonliteral interpretation of scripture; otherwise, his literal interpretation of the resurrection passages and nonliteral reading of other passages will be arbitrary. So he lays down several criteria for the application of nonliteral interpretations, one of which is reason. If we come across a biblical passage that violates logic, we *must* interpret it in such a way that the absurdity is removed. For example, when God is described as a "devouring fire and a jealous deity" (Deuteronomy 4:24), we are obliged to read this ascription nonliterally. For fire and jealousy are attributes of corporeal creatures, but God is not corporeal. To assert then that God is fiery or jealous is to attribute to Him contradictory conditions: God is both incorporeal and corporeal; however, this is absurd. Hence, do not expect or demand that God do the logically impossible.[6]

Moses Maimonides

As is well known, Maimonides (1138–1204) was very reluctant to ascribe any attribute to God; however, in practice he does discuss in *Guide of the Perplexed* some basic attributes of God, such as omniscience and providence.[7] In fact, these two attributes are included in his Thirteen Articles of Faith incumbent upon all Jews (Article 10 – omniscience; Article 11 – providence). Omnipotence, however, is not listed as an Article of Faith. Moreover, unlike the principles of omniscience and providence, there is no separate treatment of omnipotence in the *Guide*. Instead, we have to extract his views on this principle from his discussions of other topics. We shall begin with his comments on the rabbinic passage about vain prayers. Both in his early *Commentary on the Mishnah* and the later code the *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides reinforces the rabbinic prohibition against asking God to change the

past. The past is over; or, in logical terms, a true proposition remains true forever. To pray that a past event or fact be undone is to ask God to make a true proposition untrue, and this is to violate the Law of Non-Contradiction. If it is true that the New England Patriots won the 2005 Super Bowl, then asking God to undo this event is asking Him to make that proposition false. One and the same proposition cannot be both true and false. Hence, prayer should be future-directed, not past-directed. In the former there are genuine possibilities; in the latter there are no longer any possibilities. Whereas the future is open, the past is closed, even for God.[8]

So far Maimonides has followed the lead of the rabbis and Saadia. In his philosophical writings he turns his attention to the general question of what is genuinely possible and how that is to be determined. The context of the discussion is the issue of creation of the world and in particular the argument for creation advanced by the *Kalām* known as the Argument from Admissability. The crucial premise in this argument, Maimonides points out, is the *Kalām* notion of possibility: Anything is possible if it can be *imagined*. Following Aristotle's distinction between imagination and thinking, or reasoning, Maimonides rejects this *Kalām* definition of possibility. For there are things that are unimaginable but which reason tells us are possible, indeed true. Inversely, there are things that we do imagine that are not really possible at all.[9] Hence, imagination is not a genuine criterion for determining possibility.[10]

Nevertheless, Maimonides is not altogether definitive about discovering or formulating a precise intellectual criterion for possibility. In a later chapter in the *Guide* he wonders whether such a criterion will ever be forthcoming. After describing a hypothetical debate between the philosophers and the theologians on the notion of possibility, Maimonides queries whether or not

> This gate is open and licit, so that every one can claim and assert with regard to any notion whatever that he conceives: This is possible; whereas someone else says: No, this is impossible because of the nature of the matter. (*Guide* III.15)

It is then not always obvious how we should go about determining the really possible. Yet, Maimonides is not in a rush to abandon reason. As he says in the very beginning of that chapter: "The impossible has a stable nature . . . Hence, the power over the impossible is not attributed to the deity." As his subsequent discussion clearly shows, he is one with the philosophers in *maintaining* that logic rules out certain states of affairs from the domain of divine power. From the mathematical examples he cites, it turns out that these pseudo-possibilities all violate the laws of logic, and thus are, in Saadia's terms, nothings. It seems that Maimonides is committed to or using a kind of "paradigm case argument" to determine what is logically possible. We begin with some clear examples of what is logically impossible, and

then proceed to see in any putative case of a possible state of affairs whether or not it is like the former; if it is, then it too is absolutely impossible. As Maimonides admits, however, there will be cases in which it will not be so easy, and some of them turn out to be the more vexing issues in philosophy and religion, for example, creation *ex nihilo*.

The topic of divine omnipotence also arises in Maimonides' discussion of miracles. In his early *Commentary on the Mishnah*, he refers to two rabbinic passages wherein the rabbis single out several specific miracles as having been preprogrammed into the world at its very creation.[11] Discussing one of these texts in part 2, chapter 29 of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides generalizes this idea and says that all miracles can be regarded as having been preprogrammed into the universe at its creation. This idea helps Maimonides dissipate the criticism that miracles seem to imply new volitions on the part of God, and thus threaten His immutability. Because God's eternal will prescribes the occurrence of a miracle at the very beginning of the universe, nothing new occurs that implies change in God. Moreover, once the miracle has occurred and terminated, nature resumes its normal course.

In perhaps his latest work, *Essay on Resurrection*, Maimonides returns to this question. Defending himself against critics who impugned his sincerity in listing the belief in resurrection as one of the thirteen dogmas of Judaism, Maimonides responded by distinguishing between that which is logically possible or impossible and that which is naturally possible or impossible. In the former the laws of logic fix the boundaries of what is possible or impossible; in the latter the laws of science determine what is possible within the natural course of events. Miracles, however, are contrary to this natural course, and thus naturally impossible. Nevertheless, if they are consistent with the laws of logic, they are logically possible, and hence doable by God; God can do whatever is logically possible. Now, the believer in the Torah can accept the logical possibility of miracles because the Torah teaches creation of the universe, which thesis Maimonides believes he has shown to be at least logically plausible and which opens the door to the possibility of miracles. The believer in Aristotle's theory of the eternity of the world, however, is committed to the theory that the laws of nature necessarily preclude miracles, because the world on this theory derives from God eternally and necessarily. In showing that the creation of the world, however, is at least logically possible, Maimonides opens up some "logical space" for the possibility of miracles as well.[12]

Isaac Albalag

In general medieval Jewish philosophers and theologians followed Saadia and Maimonides in understanding divine omnipotence as the power to do whatever is logically possible. Nevertheless, alternative ways of formulating the notions of the

possible and of power were proposed by several later thinkers, some of whom suggested different approaches or attitudes toward divine omnipotence. We shall consider first a late-thirteenth-century figure, relatively unknown and somewhat isolated, yet most intriguing for several reasons – Isaac Albalag. As Georges Vajda, his most authoritative modern commentator, has noted, "of the life and career of Isaac Albalag we hardly know anything."[13] Most of the modern literature on Albalag, and there is not that much, has focused upon his "double-truth theory," which is understandable, because it is an eccentric and exotic episode in the history of medieval Jewish philosophy.[14] Albalag's only extant work is his translation and commentary of Al-Ghazālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers*, an encyclopedia of the philosophical theories of al-Fārābī and Avicenna. His commentary is critical, in which he makes frequent use of Averroes to criticize the earlier Muslim thinkers and Maimonides, whom he considers to be unduly influenced by Avicenna.[15]

Albalag's treatment of omnipotence emerges out of his discussions of the possible. In note 6 of the Commentary he begins by narrating an encounter with a local rabbi who rejected the Aristotelian notion of omnipotence as the power to do the logically possible as too restrictive. In theory at least anyone of us could be omnipotent on this criterion. In his response to this objection Albalag initially lays down a distinction between two types of possibility: (1) the possibility (*efsharut*) possessed by an agent to perform some action; and (2) the possibility inherent in a subject to receive the act of the agent. Although Albalag uses the Hebrew term *efsharut* throughout this discussion, and this word usually connotes the logical notion "possibility," it seems that what he is really talking about is power. Albalag's distinction seems to be then the Aristotelian distinction between active and passive, or potential, powers.[16] A trained carpenter, for example, has the possibility, or power, to make a chair out of a piece of wood; the wood has the possibility, or power, to be made into a chair. For a chair to be made requires both an agent and a subject satisfying these two conditions. Now, in the case of any proposed action, we must consider whether both conditions are present. Clearly, if the agent does not have the possibility to perform the act, that is, he lacks the power to do it, he is not by any means omnipotent. If, however, what is supposed to be done does not have the possibility of being done at all, then that the act is not performed by this agent does not imply any impotence on the agent's part. What was supposed to be an action turns out to be a nonact. It is not doable because it is not a real possibility. Accordingly, if we ask God to make a triangle such that its interior angles equal 181 degrees, we are making a vain request, since this is a logical impossibility. That God "cannot" make such a triangle does not imply that He is not omnipotent; it only means that the person requesting this is a fool. In one sense our rabbi was right, if

only trivially: Whenever both possibilities, or powers, are present, the act can be done by *any* agent. This does not mean that every agent is omnipotent; it means only that some acts can be done by many agents, although there will be some acts that can be done by only a few, perhaps only one agent.

Gersonides

The fourteenth-century astronomer, philosopher, and biblical exegete Levi ben Gershom, or Gersonides (1288–1344), accepted the general outlook of his Jewish predecessors concerning divine omnipotence. Although he does not address this issue directly or in detail, he expresses his point of view in discussions on other topics. Like Saadia and Maimonides divine power is defined in terms of the notion of logical possibility; accordingly, that which is logically impossible cannot be done. So God cannot make a triangle whose interior angles total less than 180 degrees; and He cannot undo the past. There are, however, two aspects of his treatment of miracles that differ from what we have found in his forerunners.

Unlike Maimonides, Gersonides locates the miracle *within* the domain of that which is *naturally possible*; there is no subdomain of the naturally impossible for Gersonides. This means that for him the miracle is in an important sense *natural*, although not entirely natural. It is natural in the sense that in bringing about miracles the agent of miracles, which for Gersonides is the Agent Intellect, uses natural means. On the other hand, a miracle must manifest something different from the "normal"; otherwise, it would not be a miracle. The miraculous event differs from nature in that in its generation the normal causal chain is not used; something in the causal series is changed in some respect. In many cases what happens is that the causal chain is abbreviated, sometimes to the point of being overridden completely, such that the event comes about *immediately*, without any of its usual causal antecedents having occurred. For example, in the transformation of the rod into a snake, the normal changes that matter would undergo for a piece of wood to become a snake would transpire over a long period of time, during which the rod would become, say, firewood, and the latter would become ashes, et cetera, until the original quantity of matter will have become a copperhead. In Moses' case, however, this whole process took virtually no time, because many, perhaps all of the intermediary subprocesses were "skipped over." Thus, no new matter was created – for Gersonides there is a law of the conservation of matter; it is just that the usual "local" train of events has been replaced by an "express" train.[17]

Gersonides lays down a general principle concerning miracles: They are brought about through the most natural means possible.

Since the natural order of existent things has been established by God (may He be blessed) in the most perfect manner possible, whenever it is necessary from the perspective of divine providence to change this order, it is incumbent upon God (may He be blessed) to deviate from this order as little as possible. Therefore, God (may He be blessed) brings about these miracles by means of causes that involve minimum natural deviation. (*Commentary on Genesis*, Parshat Noah, 20d; my translation)

Because miracles are located in the domain of the naturally possible, they must be "naturalized" to the maximum. In this sense, miracles are not so much exceptions to or violations of nature as unusual events in which the normal causal network is in some way modified, but not entirely. God is in general "committed" to work within nature even when He has a reason for going beyond it. Gersonides nicely expresses this principle in the following passage.

[God] does not hate nature, for He has ordered it; therefore He does not disagree with it except in times of necessity and to the minimum degree that is possible. (*Commentary on Deuteronomy*, Parshat ʿEqev, 115d)

To this extent we can say that divine omnipotence is not only defined by logic but by nature as well, so long as we understood nature in a broad sense as including processes that are unusual yet possible. Gersonides departs from his usual irenic spirit in explicitly castigating the ignorant who in their desire to magnify God's power understand and describe miracles in most bizarre ways. In reality, he claims, they denigrate God instead of praising Him.

Some modern commentators have attributed to Gersonides the concept of a "law of miracles." Because for Gersonides nature is a nomological system, even those events that deviate from this system in some way are also law-governed, albeit within a system of laws special to them. Let the domain of natural possibility be designated by {NP}. Within {NP} there are two subdomains: {L} and {M}. Subdomain {L} contains all those events governed by the standard laws of nature, which for Gersonides, as we have seen, were established by God when the world was created. Subdomain {M}, however, includes those events that are natural insofar as they have counterparts in {L}, for example, earthquakes or snakes, but in {M} these events are governed by a different set of laws, the "laws of miracles." Whereas in {L} an earthquake comes about under a specific set of sufficient conditions, in {M} some, perhaps all, of these conditions are absent. If in {L} an earthquake occurs whenever conditions a,b,c . . . k are present, in {M} the earthquake can occur even when conditions b and c, for example, are absent. The earthquake is, of course, a natural event; however, its occurrence at the time of Korah's rebellion was miraculous as well, because it came about even when conditions b and c did

not obtain. In both {L} and {M} events are governed by laws; it is just that the laws in these two subdomains of the natural differ. Nevertheless, both sets of laws have been "preestablished" at creation.[18]

The topic of omnipotence surfaces also in Gersonides' cosmology, first in his defense of cosmic indestructibility, and second in his rejection of the traditional doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. A weak form of the former doctrine was advocated by Plato when he allowed for the everlastingness of the world by divine fiat, even though all corporeal entities are inherently destructible.[19] This view was sharply criticized by Aristotle in *On the Heavens* 1.12, in which the theorem *whatever is generable is destructible and conversely* is strongly defended. For Aristotle, if Plato admits that the world is generated, then he has to agree that it is destructible as well, no matter what. Of course, for Aristotle the world is neither. Gersonides navigates a passage between Plato and Aristotle. With the former he maintains that the world has been generated and will endure for infinite time; but contrary to Plato he will not allow that the world is inherently destructible. For him the world is in the strong sense indestructible: Under no conditions will the world disappear. Now the interesting point in this thesis is his argument showing that the world cannot be destroyed by God. For a rational agent to destroy what it has made, there has to be a "sufficient reason." What reason could God have to destroy what He made? Did He do a bad job? Is He angry and unforgiving? Capricious? In God's case there is no way we could explain His destroying His perfect handiwork. So He cannot. If someone were to object that this would be restricting or diminishing His power, Gersonides would simply say that God can do whatever is logically possible, but destroying the world is not logically possible for a perfectly benevolent and rational Creator. This is no real limitation on God, just the logical consequence of what it is to be perfectly rational and benevolent.[20]

Gersonides' rejection of creation *ex nihilo* is one of the more original and striking aspects of his philosophy. Despite the firm basis of this doctrine in traditional Jewish thought, he believes it to be absurd. Along with the ancient Greek philosophers he is committed to the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit*. In his critique of creation *ex nihilo* he adduces several arguments that aim to show the incoherence of this traditional doctrine. How is it possible for that which is pure form, God, to create matter from absolutely nothing? In general, forms give, or endow, forms to existent matter. Indeed, nothing is generated absolutely: in generation a material thing loses its form and takes on another form; neither the matter nor the new form is generated from nothing. Underlying this principle is the axiom that in the generation of something the cause possesses an active power of generating a new form and the effect has a passive power of receiving this new form. These two powers are correlatives: The

one implies the other. Hence, in the creation of the world, God's active power of generation of form and matter's passive power of receiving form "meet," and a world is generated. The passive power of receiving form must, however, inhere, or be present, in the matter. Expressed in logical terms, the possibility of the world's being created must have a substratum; possibilities need a "location," a subject of which they can be predicated. This subject is, according to Gersonides, an eternal shapeless body from which God makes a cosmos, an ordered world.[21]

Ḥasdai Crescas

Crescas (d. 1412) was the first Jewish thinker, I believe, to have addressed the topic of divine omnipotence directly and in detail. Unlike Maimonides, Crescas specifies omnipotence (*yekholet*, "ability" or "capacity") as a dogma and as the third of six logical presuppositions of the principle of divine revelation, along with omniscience, providence, prophecy, choice, and purpose. As his subsequent discussion reveals, miracles are the domain in which divine omnipotence is most manifest. Although some of Crescas' conclusions are similar to or identical with his predecessors, he reaches them by a different set of analytical terms.

Crescas defines an agent's ability in terms of its quantitative capacity to perform a task. If the agent is able to do the job for infinite time and if its exercise of this capacity has infinite force, or intensity, then the agent has infinite power, or is omnipotent. Unlike most of his predecessors Crescas begins his treatment of this subject by locating it in the context of infinity. This should not surprise those who are familiar with Crescas' natural philosophy, wherein the infinite is not only tolerated but accepted with joy.[22] What is important for Crescas is the distinction between agents whose powers are limited with respect to the time during which they can perform the act and the force that they can expend in doing the act, and agents that are not so limited. In the former sooner or later their power will have been exhausted and will be resisted or surpassed, resulting in fatigue and eventually impotence; in the latter no such results will occur. An infinitely powerful agent is able to perform forever and will have no other force resisting or exceeding it; hence, its power is inexhaustible and limitless.[23] Lest one think that infinite power really knows no "bounds," Crescas immediately adds that the laws of logic actually define omnipotence. No less than any of his predecessors Crescas is committed to the "omnipotence" of these laws. So God cannot do "whatever cannot be rationally conceived," and in particular He cannot undo the past. On the other hand, that which is contrary to some natural law falls within the capacity of an agent of infinite power. Thus, such an agent can perform that which is logically possible

but naturally impossible, that is, miracles, especially the greatest of them all, creation *ex nihilo*. Crescas' conclusion agrees with Maimonides, although his premises differ.

How can it be determined whether the power of an agent is infinite? Crescas claims that finite agents have a definite, or determinate, relationship to what they do or act on. This relationship is regulated by both internal and external conditions circumscribing what the agent can do. No matter how strong I may be, I shall be able to lift a given weight for so long; however fast I may be, I can run a given distance only with finite velocity. At some point in time or at some specific velocity I will drop the weight or run no faster. I shall have reached my limit. Now in these cases, my will is not a sufficient condition for achieving my goal; my body sets definite conditions on what I can do. Suppose there is an agent all of whose actions are determined by nothing except its will. Such an agent, Crescas contends, is an infinite agent. Nothing circumscribes its actions, because there is no fixed relationship between it and what it wants to do: "Limitation in power results from a definite relationship between the agent and the thing acted upon."[24]

That no such relationship obtains in the case of an infinitely powerful agent introduces another feature of omnipotence, one that seems to differ from, indeed opposes Gersonides' doctrine. Crescas claims that in the performance of some miracles, perhaps all of them, God acts without requiring any coagent, or instrument, and the act takes no time at all. Thus, in the transformation of the rod into the snake, the miracle was not just a matter of shortening the time of the natural process of transformation, but the *instantaneous* occurrence of the event. Furthermore, God is not required to use some natural means to bring about the miracle, as Gersonides had maintained. If He had wanted, God could have created a snake without a rod or any material serving as subject for the transformation. The latter is a condition for natural transformations and artistic creations. God is neither nature nor Michelangelo. Committed to his naturalistic agenda Gersonides was always looking for some way to make miracles "ordinary" in some respect. When things got really difficult, he, like Maimonides, would resort to making the miracle a figment of the imagination occurring in a prophetic dream, as in the case of Bil'am's donkey.[25] For Crescas, however, it is a serious error to "explain away" miracles in this fashion. The donkey really did speak! To be sure, animals in general and donkeys in particular do not possess "rational speech"; but the Creator of their nature as mute animals has the power to suspend this nature if He so wills. "He who makes the laws can break them." The laws of biology are not as absolute as the laws of logic. Indeed, miracles are not primarily signs of the inherent contingency of nature, despite its

normal regularities; they are essentially visible proofs of divine infinite power, or omnipotence.[26]

Isaac Abrabanel

In many respects Isaac Abrabanel can be considered the last of the medieval Jewish philosophers insofar as he represents the culmination of Aristotelian philosophy as the authoritative framework within which Jewish philosophy or philosophical theology is written. Although he presented himself as a critic of this enterprise, he never emancipated himself from its language and conceptual framework; nor did he cease using philosophical arguments when he was criticizing the philosophers. This is true not only in his philosophical and theological treatises but in his biblical commentaries as well. As Maimonides and Gersonides before him, he treats the topic of divine omnipotence in the context of the doctrines of creation and miracles. Against Gersonides he defends the traditional doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*; against both Maimonides and Gersonides he rejects the "naturalization" of miracles and emphasizes their unnatural character. Thus, he proposes a strong interpretation of divine omnipotence.

The philosophers and Gersonides had maintained that creation *ex nihilo* is impossible. Accordingly, Abrabanel begins his defense of this doctrine with an analysis of the impossible. He distinguishes between that which is "impossible absolutely, or impossible by its very nature" and that which is "impossible relative to an agent." As his examples of the former indicate, what he means by the absolutely impossible is the logically impossible, the concept we have encountered in all of our preceding thinkers. No less than his predecessors Abrabanel is committed to the primacy of the laws of logic. Yes, God is omnipotent; but His omnipotence is "bound" by these laws: "Religious faith does not compel reason to believe what leads to a contradiction nor to contradict self-evident axioms and their logically demonstrated consequences."[27] As Saadia had put it, that which is absolutely impossible is a "nothing," a nonevent, or a meaningless verbal formula. In such statements "the predicate contradicts and prevents the subject [from existence]."[28] Because the Torah is the embodiment of truth, how can it contain or teach anything that is utterly absurd?

Once he has defined the absolutely impossible as that which violates logic, Abrabanel then proceeds to apply this principle to the issue of creation *ex nihilo*. This notion, he claims, is not a logical absurdity; it is consistent with logic, albeit contrary to the laws of physics. The sentence "The world has been created after absolute privation" is not self-contradictory. Abrabanel maintains that in the phrase *ex nihilo* the preposition *ex* means "after," in the same sense as in the sentence "After the night comes the day." The term "nothing" does not refer to some kind

of shadowy thing that serves as the substratum of the world's genesis; rather, it just simply connotes that the world's coming into existence did not involve any substratum at all: God created it "after" its absolute nonexistence from no prior material cause.[29]

Nevertheless, creation *ex nihilo* is impossible in the second sense of "impossible." For all agents but God to bring about something from absolutely nothing is impossible. Here, however, the impossibility is relative to the agent's incapacity, not because of the inherent impossibility of the act itself. No natural or human agent can make something from nothing: Flowers are generated from seeds and water; statues are made from bronze or some other material. What prevents natural and human agents from creating things from nothing is their *finite* power. This notion of possibility relative to an agent leads Abrabanel to distinguish among three types of agents: (1) artisans, (2) natural agents, and (3) God. The first two are finite in power because their activity involves some kind of corporeal component, either as an instrument or as material substratum. Hence, both with respect to duration and force the powers of artisans and natural agents are limited. These limitations are absent in the case of God, Who as incorporeal agent does not need either instruments or material to accomplish what He does. In this sense, God's power is "unbounded"; thus He can do something forever and with infinite intensity. As we have seen, this notion of omnipotence as infinite power was advanced by Crescas. Accordingly, because the notion of creation *ex nihilo* is not self-contradictory and God's power is infinite, He can make something without using any material substratum.[30]

Abrabanel is not yet finished; he must come to grips with the philosophers' argument about the "housing" of possibilities in a substratum. Here Abrabanel is faced with two opponents, not only Gersonides but Maimonides as well, who rejected the attempt of some Muslim theologians to avoid this problem by denying the need for locating the world's possibility in some material substratum. According to these thinkers, the possibility of the world's existence before it was created "resided" only in God; there is no need for any other location.[31] Abrabanel accepts the view of these Muslim theologians.

This philosophical argument trades on the previously mentioned Aristotelian distinction between active and passive powers, or potentialities. Accordingly, if the world was created, the possibility of its being created was a passive potentiality inherent in some material substratum. The active potentiality was of course God's power to create. Now, whatever the merits of this analysis in understanding natural and artistic generation, it has, according to Abrabanel, no application to the case before us. In the generation of flower or of a statue we have a process involving time and motion in which something is changed into something else. The *terminus*

a quo of the change has to have the potentiality of becoming the *terminus ad quem*; otherwise, there will be no change of a seed into a flower or of a lump of marble into a statue. Flowers cannot be generated out of human semen; nor statues out of feathers. The thesis of creation *ex nihilo* maintains that in the creation of the world there was no process at all: God created the world instantaneously without involving any motion or change on His part. He simply *willed* it into existence. The only potentiality, or possibility, involved here is God's power to create, and this power, we have seen, is infinite. As such it can do whatever is logically possible. Indeed, Abrabanel claims, the notion of a passive potentiality, or power, is a fiction, perhaps useful in some contexts, but not necessary to use in all situations. It may be helpful to describe the process of a caterpillar's becoming a butterfly in terms of the vocabulary of active and passive potentialities. What we are doing here is viewing the process from its outcome: We have observed the butterfly emerging from the caterpillar, and so we say that the caterpillar had to have *already* the potentiality of becoming a butterfly. "It is in the caterpillar." This is, however, according to Abrabanel, just a mode of speech.

> One can say further that this substratum for possibility [i.e., the passive potentiality] is some respect [the act of human reason] . . . it is difficult for us to conceive the actual creation of something without conceiving its possibility existing prior to its actual existence . . . But this priority is just conceptual. (*Deeds* 4.3, 33c)

This habit of thinking of material substrata as housing possibilities is based on our perceptual experience, and in that domain it can be useful. The issue before us is not the generation of a butterfly, but the creation of a world. Why should we expect that this generation be exactly like what happens in the generation of a butterfly or a statue?[32]

Like Maimonides and Gersonides, Abrabanel construes the issue of creation as intimately connected with the problem of miracles, and in both cases divine omnipotence is implied. Abrabanel discusses miracles in several of his works; but the last book in *Deeds of God* is entirely devoted to this topic. In many respects his treatment of this subject is polemical, for both Maimonides and Gersonides were, to Abrabanel, "naturalizers" who, in their attempt to make the Torah philosophically respectable, went too far in their rationalistic explanations of biblical miracles. Abrabanel's criticisms of these two thinkers are diverse and often acute; however, our chief concern here is how he understands miracles as manifestations of divine omnipotence.

Despite his general antipathy to Aristotelian philosophy, in his discussion of miracles Abrabanel uses Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes as the conceptual

framework for his analysis. (In what follows I shall modify the order of his treatment to highlight the topic of divine power.) First let us consider the formal cause of miracles, that is, *what* they are. At the outset Abrabanel points out that there are several different Hebrew terms used in the Bible to denote the miraculous. These terms differ in their primary connotations, although they all are used to signify something unusual. Moreover, although they all connote something extraordinary, they differ in the degree of extraordinariness that the event, to which they severally refer, exhibits. The most "strange" is the event denoted by the Hebrew term *peleh* and its cognates: Such an event is so strange that it is regarded as *contrary* to the natural order. Because it is this type of event that raises the whole issue of divine omnipotence, our discussion will focus on Abrabanel's analysis of the miracle as the event that is the most unnatural.

Natural events are generated under certain conditions that limit their occurrence. According to Abrabanel there are three such conditions: (1) the capacity of the generated thing to be generated by the thing that generates it (e.g., puppy cannot be generated by cat); (2) the time involved in the generative process is limited (e.g., a human fetus is born after nine months); and (3) the place of generation is determinate (e.g., the fetus is not gestated in the liver). These general conditions are specified by determinate causal factors, the absence of which results in the failure of the generation. These conditions and factors constitute what we have called the domain of natural possibility. Now, in the case of miraculous generation, these conditions do not obtain, and thus the miracle is "strange," or unnatural. Abrabanel gives the following definition, or the formal cause, of a miracle: " . . . the definition of a miracle, or wonder, is the existence of something without its natural causes and dispositions, brought about through the intention and will of an intentional and voluntary [agent]."[33] His emphasis on the absence of the normal conditions of generation is directed against Gersonides' attempt to naturalize miracles by placing them within natural possibility as instances of a special subset of laws operating within nature. Abrabanel explicitly accuses Gersonides of emptying the notion of the miracle of its very essence. If the miracle were an event whose causal conditions were just abbreviated or accelerated, it still would be, Abrabanel contends, a natural phenomenon, and accordingly nothing to wonder about. What makes a miracle significant is its *unnaturalness*. Thus, for Abrabanel miracles are not a subdomain within the general domain of the naturally possible; rather, they fall outside this domain, although they are within the domain of the logically possible. To use scholastic language, miracles are within the *potentia absoluta Dei* but not within the *potentia ordinata Dei*. The latter is the natural order created by God; however, this order can be overridden by God, and this is the miracle. As Abrabanel puts it, there

are two ways God runs the world: (1) the natural order; and (2) divine providence according to His absolute will by virtue of which He can suspend the natural order of which He is the Creator. This is exactly what divine omnipotence means.[34]

Medieval Jewish thinkers under the sway of both rabbinic tradition and Aristotelian philosophy had an informed sense of what is possible for God to do. Unlike some Christian and Muslim theologians, they paid their respects to God not by asking or expecting Him to do the absurd. Nevertheless, just excluding the logically impossible was not sufficient: One had to determine what exactly is logically impossible, and here differences arose. There were those who were sparing in their willingness to expand God's power over nature, which they regarded as one of God's creations. To maintain that God could change this domain was, in their eyes, to ascribe to God impotence, not omnipotence. Miracles then had to be minimized by naturalizing them to the maximum degree. On the other hand, those thinkers who had a more robust sense of divine omnipotence felt that this project of naturalization undermined God's power and implied limitations on what He could accomplish. Can the infinite be limited?

III. DIVINE OMNISCIENCE

The Lord searches all hearts and discerns every invention of men's thoughts. (I. Chronicles 28:9)

I reveal the end from the beginning, from ancient times I reveal what is to be. (Isaiah 46:10)

For several reasons the problem of divine omniscience was more difficult for medieval thinkers. Divine omnipotence was relatively easy to define in terms of logical possibility as a boundary condition within which God's power is operative. God's knowledge, however, was more complex. Does it encompass every possible fact? Does God know, for example, what I am doing at this very moment? Does He know what I shall be doing tomorrow? Does His knowledge increase over time? Most medieval Jewish philosophers were concerned with determining the precise domain of God's knowledge and with the apparent dilemma posed by Aristotle's query in *On Interpretation* 9 and reformulated in theological terms by Rabbi Aqiba. With respect to the problem of the domain of divine cognition they were especially concerned with the question whether or not God has knowledge of sensible particulars, such as human beings and their actions. Once this question was answered affirmatively, they then had to confront the dilemma between God's having knowledge of human actions and the apparent incompatibility between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Rabbi Aqiba's dictum alone was not enough

to satisfy them. Although most were compatibilists, they differed considerably in the ways in which they showed the compatibility between omniscience and human freedom. There were those who remained faithful to Rabbi Aqiba and tried to give equal weight to both theses. Yet, for some there was a definite bias in favor of divine omniscience, so much so that human freedom was threatened or weakened. Others, however, tipped the balance toward human freedom, implying some kind of restriction on God's knowledge. In doing so the latter were unwittingly approaching the view of Alexander of Aphrodisias and thus opened themselves up to the charge of heresy. This was then not just a theoretical matter.

Saadia Gaon

As in the case of divine omnipotence, Saadia was the first Jewish thinker to address the issue of divine omniscience, and he did so again within the context of Muslim *Kalām*. There was in Muslim *Kalām* such a strong emphasis on the greatness of God that the attribution of any power to man seemed an affront to God. Accordingly, for some Muslim theologians man is not capable of any genuine action or choice. Only God can act and choose. To Saadia this radical conclusion is absurd. If man cannot act or choose, how can he be held responsible for his behavior, and thus be justly rewarded or punished? Because religious texts and tradition clearly assume and explicitly state that man is a morally responsible agent, man does have the capacity to act as a free agent. Ought implies can. If man lacked choice, God could not justly reward or punish, but God is just! Saadia buttresses this "transcendental argument" by appealing to our internal experience of free action: We simply feel ourselves to be free to speak or to keep silent. It is up to us.[35]

There were some Muslim theologians who were sensitive to the consequences of denying man any power and they attempted to find some way of attributing to man the power to act. One such theory was the "theory of acquisition": At the very moment when a person is supposed to act, God gives the person the power to act. Hence, if the person acts properly, reward ensues; if not, punishment. Saadia rejects this ad hoc doctrine. For him the power to act, or choice, must precede the act. If the power and the act are simultaneous, as this theory postulates, then either both are the causes or effects of each other, or neither is. In either case we have gained nothing, and certainly we do not want to say that the power came after the act; for then we would have to allow that the act could be undone, and this is absurd. Therefore, as we all believe, our power to choose and act precedes the actual choice and act.[36]

Not only does Saadia have a robust concept of human freedom, he is also committed to the traditional doctrine of omniscience as one of the divine attributes.

Moreover, he is quite explicit in distinguishing divine cognition from human cognition in attributing to God knowledge of the future, as well as the past, and that this knowledge is not dependent on any data, unlike human cognition.[37] Can God's knowledge of a person's future choices or actions be reconciled with the genuine freedom or contingency in these choices and actions? Saadia believes that there is no real problem here. It is one thing to know that some event will occur, and it is another thing to cause it to occur. We know that the sun will set in the west, but we obviously do not cause it to set in the west. Analogously, God knows that I will listen to Bach tomorrow, but He does not make me listen to Bach. I could listen to Handel instead, but if I do, God knows that too.[38]

This solution of the dilemma was not unknown in Mutazilite *Kalām*, and it is not unlikely that Saadia was influenced by this school of *Kalām*, as he was in other areas of his thought.[39] This approach to the problem is also found in early Christian theology, especially Augustine. In attempting to dissolve the dilemma Augustine makes an analogy between memory and foreknowledge: just as in truly remembering some event we do not cause that event, so in predicting truly some event we do not cause that event. So God's foreknowledge is not causative.[40] Saadia's analysis, however, differs in that he does not use Augustine's analogy. Instead, he grounds his distinction between knowing and causing in God's eternity. Because God is eternal His knowledge is eternal. This means that if God knows that I shall listen to Bach tomorrow, He knows this fact eternally. Now if His knowledge is causative, this would mean that I am listening to Bach eternally, which is clearly false.[41] Nevertheless, it should be noted that neither Augustine nor Saadia has succeeded in removing the dilemma. For even if God's knowing my music preferences does not cause them, His knowing them does imply that whatever they turn out to be, they cannot be otherwise. After all, God does not make mistakes. Can I then be free?

Maimonides

When we turn to Maimonides and his successors we need to keep in mind the impact of the Muslim philosophers, especially al-Fārābī and Avicenna. As one consequence of their influence the problem of omniscience was framed in terms of the more general question of the domain of God's knowledge, in particular whether or not His cognition encompasses knowing individual facts about individual items. The problem of foreknowledge will turn out to be just one facet of this general issue. Indeed, underlying this issue, according to Maimonides, was the problem of divine providence: If God does possess knowledge of particulars, then He would seem to be responsible for the evils that happen to them, especially the misfortunes

occurring to the righteous. To avoid this problem the philosophers denied that God has any knowledge of particulars. His knowledge, Avicenna claimed, consists of general laws, and He knows individuals only insofar as these individuals instantiate these laws.[42] In their defense of this radical position, the philosophers in question adduced several arguments. Most of these arguments have to do with what is involved in knowing particulars, especially sensible particulars. On their view to know a sensible particular located in a space–time framework, the knower must have the appropriate cognitive apparatus and be itself in that space–time framework: I can hear a dog barking because I have functioning ears and am located in the same spatial–temporal framework as the dog. If the putative knower does not have the requisite cognitive equipment and is not in the appropriate framework, then he/she cannot have knowledge of a sensible particular. Moreover, because these particulars are in time and change over time, the knower of these items would itself have to be in time, and hence be subject to change, especially in its cognitive capital. Now obviously, God does not satisfy these epistemic conditions, because He is immaterial and eternal. Hence, God does not know sensible particulars. It is somewhat curious that in this initial formulation of the philosophical arguments against divine omniscience Maimonides does not mention the foreknowledge dilemma; he introduces it only in the subsequent chapter on divine providence and in his refutation of the philosophers' position in chapter 20.

Maimonides' refutation of the philosophical theory is a special application of his general theory of negative attributes. If the attribute of knowledge is predicated of God absolutely equivocally, then whatever epistemic conditions hold of human cognition need not be true of divine cognition. Why should we think that God is subject to the same epistemic logic as we are? God is, for Maimonides, radically different from us; thus His way of knowing is totally different from our modes of cognition: "between our knowledge and His knowledge there is nothing in common, as there is nothing in common between our essence and His essence."[43] Accordingly, none of the absurd consequences drawn by the philosophers from the thesis of divine omniscience are valid. This is especially true for our venerable dilemma. Rabbi Aqiba's confidence in the compatibility between divine foreknowledge and human freedom was his awareness of God's uniqueness. Once we realize how different God is from us, we understand that it is radical mistake to assimilate God's knowing to our knowing. Thus, even if God's beliefs about future contingent events must be true (otherwise He would not be omniscient), nevertheless the contingency in these events is not annulled: "the possible . . . [does not] quit its nature." So our choices are genuine choices and we are free agents, even though God knows exactly what we shall do. Moreover, do not expect to

understand fully the complete compatibility between the two theses of the apparent dilemma; if we could understand it, we would be God.[44]

Maimonides' recourse to what Spinoza called the "asylum of ignorance" may satisfy some; but to others it has the unsatisfying feature of being a "conversation stopper." Many of us want to know why our ordinary epistemic logic is necessarily inapplicable to God. To be sure, God is quite different from us, but does this imply that the logic of truth conditions does not apply to His beliefs? In the case of omnipotence we saw how Maimonides was committed to the laws of logic in determining the domain of what God can do. Why was he not equally prepared to apply these laws to God's beliefs? This question bothered Gersonides, as we shall see.

There is another puzzling element in Maimonides' discussion of this problem. In his summary of the *Kalām* positions on divine providence Maimonides mentions the Mu'tazilite doctrine that God knows everything, including particulars, and yet man has the ability to act freely.[45] This is exactly the opinion of Rabbi Aqiba and of Maimonides. Yet he says here, "this [opinion] leads, as the slightest reflection should make clear, to self-contradiction." It is both interesting and curious to note that among all the commentaries, medieval and modern, on the *Guide* only the medieval commentator Efodi (Profiat Duran, d. early fifteenth century) senses a difficulty here and calls attention to the contradiction between denying the compatibility in this chapter but defending it in chapters 16 and 20.[46] Is this one of the notorious contradictions in the *Guide*?

Maimonides' treatment of human choice – the other horn of Rabbi Aqiba's dilemma – is also problematic and has received considerable comment in the recent literature. In his earlier legal writings Maimonides is quite forthright in defending human choice as unhampered by external or internal forces. Man is an autonomous agent, and hence is fully responsible for his actions.[47] As much as Saadia, Maimonides is committed to the principle ought implies can: "if there were some force inherent in his [nature] which irresistibly drew him to a particular course . . . or activities . . . how could the Almighty have charged us through His prophets: 'Do this and do not do that?'"[48] Maimonides appears to endorse this view in the *Guide* as well, when, in contrast to the Muslim *Kalām*, he claims that it is a "fundamental principle of the Law of Moses . . . that man has an absolute ability to act."[49]

Nevertheless, some recent scholars have raised questions about the nature of this freedom that Maimonides attributes to us and have argued that in *Guide* II.48 Maimonides has qualified this freedom and is committed to a kind of determinism.[50] According to their reading of this chapter, Maimonides maintains that all events,

including human choices, are traceable to God, whose will is the ultimate cause of everything. Hence, human choices and actions are determined, or necessitated, just as natural phenomena are. Thus, the earlier view expressed in his legal works is now retracted in favor of a more philosophical doctrine of "strict determinism" (Altmann's language). These scholars, however, maintain that this determinism is still compatible with human freedom and choice.[51] Expressed in the current philosophical idiom, Maimonides' view is an instance of "soft determinism," according to which our choices and actions are caused, yet we are at liberty to choose and act as we wish. Causation is not compulsion.[52]

This interpretation of Maimonides has, however, been challenged on various grounds, both exegetical and philosophical. Commentators have suggested equally plausible alternative readings of *Guide* II.48.[53] Some have made the important philosophical point that causation does not imply necessitation.[54] Adopting a particular interpretation of Aristotle's theory of moral responsibility, they have accepted the distinction, based on Aristotle, between an action's being caused and an action's being determined, or necessitated.[55] Accordingly, some actions, especially those resulting from choice, have causes, or reasons, insofar as they are the products of deliberation, or reasoning; nevertheless, they are not determined, or necessitated. They could have been otherwise, even in the very same set of circumstances. Thus, even if *Guide* II.48 does assert that human choices are caused, they are not determined. Finally, it should be noted that none of Maimonides' later medieval commentators or critics saw him as a determinist. Even Hasdai Crescas, who will turn out to be the most outspoken defender of causal determinism in medieval Jewish philosophy, does not mention Maimonides as support for his own adoption of determinism.[56]

Gersonides

"Levi ben Gerson's solution . . . is a theological monstrosity." "Gersonides' theory of the divine knowledge radically destroys the whole history as told in the Bible." These are not statements made by orthodox Jewish theologians but by modern objective historians of medieval philosophy, who rightly see in Gersonides a deeply different account of divine omniscience.[57] As we have seen in Saadia and in Maimonides, the standard approach was to defend in one way or another Rabbi Aqiba's compatibility thesis. Not so Gersonides, who does not mention Rabbi Aqiba at all. Although he claims that he too preserves compatibility and that his theory is exactly what the Torah teaches, it is quite evident to any reader of Book 3 of his *Wars of the Lord* that something strange is going on.[58] Indeed, Gersonides' version

of compatibilism did not fool many later medieval readers, such as Hasdai Crescas, who understandably saw him as denying one horn of Rabbi Aqiba's dictum – "everything is foreseen" – in favor of the other – " freedom is given."

Although Gersonides' most detailed treatment of this problem is found in Book 3 of the *Wars*, whose main theme is the nature of Divine Knowledge, his discussion focuses on the epistemological character and scope of God's cognition, especially the question whether God knows space–time particulars. The issue of foreknowledge is treated as just one aspect of this more general question. He begins his discussion by presenting a debate between the "Philosophers" and the "Sages of the Torah," whose most distinguished defender is Maimonides. The former deny that God knows space–time particulars as particulars, whereas the latter affirm that God does know them. As we have seen, Maimonides defends the compatibility thesis by means of his theological doctrine that divine cognition is radically different from human cognition, such that none of the arguments of the philosophers against divine omniscience in the traditional sense are valid.

Gersonides shows his bias quite early in subjecting Maimonides' argument to a thorough critique, which not only concludes that his doctrine of omniscience is wrong but his whole general theory of negative attributes is fallacious.[59] Although he does make a modest criticism of the philosophers' arguments, it is evident that he agrees with their main conclusion and that he accepts most of their arguments. What makes space–time particulars unknown to God is the epistemological fact, so the philosophers believe, that such particulars can be known, if they are known at all, only by someone with the appropriate cognitive apparatus, that is, sensation. Because God is incorporeal, He does not have this apparatus; therefore, He does not know space–time particulars.[60] Fundamental to the argument of the philosophers is the Aristotelian principle that particulars are essentially unknowable because they are mutable and unlimited, whereas that which is knowable is constant and limited. As Aristotle had insisted, "knowledge is of universals."[61] Indeterminacy and indefiniteness are marks of ignorance or mere opinion, not knowledge.

Gersonides supports this argument by several other considerations that are discussed elsewhere. In his *Supercommentary on Averroes' Commentary upon Aristotle's On Interpretation 9,* Gersonides reaches the conclusion that according to Aristotle statements about future contingencies have no definite truth value. He expresses no reservations about this conclusion.[62] From this reading of Aristotle's discussion his most authoritative ancient interpreter Alexander of Aphrodisias inferred that God has no knowledge of future contingencies.[63] Gersonides agrees, except for one modification: God knows particulars, including future contingencies, insofar as they instantiate general laws, or what he likes to refer to as "the law and order

of existent things." Because this law is included in and derives from God's knowledge of Himself, it is knowable to Him. This law does not specify any definite individuals or particular events; it is wholly general. Accordingly, God knows that human beings will sin; after all, they are endowed with choice. He does not know *which* person will sin or when. Divine omniscience is still preserved, because on this account we have attributed to God knowledge of universal truths, which is, as we have learned from Aristotle, knowledge in the strict sense. As Creator of the universe God possesses knowledge of *all* the laws that govern this universe. God is omniscient insofar as He knows everything that is knowable, that is, the laws of the universe. Space–time particulars, especially future contingencies, however, are not knowable. That they are unknown is not an imperfection in any knower; it is an imperfection on the part of this class of events.[64]

Another relevant discussion is found in his treatise on creation, which constitutes Book 6 of *Wars*. In attempting to refute Aristotle's argument that because time is infinite the world is eternal, Gersonides prefaces his critique of this argument by a general discussion of the nature of time.[65] Of special interest to him is the question whether or not there is a crucial difference between past and future time. In some sense, as Aristotle pointed out, neither the past nor the future exists: the former has gone, the latter is not yet.[66] Gersonides accepts only the latter claim. He wants to argue that in some important sense the past is real, or actual, whereas the future is merely potential. Or, the past is "closed," whereas the future is "open." The past is closed because there are no truth gaps in it: for every possible pair of contradictory alternatives it is already determinate which alternative is true. Whether or not the true alternative is known is irrelevant; what is relevant is that there is no ontological indeterminacy in the past. In this sense the past is "full," or saturated. Not so the future, where there are plenty of gaps. Indeed, it is quite "empty," waiting to be filled. Herein the "iffy" nature of the future. Although Gersonides is mainly interested in using this difference between the past and the future to prove that the past's actuality, or reality, must be finite, otherwise an unacceptable actual infinite would result, this point supports his reading of Aristotle's *On Interpretation* 9 and his argument against Maimonides. The "openness," or potentiality, of the future means that statements about future contingencies have nothing to latch onto to verify them.[67] If truth is understood to be a correspondence between a proposition and some fact in the world, then propositions referring to future contingencies have no such facts; they are referentially empty. Hence, there is no knowledge of future contingencies. Maimonides' appeal to God's special mode of cognition of such propositions, not accessible to or understandable by us, is just a confession of failure or leap into mysticism.[68]

Although to many Gersonides' notion of omniscience is insufficiently "robust," to others it is sufficiently attentive to what we ordinarily mean by "choice," or human freedom. In this sense, Gersonides opts for the latter horn of Rabbi Aqiba's dilemma, even if it involves an apparent "weakening" of the former horn. It is therefore appropriate to ask, what exactly is his theory of choice? Like Maimonides in the *Guide* Gersonides does not say much about choice in *Wars*. This is especially problematic because in this treatise he frequently invokes a doctrine to explain certain phenomena that would seem to preclude choice altogether – astral determinism. Unlike Maimonides, Gersonides was a fervid believer in astrology. Given his propensity to consider all sides to a question, one would have expected him to say more about choice, which astral determinism seems to annul. This expectation is, however, unfulfilled. Fortunately, he compensates for this lack in his biblical and philosophical commentaries.[69] Gersonides' underlying assumption is that human choice is capable of undermining or acting contrary to the causal patterns determined by natural, especially astral configurations.[70]

In his commentary on the story of the Garden of Eden, Gersonides attempts to respond to the question, why God did not make man incapable of choosing evil? In the biblical and Gersonidean scale of being, man occupies a rank between that of the angels, or separate intellects, and that of the nonhuman animals. Unlike the latter, man possesses intellect or reason, but unlike the intellect of the angels, the human intellect is embodied, and thus subject to all kinds of impediments and infirmities. Yet, having intellect man has choice, which the other animals do not possess, but because his intellect is "housed" in a body, it is liable to be led astray by desire and passion. Thus, we choose to do evil, which the angels never do because they are incorporeal. Accordingly, we see that choice is implied by the possession of intellect; however, bad choices result from our corporeal nature. Now, if it be asked, why did God not create man having the same kind of intellect as the angels, Gersonides replies that if man had the intellect of the angels, he would not be able to attain human perfection. Man becomes perfect to the extent that he *chooses* to be perfect and consistently follows the correct path to human perfection: "Choice, with which man is endowed, is therefore the instrument whereby he attains perfection."[71]

Choice is so powerful that it can subvert not only the astral order but God's knowledge of this order. For if we did not have choice, we would be on the same level as the other animals. Moreover, if God's knowing the astral order were sufficient to give him knowledge of our choices, then our choices would not be genuine choices and what we do would not be genuinely contingent acts.

Human choice rules over this [astrological] order. Thus, it is possible that what men do is contrary to what God (may He be blessed) knows of this order. For He knows their actions to the extent that there is knowledge of them, i.e., in so far as they are ordered and defined [or limited]. However, in so far as they are contingent, there is no possibility of knowing them. For if we were to assume that there is knowledge [of them], they would not be contingent.[72]

With this principle in hand Gersonides proceeds to interpret the puzzling story of God's plan to destroy the sinful citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. If the story is read literally, it would seem to imply that God is not sure whether they deserve to be destroyed; so He has to "go down and see" for Himself (Genesis 18:21). So God is not omniscient after all! Not so, if we know how to read scripture. For Gersonides this story is a parable revealed to Abraham in a prophetic dream, and thus uses ordinary human language to make an important philosophical point. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah are as a group evil; God knows this general fact from knowing their astrological pattern. Because, however, even they have choice, it is possible that some of them will choose to do good. If there are such people, they will merit divine providence. Abraham's bargaining with God was just a figurative way of highlighting the fact that there were only a few who merited saving from the ultimate destruction of the cities.

It is difficult to believe Gersonides when he claims for himself that he has remained faithful to the Torah and tradition in his doctrine of divine cognition. Sincere in his commitment to the compatibility thesis, he nevertheless construes divine omniscience and human choice in a way whereby the latter is so strong that the former becomes attenuated. Whether we label his account of omniscience as "weak" or "limited" really does not matter. As Charles Manekin has insisted, in a strict sense Gersonides gives God all that logic grants: He knows everything that can be known. Space–time particulars cannot be known, nor can future contingencies. So in not knowing them God is not ignorant or epistemically underdeveloped.[73] Nevertheless, no matter how we describe God's knowledge, as Gersonides understands it, it is surely not the kind of cognition that religious people are accustomed to ascribe to God, a point quickly seized on by Gersonides' medieval and modern critics. A more robust account of omniscience was more to their liking. Then our dilemma resurfaces: Do we have to weaken choice?

Abner's Challenge

In the first decades of the fourteenth century a Spanish Jewish physician with philosophical interests pondered the plight of the Jewish people in exile and eventually converted to Christianity. In justifying his apostasy Abner of Burgos (1270–1348),

or Alfonso of Valladolid after his conversion, used several arguments, some of which having a "fatalistic" thrust: His conversion was determined by God, and hence is not only defensible but inevitable.[74] Abner's determinism was an amalgam of theological arguments drawn from the Christian doctrine of predestination and the Muslim emphasis on divine omnipotence and omniscience, as well as an appeal to astrology. Because our concern here is on the Jewish response to Abner, we shall consider his arguments as they were understood and answered by his critics.

The first known refutation of Abner's deterministic defense of his apostasy was that of Isaac Pollegar (Policar, d. ca. 1330.), a former friend. In part 3 of his *The Support of Religion* (*'Ezer Ha-Dat*) Isaac set out to refute Abner's philosophical arguments in favor of determinism and to defend his own version of compatibilism. He formulates his critique in the form of a dialogue between an astrologer and a scholar, who begins by refuting the claims of the former. Like Maimonides Pollegar has little use for astrology, which he claims is a pseudoscience. Its predictions are often false or uselessly vague, as the more honest astrologers admit. Moreover, it invalidly infers from the true effects of the sun and the moon the conclusion that all the stars and planets have effects on the earth. Whereas in the case of the former we can verify the heat and light emitted by the sun and the changes in the ocean tides caused by the moon, there is no empirical evidence of the influence of Saturn on the moods or behavior of people born on Saturday. Most important, if astrology were completely determinative, there would be no human choice, or free will, and that is totally unacceptable, both to the Jew and to the philosopher.[75]

Finally, the rational soul is immune from celestial causation by virtue of its immateriality. Bodies affect bodies, not the intellect. Pollegar assumes here an Avicennian psychology, according to which the human soul, especially its intellectual part, or function, is separate from matter.[76] For some thinkers, like Avicenna, Maimonides, and Aquinas, this thesis also laid the basis for their doctrines of immortality. For Pollegar it serves, at least in this context, as an argument for astrological impotence with respect to human volition. He supports this contention by using Aristotle's distinction between natural agents, or powers, and rational agents, or powers.[77] Whereas the former are limited in their causal efficacy to one effect in the same set of circumstances, the latter are not. The moon must bring about either a high or low tide under certain specific conditions: If it is midnight there is low tide, and if it is the morning it is high tide. Not so rational agents, or powers. Three minutes from now I can either remain sitting or I can get up from my desk. It is up to me. Abner's strong affirmation of astral determinism effaces this distinction and reduces humans to rocks.

In addition to his astrological argument Abner formulated an extremely strong version of divine omniscience that ultimately annulled human choice, a consequence that he was prepared to accept. Pollegar, however, was not ready to abandon human freedom; like Gersonides he is committed to a robust concept of human choice. Nevertheless, because he accepts Rabbi Aqiba's reconciliationist position, he also believes in a sufficiently strong notion of divine omniscience, at least strong enough to satisfy his religious scruples. Yet, he is in a sense hobbled by his acceptance of the standard medieval interpretation of Aristotle's conclusion in *On Interpretation* 9 that statements about future contingencies are not determinately true.[78] This admission would seem to place some qualification or limitation on divine knowledge. Pollegar believed that he could defend Rabbi Aqiba's dictum without diminishing or sacrificing divine omniscience. To this end he proposes two distinctive theses: one designed to explain how, although God is omniscient His knowledge of future contingents is not determinate, and the other to show how human choice is not determined.[79]

In arguing for his first thesis that omniscience does not imply determinate knowledge of future contingencies Pollegar introduces a feature that is absent, as far as I know, in previous Jewish discussions of this topic. He claims that in any case of a future contingency, the event is "absolutely possible" before its eventuation, although necessary once it has been actualized.[80] This means that a knower, even an omniscient one, does not have determinate knowledge of such an event *prior* to its occurrence, although once the event has taken place, the knower does have determinate knowledge of that event. Let F be the true statement "Sam does A at t*." According to Pollegar prior to t* F is indeterminate, or F's falsity is "absolutely possible." It is only at t* that the possibility of F's falsity disappears because Sam has done A. In Gersonides' language, because prior to t* the future was "completely potential," or open, Sam could have done not-A. The potentiality, or openness, of the future was "closed" precisely at the moment when the future became present and then past; in our present case when Sam did A. Now if we turn to God and ask what does He know about this state of affairs, Pollegar says that God eternally knows/wills that F be "absolutely possible," or contingent prior to its actualization at t*. Accordingly, prior to t* F is logically indeterminate. It becomes determinate only at t* when Sam does A, when the possibility of not-A has vanished and A has become necessary. The necessity here is harmless: "What is, necessarily is, when it is."[81] As Aristotle had insisted, however, it does not follow that what is, necessarily is.

Suppose it be objected: Does not God's belief that F prior to t* is "absolutely possible" but at t* is necessary constitute a change in God? Pollegar replies by

first making use of the commonly held view of God's eternal knowing/willing, and by distinguishing between P: God eternally knows/wills that prior to t* F is absolutely possible, or contingent, and that at t* He knows/wills F, and Q: prior to t* God knows/wills F at t*. If Q, F would be necessarily the case prior to t* and hence no contingency would be the case prior to and at t* such that not-F would be possible. Indeed, as Saadia had already pointed out, F would exist prior to its existence. If P, we not only have preserved the indeterminacy of F prior to t* but God's immutability as well, because in knowing/willing that F *will* be true, or determinate, at t* He has not changed, no more than I have changed if I know that although the leaf is now green, it will be brown two months from now. What changed is the modality of F: from being "absolutely possible," or contingent, to being necessary; or, F has changed from being just potentially true to being actually true. In short, God eternally knows/wills that Sam will do F at t*, although prior to t* not-F was absolutely possible.[82]

Still someone might object that God's eternally knowing/willing that Sam do F at t* annuls the possibility that Sam can do not-F. Abner has not yet been defeated. At this juncture Pollegar introduces his idea of coincident wills: At t* Sam's will coincided with God's eternal will, resulting in A. Prior to t*, however, Sam had the choice to do not-A at t*. At t* all the conditions relevant to the actualization of A, including God's knowledge and will, but especially Sam's own volition to do A, were put into play, thus resulting in A. Pollegar explicates this notion by first introducing the following analogies: (1) just as the human soul is related to its body, so God's will is related to the world; and (2) just as it can be said that when a nerve moves the finger, it can be also said that the person wills the finger to be moved. He then proceeds to link our will to God's will in such a way that whenever we freely act, God's will and our will come together. "My will is connected [*qashur*] with the will of my Creator, and both wills are united in the [same] instant such that my will is part of His will, and therefore I follow after Him. At the moment that He wills to act, so do I will [to act]."[83] Pulgar is claiming here that Sam's choice to do F at t* "agrees" [*masqim*] with God's eternally knowing/willing that Sam wills F at t*.[84] God's will and Sam's will are then "in synchrony."[85]

It must be admitted, however, that Pollegar's language is troubling, especially the phrases "part of His will" and "at the moment He wills to act." This fault led Julius Guttmann to characterize Pollegar's theory as "semi-pantheistic" and to criticize it for undermining human autonomy, which Pollegar wanted to preserve.[86] If the former expression is taken literally, it does suggest that God's will is "partible," divisible in the sense of being individuated into discrete volitions with which human volitions are somehow identical, or coextensive. I doubt very much if Pollegar had

this in mind, nor does the latter phrase correctly express his view either. God does not decide to "will to act" at the very moment Sam wills to act. Rather, God *eternally* wills that Sam will choose to do F at t*.

Perhaps we can be more generous in our reading of Pollegar here. Instead of construing this connection between the divine and human wills in the languages of parts and of temporal occurrents, let us understand it as suggesting a *congruence* of volitions, one of which eternally antecedes the other. What we have here are two independent sets of volitions, one divine, the other human. The two series are independent in the sense that no volition in one set causes a volition in the other; in this way, Pollegar believes, a person's choice to do F is not causally determined by God's volition that F come about. If I take my grandchild to buy a toy and the child chooses a certain game, which is exactly the toy that I wish that he choose, does this happy coincidence imply that I determined the selection? Now in our case too, God's willing that Sam do F does not cause Sam to will and do F. The two volitions are, Pollegar claims, causally independent of each other; they just coincide.[87]

What is genuinely problematic about Pollegar's theory, as Guttmann noted, is the element of knowledge.[88] Like Maimonides and others, Pollegar sees the divine will as virtually indistinguishable from divine knowledge. Accordingly, the congruence of divine and human wills implies the truth of God's belief that Sam will do A at t*. Because all of God's beliefs are true, there does not seem to be any possibility that Sam could do not-A at t*. So Aristotle's dilemma has come back to haunt Pollegar. If we try to avoid this consequence and say that God's knowing F is simultaneous with Sam's choosing F at t*, we appear to be introducing a *novum* into God, and Pollegar is quite clear in his wanting to avoid this undesirable consequence. Could it be, however, that Pollegar is suggesting that prior to t* God has no beliefs at all about the choices Sam will make at t*, because there is nothing in the world prior to t* to which such a belief could be "attached?" All God wills is that Sam will what He wills. As Pollegar insists, prior to t* everything is "absolutely possible," or "open." In this sense, God's omniscience is *post factum*: all of His beliefs are true and He knows all truths; but the beliefs about contingencies are verified "retroactively." Whatever turns out to be true is recorded in God's "book," and in this sense all facts are known by God, but this "omniscience" is "after" the event. If it be objected that this makes God's knowledge no different from our knowledge, it could be replied on Pollegar's behalf that having no beliefs at all about future contingencies is a virtue of wisdom, because the wise person knows that no such beliefs are true or false prior to the eventuation of the events that make such beliefs true or false. Divine omniscience about future contingencies turns out to be Socratic wisdom.[89]

Another response to Abner was provided by Moses of Narbonne ("Narboni," d. 1362), a commentator of both Averroes and Maimonides. His composition "An Essay on Choice" begins with an anonymous reference to a contemporary "sage" who wrote a treatise entitled "Letter on the Decree" in which he denied the existence of choice and defended a theory of predestination, or "eternal decree" (*gezerah*). At the end of his own essay Narboni mentions Abner by name and refers to his conversion and his use of predestination to explain and excuse "his retreat from the Lord and departure from His kingdom." Narboni challenges Abner's predestination thesis and at the end of the essay offers his own doctrine of divine omniscience, in which his Averroist leanings are evident.[90]

Like most medievals Narboni appeals to Aristotle's authority in defending the existence of the contingent. In addition to citing the standard texts in Aristotle, he provides some independent elucidation of the "accidental," or the contingent, of which our choices are a subclass. These comments are based on Aristotle's brief and "obscure" remarks in *Metaphysics* VI.2–3, where Aristotle attempts to defend the existence of accidental phenomena as events that are rare and unpredictable, and hence not amenable to scientific explanation. They are events that have accidental causes. Narboni focuses on the last point. Suppose x causes y (e.g., a man generates a child). Now the existence of y, the effect, necessitates the existence of its cause. The converse is not true: For it is possible that given the putative cause, the putative effect will not result. Something can intervene that prevents the usual causal sequence from taking place. This is especially the case when the causal sequence involves numerous intermediary causes, any one of which can be blocked. In other words, a causal judgment has to be qualified by a *ceteris paribus* clause, which in some cases at least is not satisfied. In cases in which it is not fulfilled, the event is an accident because its coming about has resulted from the occurrence of an accidental cause, whose own coming about is ultimately traceable to some initial contingent condition that has no necessitating cause.[91]

Now human choice is a kind of "accidental cause" in the sense that even though there may be causes that incline or motivate us to do F, we are able to do not-F. This is the case, Narboni emphasizes, with respect to astral determination, which Abner had appealed to in his defense of predestination. The heavenly bodies do have some influence on terrestrial affairs, including human affairs, but they are not necessitating. Human choice can subvert these factors, as we have learned from Gersonides. There is then for human beings a domain of events that is "up to us." Abner's attempt then to justify, as well as explain, his apostasy fails. He could have remained faithful to the divine law in which he grew up and resisted the deceitful temptations of a better material life. He has no excuse.[92]

In his discussion of omniscience Narboni makes use of Averroes' principle that God's cognition is neither universal nor particular and Maimonides' thesis that God's knowledge is not acquisitive but original.[93] Whereas for humans knowledge is derived from particular sense data from which universal concepts are abstracted, God neither receives data nor abstracts concepts; rather, He is the cause of the data. Thus He knows "in a more excellent manner."[94] As Maimonides had insisted, God's knowledge is better understood as creative, or active, whereas our knowledge is passive, or receptive. In reality, God knows everything because He knows Himself, and everything is ultimately traceable to God.[95] Thus, Rabbi Aqiba was right in claiming that everything is foreseen; indeed, "God is not ignorant of even a grain of millet."[96]

Unfortunately, Narboni's appeal to his two mentors does not help him against Abner's strong determism or Gersonides' weak omniscience. Even if we assume that, as Charles Manekin has recently argued, Narboni's advocacy of Averroes' dictum that God's knowledge is neither universal nor particular is a legitimate interpretation of Maimonides' thesis that God's knowledge is radically different from human cognition, one could still say that all of these thinkers have embarked upon a dead end. To attribute foreknowledge to God of future contingents *qua* contingent while admitting that comprehension of this thesis is beyond us is to evade the issue, not solve it. If God's foreknowledge is not necessitating, as Abner denied but Narboni believed, then we need to know why it is not. If some of our actions are truly free, we want to know how God could have genuine knowledge of them. Manekin has claimed that this issue should be framed as a conflict between those thinkers who believe that we can understand how God knows contingents and those who deny such a possibility. Gersonides then turns out to be a philosophical optimist; he knows how God knows contingents. He knows them just as they are – contingent, subject only to laws; more than that is not possible, *even for God*. Averroes, Maimonides, and Narboni, however, reveal themselves to be philosophical pessimists, throwing up their hands in their retreat to the asylum of ignorance.[97] Not being a philosopher Rabbi Aqiba was most likely satisfied to take up residence there. Is that a place where philosophers want to inhabit?

Ḥasdai Crescas

In his *Light of the Lord* Crescas lists divine omniscience as the first of those dogmas that a person who believes in revealed religion must accept.[98] After initially citing the appropriate supporting biblical and rabbinic passages, he then proceeds to offer a philosophical analysis and defense of it. It is clear from his exposition that his main

target is Gersonides, whose doctrine of omniscience is for Crescas sheer heresy. Ostensibly Crescas wants to offer both a compatibilist account of omniscience that is sufficiently strong to satisfy the traditionalists and at the same time a defense of contingency, especially choice, that makes human action genuinely efficacious. It will turn out, however, that like most of his predecessors he will have to minimize one to achieve the other.[99]

In his critique of Gersonides, Crescas develops a theory of divine cognition that he believes answers all the objections raised by Gersonides against the view that God knows space–time particulars, especially future contingents, in their particularity. Crescas himself suggests that his theory is in agreement with the views of Maimonides; indeed, it is a defense of them. We shall see, however, that this appeal to Maimonides is questionable. What Crescas really gives us is an account of divine cognition that is quite novel in the Jewish philosophical literature, although it does have counterparts in the Greek, Arabic, and Latin sources. Already in the Greek Neoplatonic literature we find a theory asserting that God knows space–time particulars, including future contingencies, *timelessly.*[100] This idea is defended in the Latin literature by Boethius and later by Aquinas.[101] What this means in Crescas' version of this thesis is that God's eternity implies a timeless intuition of all events such that they are all included in His timeless present. In short, what we call a future event is for God known in the timeless present. In reality then there is no *fore*-knowledge for God. Yet, God is omniscient in the strong sense, He knows all facts, including those that we conceive as future and "iffy." His knowing these facts fixes their truth value, and hence His knowledge of them is determinate. Accordingly, His knowledge determines their truth value, but does this not imply that these events are necessitated and have no contingency? Are we not back to Aristotle's dilemma?

To solve this dilemma Crescas makes use of a distinction developed by Avicenna between things that are necessary in themselves and things that are necessary by virtue of their cause but are logically contingent in themselves.[102] Let D be the proposition "The New York Mets will win the 2010 World Series." Suppose it is now April 2010 and the World Series will take place in October. For us D has *now* no determinate truth value, although we may want to venture a prediction at our own risk. Moreover, D is a logically contingent proposition: It is perfectly conceivable that it be false as well as true. Abstracted from any relationship to some knower it is logically indeterminate. Once we introduce divine omniscience, however, the picture changes: Because God knows D, D has a determinate truth value, and the event that it describes will definitely come about. Yet its "necessity" is harmless, Crescas claims. Although God's knowing D does in some sense make

D true, D still retains its inherent logical contingency, because in some other set of circumstances not-D could be true; that is, if God knows not-D. Accordingly, God's knowing D is compatible with D's being contingent.[103]

Does Crescas' strong version omniscience rule out choice? In his fifth principle of his dogmatics Crescas considers the other horn of Aristotle's and Rabbi Aqiba's dilemma – human choice. Crescas is perfectly aware that his account of omniscience could suggest to the unwary that there is no such thing as "the possible," or contingency, and this would be incompatible with the giving of divine commandments. Crescas makes it quite clear in his opening remarks to this topic that if we do not have choice, if there is no such thing as contingency, the whole Torah is meaningless. It would seem that he has put himself into a real bind: By giving God determinate knowledge of contingencies he has really eliminated genuine contingency and choice. This is not the case, he shall argue.

Crescas' discussion of choice is especially interesting in that it does not confine itself to Rabbi Aqiba's dilemma. Crescas actually undertakes to give an analysis of choice in the context of a general account of "the possible," in the course of which he develops a theory of psychological determinism. The latter too, he realizes, gives rise to the legitimacy of choice, and so he proceeds to offer an account of the latter that is consistent with causal determinism. In short, Crescas was a medieval "soft determinist."[104] Unlike the "hard determinist," such as Abner of Burgos, Crescas, the soft determinist, believes that even though our actions have causes, we still do have a choice in what we do. Hence, even though our actions are "weakly necessitated, or determined," as we have already seen by divine knowledge, and in general by any number of kinds of natural causes, there is still some sort of contingency in them. Hence, we are free.[105]

After presenting the arguments pro and con for the existence of contingency Crescas concludes that although an event is caused, there is still contingency in these events insofar as these events could have turned out otherwise if the causal conditions had been different. So even though I "must" do X given that there is a set of causal conditions that necessitate my doing X under certain specified circumstances, I could do not-X if these conditions were different, and they could be different, because there is no absolute necessity present in this context. Given my background, environment, and experiences I have become a professor of philosophy. This is predicable to someone who possesses all the relevant information. Yet I could have become a professional baseball player had the causal conditions been different. There is no absolute necessity that I become one or the other; but given that I am subject to all kinds of circumstantial conditions, I do become one or the other. This provides Crescas with the opening, the "elbow-room" (Dennett's

phrase) he needs for contingency. If there is contingency here, there is choice. Had the conditions been different, I would have chosen otherwise. Thus I am free even though my choices are caused. If we consider God's knowledge to be a determining cause, then even though He eternally knows that I shall go to the baseball game this evening, my going is still a contingent event insofar as it is not an absolutely necessary fact true in all possible worlds. After all, God could have known that I would stay home and study philosophy. What we do then is indeed necessary but just from "one aspect" (*tzad eḥad*); however, it is contingent from another aspect (*tzad aḥer*). "Everything is foreseen; but freedom is given." Rabbi Aqiba has been vindicated.

There is a curious passage in this section where Crescas worries that his account of choice may be misconstrued by some of his readers as being incompatible with the traditional belief in free will. In particular, what point do the commandments have if my doing or not-doing them is necessitated by causes, one of which is God's knowledge? Why is Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac so meritorious if he had to do so, because God knew that he would? In response Crescas claims that the commandments are themselves causes of our actions. Abraham did what he did *because* God commanded him. We refrain from committing incest *because* God commanded us to do so. Had God not given these commandments we would be free to do otherwise. Suppose someone were to object saying, why are we rewarded or punished if the act is necessitated? Crescas replies, the reward or the punishment is itself a necessary consequence of what we have done. It is built into the divine program that if people refrain from committing incest, the probability of birth defects is reduced.

> They [the uncomprehending masses] don't realize that the punishment follows from the sins just as the effect follows from its cause. Therefore, it is part of the divine wisdom to make the commandments and admonitions motivating means and strong causes to guide man toward human felicity . . . This is the divine providence.[106]

The crucial point here, Crescas insists, is that the person not *feel* any compulsion when the act is performed. As long as I feel free when I go to the baseball game, I am free, even though my going is determined by a set of causes. If the agent does feel compelled, or forced, then the act is not free; it is not "an act of his soul," as Crescas puts it. Like Aristotle before him and David Hume after him, Crescas identifies liberty with the absence of constraint; voluntary acts are those done under no compelling factors.[107] Choice, or freedom, then is a negative condition: We are free as long as nothing interferes or prevents us from doing what we want to do.

Crescas' Critics

Crescas' solution was rejected by most fifteenth-century Jewish thinkers, including those who were generally sympathetic with his anti-Aristotelian approach to Jewish theology, such as Isaac Arama (d. 1494) and Isaac Abrabanel (d. 1509). Even Crescas' pupil Joseph Albo (d. 1444) refused to follow him on this issue.[108] In their view Gersonides had sacrificed divine omniscience on the altar of human freedom, whereas Crescas had abandoned human freedom altogether in his effort to give God the strongest form of omniscience. To rebut Gersonides they made use of Crescas; to counter Crescas they had to find a way out of his determinism. To achieve the latter they developed different alternative accounts of choice and its compatibility with omniscience. We shall begin first with their critique of Crescas.

Although they agreed with Crescas' intention to defend a strong version of omniscience, they maintained that his account of choice and contingency was too weak, indeed empty.

> What good is there in saying that they [contingent states of affairs] are possible considered by themselves, as long as they are determined and necessary from . . . causes? For they cannot come into existence in any other way.[109]

> The [thesis that a thing is contingent in itself but necessary by virtue of its causes] is false in my opinion. For with respect to a thing that is necessary by virtue of its causes, what contingency remains in it? Does the ignorance of its causes confer contingency upon it? It would be better to say of it that it is something necessary but its causes are not known.[110]

Both Albo and Arama contend that the notion of a contingent event that in reality is caused in such a way that it necessarily eventuates is worthless. To say that under a different set of conditions another outcome is possible is to say that in some other possible world things could be different. We are interested in real choices made in the world in which we live, not in some fictitious universe. What we need to know is whether or not our choices are genuine choices: Did we have the option of choosing not-A when in fact we chose A at t*? A sufficiently robust account of choice involves the notion of an act's being "up to us."[111] This condition is satisfied only if at t* both A and not-A were open to the agent. On Crescas' theory only one of these alternatives is doable. Thus, both theological and psychological determinism do away with choice. On this point, at least, Gersonides was right.[112]

When they attempt to formulate a compatibilist account of divine omniscience, things become more difficult for these thinkers. Moreover, here they take different paths: Albo appeals to Maimonides' asylum of ignorance; Abrabanel develops a theory that is very similar in some respects to the Boethius–Aquinas solution.

Arama, however, proposes a novel account, although he advances it as an explication of Maimonides' theory. Because Maimonides' *via negativa* "solution" does not really solve the problem and the Boethius–Aquinas theory abandons the notion of foreknowledge altogether in favor of divine eternal knowledge, resulting in the fixing of the determinate truth value of alleged future contingent, as we have seen in Crescas, we need not discuss these options any further. Let us focus on Arama's solution.[113]

Arama's fullest treatment of this issue is located most appropriately in his discussion of the biblical story of the Binding of Isaac, which had already been recognized by Gersonides and others as the biblical locus for the philosophical topic of omniscience. One especially novel feature of his approach is that Arama points to an asymmetry in the logical or epistemological weight of the two horns of the dilemma. It is more difficult, he claims, to solve the dilemma if you take "free choice" (*ḥofshiut ha-beḥira*) as your fixed point and then try to construct a meaningful concept of omniscience compatible with it. This is what Gersonides did, and he failed. If, however, we make omniscience our fixed point and adequately understand what it means, we will be in a better position to see how it is compatible with choice. To illustrate this methodological point Arama borrows an example from Rabbenu Nissim, one of Crescas' teachers.

Suppose someone is sick, suffering from both depression and migraine headaches. Now it could be suggested that it would be quicker to treat the migraine and relieve the patient from his headaches and then go on to treat the depression with talk therapy and drugs. This would, however, be a mistake, not only because it assumes wrongly that the migraine will be quicker to cure, but also because it disregards the causal connection between the depression and the migraine. The better route is to treat the depression, because it will result in curing the migraine as well. Now this is precisely our situation with the dilemma between omniscience and choice. Arama claims that if we can find an adequate account of omniscience, we will be able to make room for choice. The reverse procedure will not be successful.[114]

Because we are dealing with divine cognition, let us lay down some basic epistemological premises. First, Arama distinguishes between two kinds of cognition: (1) intellectual and (2) perceptual. The former is superior to the latter, because it is universal and essential, whereas the latter is particular and accidental.[115] Intellectual cognition in man proceeds by abstraction from particular sense data to the formation of general concepts describing the essences of things. Perception is primarily concerned with the accidental, or superficial, features of things. Second, there is a kind of cognition that completes and perfects the knower. To have this knowledge

is to improve one's essence as a knowing being. On the other hand, some information that we obtain makes no real difference to us; its acquisition does not really make us any more intelligent or wise. In the first case, the new information results in a real change in our mental outlook; in the latter, no genuine change takes place, because here what we come aware of comes and goes.[116] The former is essential cognition; the latter is just accidental.

When we apply these epistemological points to divine cognition, we get the following results. First, God's knowledge is intellectual: His cognitive apparatus is radically different from ours. God does not need to abstract universal concepts: He is in possession of them a priori. Nevertheless, this feature of divine cognition does not, as Gersonides had thought, preclude God from having knowledge of particulars. For God's universal knowledge encompasses particulars insofar as the latter are derived from God's knowledge which is creative.

> However [with respect to], God, although . . . things are known to Him in a universal and intellectual way, nothing in the corporal world [literally, "the world of darkness"] is unknown to Him insofar as He is the creator of everything; [He knows these things] by means of an extraordinary intellectual knowledge.[117]

Although the exact means whereby His general knowledge involves particular knowledge is unknown to us, the fact that He is the ultimate cause of the universe, "the Creator of everything," implies His knowledge of everything; otherwise He would be an imperfect artisan.

Second, God's knowledge of particulars is nonessential in the sense that God is not improved or changed by such information. Accordingly, His coming to know the outcomes of baseball games does not import any change in Him; in this sense they do not matter to Him, although they may matter to us. In fact, it would be more accurate, Arama contends, to say that of these facts God is just not ignorant of them, rather than to say He knows them.[118] Here Arama is close to Maimonides but not entirely. His language certainly resonates with Maimonides' negative attribute theory. But unlike Maimonides Arama considers divine cognitions of particulars to be a kind of relational attribute, which Maimonides had rejected. In this context Arama makes use of al-Ghazālī, who had argued against Avicenna that God's knowing temporal and mutable phenomena does not import temporality and change in Himself; for the latter facts are just relational features, and as such do not possess sufficient ontological weight to introduce change in the knower. Suppose God or for that matter any knower knows that at t1 there is no lunar eclipse, but that at t2 there will be a lunar eclipse, and that at t3 there was a lunar eclipse. To be sure, throughout t1–t3 the moon has changed in its relationship to terrestrial observers

and the sun, although the knower has not changed at all. Now in the case of contingent states of affairs in the world, their coming into being and passing out of existence are "not unknown" to God, but their temporal careers do not imply any change in Him.[119]

This lack of real change in God leads Arama to assert that in some sense God's knowledge of contingent events is "consequent" upon them.

> We can say that God's foreknowledge of one of the alternatives of a pair of future contingent actions involving choice is *consequent upon* (*nimsheḥet,* or, "follows from") what in fact eventuates, not that their existence [is consequent upon] His knowing them. For, since concerning such events, there is [here] only the negation of ignorance, or its absence, why should we refrain from attributing the dependency of this negation, or absence [of ignorance], to the existence of those actions?[120]

Arama believes, as did Saadia, that divine cognition of future contingents is not causative; unlike any of our previous thinkers he seems to be saying that this cognition is in some way dependent on what transpires in the world. In doing so, is he opening himself up to the charge of making God's knowledge the *effect* of what is taking place? Is divine knowledge literally a posteriori?

If, however, all what Arama means by the use of the term "consequent" is simply the truism that God is not ignorant of all truths, including those about future contingencies, then there is no problem. But I am not so sure that this is enough to dissipate the dilemma and vindicate both omniscience and freedom in their strong senses. Let us concede for the moment that Arama has removed the difficulty about God's foreknowledge and His immutability. Nevertheless, do we still have a meaningful concept of choice? No matter how we formulate God's knowledge, it is still the case that if God knows or is not ignorant of some future event, the truth value of the statement describing that event has a definite truth value, such that the nonoccurrence of that event is precluded. For that set of alternative contingencies the case has already been closed. Arama's solution turns out to be more an analysis that preserves divine immutability rather than one that allows for genuine contingency. It is then disappointing that even though having a real concern for contingency, Arama ultimately failed to find a place for it. Perhaps his failure can be explained or at least understood as resulting from the context of his primary treatment of this subject: the binding of Isaac. It is quite evident that Arama was most concerned with providing an answer to a question about the verse that concludes the story: "For *now* I know that you are a god-fearing man" (Genesis 22:12; my emphasis). If the temporal adverb is taken literally, it would imply that God did not know what Abraham would do until he did it, and

this would undermine the belief in divine omniscience. To show that this is not the case, Arama provided an analysis of divine cognition that enabled him to read this verse in a way consistent with divine omniscience and divine immutability. In concentrating on this problem Arama lost sight of the other vexing issue in the story: If God is strongly omniscient and hence knew what Abraham would do, could Abraham have changed his mind on the third day and not bound Isaac? Although he realized that Crescas' account of contingency and choice was too weak to be of any real value, Arama did not come up with a satisfactory solution to our original problem of reconciling choice with omniscience.

EPILOGUE

The attempt to explain how it is possible to reconcile divine omniscience with human freedom proved to be far more difficult than the problem of determining the domain of divine omnipotence. In the latter there was near unanimity that the principle of logical possibility had to be preserved. The troubling question was to ascertain what kinds of events fall within the scope of this principle. In the case of divine omniscience and human freedom, however, even though almost all of our thinkers paid at least lip service to these dogmas, their understanding of them exhibited considerable diversity, sometimes resulting in radically different solutions to Rabbi Aqiba's dilemma. Our analysis has shown that in all of these solutions one of the opposing horns of the dilemma had to be sacrificed in favor of the other. It seemed impossible to maintain both omniscience and human freedom in a robust form. Perhaps a way out of this predicament is to ask ourselves, which dogma do we need more, and then make it the fulcrum of the solution. As we have seen, Isaac Arama seemed to have asked himself this question, but perhaps he chose the wrong dogma. Let us see if in choosing human freedom as our starting point, the dilemma will be less oppressive, if not solved.

If we work within a framework of divine law consisting of many commandments, the concept of moral responsibility is central and crucial: Ought implies can. Even Ḥasdai Crescas, the one who was prepared to weaken human choice, realized that he needed this concept. So let us, with Gersonides, make freedom fundamental. Then, however, the champions of omniscience will cry out and accuse us of blasphemy, for we have, they believe, insulted God. Yet, have we really weakened or limited God's cognition? As in the case of divine omnipotence, where all our thinkers held fast to the principle that God can do whatever is logically possible, so here with omniscience we adhere to the principle that God knows whatever is knowable. As Gersonides showed, there are certain facts that are, strictly speaking, unknowable:

either because they do not satisfy the epistemic conditions of strict knowability; or they cannot be known by a knower of a certain type; or they cannot be known without losing their modal or temporal status as contingent or future states. These unknowables are then analogous to the impossibles that God cannot do: Just as the latter fall outside of the domain of logical possibility, so the former are not within the domain of epistemic possibility. That God's cognition does not extend to such events is no more a defect than the fact that His power does not include undoing the past. As Saadia Gaon said in the case of omnipotence, the "thing" that God "cannot" do is not a real thing; so the future contingency of which God does not have foreknowledge is not a real event. Just as there is no impotence in the former, so in the latter there is no ignorance. Am I ignorant of arithmetic if I cannot give an even prime number other than the number 2?

NOTES

1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.2, 1139b8–11.
2 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV.3, 1005b17–34; 4.4.
3 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Fate*, chap. 30. Cicero, *On Divination*, 2.
4 H. Wolfson 1976, chap. 8; 1979.
5 H. Wolfson 1976. p. 584. In medieval Christian thought the view that God can do the logically impossible has been commonly ascribed to Peter Damian (1007–1172); however, this ascription has been challenged by S. Knuuttila 1993, pp. 63–67.
6 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, VII.2.
7 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III.16–24.
8 Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Berakhot 9.3; *Mishneh Torah*, Treatise Adoration, Blessings 10.22 and 26.
9 Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, chap. 1; *Guide* I.73, tenth proposition.
10 Ivry 1982, pp. 67–84.
11 *Mishnah*, Avot, 5.6; *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis, 5:5. Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Avot, 5.6; *Eight Chapters*, chap. 8.
12 Maimonides 1985b pp. 223–32; *Guide* II.25; Maimonides 1970–1971, chap. 25.
13 Vajda 1960, p. 7, my translation.
14 Guttmann 1946, pp. 75–92. Touati 1962, pp. 34–47.
15 Albalag, *Sefer Tiqqun De'ot*, n. 6.
16 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IX.1.
17 *Wars of the Lord*, VI.2.12, Gersonides 1999, pp. 504–5; *Commentary on the Torah*, 1547, Genesis, Parashat Beshalakh, 69a, 70b.
18 Guttmann 1964, p. 248; Touati 1973, pp. 469–77; Kellner 1980, pp. 5–34. It should be noted, however, that Gersonides departs from the rabbinic view, endorsed by Maimonides, that miracles were preestablished at creation such that they *necessarily* occurred. If this were so, Gersonides contends, there would be no contingency in the miracle and in some cases the characters involved in the miracle would not be free agents. For example, if the parting of the Sea of Reeds had been preprogrammed such that it necessarily occurred, then Pharoah was not a free agent when he denied the Israelites' freedom. As we shall soon see, Gersonides was a strong advocate of human choice. Accordingly, the relevant "law of miracles" has to be understood *hypothetically*: *If* Pharoah refuses to let the

Israelites leave Egypt, he and the Egyptians will drown. In this way, human free will and God's eternal immutable will are both preserved. *Wars* VI.2.10, Gersonides 1999, p. 486; *Commentary on I Kings*, chap. 22, twenty-fourth lesson.

19 Plato, *Timaeus*, 41B.
20 *Wars* VI.1.16.
21 *Wars* VI.1.17.
22 H. Wolfson 1929a, chap. 2.
23 Crescas, *'Or Hashem* (*Light of the Lord*), Second Treatise, Principle 3, chap. 1.
24 Crescas, *'Or Hashem*, Second Treatise, Principle 3, chap. 2.
25 Gersonides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Numbers, Parashat Balaq, 96c.
26 Schweid 1970b, pp. 197–203. Ravitsky 1988, pp. 69–110.
27 *The Deeds of God*, Abrabanel 1863, p. 30b.
28 *The Deeds of God*, Abrabanel 1863, p. 31a.
29 *The Deeds of God*, Abrabanel 1863, p.31d. Abrabanel's analysis is similar to that given by Aquinas, whom he occasionally cites in other contexts. (Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2.37; *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 45, a1, ad 3).
30 *The Deeds of God*, Abrabanel 1863, p. 36b.
31 Maimonides, *Guide*, II.14, fourth scientific argument. Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, First Discussion, fourth proof.
32 Feldman 1994, pp. 33–40.
33 *The Deeds of God*, Abrabanel 1863, p. 97c.
34 *The Deeds of God*, Abrabanel 1963, p. 91b. Feldman 2003, chap. 6. Borodowsky 2003.
35 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Fourth Treatise, chaps. 3–4.
36 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Fourth Treatise, chap. 3.
37 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Second Treatise, chaps. 1 and 13.
38 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Fourth Treatise, chap. 4.
39 Wolfson 1976, pp. 662–3.
40 Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, Book 3, chaps. 3–4.
41 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Fourth Treatise, chap. 4.
42 *Guide* III.16. Marmura 1985, pp. 81–94. Kogan 1985, pp. 95–104.
43 *Guide* III.20. Maimonides 1963, p. 482.
44 Ivry 1985, pp. 161–84.
45 *Guide* III.17, fourth opinion.
46 Profiat Duran, *Commentary on the Guide of the Perplexed* (1904).
47 Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, chap. 8; *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance, chap. 5.
48 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance, 5.4.
49 *Guide* III.17. Maimonides 1963, p. 469.
50 Altmann 1974, pp. 25–52. Pines 1960, pp. 195–8.
51 Altmann 1974, p. 44.
52 This form of determinism has been advocated by many modern philosophers, including Hume, J.S. Mill, and many twentieth-century philosophers.
53 Gellman 1989, pp. 139–50.
54 Hyman 1997, pp. 133–52; Stern 1997, pp. 217–66.
55 Sorabji, 1980, chap. 14.
56 Rudavsky 2000, pp. 115–24.
57 Husik 1916, p. 346; Sirat 1990, p. 296.
58 Gersonides' position may have been anticipated in Jewish philosophy by Abraham ibn Daud (ca. 1110–1180); however, there is no evidence that Gersonides knew the latter's treatise *The Exalted Faith*, written originally in Arabic. See Samuelson 1977a, pp. 81–90.

59 *Wars* III.3.
60 *Wars* III.2. It should be noted in this context that the counter-argument of Boethius and Aquinas is not mentioned at all by Gersonides. This argument claims that (1) the object known is known in terms of the specific nature of the knower; (2) God is timeless; and hence (3) God knows temporal particulars in a nontemporal way (Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book 5, Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I. q. 14, a.13). This point is relevant in evaluating the claim advanced by Pines and others that Gersonides was influenced by scholastic thinkers on this question (Pines 1977b, pp. 174–242; Sirat, Klein-Braslavy, and Weijers 2003).
61 Aristotle, *On the Soul*, II.5, 417b23.
62 Gersonides, *Supercommentary on Averroes' Commentary on On Interpretation,* chap. 9, Bodleian manuscript #1352.
63 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Fate*, chap. 30.
64 The literature on Gersonides' theory of omniscience is quite extensive. One should consult the general bibliography collected by Kellner 1992. Two more recent discussions should be noted: Rudavsky 2003, pp. 126–33; Manekin 1998, pp. 135–70.
65 *Wars* VI.1.10.
66 Aristotle, Physics IV.10.
67 This point corresponds to the first part of the sixth argument of the Philosophers in Gersonides' summary of their case against divine cognition of space–time particulars.
68 Prior 1968, pp. 26–44; Fischer and Ravizza 1993, pp. 23–9.
69 Manekin 1997, pp. 165–204.
70 *Wars* III.4-5.
71 Gersonides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Genesis, Parashat Bereshit, 15a.
72 Gersonides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Genesis, Parashat Va'yera, fifteenth lesson, 28d.
73 Manekin 1998, p.74.
74 Baer 1971, vol 1, pp. 327–54. Manekin 1997, pp. 366–9.
75 *Ezer Ha-Dat* (*The Support of Religion*), Pollegar 1984, pp. 108–16, 131–2.
76 Pollegar 1984, pp. 125 and 140. Avicenna, *The Deliverance*, Psychology, reprinted in Hyman and Walsh 1973, pp. 255–62.
77 Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* IX.2
78 Pollegar 1984, pp. 152–3.
79 Guttmann 1964, pp. 232–3; Sirat 1985, pp. 315–22; Pines 1990, pp. 395–405; Manekin 1997, pp. 367–8.
80 Pollegar 1984, pp. 116, 118, 136–7.
81 Aristotle, *On Interpretation* IX, 19a22.
82 Pollegar 1984, pp. 118–9, 135–7.
83 Pollegar 1984, p. 120, my translation; see also p. 145.
84 Pollegar 1984, p. 103.
85 Rudavsky 2003, p. 354.
86 Guttmann 1964, p. 232.
87 Sirat 1985, pp. 320–1 and Rudavsky 2003, p. 354, draw a parallel here between Pollegar and Leibniz' theory of preestablished harmony.
88 Guttmann 1964, p. 232.
89 Pines has suggested that Pollegar solution exhibits significant similarities to that of several scholastic theologians, especially those in the Scotist tradition and that he was influenced by *them* (Pines 1986c, pp. 401–5; Pines' discussion is based on Schwamm 1934). I am, however, not convinced by this thesis. First, Scotus himself was one a vigorous defender of a very strong version of divine omniscience: God does have determinate

foreknowledge of future contingencies. Pollegar denied this claim (Scotus, in Hyman and Walsh 1973, pp. 632–9; Craig 1988, chap. 5). Second, although there may be some verbal similarities between Pollegar's notion of congruent wills and the language of some of Scotus' followers, the latter's use of such terms as *concausante*, *cooperationis* and *concurrere* imply God's participation in human volition and action, a doctrine that Pollegar rejects (Schwamm 1934, 81ff).

90 Narboni 1982. M. Hayoun, the translator of this essay, discusses Narboni's solution in his treatise *La Philosophie et la théologie de Moise de Narbonne,* Hayoun 1989, pp. 110–26, 231–41.

91 Narboni 1982, pp. 156–9. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VI.3, 1028a13. Sorabji 1980, chap. 1.

92 Narboni 1982, pp. 155–6.

93 *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, Thirteenth Discussion, Averroes 1969, p. 280. Maimonides, *Guide* III.21.

94 Narboni 1982, p. 159.

95 *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, Eleventh Discussion, Averroes 1969, pp. 265, 269 and Twelfth Discussion, pp. 280, 285.

96 Narboni 1982, p. 164.

97 Manekin 2002, p. 74.

98 Crescas, *'Or Ha-Shem*, Book Two, first principle.

99 In recent years, there has been a fairly extensive discussion of this topic. Touati 1990c, pp. 273–88 and pp. 305–12; Feldman 1982, pp. 3–28; Ravitsky 1988, part 1, chap. 2; Rudavsky 2000, pp. 140–5.

100 Proclus 1833, pp. 22–3. Philoponus 1899, Book 16, pp. 560–71.

101 Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book 5. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.q.14, a. 13.

102 Hourani 1972, pp. 74–86.

103 It has been claimed by Pines and others that here too a scholastic influence is present. Although the conclusions reached by Crescas, Boethius, and Aquinas are similar, it is important to note that their language and argumentation are quite different. Boethius makes heavy use of a distinction between simple, or absolute, necessity and conditional necessity. The former is harmful to free will, the latter is not. Analogously, Aquinas distinguishes between necessity *de re* and necessity *de dictu*. The former is again harmful, because it implies that God necessarily knows some event or fact because the event in question is intrinsically necessary; the latter only asserts that if it is the case that God knows some event, the event will eventuate, and this assertion is harmless. Crescas, however, does not make use of either Boethius' or Aquinas' distinctions. His language is that of Avicenna and is based on the distinction between logical necessity and natural, or causal, necessity. Nevertheless, in all of these thinkers there is the attempt to solve the dilemma by introducing a notion of "weak necessity," which divine omniscience implies, such that choice and free will are not compromised. Whether they have succeeded is another matter altogether.

104 Guttmann 1935, pp. 326–49; Ravitsky 1981b, pp. 445–69; W. Harvey 1984–1985, pp. 275–80; Touati 1990, pp. 305–12.

105 Baer argued that Crescas was influenced here by Abner of Burgos (F. Baer 1940, pp. 188–206 [Hebrew]). Feldman 1982, n. 21.

106 Crescas, *'Or Ha-Shem,* Book 2, Fifth Principle, chap. 3, my translation.

107 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.2. Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding,* section 8.

108 *Sefer Iqqarim* 4.1.

109 *Sefer Iqqarim* 4.1. Albo 1946, p. 7.

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111 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Fate*, chap. 5.
112 Feldman 1984b, pp. 15–54. On Abrabanel, see Feldman 2003, 2.8.
113 Wilensky 1956, chap. 7; Feldman 1985, pp. 123–9.
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115 *Aqedat Yitzhaq*, Genesis, Gate 10, Arama 1849, p. 96b. Arama cites Aristotle, *Physics* I.1.
116 *Aqedat Yitzhaq*, Genesis, Gate 21, Arama 1849, pp. 167b–168a.
117 *Aqedat Yitzhaq*, Genesis, Gate 10, Arama 1849, p. 97b, my translation.
118 *Aqedat Yitzhaq*, Genesis, Gate 21, Arama 1849, pp. 167b–168a.
119 *Aqedat Yitzhaq*, Genesis, Gate 21, Arama 1849, p. 166b. Al Ghazālī 1969, vol. 1, p. 278.
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PART VI

PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

21

VIRTUE AND HAPPINESS

HAVA TIROSH-SAMUELSON

The number of Jewish philosophical texts devoted exclusively to virtue and happiness is relatively small, yet the themes of virtue and happiness loom large in premodern Jewish philosophy. As key concepts of the science of ethics, virtue and happiness concern not only a theory about character formation and right action but also many assumptions about the structure of the world, the nature of human beings, the purpose of human life, the production and effects of knowledge, the social dimension of philosophy, the ideal political regime, and the relationship between humans and God. Therefore, the discourse on virtue and happiness was inseparable from a host of metaphysical, cosmological, psychological, epistemological, political, and theological theories. The Jewish philosophical discourse, moreover, was not carried out in a vacuum but through interaction with non-Jewish philosophy in the Greco–Roman world and in medieval Islam and Christendom. Through theorizing about virtue and happiness Jewish philosophers articulated their views on being human, being a Jew, and being a Jewish philosopher.

I. THE GRECO–ROMAN WORLD

Greek Foundations

In the Aristotelian classification of the sciences, practical philosophy studies voluntary actions and involves deliberations about things that are subject to change. Practical philosophy consists of the science of ethics and politics; whereas the former studies the individual, the latter studies society and state, but the two are closely connected: Aristotle's ethics has social dimensions and his politics are ethical. The science of ethics concerns the cultivation of character through the acquisition of virtues. Virtue is a quality of character to be admired, encouraged, and emulated; its opposite is vice, a character trait to be despised and discouraged in others and prevented or avoided in oneself. A right action is one that is in accordance with what the virtuous person would do in the circumstances, and what makes the action right is that it is what a person with a virtuous character would do.[1] In ethics of virtue, the notion of goodness is primary: No account can be given of what

makes an action right without having first established what is valuable or good. The virtues are objectively good, whether or not the agent who has them desires to have them.

Good character enables the moral agent to lead an objectively good life, that is, to experience happiness (*eudaimonia*). Happiness does not mean having fun, feeling content, or enjoying physical pleasure, nor does it mean possessing wealth, power, or fame. Rather, happiness means human flourishing, or well-being, an objective standard that is rooted in the nature of human beings and that organizes all activities into a meaningful pattern for the duration of one's entire life. The happy, or flourishing, life is a life in which what is objectively good for human beings is attained when they conduct themselves in a particular manner and undertake those activities that promote what is objectively good for humans as members of the human species.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle presents a systematic analysis of virtue and happiness that provides the foundation for all future reflections in ancient and medieval philosophy. Like Plato, Aristotle places the notion of goodness at the center of his analysis of virtue and happiness, but he rejects Plato's theory of the Good. By explaining how the human good in action (i.e., the subject of ethics) cannot be conceptualized apart from analysis of the final good,[2] Aristotle maintains that the good we seek is not a self-subsistent Form antecedent to good things, but the end (*telos*) for the sake of which each and every act is done. While recognizing that certain goods promote each other and that there are intrinsic goods that can also function as a means for yet a higher good, Aristotle envisions the sphere of human affairs (and indeed reality as a whole) as a hierarchy of interlocking means and ends. This hierarchy cannot go on ad infinitum; there must be one thing that we seek above all else because we seek it only for its own sake. The final good must be "most complete" (*teleion*, literally: "most goallike" or "endlike") and "self-sufficient" (*autarkes*).[3] Aristotle shows that only happiness qualifies as the final good that all humans seek. Human happiness, however, is predicated on the actualization of the rational potential of humans, because it is the characteristic activity (*ergon*) that distinguishes humans from all other beings. Because human excellence (or virtue) is the mature functioning of the capacity to reason, Aristotle concludes that happiness means a "life in accordance with the rational principle" when the rational aspect of the soul, the intellect, rules over the nonrational functions of the soul and structures all human activities in accordance with reason.

Aristotle's analysis of human rationality moves in two directions, resulting in two different conceptions of happiness. On the one hand, he shows that the cultivation of virtue, which leads to the formation of good character, is carried out in the

social sphere through deliberation and choice. Practical reasoning (*logos praktikos*) is the capacity that enables us to do what is "just right," namely grasp the mean or intermediate point between two extremes – one an excess the other defect – and apply the mean to concrete situations.[4] The mean is about having the right feeling toward the right object, at the right time, for the right reason, under the right circumstances, and acting accordingly.[5] Thus courage is the virtue that lies between love of danger and rashness, and liberality is the virtue that lies between spending and prodigality. These moral virtues are cultivated through interaction with other people, especially with one's friends who serve as a mirror for the self.

The perfection, or excellence of practical reason is the intellectual virtue of prudence, or practical wisdom (*phronesis)*, which is concerned with guiding actions with respect to things that can be other than they are. Aristotle defines practical wisdom as "a state grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about what is good or bad for a human being."[6] Although Aristotle classifies *phronesis* as an intellectual virtue, he also presents it as intimately connected with the moral virtues; no one can have the moral virtues without *phronesis* and anyone with *phronesis* has the moral virtues.[7] For most of the *Ethics* Aristotle presents happiness as "an activity of the *complete* (*teleion*) life in accordance with complete virtue." This means that the happiest life consists of just and decent living in the *political sphere*. The happy man is the one who expresses his balanced character in action toward other persons and who possesses both moral and intellectual virtues. The happy, well-functioning person is the well-rounded one who cultivates a wide range of virtues, including generosity, temperance and courage, as well as the more down-to-earth qualities of wit, humor, and conviviality.

In contrast, at the end of the *Ethics* (Book X, chapters 7–8) Aristotle focuses on the intellectual capacity of theoretical reason (*logos theoreticos*), whose perfection, theoretical wisdom, is now presented as the final end of human life. The intellectual virtue of theoretical wisdom encompasses knowledge of things that are necessary, unchanging, eternal, self-contained, and noble; these are truths about things that cannot be otherwise, the first principles of reality. This activity satisfies the conditions of the final good (i.e., "complete" and "self-sufficient") because humans can engage in it over a long period of time; it is the most pleasant of activities because it perfects the most noble part in us; it is self-sufficient, because nothing can be added to it to make it better; it is leisurely, because it is done for its own sake, aiming at no end beyond itself; and it is the one activity that makes human beings most like gods. Aristotle concludes that we should make ourselves immortal by cultivating that "which is divine in us."[8] The human capacity to cognize eternal truths enables the wise man to be like the gods, that is, transcend the natural order

and participate in the divine order. By virtue of this activity humans may be called "divine" because they become like God. By extension, everything associated with this knowledge – the understanding that nurtures it, the life that it controls, the happiness it inspires, and even the man who devotes himself to it – may share the same epithet, "divine."

Aristotle's ambiguous analysis of happiness generated an on-going process of interpretation that constituted the Aristotelian tradition in western philosophy, of which Jewish philosophy is but one small chapter. In the Hellenistic world, Aristotle's legacy was interpreted by several philosophical schools who articulated their distinctive approaches to happiness on the basis of his analysis.[9] His immediate successors, the Peripatetics, elaborated the details of his ethical theory but added little to it. The Cynics, however, went back to Socrates' position and regarded moral virtue as sufficient for *eudaimonia*, which they equated with a disposition of independence or freedom from worldly needs and passions. Their teaching had a strong ascetic character, because they emphasized self-sufficiency as the only remedy for the vicissitudes of fortune and the oppression of conventions. The Epicureans perpetuated the Socratic notion that philosophy is a therapeutic activity but the ultimate goal was untroubledness or tranquility, a state of mind of the happy person. The goal was to rid oneself from beliefs that cause the suffering of the soul through rigorous philosophical analysis. The Stoics also agreed with Socrates that virtue alone is sufficient for happiness, which they identified as "life in accordance with nature (*physis*)." For the Stoics, living in accordance with nature means living rationally. The Stoics absorbed the Cynic inventory of things into "good," "bad," and "indifferent": The good includes the four cardinal virtues of practical wisdom, temperance, justice, and courage; the base includes thoughtlessness, intemperance, injustice, and cowardice. The Stoics interpreted these moral categories epistemically. They internalized morality and happiness: The happy life is the "absence of passions" because they manifest mistaken judgments by the ruling reason. For the Stoics, only virtue has absolute or intrinsic worth and unhappiness is largely a cognitive mistake.

Notwithstanding their differences, all Hellenistic schools agreed that "virtuous people must improve their degree of happiness by being virtuous, and that no one can improve their degree of happiness as much by any other course of action."[10] Moreover, they all viewed philosophy not just as a way to *inform* people about the world and about truth but a way to *form* people, namely, to mold their character so they would choose the right kind of life. Philosophy was a training for life that involved mastery of speech (through rhetorical and dialectical exercises), knowledge of science of government (i.e., politics), and self-mastery through spiritual exercises

(*askesis*). This approach to happiness and virtue had much more in common with the biblical approach to right living than is commonly understood.

Biblical and Rabbinic Conceptions of Happiness

The Bible, of course, was not a philosophical text and it did not propose a systematic account of any topic, including virtue and happiness. Nonetheless, the theologico-ethical outlook of the Bible, especially as expressed in the Wisdom stratum,[11] can be expressed in propositional terms. On the surface, biblical morality seems to be quite different from Greek moral philosophy. Whereas the ancient Greek philosophers focused on the goodness of the *agent* (i.e., virtue), the Bible focused on the goodness of the *act* defined in terms of obligation or duty to law or rules. The Bible, therefore, is usually adduced as an example of deontological ethics, whose major modern exponent was Immanuel Kant.[12] In fact, the Bible (and rabbinic Judaism that developed on its basis) articulated a morality in which virtue and duty are complementary, and the Bible shared the assumption of Greek philosophy that to act rightly the moral agent must acquire virtues through training that conditions the moral agent to live wisely.

The main biblical term to denote happiness is *ashrei*,[13] a verbal form that means "oh for the happiness of that person," or "how fortunate is the person who . . . ." The term is etymologically related both to the Akkadian roots that mean "to be upright" or "to be in order (right, correct)" and to the Egyptian word that means "to go straight, to lead, guide." Because *ashrei* is linked to walking, the Bible often associates it with the word *derekh* ("path," "way") that denotes a life as a whole, a pattern of living of a certain kind. Often in the Bible the word *derekh* is associated with the stem *tz-l-h*, which means "to do well" or "to prosper." When a particular task is completed successfully, it is understood to be due to divine involvement. The request for divine blessing is evoked when one bids farewell to another and bestows a good wish for a future success. In some cases the verb *tz-l-h* appears in agricultural metaphors and associated with the stem *tz-m-h* ("to grow," "to give rise to"). Thus in biblical religion, no less than in Greek philosophy, human well-being meant flourishing throughout one's life.[14]

Although the Bible does not have a word equivalent to virtue and does not have a theory about character formation, the book of Proverbs provides rich description of the character formation as part of moral education in preparation for life. The counsel of the wise man was meant to cultivate the good person, whose good actions flow effortlessly from the well-established good character. Because character formation begins by avoiding any excess, even of those things that are good in themselves, Proverbs warns against excessive drink and gluttony and against too

much talk and bad company. In this prudential mentality, good things carried to excess yield negative consequences.

Proverbs and biblical Wisdom tradition in general presupposed that reality is meaningfully ordered and that human intelligence is capable of deciphering that order so as to orient human life in accord with it.[15] To live wisely is to live in harmony with the ordered universe and it can be achieved only if the wise person acquires the virtue of self-control. Thus the wise subdues his passions, whereas the fool is governed by them. The wise acquires the virtues by avoiding dangerous temptations that lead one to become wicked. The wise knows that drunkenness, laziness, and gossip are dangers that lure young people and adults away from the path of life. Self-control is the most evident in the way the wise person speaks, because the tongue is the most difficult thing to master. The wise person speaks the right words at the right time, so that he expresses himself eloquently as much as he appreciates the value of silence. Proper speech enables the wise to treat friends and enemies appropriately and to present himself competently with dignity in front of superiors.

The prudential mindset of the ancient Wisdom in Proverbs was blended with the covenantal theology of ancient Israel already in Deuteronomy.[16] In Deuteronomy the way of wisdom was identified with the "fear of God" (*yir'at* YHWH) where wisdom (*ḥokhmah*) is understood as the underlying order of the universe that belongs to the all-benevolent Creator. The one who holds aloof from evil and carefully avoids it because he fears God embarks on the path of Wisdom and the good life. In the covenantal morality of Deuteronomy, Torah was regarded as the true source of sound ethical conduct that leads to happiness; right conduct then means following the divine law as the wise person interprets it. Proverbs insists that right conduct is a matter of reverence and dedication as much as it is a matter of inner disposition. It is not surprising therefore that Proverbs holds that virtue or inner disposition cannot be lost once it is acquired.

The wise person (*ḥakham*), the one who cultivates the proper inner dispositions according to wisdom, is also the righteous person (*tzaddiq*), the one who behaves justly according to the teaching of a just God.[17] The righteous person is the wise one who delights in meditating on the wisdom embodied in the sacred writings that reveal the will of God, namely, the Torah. His antithesis is the one who foolishly ignores God's teaching and whose life is therefore marked by a poor quality. Because God's Torah is now regarded as the true source of sound ethical conduct, the unwise person is not only a fool but a person who offends against God. By contrast the wise person has the inner religious insight to know that God rules the world. He understands the words of the prophet and the ways and gracious act of God

as much as he is aware of his own sin and the way in which life is circumscribed by God. This type of insight breeds humility (*anavah*), which is also the basis of true faith (*emunah*) and trust (*bitaḥon*). In biblical Wisdom literature edited in the late Second Temple period, living by the Torah was understood as its own reward because through it one enjoyed the good life.

The best expression of the biblical conception of happiness is found in the Book of Psalms, especially in Psalms 1 that was placed at the beginning of the collection to offer a lens through which to interpret the entire book.[18] It clearly states that the best lived life is one devoted to the Torah of God; through it one can become righteous as God is and flourish, "like a tree planted on streams of water," that is, experience happiness.[19] The life of Torah, however, requires the cultivation of moral virtues as well as knowledge about the relationship of Torah to God's created world: God's Torah itself constitutes the life in which humans can flourish. Although Psalms 1 is a poetic text, it is possible to articulate its conception of the happy life in propositional language: Happiness pertains to the quality of life as a whole rather than to a momentary sensation of pleasure; it is an activity rather than a static condition; it is predicated on the acquisition of inner disposition to behave in a certain way, and it pertains to the nature of human beings and their place in the cosmic order. The happy life is a life that is intrinsically good; it is good not for anything else but itself; it is a path taken for its own sake rather than for the sake of someone else. The ideal person is one who actualizes the one and only best way of life. By contrast, there are many ways to fall short of the idea, or ways that prevent one from attaining the ideal. The good life itself manifests internal unity; it exhibits no conflict and turmoil, it is a life in which a single overarching purpose endows everything with meaning and makes the various parts of the life fit into an organized whole.

The biblical view of happiness and virtue was further elaborated in rabbinic Judaism that evolved after the destruction of the Second Temple. The rabbis were a small intellectual elite who shared many of the characteristics of the Greco–Roman philosophical schools, even though the rabbis were not philosophers in the narrow sense of the term. The rabbis did use logical procedures in their exegesis of scripture, but they did not use syllogistic reasoning in pursuit of truth about first principles. Nonetheless, in terms of social function the rabbis had much in common with philosophical schools of antiquity. Like the Greco–Roman philosophers, the rabbis taught without pay, attached themselves to particular disciples who followed them around and served them, and looked to gifts for support. Similar to other intellectual elites in the Hellenistic world, the rabbis distinguished themselves by walk, speech, and peculiar clothing, and they demanded for themselves

a privileged status, especially in terms of exemption from taxation. To legitimize their intellectual activity, the rabbinic scholars created a "chain of tradition," a list of teachers (rather than ancestors) modeled on Hellenistic philosophical schools. As Martin Goodman notes, the rabbis were "as Greek philosophers [who] were expected to teach practical ethics as physicians of the souls rather than as impractical theorizers."[20]

Most relevantly, the rabbis understood philosophy as a way of life that leads to happiness, a way of life that requires intentional character formation through deliberate spiritual exercises.[21] In this regard the rabbis could be viewed as moral philosophers, and it might even be possible to chart the moral philosophy of individual rabbis. The rabbinic scholars viewed the wise man as a hero of virtue who possesses encyclopedic knowledge, both of which are components of the happy life. The rabbis absorbed the Stoic catalogues of virtues and vices as well as specific social values such as self-sufficiency, self-knowledge, the simple life, nonconformity, imperturability, and equanimity. In the rabbinic portrayal of the ideal life, there is a strong antivanity and antiluxury posture reflecting a moral discipline based on self-control. Furthermore, the rabbinic sage, like his Greco–Roman counterpart, made wisdom his ultimate concern and considered its pursuit as expressed in the Torah to be the road to personal fulfillment in accordance with an eternal pattern.

As pursuers of wisdom, the rabbis took for granted that the pursuit of wisdom is both theoretical (*iyyun)* and practical (*maʿaseh*), that the life of wisdom requires the cultivation of a good character that possesses specific virtue, that character requires self-control and mastery of passions, and that the life of the virtuous person constitutes human happiness. Because virtue ethics is determined by the *function* of humans, the rabbinic religious ethos differed from the virtue ethics of the Greco–Roman philosophical schools. In rabbinic Judaism ethics were in the service of a *personal relationship with God*, a value that is clearly missing in Greek virtue ethics. Rabbinic texts developed the linkage between happiness and righteous conduct posited by Psalms 1, either by using the biblical verses as proof texts for homilies on other scriptural texts or by elaborating on the meaning of that Psalm.

Elaborating the motifs of Wisdom literature, rabbinic texts state forthrightly that for Israel, the Chosen people of God, happiness is to be found in adherence to God's revealed Torah, as interpreted by the rabbis. Rabbinic views on happiness can be gleaned from the numerous statements that begin with the biblical formula *ashrei* (happy is/are) and from rabbinic homilies on the language of the Psalm. In rabbinic sources the term *ashrei* functions as an antecedent to a cohortative statement that expresses approval of a certain conduct or that promotes certain religious values. For the rabbis, the life of Torah was *philosophia* literally speaking, namely love

of wisdom, but the ultimate end of life was the attainment of holiness through the imitation of God. The rabbinic understanding of virtue was inseparable from rabbinic theology and from the context of the rabbinic academy, where virtue was cultivated through interpersonal relationships among its members. In the organic web of rabbinic values,[22] the very observance of Torah's commandments constituted the best way to live and flourish so as to become holy as God is holy. Those who live by the Torah are happy; they enjoy well-being in this world and everlasting life in the world-to-come.

Under the broad category of *derekh eretz* the rabbis articulated an elaborate virtue ethics within the framework of covenantal theology that enjoins one to observe divine commands.[23] The Torah itself teaches *derekh eretz* and one who studies Torah must also study *derekeh eretz*. Although knowledge of *derekh eretz* came even before the revelation of Torah, its practice after the revelation is enhanced by the observance of *mitzvot*. He who practices both *derekh eretz* and *mitzvot* can avoid transgression and enjoy divine rewards; conversely, infringement of the principles of ethical *derekh eretz* leads to misfortunes. As the revelation of a commanding God, the Torah makes known what God wishes His believers to do in the form of Law. Obeying His will as expressed in the commandments is therefore the duty of all those who stand within the covenantal relationship to God. The ability to follow God's revealed law is predicated on the acquisition of specific virtues, character traits that dispose one to be open to observe His will as revealed in the Torah. Thus the conduct that the rabbinic texts consider as *derekh eretz* is itself predicated on virtues that create a personality well disposed to observe God's commands. Furthermore, because rabbinic teachings were themselves considered normative Torah, the virtues that the rabbis found desirable were not merely recommendation or guiding principles for behavior, but duties that carried obligatory force. In other words, one must strive to emulate those values.

The rabbinic program of self-discipline required curbing of desire and ideally yielded a transformation or reshaping of desire. Because the taming of desire minimally involves delay of gratification and maximally abnegation and self-denial, it is obvious that moral training involved some measuring of pain and suffering. The Cynics and the Stoics regarded discomfort as totally necessary and to be compatible with both human flourishing and freedom. Conversely, the individual who shuns pain and is dominated by the human penchant for physical comfort and pleasure will become a slave to the passions. Likewise, the rabbis viewed the Torah as a system of moral training that frees individuals from pursuit of illusory goods and trivial concerns, directing them to devote their lives to what matters most, relationship with God.

Most instructively, the rabbis, like the later Stoics, regarded the virtues as their own reward and highlighted joy (*simḥa*) as the byproduct of the life of virtue. Pierre Hadot explains that "Stoic joy is not the motive and the end of moral action, but rather virtue is its own reward. . . . Stoic joy, like Aristotelian pleasure, comes along as an extra surplus in addition to action in conformity with nature."[24] By the same token, the rabbis spoke about the joy produced by the observance of the commandments as the very reward for the commandments; the life of Torah is joyful, containing its own reward. It is not surprising that both rabbis and Stoics depicted the happy life as "the straight path" or the "right road," which for the Stoics meant life in the "right direction" of nature and for the rabbis it entailed life in accord with the path paved by the Torah.

The rewards for right conduct, according to the rabbis, are experienced in this world and in the next. These rewards, which Israel prays for and hopes to receive, are granted only if Israel worships God for God's sake. For the individual, the goods include health, longevity, dignity, livelihood, a loving family, satisfaction, and joy. Because these goods are experienced in human interaction through doing acts of loving kindness, the rewards of Torah pertain not just to the individual but to the community at large. A life devoted to Torah then yields a community that enjoys justice, friendliness, compassion, and peacefulness. In this ideal life, there is no strife, no conflict, no unnecessary hatred, no fraud, and no deception; human relations are properly conducted. On the collective level, the quality of Israel's life among the nations manifests the quality of its relationship with God as well. The full reward for the life of Torah, however, is in the remote future, in the Days of the Messiah, when Israel's political tribulations will come to an end and it will be redeemed.[25] From the apocalyptic literature the rabbinic tradition absorbed a catastrophic depiction of the end of days: The victory of the righteous Israel will come only after cataclysmic wars with its enemies and a significant deterioration in its quality of life, but thereafter the ideally good life will be significantly better than the historical reality known in the present.

As for the individual, the rabbis perpetuated the belief in personal survival after death, and the more they absorbed Platonic philosophy the more they could talk about the immortality of the soul. There is a causal nexus between the life of virtue in this world and the survival of the individual soul. For the righteous, death is not to be feared because life does not end with it. The souls of the righteous continue to exist in the world-to-come, enjoying a blissful intimacy with God and knowing no want, need, strife, or conflict. It is a life of peace, joy, and delight. The ideal existence is imaged in the rabbis' own image as a place where the righteous will study Torah and experience the intense pleasure that accompanies intellectual

activity. The entry into this reality is the highest reward Torah can offer, reflecting the justice of God who rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. The status of the body remains unresolved: Generally the revivification of the dead is part of the eschatological future. At the posthistorical phase, the body and soul of the righteous will be reunited and the final triumph over evil will be accomplished.

Virtue, Happiness, and Immortality in Judeo–Hellenistic Philosophy

Whereas the rabbinic reflections on virtue and happiness attest some influence of Greco–Roman philosophical schools, the first comprehensive attempt to read scripture through the lens of Greek moral philosophy belongs to Jewish philosophers in Hellenistic Egypt. In the Egyptian diaspora, where Jews constituted a distinct political minority with the freedom to observe their own religious rites, the adoption of Greek culture was more profound than in Palestine. Jewish authors adopted Greek literary modes giving rise to new Jewish literary genres, including history, romance, drama, epic, lyric poetry, and philosophy. The Jewish philosophers of the Hellenistic age were the first to reconcile the scriptural understanding of the happy life with Greek philosophy.

Philo of Alexandria (ca.20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.), the most important Jewish philosopher of the Egyptian diaspora, drew on the Jewish Wisdom tradition while being thoroughly proficient in the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Pythagoreans.[26] He was the first to identify the notion of happiness with Torah (*nomos)* and reason (*logos*) and his treatment of the nexus of virtue, knowledge, and well-being presaged the more systematic discussion in medieval Jewish philosophers, even though the writings of Philo were not accessible to them directly. Philo identified the biblical God, the Creator of the universe and the revealer of the Law, with the God of the Greek philosophers, the perfect being who is perfectly self-sufficient. As Pure Being, God is "the first and most perfect of all things; from whom, as from a foundation, all particular blessings are showered upon the world."[27] Philo's language is undoubtedly Platonic, but Philo went beyond Plato when he stated that as the primal good

> [God] alone is happy and blessed, having no participation in any evil whatever, but being full of all perfect blessings. Or rather, if one is to say the exact truth being Himself the good who has showered all particular good things over the heaven and earth.[28]

God's perfection is complete because of God's totally incorporeal nature. "God is Himself the perfection, and completion, and boundary of happiness."[29] The Creator God who is the source of all existents is, therefore, both the origin of human happiness as well as the ultimate end that human beings seek. If God is

perfect happiness, the happy life must be a life that seeks to imitate God. Such a life is what the Bible calls "holy," a life that Israel must be called to lead by observing God's law. The divine Law of Moses leads its adherents to the attainment of the ultimate end of human life: the seeing of God.

God is not seen with the eyes of the body but with the "eyes of the soul," namely the mind. This is what scripture means when it speaks about creation in the "image of God" (Gen. 1:26). In agreement with Platonic psychology, Philo saw human beings as a temporary union of two substances that separate at death. The biblical narrative teaches the truth of the human condition where the body is the source of passions and temptation that lead one away from focusing on God. Indeed, the body is "an evil thing, and one that plots against the soul and that is at all times lifeless and dead."[30] Hence Philo exhorts his reader to leave the body and its passions and his ethical teachings are meant to direct the reader on the path that leads the human soul to become Godlike, culminating in the mystical experience of "seeing God."[31] To attain the ultimate end of human life, humans must devote themselves to the acquisition of virtue. He concludes that "happiness is the employment of perfect virtue in a perfect life."[32]

Philo's analysis of virtue combined elements from the Aristotelian and Stoic traditions. According to Aristotle virtue is the mean between the two extremes of an excess or a deficiency and it emerges through habitual practice when reason controls the emotions and the passions. Thus the Peripatetics acknowledged that some emotions are useful, recognized degrees between virtues and vices, and counseled moderation. In contrast, the Stoics held that virtue is the only good, that between virtue and vice there is no middle ground, and that virtue is acquired by extirpation of passions. They called for obliteration of all feelings and emotions to become free of them, denied differences in importance between various virtues and vices, and held that humans are either perfectly virtuous or perfectly wicked. The main insight is that virtue resides in action that is free and "in conformity with reason."

On the acquisition of virtue, Philo sided with the Peripatetics against the Stoics. He did not regard all emotions as negative, because they were given by God. Philo did not believe that human beings are either perfectly virtuous or perfectly wicked. Instead he considered life as a process of self-improvement through the gradual acquisition of virtues. Philo adopted Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, which he understood as a doctrine of moderation. Moderation between excess and deficiency is the best path, the straight path prepared by God for the man of virtue. To attain the middle road, self-control is particularly necessary to combat desire. Virtue does not mean the absence of emotions and feeling but their moderate control. Yet the Stoic view of virtue is not totally absent. Philo's description of Moses resonates

with the Stoic notion that the emotions must be extirpated. In the case of Moses, the complete absence of passions is possible only because Moses received special assistance from God. Moses is called divine and holy because he was perfectly wise.

In regard to the classification of the virtues Philo combined elements from Plato and from Aristotle, to which he added his own religious contribution.[33] One classification of the virtues, based on Platonic ontology, is the distinction between generic Virtue and specific virtues. That distinction is the core of Philo's allegorical interpretation of the Garden of Eden narrative, where Eden stands for the Wisdom of God, the *Logos*; and the trees in the Garden are "trees of Virtue, from which all specific virtues flow," and its preeminence is denoted by the location in the middle of the garden, which is the Soul. In Philo's interpretation of Genesis 2:9, God caused every theoretical and practical virtue to spring out of the soul. Generic virtue, namely goodness, is represented in the biblical narrative by the Tree of Life and by the River. Philo subordinates Greek virtue ethics to the biblical text by paying close attention to the meaning of Hebrew words, refracted through the Greek translation. The four rivers symbolized the "heavenly virtues," namely the virtues of the soul that lead one who cultivates them to heaven. The "earthly virtues" are bodily excellences that are to be differentiated from external advantages such as wealth, which do not properly belong to ethics because they do not pertain to character per se.

Side by side with the Platonic classification there is also the Aristotelian distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, which was commonplace by Philo's day. In this regard too Philo mixed Aristotelian and Stoic themes. On the one hand, he endorsed the claim that the good life is a life shaped by law that is rooted in reason and in nature. He did not, however, believe that human reason could discover the laws of nature on its own. Only a law that was revealed by God, the Creator of nature, can be in accordance with nature. That law, Philo insisted, is the Law of Moses. It alone would lead one to the attainment of happiness by inculcating true beliefs and good deeds. As for distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, Philo gave it a Stoic coloring when he distinguished between "practice virtues" and "contemplative virtues."

The contemplative virtues have God as their object. One such virtue is the belief that God exists; another is the belief that God exercises providential care over what he has created. The first four of the Ten Commandments are intended to include intellectual virtues. To possess all of the intellectual virtues is to possess Wisdom, which is knowledge of all the teaching contained in the Law. Wisdom is also defined in terms of its four constituent virtues: piety, godliness, holiness, and faith. For Philo, the properly ordered life, the life that is lived in accordance with

nature and with divine reason, requires the virtue of piety. Piety is the Wisdom in the service of God. Philo turns faith into a virtue.[34] Faith is trust in God alone: faith in the revealed truth of scripture. It has a cognitive aspect (commitment to the belief that God is one and that he provides for His world. Faith is called the "queen of the virtues"; having faith means putting trust in God rather than in high office, fame, or other external goods. The religious virtues indicate where Philo departed from his Greek teachers. He also departed from them in regard to moral virtues that are experienced in the social spheres. He paid a lot of attention to the virtue of humanity (*philanthropeia).* The virtue of humanity means giving help to those in need. The pious man is a humane man. Fellow-feeling and just dealings with others go hand in hand, and both derive from acknowledgment of the holiness of God, although these virtues are not identical with piety. Other virtues related to humanity and justice are concord, equality, grace, and mercy. Philo's creative hermeneutics transformed Greek virtue ethics into Jewish religious ethics.

The zenith of happiness, according to Philo, is "being loved by God." A particular conception of God as Creator led Philo to understand happiness as a love linked to knowledge, a love that is different from the emotions we associate with earthly love. Those who live the virtuous life, in which reason governs the emotions and passions, enjoy happiness in this life and participate to some extent in God's perfect happiness. The zenith of the happy life is an individual ecstatic and unmediated coming to know the transcendent and immaterial God. It is a contemplative mystical experience in which the "eye of the mind" or the soul comes to "see God." This mystical experience governs the direction of the happy life organizing all human activities so as to attain it. Because for Philo the revealed Law of Moses is the ideal law that God implanted in nature at creation, the universal goal of "seeing God" is achievable only for those who live by the Law of Moses; it alone guides humanity in accordance of nature. The experience of "seeing God" constitutes the community of "Israel," which is an intellectual religious category rather than an ethnic or national category.

Is it possible to have this mystical experience in this life? Philo remains ambiguous. Ordinary men cannot see God in this life, because they are governed by their bodies. Only exceptional persons such as Moses and a few other biblical figures could claim such an experience. Moses was superior to all other human beings in that he was "the all-wise." Philo depicted Moses as an outstanding moral and religious personality; loved by God as few others have been, Moses was a man of "special holiness," even the "holiest of men." He is described as "the most perfect of men" with reference to his priestly piety and his constant and unbroken nobility and other virtues. He was "king, and law-giver, and high priest and

prophet," and in "each function he won the highest place." In accordance with the Platonic schema of *Republic*, Philo portrays Moses as the philosopher-king who "attained the very summit of philosophy" and he properly deserved the title *theos*, (i.e., divine). From God he received divine communication and embodied it in the form of law that rescues mankind from the bondage of matter. The divine Law of Moses is the ideal law, the perfect natural law sought by the philosophers, and the Ten Commandments are the supreme catalogue of virtues. To live the virtuous life one must live by the Law of Moses.

For the rest of humanity, the mystical experience itself remains an ideal that will be realized only in the afterlife, after the soul is separated from the body. What about Israel, the category that Philo reserves for "he who sees God?" It seems that this community (which for Philo is a religious rather than an ethnic category) can come to know God in this life, to the extent that God is knowable. One group of Jewish people – the Therapeutae of Lake Mareotis in Egypt – in fact enacted Philo's ideal program for the happy life. They were viewed as "free by nature and not subject to the frown of any human being." They "celebrated their manner of messing together and their fellowship with one another beyond all description in respect of its mutual good faith, which is an ample proof of a perfect and very happy life."[35] Philo's description was constructed to fit his ideal of happiness: the life of virtue that leads to a mystical "seeing" of God. Whether or not the group actually attained mystical experiences is less important; their life style definitely illustrated the happiest way of life, according to Philo.

Philo's fusion of ethics of virtue and ethics of duty and his interpretation of Mosaic Law as the perfect law that secures happiness would be elaborated in the Middle Ages, even though the medieval Jewish philosophers did not have direct access to his teachings. Judeo–Hellenistic philosophy itself was destroyed by the Romans when they quelled the Jewish rebellions of 115–117, whereas the reframing of Judaism by the rabbis in Palestine and Babylonia became normative Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism, including its approach to virtue and happiness, would undergo profound transformation in the Middle Ages when philosophically trained rabbis reinterpreted scripture on the assumptions that the revealed text contained philosophical truths and that observing the commandments of the Torah enabled one to attain happiness.

II. JUDEO-ARABIC PHILOSOPHY

In the eighth and ninth centuries Greek and Hellenistic philosophy and science were revived in Islam due to a massive translation effort underwritten by the Abbasid

Caliphs. Of Aristotle's works the most popular text among the Muslim gentlemen in the service of the Muslim state was the *Nicomachean Ethics*. They developed a broad sociocultural program known as *adāb*,[36] a philosophical *derekh eretz* so to speak, whose major values were moderation and self-control, tailored to fit the needs of the Muslim state and the peculiarities of the Muslim religion. Thus mastery of calligraphy and fluency in the art of poetry were added to the requisite virtues of the learned men articulated by Greek and Hellenistic philosophers. The *adib* culled his knowledge from prose books whose contents encompassed tales, fables, anecdotes, practical advice, and popularization of scientific information, all gleaned from the philosophical–scientific heritage of the Hellenistic world interspersed with some material from India.

In its attitude toward happiness *adāb* culture encompassed two contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, it gave rise to a robust worldliness that celebrated the pleasures of the senses and viewed advancement in the court the goal of human life. On the other hand, *adāb* culture also promoted literary reflections on the human condition that diminished the value of all temporal endeavors. *Adībs* taught that worldly pleasures and social success are only illusory, preventing one from attaining genuine happiness. True reality lies not in this world but in the next life and it could be attained through focusing on God alone. These Sufi-inspired reflections expressed in sententious poetry and rhymed aphorisms were suffused with an acute awareness of human mortality of the transience of wealth and political success, and of the profound insecurity of all human affairs.

Muslim philosophers (*falāsifa*) who shared the *adāb* culture developed the systematic analysis of character traits necessary for the attainment of happiness. These treatises established ethics as the "science of character" (*ilm al-akhlāq*) and were based on the translation of *Nicomachean Ethics* into Arabic by Ishāq ibn Hunāyn (d. 911).[37] The most thorough reworking of Greek ethics in Islam was articulated by al-Fārābī (d. 950) who composed commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (no longer extant), as well as systematic reflections on happiness in his *Tahsīl a-Sa'adah* (*Attainment of Happiness*) and *Al Tanbīh 'ala Sabīl al-Sa'adah* (*Paths for the Attainment of Happiness*) and in the *Iḥṣa al 'Ulūm* (*The Enumeration of the Sciences*). Convinced of the fundamental agreement between Plato and Aristotle, al-Fārābī combined Plato's political theory, Plotinian metaphysics, and Aristotlian ethics into a comprehensive theory about the attainment of human happiness.[38] The virtuous regime is that which safeguards moral traits conducive to true happiness, and the nonvirtuous stresses traits of character conducive to imaginary happiness. True happiness is attained only by those living in the virtuous city, founded by a philosopher-prophet-imam and legislator of the perfect law. The people who live in

such a regime can attain the ultimate goal of happiness that consists of a conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) between the human intellect and the divine intellect. At this point humans become intellects in themselves, transformed from material beings to semidivine beings. These ideas deeply shaped Maimonides' views on virtue and happiness, to be discussed later. After al-Fārābī various Muslim philosophers composed systematic treatises about the cultivation of the moral character and the ideal virtues.[39]

Saadia Gaon: Happiness and Rabbinic Eschatology

Saadia Gaon (d. 942) was the first Jewish philosophical theologian to offer a systematic analysis of the ultimate end of human life as part of his rationalist defense of Judaism against the Karaite critique. Saadia's Tenth Treatise of *Kitāb al-Amānāt wa'l'Itiqādāt* (*The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*) reflects about happiness by beginning with observations on actual human conduct and with citations of various opinions about human happiness. Saadia was the first to introduce philosophical anthropology as the basis of Jewish ethics and the first to demonstrate that rational arguments are compatible with scriptural and rabbinic views. The style of his reasoning and the content of some of his arguments are identical with that of the Mutazilite school of Kalām.[40] As a Jewish Mutazilite, Saadia was concerned with the themes of divine unity, divine justice, rewards and punishments, and good and evil actions.

Because happiness according to the philosophers pertains to the quality of the human soul, Saadia examines various theories on the nature of the human soul and its association with the body. He rejects those doctrines that are in conflict with the belief in creation and is particularly averse to theories that view the soul as a substance that emanates from God's substance. He also dismisses theories that the soul is an accident, located in a particular part of the body. His own theory is that humans are a temporary combination of two substances – body and soul – both *created by God and are united by him*. The substance of the soul is refined "comparable in purity to that of the heavenly sphere [and] like the latter, it attains luminosity as a result of the light which it receives from God."[41] This definition is generally Platonic, and indeed he was the first philosopher to speak about knowledge in visual metaphors. Yet for Saadia the soul is not strictly speaking a noncorporeal substance, rather it is made of a refined substance that is not devoid of matter altogether, even though it is qualitatively different from the corporeal body, "a dark place" in which the luminous soul is imprisoned for the duration of its life on earth. The human soul needs the body as its instrument of action, "for the soul performs its functions only by means of the body, since the act of every created being requires for its execution some instrument."[42] Like Plato, Saadia distinguished between the

appetitive, impulsive, and cognitive faculties or parts of the soul and regarded the body as an instrument of the soul.

The dualism of body and soul affected Saadia's understanding of human happiness. The well-being of the soul is predicated on the well-being of the body but the latter requires control of the body by the soul. To allow the body to take the lead would result in the soul's destruction. The interdependence of body and soul explains why Saadia insisted on the doctrine of bodily resurrection: Even though on earth the two substances separate and the soul of the righteous continues to live on as immortal substance, in the end of time as a result of divine intervention, the individual soul will be recombined with its corresponding body. For the duration of human life on earth a proper balance between soul and body constitutes the morally good life, for which one is rewarded with eternal life and the recombination of body and soul in the eschatological remote future. The good life is thus a balanced life in which all the aspects of the human composite are given appropriate expression within a hierarchy of goods.

Saadia lists all goods that moral philosophers in antiquity discussed with reference to human happiness. He rejects ascetic ideals inspired by Cynic and Stoic moral philosophers that in Saadia's day were endorsed by Christian monastics and Sufis, which al-Kindī rendered philosophically. According to Saadia, a human life governed by asceticism lacks proper balance. Denial of bodily needs or harsh treatment through radical extreme asceticism does not accord with God's creation. Moderation would thus be the ideal practice to yield the good life. Moderation and self-control is the core of Saadia's moral advice. The ideal life is rooted in balance, although Saadia does not provide the details how to achieve the balance. This has already been specified by the precepts of the Torah as interpreted by the rabbis.

The very duality of human nature means that humans have both embodied life in this world and life after the disintegration of the body. These two modes are interdependent: The quality of character and the goodness of one's deeds determine the ability to survive the deterioration of the body. Neither excessive indulgence in bodily pleasure nor extreme abstinence from satisfying bodily needs is good. Rather, balance in this life is necessary if one is to attain the afterlife. Such balance is accomplished in fact by living within the structures of the Law. The dual nature of human existence dictates that the afterlife does not end with the separation of the soul from the body. That body will eventually be revived in the posthistorical eschatological future. The belief in resurrection of the dead follows from the belief in creation: If the first can be proven rationally, as Saadia does, so can the last.

After the death of the body the disembodied soul is stored up until the time of retribution. Without philosophical clarity, Saadia speaks of the ascent of the souls

of the righteous and the descent of the souls of the wicked, but before the soul enters this final state, it will suffer in accordance with its deeds on earth. At some point in time, God will reunite the souls and their bodies and then will judge them. The eschatological drama will include the resurrection of the dead, reserved only to Jews, the messianic age, and finally the world-to-come in which the reunited body and soul will persist nonmaterially as light, very differently from their earthly existence. Saadia left rabbinic Jewish eschatology intact.

Jewish Neoplatonic Philosophers: Happiness and Purification of the Soul

Saadia laid the foundation for rationalist religious ethics in which human reason was applied to any claim, whether made by authoritative sacred texts or articulated on the basis of scientific information. The goal of this philosophical ethics was ultimately religious – namely, the relationship with God. In the two centuries following Saadia, Jewish philosophy was written in Judeo–Arabic by intellectuals who were deeply immersed in the culture of their time, be it the *adab* culture or systematic philosophy (*falsafa*), especially as popularized by the encyclopedia of the Brethern of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Safā*).[43] Their learned amalgam of Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism was highly intellectualist but did not appear to threaten the religious mentality of Muslims or Jews, because it retained the belief in the personal immortality and viewed the pursuit of intellectual perfection as a religious activity. The hierarchical metaphysics of Neoplatonism and its religious overtones could be easily absorbed into a theistic framework and provide rationalist support to a religious outlook concerned with perfection of the individual and the purification of the soul through ritual practice.

The first to fuse the Neoplatonic schema and its strong mystical overtones with the rabbinic eschatology was Isaac Israeli (d. ca. 940) in Qayrawan. He identified the bliss of the world-to-come with the climax of the soul's ascent from its entanglement in matter to union with the supernal world. For Isaac Israeli the world-to-come means the bliss experienced in the afterlife when the soul purifies itself and experiences illumination and union with the supernal light. He holds that such union can already be achieved in this world, provided that one withdraws from the influence of the flesh and of the lower souls. The union of the soul with the supernal light is not a union with God, but "wisdom," which together with "First Matter" occupies a place just below God in Israeli's metaphysical scheme. The final stage of the soul's ascent is identified with the religious notion of Paradise.[44] Like Saadia he held that in contrast with the blissfulness of paradise there is punishment in the hereafter: The soul of the sinner will experience pain as it is tortured by fire.

A more important contributor to reflections on virtue and happiness was Solomon ibn Gabirol (d. 1058) who served as a professional poet in the court of the Jewish patron, Yequtiel ibn Hasan in Saragossa. Ibn Gabirol possessed extensive knowledge of the *adab* prose literature and mastered its poetic conventions and ideals, drawing much of his knowledge from Hunain ibn Yishāq's collection of aphoristic, biographical, gnomic, anecdotal literature entitled *Adab al-Falāsifah*, which was translated into Hebrew as *Musarei Ha-Philosophim* (*The Moral Teachings of the Philosophers*). For this reason a collection of Arabic moral aphorisms that circulated in a Hebrew translation under the title *Mivḥar Ha-Peninim* (*Choice of Pearls*) was attributed to Solomon ibn Gabirol. From the vast encyclopedic knowledge of Arabic learning, he culled his philosophical–scientific knowledge, molding it all into his own philosophy that had a strong Neoplatonic tinge, and also departing from prevailing Neoplatonism on some important points.

Gabirol composed the first systematic treatise that spells out how the well-being of mankind is linked to the structure of the universe and to the structure of human beings. His *Islāh al-Akhlāq*, translated into Hebrew as *Tiqqun Middot ha-Nefesh* (*Improvement of the Moral Qualities*), presents a distinct Jewish contribution to the science of character in Islamic philosophy. Like the Brethren of Purity, Ibn Gabirol grounded moral training in human biology showing how human temperaments are rooted in human physiology, as understood by the medical ethics of Galen and Hippocrates.

In Gabirol's psychological theory the human being is a composition of two substances: the corporeal body and the noncorporeal soul. By virtue of the soul, the human being stands at the top of a hierarchy of beings in the material world. At the peak of the created order, the human constitution manifests intentional design, orderliness, and beauty. Echoing the common theme in encyclopedia of the Brethren of Purity, Ibn Gabirol presents the human species as a microcosm in which the four elements and the four humors reflect the mathematical assumptions of the Pythagorean tradition. The rational soul is defined as "pure, stainless, and simple," although he does not explain how the rational soul is linked to the vegetative soul. What is clear is that proper management of the body by the soul should exhibit the control of the rational soul. Human well-being in this life thus requires the hegemony of reason over the passions and appetites of the body. If reason fails, one falls prey to the irrational desires of the body and loses the "enduring happiness which man can reach in the intellectual world, the world-to-come."[45]

The principles that underlie proper human conduct constitute the "medicine of the soul," which is analogous to the "medicine of the body," and the wise man is like a "skillful physician who prepares prescriptions, taking of every medicine

a definite quality."[46] The ultimate end of his medical management is not life in the temporal order but rather the everlasting existing of the rational soul in the intelligible realm. The ideal person is one who reaches a well-balanced condition of body and soul: He makes the rational soul govern his passions. The ideal virtues include meekness, modesty, capacity to love, compassion and mercy, cheerfulness and good disposition, good will and contentment, alertness, generosity, and valor. The vices include pride, impudence, capacity to hate, cruelty, wrath, envy, sloth, niggardliness, and cowardice. The virtues are generally in accord with the rabbinic tradition, except for the virtue of magnanimity, which reflects Ibn Gabirol's courtier social setting. The moral life means the conditioning of the soul (or "improvement") of desire; by perfecting oneself morally and intellectually the human soul can attain the ultimate religious goal of human life.

In his religious poem *Keter Malkhut* (*Kingly Crown*), which became a part of the liturgy for Day of Atonement, Ibn Gabirol depicted the world-to-come in the context of Neoplatonic metaphysics and cosmology. From God as the "uppermost light" (*or elyon*) emanates Wisdom (*ḥokhmah*) and from Wisdom emanates the divine Will (*ḥefetz*). The emanationist process is understood in philosophical terms taken from pseudo-Empedoclean literary sources in which Matter determines the nature of a substance contrary to the Aristotelian view that assigns this function to Form.[47] In the hierarchy of beings, everything under the Will is a composition of Matter and Form, participating in Universal Matter and Universal Form that emanate from the Will with the Divine Throne. The cosmic hierarchy includes, in descending order, the Cosmic Intellect, the outermost sphere which is responsible for the daily rotation of the heavens, the remaining celestial spheres, the earth, and the four elements. Unto this cosmological schema, Ibn Gabirol projects the career of the soul whose end is the world-to-come, depicted as a resting place where the righteous will receive their reward. The immortality of the soul is incorporeal and individual, but it does not involve a mystical union with God. The attainment of immortality is predicated on the cultivation of virtues and the acquisition of knowledge, by which the soul frees itself from the body. The philosophical details of the ascent of the soul are worked out in *Fons Vitae* (*Meqor Ḥayyim*) but the discussion remains somewhat obscure.

Other Jewish Neoplatonists in the eleventh century who shared this outlook were Joseph ibn Tzaddiq and Abraham bar Ḥiyya. For them too the ultimate end of human life was the release of the soul from its bondage in the body, but this elevated state is due to various ascetic practices ("afflictions of the soul") rather than to moderation according to the doctrine of the mean. In the hierarchy of beings, which extends from the most spiritual – God – to the most corporeal – the minerals,

plants, and animals of this world – the human being is an intermediary entity, combining a spiritual soul and a corporeal body, each belonging to a different level of existence. The goal of life is to allow the essential light of the human soul to shine by avoiding sin through rational living. The perfect person is the one who separates himself from the aspects of this world for the sake of the world-to-come, namely by living an ascetic life, which results in the emancipation of the soul from the material body and its return to the Upper World of Pure Form. Such a man is a saint whose life is like a "perpetual Sabbath" and whose "pleasure is defined as the meditation on the laws of God."[48] The saintly men renounce worldly possessions, sexual desire, and physical pleasures and are guided solely by the virtue of humility. Through this ascetic regime the soul becomes what it truly is: a separate, luminous entity that can participate in the pure divine light.

This religious vision, which echoes Sufi themes,[49] was expressed most systematically in the work of Bahya ibn Paquda (d. ca. 1156), *Kitāb al-hidāya ilā Farā'id al Qulūb* (*Ḥovot ha-Levavot; Duties of the Heart*). Bahya shared the intellectualist religiosity of the Jewish thinkers and the Neoplatonic metaphysics presupposed by them but he was critical of a superficial endorsement of the *adāb* culture among the Jewish courtiers. Like Bar Ḥiyya, Bahya held that happiness is not found in material prosperity, bodily pleasures, and social successes. The essence of being human is the intellect and human well-being depends on the excellence of the intellect. Because the rational soul does not belong to this world, the happiness of the soul cannot be experienced in his world but only in the afterlife. The quality of one's life will determine whether or not the individual rational soul will attain the desired perfection. Bahya's book is most similar in orientation to al-Ghazālī's *Kimyat-yi Sa'adāt* (*Alchemy of Happiness*) whose goal was to show how life in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an leads to love of God, the ultimate end of human life.[50] Like al-Ghazālī, Bahya offers a therapeutic program that can either prevent the sickness of the soul or halt it in case sickness takes root. Yet the proper care of the soul is feasible only for those who possess an accurate knowledge of the structure of the universe created by God and a correct understanding of the human condition.

The well-being of the soul constitutes the ultimate end of human life. Bahya defines it as follows: "The soul is a simple spiritual substance, which inclines by its nature to the spiritual beings that are like itself, and rejects by its nature the coarse bodies that are unlike it."[51] Like Saadia and Ibn Gabirol, Bahya was committed to the Platonic psychological schema that views the soul and the body as two substances combined temporarily for the duration of a person's life. Bahya does not provide a detailed philosophical analysis of the combination of the soul and the body and this is why the anonymous *Kitāb ma'ānī al-nāfs* was ascribed to him. It provides the philosophical theory that Bahya presupposes but does not include.

Lumping human drives, impulses, and craving under the category of "desire" (*ishq*) Bahya discusses this raw energy located in the body (or more specifically in the liver). In itself desire is a positive force, "implanted by God" in humans, enabling them to propagate so as to ensure the perpetuation of the species. It becomes a negative force only when it produces excesses, be they in possession, status, or pleasures. Desire is a natural propensity toward sensual pleasure that all animals have and the goal of the moral life is to control desire. The best measure to protect the soul against sickness and to ensure that human beings enjoy the afterlife is offered by the Torah itself: "The Law is the medicine for the sickness of the soul and this malady of nature."[52] The taming of desire through the cultivation of religious virtues orients human beings toward God rather than toward the pursuit of transient and illusory worldly success.

Submission to the Law of God begins with the fear of punishment and an expectation of reward, but these pertain primarily to "duties of the limbs" and do not constitute the highest form of worship. Ascending to the level of intellectual obedience of God, worship becomes an expression of reverence for and awe of God. Although Saadia is quite critical of asceticism, Bahya sees how asceticism can lead to the soul's nearness to God. Bahya too rejects extreme forms of asceticism as a regimen for happiness and favors instead "moderate asceticism," one that is this-worldly and life affirming. Such asceticism yields the virtues of compassion, mercy, gratitude, sensitivity to the needs of others, patience, truthfulness, and forbearance,[53] which are manifestations of religious virtues that are rooted in the correct understanding of the human condition.

Most of *Duties of the Heart* is an elaborate discussion of the virtuous person who draws the correct conclusions from the awareness that the world is God's creation and that God alone is the true sovereign of the affairs of the world. There is only one proper object of worship of service – God. If so, total reliance on God is the proper posture of the religious person. Bahya develops the religious virtues of trust and its concomitant virtue, humility. True humility is the result of constant self-examination or self-reckoning in which a person brings to mind, meditates and reflects on the human condition. The life of the humble man is a happy life, because happiness pertains to the soul. In this world the soul has a task to fulfill; it must control the natural inclinations of the body toward excess and direct itself toward the True, the Good, and the Real – God. Life in this world is a preparation for the felicity of the soul in the next life.

The Platonic myth of the soul is echoed in Bahya's description of the return of the soul to its origin. The man who returns to God in this fashion is "the happiest" and the conduct that facilitates it is "the path of happiness." The end of human life is a mystical-intellectual vision. When the prescriptions of the Law are properly

understood and performed with appropriate mental posture, the human soul is able to purify itself by acquiring temporal, intellectual, and religious virtues that enable the soul to control the body. The full reward of this perfect life is to be experienced after the death of the body, but already in this world the lover of God enjoys the profound benefits of obedience to God. The lover of God is relatively free from the limitations of the corporeal world, experiencing the bliss of spiritual life.

Moses Maimonides: Happiness and the Perfect Law of Moses

By the mid-twelfth century the notion that happiness pertains to the perfection of the soul and that it is attainable for those who observe the Torah and ensure that their reason controls their emotions and bodily urges was shared by many Jewish philosophers in Islam. However, the more Jewish philosophers gained access to the teachings of Aristotle, the more they understood the perfection of the soul exclusively in terms of perfection of the rational soul, namely, the intellect. Consequently, reflections on virtue and happiness were now intertwined with an elaborate theory of knowledge and much of it was derived from the Hellenistic commentators on Aristotle, especially Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. ca. 200) and Themestius (d. 392), whose commentaries on Aristotle's *De Anima* explored the precise meaning of Aristotle's claim that the soul is an *entelekheia*, that is an actual state of being whose relationship to the body is analogous to the relationship between form and matter.[54]

The first Jewish Aristotelian, Abraham ibn Daud (d. 1180), stated in his *Emunah Ramah* (*The Exalted Faith*) that the attainment of happiness is the ultimate end of human life. Echoing the teachings of Avicenna on happiness,[55] Ibn Daud asserts that happiness means perfection of the human soul attainable by those who cultivate the virtues through the observance of Torah and who also actualize their rational potential. The happy life culminates in intellectual perfection, which he identifies with the love of God. Only the one who possesses a correct knowledge of the world can come to love God, because love is commensurate with knowledge and knowledge of God leads to imitation of God in one's interaction with others. The relationship between intellectual perfection and moral perfection, between the virtues and the observance of Jewish law, and between knowledge of God and the love of God, would be worked out by Moses Maimonides (d. 1204).

In many respects Maimonides' teachings on virtue and happiness are not original; elements in his theory could be traced to Muslim and Jewish predecessors, especially al-Fārābī,[56] Ibn Bājja,[57] Solomon ibn Gabirol, and Baḥya ibn Paquda. Yet, Maimonides creates a new ethical discourse on virtue and happiness by making explicit the Aristotelian foundation of rabbinic ethics. He not only analyzes the

rabbinic tradition in light of categories taken from Aristotle, he explicitly refers to the *Nicomachean Ethics* in his *halakhic* works, the *Commentary on the Mishnah* and the *Mishneh Torah*. In so doing Maimonides in effect suggests that Aristotle's teachings, to the extent that they are true, are perfectly compatible with the revealed Torah and that as such they are authoritative to Jews. Moreover, Maimonides claims that the Torah itself should be approached as an esoteric text whose inner meaning is identical with Aristotle's physics and metaphysics: The Torah teaches philosophical truths necessary for the attainment of happiness in the "language of human beings," namely, through figurative speech. Finally, Maimonides claims that the Torah establishes the ideal political regime in which human happiness can be attained, provided one knows how to interpret the Torah correctly and understand its philosophical meaning.

In accord with Aristotle, Maimonides defines human happiness in terms of well-being, or proper functioning, of the species as a whole. The capacity to reason distinguishes human beings from other animals and enables the human to be like God in some respect. The Torah expresses this point poetically when it speaks about creation in the "divine image" (*tzelem elohim*) in Genesis 1:26. In his interpretation of the biblical narrative of the Garden of Eden, Maimonides sheds light on human nature through his interpretation of the Fall of Adam. The biblical narrative is understood as a philosophical parable that prescribes both how humans as a species ideally should act, and how they tend to act when they fall short of the ideal.[58] Prelapsarian Adam signifies the human ideal in which a perfect intellect is engaged in contemplative activity that discerns between truth and falsehood. The sin of disobedience is understood as an exercise of the God-given ability to choose, which led Adam to shift from contemplation to a lower epistemic activity, the differentiation between good and bad, that is, moral decision making. Although humans in the world are engaged in acquisition of moral knowledge this is not what constitutes the ultimate end of human life. Contemplation of necessary truths is declared to be "in true reality the ultimate end: this is what gives the individual true perfection, a perfection belonging to him alone; and it gives him permanent perdurance, through it man is man."[59] The "final perfection" attained through intellectual activity is the "sole case" of human immortality.

How can the human ideal be attained? The answer lies in Maimonides' theory of knowledge, which is inseparable from his cosmology. Maimonides was familiar with Aristotle's cognitive theories through the commentaries of the Hellenistic philosophers Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius, both known to him through Arabic sources. The former insists that the intellect is but a disposition to cognize intelligibles and what survives death is only the actualized intellect; the latter views

the intellect along Platonic lines as a separate substance and thus for him the immortality of the individual soul was not a problem. Among the Muslim philosophers, al-Fārābī and Ibn Bājja are closer to Alexander's view, whereas Avicenna adopts the view of Themestius. Davidson has shown that Maimonides endorsed the view of Ibn Bajja when he defines the human rational faculty as a "power in a body," where "power" means a disposition or capacity to become something. That capacity is actualized during the process of thinking. Maimonides calls the disposition to know "the material intellect" or "hylic intellect" and he believes that the rational human soul is created as a "disposition in the human organization," "inseparable from its body," although "it is not inseparable in the sense of being distributed through the human body." Through learning, the human intellect actualizes the potentiality and when we actually think about what we know, the human intellect is a unity of knower, known, and the act of knowing. The original state of the intellect is called the potential intellect, the achieved final state is when the intellect has become the "acquired intellect," and the intermediate state when the intellect is in the process of realizing knowledge is called "an actual human intellect" or "intellect *in actu*."

To move from potentiality to actuality, the human intellect requires an agent, an intellect or intelligence that is already actual and that acts as an agent of change. This function as assigned to the Active Intellect, the lowest of the chain of intelligences. Like a lamp that sheds light and makes physical things visible, so the Active Intellect makes things accessible to the human intellect. As an incorporeal Intelligence, the Active Intellect is engaged in thinking, and the objects of its thinking are the laws that govern the processes in the terrestrial world. The human intellect achieves the unity of knower, known, and the act of knowing when the human intellect "unites" or "conjoins" with the Active Intellect. At this point the human intellect will know all that can be known about the terrestrial world. What prevents human beings from uniting with the Active Intellect is the corporeal body and the bodily dependent functions of the soul. The more one overcomes corporeal embodiment, the more one can actualize the potential of the human intellect to conjoin with the Active Intellect.

The attainment of the cognitive state called "acquired intellect" is the final perfection of the human species; it is attained when one "knows everything a man can know about all existent things." Maimonides equates this highest form of human cognition with prophecy, which he defines as an "overflow" from the Active Intellect onto the human intellect that is prepared to receive it. Because the prophet conjoins with the Active Intellect and attains knowledge of abstract laws that govern the terrestrial universe, he is the wise man whose intellect reaches

perfection. The more perfect a person is intellectually, the more he is able to receive the overflow and become a prophet. Because prophets differed among themselves in their degree of dependence on the body, the most superior prophet-philosopher is the one who is least dependent on his bodily functions. Maimonides assigns this level of achievement to one individual only – the prophet Moses. Maimonides states that the Torah of Moses is "divine," namely, perfect, because it can be shown empirically to secure the perfection of well-being of the body and the well-being of the soul.[60] The relationship between the two is understood in Aristotelian terms, as Maimonides adopts the contours of Aristotelian psychology.

For Maimonides, the body and soul are not two separate substances, as they were for Plato, but the soul is the *form of the body*. The soul is the organizational principle of the living body that accounts for various physiological and rational functions. These functions are arranged in hierarchical order, from the most bodily dependent functions of nutrition, growth, and reproduction, through the function of sensation, appetite, and imagination, to the least physically dependent function of cognition. To fully live as a human being both body and soul must function well together, and this can happen only if the rational soul, or intellect, governs the lower functions of the soul.

In continuity with al-Fārābī and Ibn Gabirol, Maimonides perpetuated the medical analogy between the philosopher and the physician: the philosopher as a "physician of the soul" who determines how to train the soul so as to acquire the virtues, and how to heal the soul when it is out of balance (*Hilkhot Deot* 2:1). In *Guide of the Perplexed* (II.40), Maimonides enumerates those virtues that constitute the well-being of the body. Training and conditioning of the appetitive function of the soul is inseparable from bodily function. Because the human being is a unified whole, desires and feelings are not disembodied mental acts but activities of the soul that have physical manifestations. The proper training of the desiring aspect is thus necessary for the maintenance of bodily health. The training of desire requires knowledge. Maimonides was aware that the Bible and the rabbis used the word *middot* to talk about character traits, including the characteristics or attributes of God that mankind is called to imitate. In *Mishneh Torah* he introduces the word *de'ot* to capture the cognitive dimension of character molding, the character that is to be acquired through habitual practice; one must know what is objectively good for the human species.

Maimonides also adopts the Aristotelian notion that to become morally virtuous humans must practice the middle way. Although born with certain disposition, due to a particular material make up, a human being can still possess good character traits by habitually practicing good deeds. When people habitually practice doing

things "just right," they become good, they acquire the intrinsic states of character out of which flow good actions. Maimonides has to work out the tension between moderation and supererogation that we already noted in rabbinic moral philosophy. He does so by asserting that the middle between extremes characterizes God's mode of operation; the ways of God describe those moderate traits. The Torah commands us to walk in God's path, namely, to choose the mean between extremes.[61] Maimonides' echoes Aristotle's doctrine of the mean in *Eight Chapters* IV, but he also departs from the Aristotelian ideal in some important respects. In some cases, where a person suffers from the sickness of the soul, it is actually advisable "to look to which side it inclines in becoming unbalanced, and then oppose it with its contrary until it returns to equilibrium." Maimonides does not go as far as Aristotle to hold that the mean is relative to the agent, but he does concern himself with the particular needs of the agent. Another major difference between Maimonides and Aristotle concerns the virtue of magnanimity (*megalopsychia*). For Aristotle, this was an overarching virtue that characterizes the virtuous person who possesses the "great soul" by virtue of which he performs benevolent acts on a large scale. Maimonides rejects this and does not consider magnanimity a virtue; instead, he counsels modesty in terms of giving and contentment with little terms of receiving. Third, Maimonides considers self-control or self-restraint as a virtue, and this can be realized only when reason properly grasps the *telos* of human life and devises the proper means to accomplish it. For Aristotle, by contrast, the very exercise of self-control or continence indicates that a person has not yet reached the highest level of moral excellence, because he still experiences conflict between desire and reason; the truly wise person experiences no such conflict. Maimonides admits the one who overcomes temptations is "more praiseworthy and perfect than the one who feels no torment at refraining from evil." The very resistance to evil temptations is itself a source of moral worthiness, contrary to Aristotle. Nonetheless, Maimonides states (*Eight Chapters* VI) that on this point "what appears in the speech of the Law is in agreement with what the philosophers had said."[62]

Maimonides resolves the tension by distinguishing between two types of desires. The rabbis and the philosophers are in agreement with regard to "things which all people commonly agree are evils, such as the shedding of blood, theft, robbery, fraud, injury to one who has done no harm, ingratitude, contempt for parents, and the like."[63] In these cases the one who does not experience any desire to commit these acts is clearly superior to the one who is tempted by these evils but manages to control oneself. The merit that the rabbis assigned to self-control pertains not to internal conflict concerning these evils, but rather to self-control with regard to prohibitions specified by the Law. The Torah refers to this category of law as

"statutes" (*ḥuqqim*). The medieval philosophers beginning with Saadia referred to them as "ceremonial laws." Their observance is a source of joy to the virtuous Jew who must exercise self-control in their observance. In this case to subdue passion (*kibush ha-yetzer*) is more praiseworthy than to observe these laws with complete emotional abandon and without reservation. The rabbis (Sifra Leviticus 20:36) were correct according to Maimonides to assign a higher rank to the one who, when confronted with temptation admits "I do indeed want to, yet I must not, for my father in heaven has forbidden it."

The moral virtues require the exercise of practical reasoning, and its excellence is the virtue of practical wisdom. How does practical reasoning function in Maimonides' theory of virtues? On the surface it seems that practical reasoning is unnecessary because the law itself determines what is right action in each and every case. As Howard Kreisel shows, however, practical reason is at least as central to Maimonides' virtue ethics as theoretical reason. On the basis of al-Fārābī's *Aphorisms of the Statesman*, Maimonides speaks about the practical intellect (*aql al-'amāli*) as a faculty "whose object is dependent on human volitional activity."[64] Practical reasoning is the faculty involved in ethics and politics, enabling humans to govern, and to produce "knowledge of the regimen to be adopted by the individual or by society in the pursuit of its well being."[65] Maimonides, however "subsumes the activity of the practical rational faculty into the activity of the imagination," a mental capacity that is particularly strong among prophets and legislators. All forms of governance "require cooperation between the practical rational faculty and the imagination."[66] This is true of all prophets, except Moses, whose imagination was perfect, but whose prophetic experience itself did not involve the imagination; only the communication of Moses' perfect experience to Israel involved the imagination, translating conceptual knowledge into figurative speech.

Although practical wisdom is necessary for the good life, it does not constitute the ultimate end of human life; that status is reserved to theoretical wisdom as we noted above. To be fully perfect, the human intellect must transcend the feature that makes it human, namely, its association with the body. By cognizing the intelligible order of reality, the human rational potential is both actualized and substantialized. The perfect intellect – the acquired intellect – is a substance separable from the body as Aristotle hinted in *De Anima* III:3. This state of being is what the rabbis designated as the world-to-come (*'olam ha-ba*). Maimonides defines *'olam ha-ba* as "the ultimate end toward which all our efforts ought to be devoted . . . the ultimate and perfect reward, the final bliss that will suffer neither interruption nor diminution."[67] In this interpretation *'olam ha-ba* lost the apocalyptic and eschatological features that were accorded to it in the traditional rabbinic view. *'Olam ha-ba* is a state of being of

the perfected rational soul. Who can enter this state of being? Maimonides leaves the answer to this question rather obscure and it gave rise to on-going controversy. In general, Maimonides understood *'olam ha-ba*, the ultimate end of human life, as an ideal whose pursuit gives direction to human life, but whose attainment is very difficult because it requires acquisition of the sciences, as well as acting in accordance with the Torah's prescriptions. Moreover, given Maimonides' epistemology, the content of the "acquired intellect" is universal rather than particular. For these reasons, it was reasonable for Maimonides' critics to charge that he did not affirm the rabbinic belief in personal immortality.

Maimonides' understanding of happiness rests on his interpretation of Mosaic Law. He asserts that Mosaic Law is perfect because it can be shown empirically that it secures the well-being of the body and the well-being of the soul. The perfection of the Law of Moses is predicated on the perfection of Moses, the "master of all prophets" and the "master of all wise men." Similarly to Philo, Maimonides depicts Moses as a unique human being who cognized the intelligible principles of reality almost directly, that is, with almost no corporeal mediation whatsoever. Moses achieved this intellectual excellence without losing his humanity. The Torah, which the prophet Moses gave to Israel, encompasses the patterns of the laws of nature because Moses' intellect was conjoined with the Active Intellect. The Torah of Moses, therefore, enters into what is natural, including human nature. Put differently, the esoteric, abstract content of the Torah is identical with the laws of nature; it manifests the order of things. The one who lives by the Torah of Moses can attain perfection.

For Jews who live by the Torah, as interpreted by Maimonides, the pursuit of happiness is not a futile one, even though only few actually achieve true felicity. The life of Torah is a happy life because the Torah is the most perfect law that enables humans to approximate happiness more than any other law. Those who live by the Torah and understand it correctly (as Maimonides claims to do) and find that the pursuit of happiness is not in vain because it makes the life within the boundaries of Torah the most reasonable, joyful, and delightful activity available to humans. In this regard Maimonides was actually closer to Aristotle and the ancient moral philosophers than it seems, even though they of course did not predicate human happiness on the life of Torah. Maimonides holds that happiness is most difficult to attain; it is an abstract standard that gives life its meaning, not a transitory feeling or a pleasant sensation. Those who pursue happiness within the structures of the Torah of Moses have a better quality of life and very few of them are able to experience the bliss of immortality in the world-to-come.

Maimonides' teachings pose several challenges to traditional Jewish beliefs for the following reasons: First, because the theory privileges the intellect and identifies happiness with perfection of the intellect, it privileges the philosophers over all other Jews and makes happiness attainable only by philosophers. In principle, the uneducated masses cannot attain happiness, because they fail to actualize their intellectual potential; in this regard, they not only fall short of the human ideal, many of them are not fully human. Second, the Maimonidean position presents moral virtue at best as a means to the attainment of intellectual perfection. This means that the *mitzvot* through which the virtuous character is cultivated have but an instrumental value. Third, because according to Maimonides intellectual perfection is attained through conjunction between the individual intellect and the universal Active Intellect, what survives death is not an individual entity but the universal content of acquired knowledge. On this view, there is no causal connection between good deeds and immortality, which was the basis for the traditional understanding of providence. For these reasons, Maimonides' theory of happiness was hotly disputed during the thirteenth century, in which the followers of Maimonides popularized his views and Aristotelian philosophy was firmly established as the dominant philosophical school among Jewish intelligentsia.

III. JEWISH PHILOSOPHY IN CHRISTIAN EUROPE

After the death of Maimonides, rationalist philosophy and its vision of the philosophical life disseminated among the learned classes in Spain, Provence, and Italy through translations of philosophical texts from Arabic into Hebrew, philosophical–scientific encyclopedias, summaries and paraphrases of philosophical texts, and philosophical commentaries on the Bible in accordance with the hermeneutical principles articulated by Maimonides.[68] Although Jewish philosophy perpetuated the terminology, philosophical themes, authoritative authors, and outlook of the Judeo–Arabic philosophical tradition, Jewish philosophy was now composed in a Christian environment and written exclusively in Hebrew. As Christian intellectuals were exposed to Aristotelianism, often through texts translated into Latin from Arabic and Hebrew, the intellectual life and religious self-understanding of the Christian west was transformed giving rise to the scholastic movement, which, in turn, would shape the Jewish–Christian encounter. Whereas in Islam the philosophical discourse on happiness generated political theories about the ideal regime necessary for the attainment of happiness, in the Christian west the philosophical discourse on virtue and happiness was configured in the context of the

interreligious debate about the salvation of the individual soul, the arena of competition between Judaism and Christianity.

Falaquera and Ibn Kaspi: Happiness and the Philosophical Ethos

In the thirteenth century the debate about the implications of Maimonides's legacy engulfed communities throughout the Jewish world. As Jewish philosophers deepened their knowledge of the philosophical corpus, they popularized the philosophical view of happiness by making Muslim political theory available to Hebrew readers. A major contributor to this enterprise was Shem Tov Falaquera (1224–1290) whose *Reshit Ḥokhmah* (*Beginning of Wisdom*) was based on al-Fārābī's *Enumeration of the Sciences*. Falaquera insists that the acquisition of philosophical knowledge constituted human happiness: Through the study of philosophy one could acquire correct knowledge about the world and the proper ways to conduct oneself in it. Falaquera radicalizes the legacy of Maimonides by clarifying that moral perfection in itself does *not* constitute the ultimate end of human life. Falaquera, who was familiar with Aristotle's *Ethics* adopts the exclusive reading of Aristotle's conception of happiness: The ultimate end of human life is contemplation of necessary truths, culminating in the knowledge of God. Taking his cue from the philosophical elitism of Ibn Bajja, Falaquera (even more than Maimonides) highlights the alienation of the philosopher, who devotes his life to contemplation of truth, and the uneducated masses who pursue imaginary happiness. Hence Falaquera recommends that "the seeker of perfection should completely keep away from anyone possessing a bad quality or corrupt opinion, and should distance himself from association with him."[69] In Jospe's words, "the seeker of perfection must thus both isolate himself from external society and insulate himself from the internal appetites and bodily senses." These ascetic recommendations are in conflict with the political nature of humans, emphasized by Plato, Aristotle, al-Fārābī, and Maimonides, and it even calls into question the need of humans to propagate the species through sex. Because female sexuality is one of the major detriments to philosophical happiness, Falaquera's book is replete with misogynist comments.[70] In general, Jewish Aristotelian philosophers excluded women from the attainment of intellectual perfection and the blissful joy of the world-to-come.

The philosophical ethos was not only a cultural posture; it also affected the interpretation of scriptures as the followers of Maimonides applied his general hermeneutical principles to the reading of the Bible. One such example was the Provençal thinker Joseph ibn Kaspi (d. 1335) whose knowledge of Aristotle's *Ethics* was derived not only from Arabic summaries of the text, as was the case of Falaquera, but also from Averroes' *Middle Commentary on the Ethics*, which was now available in

a Hebrew translation by Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles.[71] Ibn Kaspi summarized this rather cumbersome translation in his *Terumat ha-Kesef* (*Offering of Silver*) in addition to a digest of Aristotle's *Ethics*.[72] He regarded *Ethics* as a practical guide for the urbane, philosophically sophisticated Jews who wished to harmonize rabbinic Judaism and philosophy. Entitled *Moreh De'ah* (*Teacher of Morals*), Ibn Kaspi's "ethical will" to his son, Solomon, is a kind of Jewish *adāb* literature.[73] Referring to *Adāb al-Falāsifa* of Yishaq ibn Hunain and to Aristotle's *Ethics*, Ibn Kaspi claims that the Torah itself (both written and oral), if interpreted correctly with the help of Maimonides' *Guide* and Aristotle's works (especially *Physics, Metaphysics*, and the *Ethics)*, enables one's soul to experience the world-to-come, the *summum bonum* (*ha-tov ha-shalem*). The very commandments of the Torah perfect the practical and theoretical aspects of the soul, leading one to eternal life. For Ibn Kaspi, then, there is no tension whatsoever between Aristotle's *Ethics* and the Torah, because "the Greek philosopher lived during the Second Temple, and he learned from the Jewish Sages all the true things that he wrote."[74] In fact, Aristotle "had presumed to interpret our precious truths, attributing the exposition to himself, while he stole it all from the books written on the subject by King Solomon and others."[75]

Although the *Ethics* was becoming more known among Jews in the early fourteenth century, the science of ethics remained secondary in importance to physics and metaphysics for the following reasons. First, with respect to ethics, there was little conflict between traditional Judaism and philosophy; they both shared the pursuit of wisdom, the ethos of self-control, and the ideal of moderation. The main challenge of Aristotelianism lay in physics and metaphysics, and for this reason Jewish philosophers devoted their attention to these sciences. Second, in the Aristotelian schema of the sciences, "practical philosophy" was secondary in importance to "theoretical philosophy" and ethics was viewed either as the preparatory acquisition of the virtues or as the application of theoretical knowledge to social reality. Third, in Judaism the praxis of religious life was determined by *Halakhah*. The Jewish philosophers lived by the strictures of Jewish law but after Maimonides none of them made a significant contribution to the study of *Halakhah*. The science of ethics was thus absorbed into philosophy of law rather than viewed as an independent science that charts its own praxis.

Gersonides: Perfection of the Intellect Constitutes Personal Immortality

In the beginning of the fourteenth century, the opponents of Jewish Aristotelianism managed to impose a ban that prohibited the study of philosophy by students younger than twenty-five years of age. Nonetheless, the study of philosophy continued apace especially in Provence. In fact, in the first half of the fourteenth century

Jewish Aristotelianism flourished as Aristotle's philosophy became better understood due to the Hebrew translations of the commentaries by Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Jewish philosophy was now "professionalized" when philosophers composed supercommentaries to the Averroean–Aristotelian corpus, even though the Jewish philosophers remained autodidacts and did not study philosophy in an institutional setting.

As Aristotle was read strictly through the prism of Averroes' philosophy, human happiness was understood strictly as a cognitive state pertaining to the perfection of the intellect. Averroes' views on human intellection, however, were by no means clear, as they evolved over time. In some of his works Averroes identifies the human material intellect with the Active Intellect, which entails that intellectual perfection is one and the same for all humans and that the intellect that survives death is universal rather than individual; the unity of the intellect undermines the belief in personal immortality. This is how Averroes was understood by some Christian scholastics, the so-called Latin Averroists, and this is why other scholastics, especially Thomas Aquinas, reject this theory on philosophical and theological grounds.[76] Among Jewish philosophers Averroes' epistemological theories generated a similar split. Thinkers such as Isaac Albalag (fl. 1340s) and Moses Narboni (d. 1362) adopt his views about the unity of the intellect in all human beings, thus shedding doubt on the belief in personal immortality.[77] Yet other thinkers, such as Hillel ben Samuel of Verona (d. 1295) and Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides) (d. 1344), insist that conjunction between the human intellect and the Active Intellect is compatible with the belief in personal immortality.

In Italy, Hillel ben Samuel of Verona was the first to claim that perfection of the intellect does not entail the loss of individuality and his views were influenced by scholastic teachings. In his *Tagmulei ha-Nefesh* (*Rewards of the Soul*) Hillel attested to familiarity with arguments of Thomas Aquinas against the Latin Averroists. Sorting out the psychological theories of Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrosdisias, Themestius, al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Averroes, and Maimonides, Hillel argues that what survives the death of the body is both spiritual and individual, a position articulated two decades earlier by Thomas Aquinas. According to Hillel, eternal happiness involves not just the perfected intellect, as Maimonides held, but also the sensitive power (*ha-koaḥ ha-margish*), the appetitive power (*ha-koaḥ ha-mit'orer*), and even the imagination (*ha-koaḥ ha-medameh*), provided the functions are perfected through the cultivation of virtues. It is the virtuous life charted by the life of *mitzvot* that leads to personal survival, contrary to the view of Averroes, for whom immortality was only universal, gained through conjunction between the human intellect and the Active Intellect.

A similar conclusion, although based on different proofs, was offered by Gersonides, whose relationship with scholasticism is more complicated than that of his Italian counterpart. Gersonides' expertise in astronomy was recognized by the Papal court of Avignon, which employed him and had his treatises translated into Latin, but it is not clear if Gersonides himself mastered Latin, because the philosophical sources he considered were exclusively Judeo–Arabic. Nonetheless, the style of Gersonides' philosophical writings, the problems that concerned him, and some of his views had strong parallels with the scholastic philosophy of his day. In *Milḥamot Adonai* (*Wars of the Lord*) Gersonides devotes extensive discussion to the immortality of the rational soul as the ultimate end of human life. He clearly privileges the philosopher over others and believes that only the one who devotes his life to the pursuit of truth is engaged in the activity that makes humans both distinct from other animals and most like God. A person who rejects the pursuit of truth alienates himself from God and forfeits the ability to experience the ultimate joy available to humans, the eternal life of the intellect. How does the human intellect attain perfection and become eternal? Does the perfected intellect remain an individual substance or does it lose its individuality? What is the relationship between action (i.e., the moral virtues) and cognition (the theoretical virtues)? Can intellectual perfection be achieved in this life, or only after the death of the body? Gersonides answers these questions by carefully and dialectically considering the arguments of his predecessors, Aristotle and his Hellenistic commentators Alexander and Themistius, the Muslim philosophers, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sina, and Averroes, and his main Jewish predecessor, Maimonides.

The gist of Gersonides' position is that the perfection of the intellect does not entail the loss of individuality. How is this possible? The answer lies in the distinction between "individuals" and "particulars" and the claim that there are individual entities that are nonmaterial. The human rational soul, the material intellect, is an individual, nonmaterial substance that has a disposition to receive intelligibles. The material intellect is instantiated in a human particular (a corporeal human being), and the disposition to know will be actualized only when the human intellect cognizes intelligible forms. The latter are universals that inhere in particular things. They become accessible to the human intellect indirectly first through sense perception, and then directly when the particular and material aspects of sense perceptions are "stripped away." The intelligible form that is now known by the human material intellect is universal in the sense that it can be instantiated by many, but it is also individual in the sense that it is one and not many.

The intelligible form exists extramentally in material particulars, and after being cognized it exists as well in the mind of the human knower. The intelligible form

exists also in the mind of the Active Intellect as part of the intelligible order of the universe. For Gersonides, the Active Intellect is the incorporeal agent of all living things (what Plato and the Platonists meant when they spoke about the World Soul) as well as the agent that imposes purposive orderliness on the corporeal world, both supralunar and sublunar.[78] The Active Intellect is the intelligible pattern of all corporeal existents and as such it possesses "wisdom and perfection" that are exhibited through the universe. As the originator of all corporeal forms, the Active Intellect knows them like an artisan who possesses the knowledge of a building before he is about to build it. Likewise the Active Intellect also knows the essences of everything that exists in the corporeal world (both supralunar and sublunar) as well as the operation that follows from them. The Active Intellect has perfect knowledge of the pattern of all the corporeal things in the universe. All lower perfections in the corporeal world are found in the Active Intellect in a more refined, unified, perfect way.

Because the Active Intellect is created directly by God, whatever the Active Intellect knows is also known by God, but in an even more perfect and unified manner. God is the perfection and the final end of the universe as a whole. Furthermore, the knowledge that constitutes the Separate Intelligences, including the Active Intellect, is God's own self-knowledge. By knowing himself, God knows everything that is knowable, namely, the intelligent plan of the universe, in the most perfect manner possible. Ontologically speaking the intelligible form exists first in the mind of God and the Active Intellect prior to its existence in material things. It follows that to cognize an intelligible form means to know what is in the mind of the Active Intellect and even in the mind of God.

To possess knowledge, namely, to reach the state of "acquired intellect," the human material intellect must possess the intelligible forms that exist primarily in the mind of the Active Intellect and secondarily in material particulars. This "acquired intellect" survives the death of the body, and it is to this state that humans should aspire if they wish to experience immortality. The contact between the human intellect and the Active Intellect, however, does not entail the disintegration of the "material intellect" or its loss of individual identity. Gersonides emphatically rejects Averroes' notion that the human "material intellect" is one and the same with the Active Intellect and that the human "material intellect" disintegrates into the Active Intellect.[79] For Gersonides the "acquired intellect" is an incorporeal, individual substance that cannot "unite with" the Active Intellect. Nonetheless even Gersonides used unitive language to depict the contact between the human acquired intellect and the semidivine Intellect, that is, *devequt*. He posits a form of rational mysticism even though he shuns the full implication of unitive language

by saying that "total conjunction" (*devequt bi-shlemut*) is attained only "somewhat" (*be-'ofen mah*) because of the material foundation of human knowledge: Conjunction is only epistemological and not ontological. The goal of human life, then, is to become philosopher-scientist for "human happiness is achieved when a man knows reality as much as he can."[80] By grasping the intelligible order of reality, albeit imperfectly, the philosopher-scientist approximates the ultimate pleasure in life, the bliss of the world-to-come.[81]

According to Gersonides, intellectual perfection does not destroy the individuality of the human intellect and human beings differ from one another in their natural disposition to pursue knowledge and in their commitment to philosophical wisdom. Although they cognize intelligible forms that are universal, the process of intellectualization does not erase the distinction between individuals; each human intellect retains its individual identity throughout the process and reaches its distinct level of perfection, depending on the kind of life a person lives. Even two persons who are committed to the acquisition of philosophical–scientific knowledge will still differ from one another, because the content of their knowledge is unique to them.

As Gersonides works out the details of the cognitive process that leads to perfection of the intellect, a new problem emerges: If ultimate human felicity is identified with the knowledge of God, does this knowledge constitute religious faith, or is faith a distinctive cognitive state? Does religious faith require any voluntary choice, or does it consist of belief that one is compelled to hold because one knows certain facts? Finally, if human beings experience the afterlife because of what they know and believe, do actions matter at all in its attainment? How is the claim that intellectual perfection is the ultimate felicity to be reconciled with the traditional Jewish believe in divine retribution? Gersonides addresses these questions by positing a "soft" form of determinism that reconciles causal determinism with human voluntary action. On the one hand, everything in the universe is determined by its causes and can be explained through them. The natural causes that determine how the corporeal world operates and how humans will act are the celestial bodies. As expert practitioner of astrology Gersonides holds that the position of the stars at the time of one's birth determines one's natural disposition or temperament, which in turn affects how one tends by nature to act and even to think. Astral determinism is part of the comprehensive causality that pervades everything in the world. Can human beings still act independently and voluntarily? Gersonides answers in the affirmative. The source of human voluntary action is the intellect, which moves a person toward that which the intellect considers to be good. Because the intellect is the efficient cause of human action, it can establish human independence from

material causality. When human beings act solely in accord with their natural material disposition, they subordinate themselves to astral determinism. If they are aware of the stars and their influences but choose to act against their natural inclination, they are free from astral determinism. The less one is conditioned by matter, the less determined are one's actions.

According to Maimonides, the highest form of knowledge available to human beings is the knowledge of God's governance in the universe through natural intermediaries. For Maimonides, when one possesses such exalted knowledge, one necessarily acts in imitation of God's action, governing other people through legislative activity that exemplifies God's attributes of action. For Gersonides, by contrast, we can know not only how God governs the world, but we can also have some positive knowledge, albeit dim and imperfect, of God's essence in whom all things exist in a supereminent and perfect way. To possess some knowledge of God, therefore does not lead to action in the political sphere but to thinking of the intelligible order of the universe. In God thinking is creative; it results in the emanation of the intelligences; likewise, the theoretical knowledge of the scientist philosopher-prophet imparts knowledge to others through information about future events. The ordinary scientist-philosophers who are not prophets have to disseminate their knowledge to others by teaching them science and philosophy, thereby making it possible for others to reach intellectual perfection and enjoy the immortality of the intellect.

What is unique about Moses is that he was singularly concerned with the attainment of human perfection. The Torah that Moses gave to Israel is a set of directives that "thoroughly guides those who observe it to true felicity." The true felicity is the immortality of the perfect intellect, but it can be attained only by those who acquire the moral virtues that the Torah itself teaches. This becomes clear in his extensive commentary on the Pentateuch. The commandments of the Torah train one to achieve moral and intellectual virtues that are necessary for human perfection. The narratives of the Torah pertain to the organization of the ideal social order, and these narratives provide theoretical information about the structure of reality.

Gersonides' argument that the Torah functions as the exclusive guide for human perfection has obvious anti-Christian intent. If Jews possess the best guide for human perfection and have access to the most advanced science of their day, why would Jews be interested in conversion? Not only did the commitment to the pursuit of scientific truth not provide the incentive to convert to Christianity, it could have conceivably functioned as a deterrent to the temptation to convert. Nonetheless, conversions to Christianity did take place and sometimes, as in the case of Abner

of Burgos, they involved leading rabbinic figures who then became high clergy who challenged their previous coreligionists to debate about the meaning of faith. In 1391 conversions to Christianity were no longer a matter of sporadic acts by individuals but collective apostasy under duress that gave rise to a new class of New Christians. At least to some of these Jewish converts Christianity indeed appeared as the path to salvation of the soul and the blissful life of ultimate felicity. To counter this perception, a new theory of happiness had to be worked and it was done by Hasdai Crescas (d. ca. 1412) who rejected the intellectualist interpretation of happiness proposed by the Jewish Aristotelians of the previous two centuries.

Crescas' Critique: Happiness as the Love of God

Crescas was convinced that the doctrine of philosophical happiness directly contributed to the mass conversion of the Jews during and after the anti-Jewish riots of 1391.[82] His goal was to liberate Jewish philosophy from the clutches of Aristotelianism and restore the causal nexus between performance of the law and eternal life. To undermine the philosophical conception of happiness Crescas first showed the mistakes of Aristotelian physics, which undergirded the philosophical conception of happiness. Crescas' critique of Aristotle's physics was informed by similar efforts undertaken among the late scholastics at Merton College of Oxford University and the College of Navarre at the University of Paris, especially the teachings of Nicole Oresme, who taught at the College of Navarre from 1348 to 1362. Whether he had only heard about the critique of Aristotle or actually had access to copies of Oresme's work, what is clear is that Crescas intended to undermine the authority of Aristotle's natural philosophy to discredit the view of philosophical happiness articulated by Maimonides and Gersonides.

According to Crescas, the doctrine of the acquired intellect is philosophically untenable and religiously undesirable. He regards the notion of philosophical happiness to be subversive to Judaism because it denies personal immortality and ignores the intrinsic value accorded to the performance of the commandments. Crescas agrees that the ultimate end of human life requires the attainment of certain perfection: perfection of the body, perfection of moral qualities, and perfection of opinions. He further concedes that these three perfections are hierarchically ordered, but he sharply disagrees with the Jewish Aristotelians about "perfection of opinions." Whereas they hold that cognition of intelligibles is the source of eternal perdurance, Crescas severs the connection between cognition and eternal happiness. By so doing he indirectly argues against Christianity by claiming that salvation does not depend on holding certain views, least of all the doctrine of the Church.

To prove that perfection of opinions does not lead to eternal life Crescas proceeds to refute the doctrine of the acquired intellect. First, he argues, the notion is self-contradictory because the acquired intellect is both a form of a man and a substance separate from that man. Second, according to this doctrine a man is truly human only through becoming an intellectual substance *in actu*. Because such a substance is different from the man "in species," a man is most human when he becomes a nonman, which is self-contradictory. Third, the notion that the intellect becomes a substance through its object of cognition is absurd because it requires that "individuals of all species would be one in number."

Crescas moves away from the intellectualist conception of happiness by shifting the conception of God from intellect that thinks itself to a lover who "possesses passion, will, joy, and love and all with infinite power." God is not an intellect that thinks itself eternally, but a personal, infinite, dynamic, and free entity whose "will is his essence." The infinite divine goodness is expressed when God willingly decides to emanate existences and sustain them as a "divine gift of love." Crescas' theory of divine love is advanced as a critique of Gersonides' view. Like Aristotle, Gersonides regards intellectual activity as the most pleasurable, delightful, and glorious; devoid of materiality, it is eternal, and it is effortless. Because God is the most perfect intellect, ultimate joy belongs to God. Gersonides is even willing to speak about God's love of the world in terms of passion and he explains the love of the subject (God) for the object (world) in the context of his explanation of creation. God passionately loves the world that he has made, but this is a cognitive delight, the delight of the artisan to his art.

Crescas finds this view to be self-contradictory and unacceptable. If joy and love are to be attributed to God, God must be understood not as a pure intellect but as an active will, which Crescas defines as "nothing but the love of the one who wills for that which he wills" (III.1.5). Love for Crescas is "nothing but the pleasure of the will. As a Creator, God is not a being that can possess passions. Instead "God is the true agent of all existent things by intention and will." God's love has no direct object (as Gersonides depicts it) but it is the rejoicing that God experiences when he "causes His good to overflow into his created beings." God's creative activity is itself an expression of joy and love, which stems from His own essence. As Creator, God is not so much the most perfect knower (or intellect) but the most perfect lover. God's love expresses God's essence, goodness, and benevolence; God's love of the universe is not the love of a subject for an object, but an essential property of God's own perfection.

God's infinite love requires the creation of an infinite number of worlds and is manifested in the "perpetual creation" of our world; God eternally and perpetually

wills the world into existence out of His infinite divine goodness. In so doing, God's love (the expression of God's will) not only sustains the world but also functions as the perfection of natural things. In positing love as a cosmic principle Crescas offers a new understanding of human happiness. If God is a lover par excellence, to imitate God so as to be perfect involves not the contemplation of eternal intelligible but the love of God. Ultimate felicity is not intellectualist; it is based on the willingness of the individual to be committed to God. Although Crescas champions the primacy of love as an activity of the will, he does not discard the Judeo–Arabic discourse on happiness entirely. He defines the human soul as a "spiritual substance, disposed to intellectual cognition" and insists that as an incorporeal substance the soul is self-subsistent and hence capable of immortality. Human ultimate felicity consists of a kind of life that is commensurate with the nature of the soul as an incorporeal substance; hence it is evident that its happiness does not belong to life in this world, but to the afterlife, once the soul is separated from the body. This happiness of the soul is predicated not on cognitive activity but on the ability of the will to freely choose the good.

It is the love for God that leads to the eternal life of the individual soul. Human love for God is reflected not in the contemplation of intelligibles, but in the actual performance of the commandments. For Crescas, the Torah is the direct expression of divine will. It is "the product of a voluntary action from the commander, who is the initiator of the action to the commanded, the receiver of the action. The infinite God wants his creatures to attain happiness; therefore, he disclosed His will by giving Israel the Torah. To choose to do good is ultimately to choose to do God's will as expressed in the commandments. The one who chooses God and loves God truly hearkens "unto Him with exceeding alacrity to fulfill His commandments, and with great vigilance not to transgress His prohibitions with joy and goodness of the heart." The more diligent one is in the performance of divine commandments, the greater the happiness and joy one finds in this world. Shifting the focus from the intellect to the will and severing the connection between cognitive activity and pleasure, Crescas maintains that perfection is in love, and pleasure is in the act of willing.

With the emphasis on the will and the performance of the commandments Crescas obliterates the Maimonidean hierarchy between the philosophers and the multitudes: Performance of the commandments is obligatory for all Jews regardless of whether they hold perfect opinions or not. His emphasis on the actual performance of the commandment has a clear anti-Christian import as well. The road to personal immortality of the soul lies not in holding views but in certain deeds that Israel received directly from God. Only those who observe the divine

commandments – Israel – can be saved. True love and service of God will be rewarded by "adhesion until the radiance of His indwelling."

Crescas' refutation of Aristotelianism was devastating, but because it was too radical, most Jewish philosophers in the first half of the fifteenth century were not ready to accept it. Because his critique derived from the theoretical analysis of Aristotle's own premises and used the tools of Aristotelian logic, Jewish philosophers interpreted it as internal criticism of Aristotle rather than as a dismantling of Aristotle's worldview. Most Sephardic intellectuals were not ready to accept his assault on Maimonideanism, the cultural program that had given the Iberian Jewish aristocracy its distinct identity. Crescas' own students and others did not adopt his innovative views on free will and determinism, the primacy of the human will and the compulsory dimensions of faith, nor did they endorse his attempt to sever the link between intellectual perfection and human felicity. They continued to defend the Maimonidean intellectualist approach to happiness and to claim that the final good consists of the knowledge of God. In the fifteenth century Iberian scholars agreed with Crescas' claims that perfection of the soul cannot be attained merely through cognitive activity in this world but only in the afterlife, that the final good consists in cleaving to God and not only in knowledge of God's governance in the world, and that only a revelation from God directs man to the ultimate felicity. Charting a middle course between Maimonides and Crescas, these philosophers offered a new perspective on human ultimate felicity.

Joseph Ibn Shem Tov and Isaac Arama: Natural vs. Supernatural Happiness

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* received more attention from Jewish philosophers than ever before. In 1405 it was translated anew into Hebrew by Rabbi Meir Alguades, the Chief Rabbi of Castilian Jewry and a personal physician to several Castilian kings. He consulted not only the Arabic original of Averroes' *Middle Commentary* but also the Latin translation by Hermann the German, which had been composed in 1240 and was the standard version among Christian scholastics, the original translation of Samuel ben Judah and another anonymous translation, which was ascribed not to al-Fārābī, the actual author, but to Thomas Aquinas. Thus by the early fifteenth century, *Ethics* was available in Hebrew in a hybrid text that fused elements from Averroes, al-Fārābī, and Aquinas, and this Hebrew translation generated new Hebrew commentaries by Joseph ibn Shem Tov in the 1440s.[83] He composed a short commentary, a summary on the *Ethics*, and eventually a long commentary. On the basis of these studies, he was able to compose *Kevod Elohim* (*The Glory of God*), a systematic attempt to prove that Aristotle's ethics and Judaism were perfectly compatible.[84] As a financier in the

court of King Enrique IV, Ibn Shem Tov was familiar with Latin commentaries on the *Ethics* and with the function of the *Ethics* as a guide to right conduct among the governing elite. Like the authors of the *adāb* literature in Islam, who were interested in the *Ethics* because it showed how to wed wisdom and politics, Ibn Shem Tov appreciated the relevance of the *Ethics* to his own life at the court. Although by the 1440s the Jewish courtiers lost their political power in Spain, the *Ethics* could still provide them with ideological justification to their elitist self-perception.

For Ibn Shem Tov, the *Ethics* is to be read as a recommendation for the social–moral life. What Aristotle says about human happiness (both practical and theoretical aspects) pertains merely to temporal life in this world, because as a pagan he did not have access to the revelation of scriptures. Jews should consult Aristotle if they wish to know how to conduct themselves in this world, especially if they wish to hold their position in the court. Aristotle was correct to state that human happiness does not lie in the acquisition of wealth, power, honor, fame, or bodily pleasures, as most people assume, but in an activity of the soul in accordance to virtue. He was also correct to subordinate the moral virtues to the intellectual ones, and to place speculative reason above practical reason. Most important, Aristotle was right when he emphasized that only the knowledge of God constitutes ultimate happiness. Through the contemplation of God, man lives not only human life, but the "divine life which is the most happy."

Ibn Shem Tov wishes to preserve the intellectualism characteristic of Aristotelian philosophy, but he offers a new interpretation of it. For Ibn Shem Tov, the intellect is literally a divine power that resides in man. The intellect is a created intelligible form, ontologically akin to, although lower than, the separate intelligences. As an intelligible form, the rational soul gives unity to the individual while being capable of existence independent of the body. Ibn Shem Tov's view on soul–body relations resembles that of Aquinas for whom the human soul is neither a separate form nor a form in body, but a created intelligible form which exists in the presence of God. Ibn Shem Tov and Aquinas walk the fine line between insisting on the unity of the human psycho-physical complex, on the one hand, and acknowledging the substantial incorporeality of the rational soul, on the other. In so arguing, Ibn Shem Tov remains loyal to Aristotelian psychology while showing that Aristotle's view is compatible with the belief in personal immortality.

Taking his cue from Aquinas, Ibn Shem Tov argues that Aristotle spoke only about temporal, imperfect happiness in this world, which is *not* the ultimate end of human life. The ultimate felicity or perfect happiness is to be found only in the afterlife and is only attainable by following the Torah. The distinction between two orders of happiness – an imperfect, natural, and temporal happiness, and a

perfect, supernatural and eternal happiness – correspond to the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, between philosophy and revealed knowledge, between conventional law and divine law, and between reason and faith. Whereas imperfect happiness pertains to all human beings who pursue moral and intellectual virtues in accordance with the philosophy of Aristotle, perfect happiness is attained only through knowledge that comes from God. The revealed Torah makes known truths that exceed the ken of natural human knowledge; this revealed knowledge makes known to man the intelligible order of reality that exists in God in the most perfect supernatural manner. The revealed Torah completes and perfects natural human reason as grace completes and perfects nature. The Torah is divine not because it perfects body and soul (as Maimonides had asserted) but because it comes from God. By the same token, the Torah is not merely the constitution of the most virtuous regime but the ideal exemplar of the universe, according to which the universe was created. As such the Torah preexisted in the divine mind in a supereminent, perfect manner. The Torah alone is salvific, it "brings about the ultimate perfection, namely, survival after death with its delight that surpasses anything else."[85] It follows that the highest cognitive activity that brings man to God is not the knowledge of philosophy but the knowledge of Torah. Precisely because the Torah is a supernatural knowledge that comes from God, those who contemplate it and follow its commandments can attain perfection even outside the social–political context. Citing Ibn Bājja's *Regimen of the Solitary* as his authoritative source, Ibn Shem Tov claims that truly felicitous men seek God not in the midst of society, but in the solitude of deserts and caves. Continuing the trend of depoliticizing human perfection, Ibn Shem Tov regards the life of the reclusive philosopher-mystic as the ideal for holy men.

For Ibn Shem Tov the *Ethics* poses no threat to the integrity of the Jewish religious society; Jews who follow the ideal of happiness in the *Ethics* will find themselves better prepared to pursue true happiness. The threat to Jewish society comes only from those pernicious interpreters of Aristotle (e.g., Gersonides) who reduce the ideal of human perfection to cognition of any intelligible, rather than to the knowledge of God. Ibn Shem Tov goes even further to accentuate the superiority of Israel over all other nation. "Man" is an equivocal term that applies primarily to Jews and only secondarily to non-Jews. Whereas the non-Jew belongs to the realm of nature, Israel belongs to the supernatural realm governed directly by God.

Ibn Shem Tov's conservative interpretation of Aristotle was a retreat from the bold optimism of Jewish philosophy of the fourteenth century and his blatant ethnocentrism was the ultimate polemical response to Christian pressure. Christianity

need be neither tempting nor threatening to Jews because it too belongs to the realm of nature. Ibn Shem Tov was aware that this claim could not be proven philosophically and had to be affirmed by a voluntary act of faith that distinguished between believers and nonbelievers. Although salvation is cognitive, it is faith, the voluntary assent of the will to revealed truths that determined whether one will be saved.

The new translation of *Ethics* with Ibn Shem Tov's commentary on it became the standard text among Sephardic Jewish intellectuals in the late-fifteenth and throughout the sixteenth centuries. Isaac Arama (d. ca. 1492), for example, used it extensively and adopted Ibn Shem Tov's views.[86] Like Ibn Shem Tov and Aquinas, Arama also distinguished between two orders of happiness – temporal and transcendent. With great respect for the practical reasoning of *Ethics*, Arama attempted to show that the moral teachings of the Torah were compatible with it. Whether the Torah is "this-worldly" or "other-worldly" was one of the bones of contention in the Jewish–Christian polemics. Arama was involved in various polemical exchanges and he reports a debate with a Christian preacher in which Arama used the practical reasoning of the Torah as a claim for its superiority over the Christian doctrine of Grace. In the fifteenth century *Ethics* was commonly used by Jewish philosophers who viewed it as a response of practical wisdom, useful especially for the ruling classes, or as a text that showed the compatibility of rational knowledge and religious faith, or as support against Christian polemicists.

Yoḥanan Alemanno: A Humanist Manual for the Attainment of Happiness

Whereas Jewish philosophy in Spain during the fifteenth century attests to the impact of scholasticism, Jewish thought in Italy, especially during the second half of the fifteenth century, marks the Jewish awareness of humanism and in some regards even Jewish contribution to it. The Italian humanists produced new translations of *Ethics* as well as commentaries, comparing Aristotle's analysis of human well-being with post-Aristotelian moral philosophies, especially Stoicism and Epicureanism.[87] The humanists were obsessed with the meaning and purpose of human life, perhaps because they did not belong to any existing social institution or more personally because of the precariousness of the tumultuous politics of Italian city-states in the fifteenth century. The humanist discourse on happiness treated themes such as: Can happiness be attained in this life? Is virtue as important an ingredient of happiness as are good health and sufficient means? Is nobility acquired or inherited? Can the humanist be truly noble if he lacks wealth and social standing? What are the virtues of the truly noble? Finally, does nobility necessitate involvement in public life? The basic insecurity of the humanists led them to adopt Stoic themes and

postures toward the vicissitudes of life. The humanist discourse on happiness has a noticeable pessimistic strain and "snobbish aloofness" even when it is expressed by people who were successful in politics and quite wealthy. The Stoics' emphasis on virtue as the only good, their rejection of external goods, and the counsel of apathy were easily combined with Christian values and postures. Although the humanists reflected on the meaning of human life in light of ancient pagan sources, they did so as practicing Christians with various degrees of personal commitment. This preoccupation inspired a close look at human emotions, attitudes, moods, and sensibilities, that is, at the psychological life of human beings. Humanist psychology became more attuned to the dynamic of inner life, and more honest about human passions such as avarice, fear, lust, envy, pride, and ambition. Humanist discourse on happiness considered human beings as they actually behave rather than the human species as an abstract category. In this context the humanists paid attention to the interaction between the soul and the body, the role the body plays in the acquisition of virtues. Some humanists highlighted the irresolvable conflict between body and soul; others emphasized the possible harmony between them, and still others called for the complete domination of the soul over the body. These positions were supported in each case by a rereading of an ancient text, be it Stoic, Epicurean, Platonic, or Aristotelian.

Jews in Italy were fully aware of the humanist movement and in some cases contributed to it by teaching leading humanists and introducing them to Jewish and Muslim philosophical sources and to *Kabbalah*, the Jewish mystical tradition. Yoḥanan Alemanno (d. 1504) is an example of a Jewish humanist who embraces the new cultural sensibilities and involves himself in the expansion of the discourse on happiness. His *Song of Solomon's Virtues* was composed as the introduction to his commentary on the Song of Songs entitled *Ḥesheq Shelomo* (*The Desire of Solomon*) at the request of Pico della Mirandola in 1488–1489. The biblical king was considered the author of Song of Songs, which the medieval scholars (Jewish and Christians) largely interpreted as an allegorical text about the progression of the soul, culminating in the mystical union with the Active Intellect or with Christ. Pico was interested in Song of Songs as a guide for the attainment of intellectual perfection in this life. Alemanno translated for Pico the commentary of Moses Narboni on Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqẓān* and composed his own commentary on Song of Songs to help Pico better grasp the meaning of the allegorical text.[88]

Alemanno composed *Song of Solomon's Virtues* to present a Jewish alternative to Renaissance Platonism.[89] He believed that a proper exposition of Solomon's successful attainment of perfection would inspire other Jews to follow the rigorous but not impossible program to achieve perfection within the boundaries of Jewish

life. As a biography of an illustrious historical persona, it was also in accord with the humanist attempt to draw lessons from history. To instruct Jews of his time how to attain perfection in this life, Alemanno composed the detailed analysis of King Solomon's virtues and achievements, culminating in conjunctions with God, or more precisely with the sixth *Sefirah*, *Tife'eret*, the center of the *Sefirot* that emanated from God.[90]

Combining Aristotle's analysis of the virtues in the *Ethics* with post-Aristotelian treatment of the Roman rhetoricians, especially Cicero, Alemanno articulates an elaborate analysis of human virtues and the requisite knowledge that enables one to acquire the virtues. The virtues, the arts, and the sciences are all arranged in an architectonic order from the lowest to the highest. This structure comprises a "ladder of perfections" that Solomon himself ascended and that the reader is invited to imitate. Such elaborate description of all aspects of human life captures the richness of the term *ma'alot* in Hebrew as "virtues," "excellences," "ranks," and "steps." The one who follows the detailed recipe for perfection provided by Alemanno will presumably experience it in this life, as did King Solomon.

Alemanno classifies all human perfections, or goods into two main classes – physical and spiritual. The physical goods are further subdivided into "internal physical goods" and "external physical goods." The former class includes beauty, health, strength, and long life, and the latter includes honor, noble ancestry, companions, and supporters. The spiritual goods too are subdivided into "internal spiritual goods" and "external spiritual goods." The first class includes the four cardinal virtues of the Platonic list and each is further subdivided to encompass a full listing of all intellectual and moral virtues. Thus under the virtue of "intelligence" he distinguishes between "right thinking" and "right understanding." Right thinking means art (*techne*), which is subdivided into "productive," "theoretical," "mathematical," and "musical" and each of these is further subdivided to encompass a whole range of human activities. Right understanding is subdivided into political science, natural sciences, rhetorical wisdom, and intuitive knowledge, and each is further subdivided into all sciences known to humanity. Under the second cardinal virtue of "self-control" or temperance, Alemanno enumerates self-restraint, generosity, cleanliness, contentment with one's lot, satisfaction with the happiness of others, munificence, sociality, congeniality, pride in accomplishments, shame, and humility. Under the cardinal virtue of "fortitude" he includes endurance, diligence, pride in achievements, honoring of virtue, magnificence, high mindedness (or greatness of soul), explanation of the soul, and determination. Finally, under "justice" he includes "right will," harmony between faculty of the soul, and ascent toward God.

Having achieved all the "internal spiritual goods," one is equipped to attain "external spiritual goods." These are depicted as objective factors that are bestowed on the individuals who are prepared to receive these objectives goods, or influences. The first objective good is bestowed at birth and pertains to the spiritual elevation of the parent at the time of conception; then there is attention paid to a person by contemporaries, divine assurance of good fortune, divine guidance, and finally the ultimate goodness and felicity.

All of these human activities, arts, sciences, and character traits are claimed to have been part of Solomon's personality and life achievements. The monarch's name, *Shlomo*, signifies his perfection (*shlemut* in Hebrew). Alemanno substantiates this rhetorically by looking at the king's account of his life in the Bible and the various teachings of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs, which the Jewish tradition ascribes to the king, as well as by adducing rabbinic *aggadot*, exempla, folk takes, and narratives about ancient heroic figures in non-Jewish sources. By fusing diverse literary modalities (exegetical, historical, and scientific-philosophical) and diverse literary sources (biblical, rabbinic, Hellenistic, Muslim, and Jewish) Alemanno teaches by example what it means to be a wise and virtuous man who has experienced perfection in this life.

When Alemanno says that the virtuous man acquires the proper dispositions and all the requisite knowledge he can attain conjunction with God, what does he mean? For the Jewish Aristotelian, this means a union between the human intellect and the Active Intellect, which Crescas found so objectionable. For Alemanno such a conjunction is not the highest rank of perfection because the Active Intellect is *not* God. Above it, there are other Separate Intelligences that moved the planets, and still above them, there is the realm of the ten *Sefirot* that emanate from God. For Alemanno, union with God is the final end of human life; it is understood as a mystical union with *Tife'eret*, which in *Kabbalah* is the symbolic manifestation of YHVH. Even conjunction with the Shekhina, according to Alemanno, cannot not account as the ultimate human perfection. The perfected man who possesses all virtues and knowledge is able to receive the overflow from the *Ein Sof* and the upper *Sefirot* that are gathered in *Tife'eret* and thereby experience a total mystical union with God. Alemanno's vision of mystical union with God as the ultimate end of human life is indebted to his spiritual mentor, the thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalist, Abraham Abulafia, for whom the ecstatic state was prophecy. Alemanno was also intimately familiar with the revival of Platonism among the Florentine humanists, and when he presents the pursuit of ecstasy as a passionate, erotic desire (*ḥesheq*) he echoes Plato's characterization of the pursuit of wisdom as "divine madness." For Alemanno, King Solomon not only best exemplified the erotic

spirituality that leads to the mystical union with God, he also expressed it most perfectly in the Song of Songs.

Moses Almosnino: Happiness as Perfection of the Will and the Love of God

The pursuit of religious perfection and its strong mystical coloring would dominate Jewish philosophy during the sixteenth century, especially among Sephardic exiles of the Spanish expulsion. Seeking to find meaning for their personal and collective tragedies, Jewish philosophers in the Sephardic diaspora of the Ottoman Empire were obsessed with the pursuit of religious perfection. Reflections on ultimate felicity appeared in sermons, treatises of systematic theology, and biblical commentaries on Proverbs, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes. The pursuit of perfection was not a mere academic interest; it shaped the liturgical life of the Sephardic exiles who instituted the custom of reading from the Psalter during the winter months and from Proverbs and Tractate Avot every Sabbath between Passover and Shavuot. It was believed that by so doing the individual would attain moral perfection, reaching the high degree of self-purification necessary for the reenactment on Shavuot of the Sinaitic theophany. Undergirding this program for religious perfection was Aristotle's *Ethics* that provided the philosophical vocabulary for analysis of virtue and happiness.

The popularity of the *Ethics* is evident in the works of Moses Almosnino (d. 1581) who was a teacher, preacher, judge, and communal leader in Salonica in the second and third quarters of the sixteenth century.[91] Instructed by an ex-converso, Aharon Afiya, Almosnino mastered Latin and was familiar with scholastic commentaries on the *Ethics,* as well as with the new Jewish commentary on the *Ethics* by Baruch ibn Ya'ish, which was based on two new fifteenth-century translations of the *Ethics* by humanists in Italy: the new Latin translation of Leonardo Bruni (1416–1417) from the version of Robert Grosseteste, and the translation from the Greek original by the Byzantine humanist scholar Johannes Argyropolous (1457). In Almosnino's day the *Ethics* continued to inspire attention when it was translated into French by the humanist Philippe Le Plessis, and into Italian by Bernardo Segni (1504–1508). Like non-Jewish humanists, Almosnino composed his own commentary on the *Ethics*, *Penei Mosheh* (*Countenance of Moses*), and devoted much effort to determine the correct text of Aristotle's *Ethics* by comparing the textual variants at his disposal.[92] Yet the main contribution of the commentary lies not in philological observations but in the attempt to anchor the *Ethics* in the Bible and rabbinic literature while at the same time drawing heavily on scholastic commentaries on the work. Almosnino refers to the commentaries on the *Ethics* by Eustratius, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Geraldus Odonis, Jean Buridan, Walter Burley, Faber

Stapulensis Jacobus (Jacques Lefvre d'Etaples), and Agostino Nifo. Relying on these commentaries is indicative not only of the breadth of Almosnino's knowledge but also of the continued interest in Aristotle's work during the sixteenth century. In the 1540s and 1550s the Italian Benedictine scholar Joachim Perion, an avowed Ciceronian, translated the *Ethics* into Italian, provoking much criticism from other humanists, and his translation led to yet another Italian translation published in Venice in 1558 and later in Paris by the French humanist Denys Lambin.

Almosnino's commentary on the *Ethics* was to prepare him to do his main educational work, preaching and teaching the meaning of the divinely revealed tradition. Throughout his theological and homiletical writings, he refers to the *Ethics*, taking for granted that moral perfection for Jews could not come except through familiarity with its vocabulary. The philosophical commentary on the *Ethics* is replete with references to scriptures and rabbinic sources. The moral teachings of King David and King Solomon, recorded in Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes as interpreted by the rabbinic sages, are presented as being in complete accord with the moral wisdom of Aristotle, Seneca, and Cicero. Thus Almosnino, like Alemanno, portrays King Solomon as the embodiment of the Renaissance ideal *homo universalis*, the wisest of all ancient sages, and claims that the religious poetry of King David compares favorably to Greek and Roman poetry. The very attempt to prove that the Bible equals the aesthetic, moral, and intellectual achievements of the ancients necessitates a rereading of scripture against this background of humanist culture. The result was a distinct Jewish moral philosophy that fused Jewish, Aristotelian, Platonic, and Stoic elements. In the ancient Jewish sources Almosnino rediscovered the humanist emphasis on the dignity and worth of the human personality, the primacy of the human will, and the striving for personal immortality through cultivation of moral virtues. As much as intense suffering made the Iberian Jews receptive to the humanist emphasis on human emotions and passions, so did the Bible provide them with evidence that the virtuous man who lives by the Torah is able to transcend the limitations of this world.

Almosnino expounds on the full education and religious merit of the *Ethics* in a practical manual for good conduct that he composed in Spanish with a Hebrew introduction for the instruction of his nephew. The title, *Regimento de la vida* (*Sefer Hanahagat ha-Ḥayyim*; *The Book of the Regimen of Living*) indicates how Almosnino understood his educational goal.[93] In his view, moral, intellectual, and religious training, which lead to human well-being, must begin at a young age because the disciplined acquisition of virtues liberates the soul from its corporeal conditioning, restoring it to its heavenly abode. The text is divided into three sections: part

one concerns physical health (or management of the body); part two discusses the moral virtues courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, magnanimity, humility, patience and affability, courtesy, and truthfulness and the conduct that leads to the cultivation of these virtues; and part three discusses the two arch moral virtues justice and friendship and the five intellectual virtues, science, wisdom, reason, prudence, and art. The acquisition of these virtues prepares one to lead a proper religious life, that is, to worship God. The study of Aristotle's *Ethics*, along with other ancient sources of moral philosophy, such as the writings of Seneca, constitute Almosnino's moral philosophy, whose goal is to lead Jews to religious perfection.

By the second half of the sixteenth century, however, Jewish Aristotelianism was a wasted force, whereas *Kabbalah* was gradually emerging to become the dominant paradigm of Jewish theology. Almosnino's moral philosophy fuses Jewish Aristotelianism and *Kabbalah*, taking at face value that the Zohar is an ancient *Midrash* and asserting that revealed suprarational knowledge is qualitatively superior to demonstrative philosophy. Almosnino was not a creative kabbalist but his reflections on the ultimate end of human life indicate the impact of *Kabbalah* and its Neoplatonic ontology and psychology. Under the sway of *Kabbalah*, Almosnino sees a qualitative difference between the souls of Jews and those of gentiles: whereas the former are part of the divine essence, the soul of the nations belongs to the realm of the Separate Intelligences; whereas the soul of Israel is a preexistent, holy substance, the souls of other humans are but "an incorporeal substance with a propensity for intellection." The result of this qualitative difference is that gentiles, even those who acquire wisdom by following Aristotle, can at best achieve earthly happiness but they necessarily fall short of attaining supernatural happiness of personal immortality.

Almosnino's psychological theories echo the Platonic approach, because he highlights the acute conflict between the spiritual soul and the corporeal body. The soul experiences its temporary association with the body not merely as a form of imprisonment (as Plato taught) but rather as a dangerous exile. Desperately the soul seeks to liberates itself from the body and regain its original spirituality and holiness. Almosnino holds that no one understood the yearning of the soul and her anguish better than King David, whose celebrated Psalms express the profound truth of the human condition in a poetic language. Those who penetrate the meaning of the Psalms could gain a deeper understanding of the ultimate end of human life and focus on its attainment. By virtue of ritualized study of the Psalms (along with Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Tractate Avot), Almosnino believes that the soul of the believer could "polish and purify" itself from the contaminating influences of the

body. Moral training was thus an elaborate practice of self-purification, even though Almosnino was no ascetic and did not adopt the ascetic practices of contemporary kabbalists in Safed.[94]

Almosnino invests the science of ethics with religious import: Whoever acquires the virtues in accord with Aristotle's moral philosophy and the teachings of the rabbis can attain the desired level of spirituality and encounter God in the verses of the revealed text. Whether or not one in fact devotes one's life to the Torah depends largely on the will, which freely decides whether to follow divine commands or not. Philosophically speaking, Almosino's reflections on the human will and its relationship to practical reasoning is the most original contribution to the discourse on virtue and happiness. Human excellence (*ma'alat ha-Adam*) lies in the freedom of the will to determine whether to be happy as God or as unhappy as the beasts. The human will is by nature rational and free; it is rational because it acts in accordance with information provided by the intellect, but it is free because it can will the known object, will against it, or not will it at all. The will is superior to the intellect not only because the known object cannot compel the will in any way, but also because the will is free to act or not to act. In the hierarchy of the soul's faculties, the will belongs to the appetitive power. Located between reason and the sense appetite, the will carries out the soul's task of taming or subduing the natural inclinations of the body. The freedom of the will entails not only ignoring the information provided by the intellect but freely choosing to pursue evil, an idea that both Aristotle and Maimonides would have found self-contradictory, because for them we will only what we consider good. For Almosnino, by contrast, the human desire to sin is neither uncommon nor merely a result of mistaken judgment by the intellect. Rather it reflects the imperfection of the will, or the sickness of the will. The upshot of Almosnino's analysis of the interplay of the will and the intellect is that human happiness requires the perfection of both. Wisdom is the perfection of the intellect and love is the perfection of the will. He concludes that the ultimate end of human life consists of the "contemplation [of God combined with love]." Unlike Maimonides, who thinks that the love of God is an intellectual activity that reflects the perfection of theoretical reason, Almosnino views love as the perfection of the will, and therefore, the perfection of practical reason. The love of God belongs to the realm or praxis (*ma'aseh*) rather than theoria (*iyyun*).

In regard to the moral virtues, Almosnino takes a different approach than Maimonides and his Greek source, Aristotle. For Almosnino, the moral life is not only a means to an end but the very core of religious life in this world. The moral life that is guided by practical reason is informed by values of religious tradition.

By imitating divine perfections revealed in the Torah, the devotee can acquire the moral virtues and attain the necessary self-spiritualization that leads to *devequt* in this world and eternal life after death. Moreover, for Almosnino the moral life of action is the very arena where one manifests the perfection of the will and the total devotion to God. Hence, the highest virtue in this life is not the intellectual virtue of philosophical wisdom but rather the virtue of prudence. Such an approach is closer to the Christian understanding of the moral life than to Maimonides'.

Borrowing from Buridan's commentary on the *Ethics*, Almosnino posits prudence as the supreme virtue, the most important of the four cardinal virtues defined by Plato (i.e., courage, justice, prudence, and wisdom). The man of practical reason is the wise man who has acquired all moral virtues, especially prudence. The prudent man is religiously perfect because he lives by the divine commands of the Torah whose prohibitions enable the good man to subdue the passions of the body and steer away from sin and whose prescriptions facilitate the acquisition of moral virtues through habitual practice of good deeds. The man who acquires prudence knows how to distinguish between real and apparent goods; he realizes that bodily pleasures, wealth, honor, glory, and fame do not constitute true happiness even though a modicum of external good is necessary for the performance of good deeds toward others (for example, charity).

The perfection of practical reason encompasses the perfection of the will, that is, the love of the good for its own sake. Because the supreme Good is the divine will, the prudent man who knows "divine things" is also the one who unconditionally loves God. It is true that the more one knows God the more one loves God, but love is not the perfection of the theoretical intellect, rather the perfection of the will, the inner dimension of praxis (*ma'aseh penimi*). The man of prudence is the one who diligently performs the *mitzvot* not because they are instrumental to the theoretical knowledge of God but because they have an intrinsic value as the expression of God's Will. The felicitous man (*ha-me'ushar*) who has acquired the virtue of prudence is the human ideal about whom king David sang in the Psalms, King Solomon praised in Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, and the Tanaim portrayed in Tractate Avot.

The ultimate end of human life is the love of God, a love of the honorable that enables the human will to resist the passions. It is through the love of God that one attains the perfection of all virtues in this world and for which one is rewarded with eternal life. The love of God is everlasting and inexhaustible because it is an unconditional love. Love is not communication between two perfect intellects but love of the infinite details of the beloved. Only a perfect will that can discern the infinite variations of particulars can love God, the most perfect Will,

unconditionally. Those who unconditionally love the Torah, the manifestations of God's infinite love, love God and enjoy everlasting salvation.

Almosnino indicates that the more Jews become familiar with the text of the *Ethics*, the more they use their knowledge of sacred texts to assert religious traditional values. By the end of the sixteenth century, largely under the sway of *Kabbalah*, Jewish philosophers returned to a personalist conception of God, they endorsed the dualism of body and soul, they paid greater attention to the noncognitive dimension of human personality, they highlighted the importance of the will in human conduct, they recognized the religious value of moral action through the performance of *mitzvot*, they diminished the importance of theoretical wisdom and focused instead on the role of practical reason in religious life, they posited the love of God as the ultimate end of life and envisioned the ultimate felicity as a mystical union with God. As a result of these changes in the conception of happiness, the very scholars who studied philosophy also paved the way for the acceptance of *Kabbalah* as the dominant schema for Jewish religious ethics.

Baruch Spinoza: Happiness as Life in Accordance with God-Nature

By the seventeenth century, Jewish Aristotelianism was no longer a creative intellectual program, even though Jewish intellectuals, especially in the Sephardic diaspora, were conversant with Jewish Aristotelianism and Aristotelian philosophical terminology continued to inform Jewish thought well into the eighteenth century. Yet in the seventeenth century the Jewish philosophical discourse on virtue and happiness also encountered the most serious critique when Baruch Spinoza challenged the identification of Torah and Wisdom that undergirded the entire discourse. Spinoza's ethical theory is deeply rooted in medieval philosophy (Jewish as well as Christian),[95] but also resonates with Stoic teachings that enjoyed significant revival during the sixteenth century.[96] Although Spinoza was embedded in premodern philosophy, he also radically transformed the meaning of the key concepts such as "virtue," "happiness," "blessedness," "good," "evil," "desire," "perfection," "reason," "God," and "Nature." Spinoza was both continuous with the Middle Ages as well as a radical break with it.

Spinoza challenges the theistic conception of God shared by both traditional Judaism and Christianity and posited a monistic vision. For Spinoza there exists only one substance – God – and all other existents are but modes of God: "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God."[97] God is not the Creator of nature and as God does not transcend nature; rather God *is* nature conceived in its totality. Human beings are finite parts of nature and as such human beings possess the drive for self-preservation, which Spinoza calls *conatus*. In

Spinoza's words, "The striving (*conatus*), by which each thing strives to persevere in its being, is nothing but the actual essence of the thing"[98] Because the *conatus*, as Don Garret explains, "constitutes the actual essence of each individual [and] defines the power and activity of the thing's own nature,"[99] virtue is "the capacity to strive for and achieve one's own advantage, conceived as self-preservation."[100] For Spinoza, as for the ancient Stoics, to "act with virtue" is equivalent "with acting under the guidance of reason," and "reason demands nothing contrary to nature."

Spinoza defines "good" as that which is conducive to self-preservation and judges all of human activities and affects in the light of the principle that all human beings have as their goal to "maximize their pleasure and utility." As material entities human beings are creatures of passions, to which they can easily become enslaved. The emotions cannot be extirpated, but they can be transformed through cognitive activity: The more we understand them, the more we can understand our place in the world and chart the right course of action. For Spinoza, we become free when we recognize human finite limitations. Thus, cheerfulness, joy, self-esteem, and love of esteem are all good because they are conducive to self-preservation, whereas hate and the negative affects it generates such as anger, disdain, envy, mockery, vengeance, and scorn are all evil because they do not promote self-preservation.[101] The goal of Spinoza's ethics is to remove false beliefs that generate negative affects, thereby enabling humans to be guided by reason alone.

Only by living in accordance with reason can one find freedom, directing oneself to the highest object of human knowledge, God. The knowledge of God is the mind's highest good and to know God is its highest virtue. Because God is not transcendent to the knower, to know God does not involve overcoming distance between the knower and the known, nor does it mean the communication between two wills, as it was for Crescas or Almosnino; rather, it means to be what one truly is, namely, a mode of the infinite God who thinks itself. Because God is the greatest perfection, God experiences eternal joy that has God as its true object. The more the human mind participates in this rejoicing, the more it experiences "blessedness," which is the intellectual love of God (*Ethics* VP36s).[102] The intellectual love of God means that God is the loved object and that the person who loves God in that manner participates in the way God loves himself. Those who love God in this way experience "peace of mind," the inner quietude that contemplatives in various mystical traditions report.

Although Spinoza's ideas are rooted in the medieval discourse on happiness, Spinoza undermined the Jewish tradition when he severed the identification of Torah and Wisdom. Spinoza challenges the view that the Torah is a divinely revealed text that teaches philosophical truths.[103] For him, the biblical text is not revealed

divine instruction but a human document that expresses the political situation of an ancient people, Israel. The Torah is not a philosophical–scientific text whose teachings lead to the attainment of happiness, because prophecy is not a cognitive phenomenon. The Bible teaches nothing philosophical, although it has much to say about morality and about the politics of the theocratic state. These insights, however, have little to do with knowledge of God, or Nature, or with the ultimate end of human life. The biblical text itself is no key to the mysteries of the universe or to an intimate relationship with God, and the intellectual love of God is not a salvation of the individual soul but "the highest possible contentment of the mind."

With Spinoza the premodern discourse on virtue and happiness within the Jewish religious tradition reaches closure. Although the discourse changed over time in accordance with Judaism's interaction with surrounding civilizations, the discourse perpetuated certain themes. The Jewish approach to happiness has much in common with Aristotle's view because both Jews and the Greek philosophers agree that happiness is predicated on the cultivation of virtues and the attainment of knowledge. At the core of the Jewish conception of happiness is the identification of Torah and Wisdom, which entails that Jews pursue wisdom as part of their loyalty to God. As Jews encounter philosophy and its related sciences in medieval Islam they expand the category of "wisdom" and devise new courses of study for the education of the virtuous person. These changes provoked debates about the curriculum and generated the rise of alternatives to rationalist philosophy, *Kabbalah*. Yet both philosophy and *Kabbalah* agree that the ultimate end of life pertains to the soul and that it can be experienced fully only in the afterlife. Because focus on the salvation of the soul was also the bone of contention between Jews and Christians and the cause of much of Jewish suffering in the late Middle Ages, the debate on happiness shaped the interaction between the two monotheistic religions, even though Jewish intellectuals expressed themselves in terms borrowed from their cultural environment. Aristotle's *Ethics*, the major text that analyzed virtue and happiness, provided the conceptual vocabulary for reflections on virtue and happiness in the matrix of the Jewish religion.[104]

NOTES

1 For a contemporary engagement of analytic philosophers with ancient virtue ethics see Slote 1992; Crisp 1996; Crisp and Slote 1997; Statman 1997; Hursthouse 1999; Darwall 2003.

2 Seminal studies on *Nicomachean Ethics* that shaped my presentation include Cooper 1975; Rorty 1980; Edel 1982; Kraut 1989; Sherman 1989; Broadie 1991; Kenny 1992; Annas 1993.

3 The ambiguity of these two conditions generated the on-going debates about the meaning of happiness as the final good for humans. See Tirosh-Samuelson 2003, pp. 19–20 and the sources cited there.
4 On practical reasoning see Ackrill 1980.
5 On the doctrine of the mean in Aristotle see Urmson in Rorty 1980, pp. 157–70; on the term "just right" see Edel 1982, p. 270. The term actually reflects the attitude toward drinking wine in Greek culture. Socrates was the ideal wine drinker, because he imbibed the right amount necessary for witty philosophical conversation without getting drunk.
6 *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.5.
7 *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.13, 1144 b 30-1.
8 *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7, 1177 b 31-1178 b1.
9 On Hellenistic schools see Sharples 1996; Shoefield and Striker 1986; Streiker 1996; and Ferry 2005.
10 Irwin in Crisp 1996, p. 42.
11 On Wisdom stratum of the Bible see Whybray 1965; Scott 1971; Crenshaw 1981; Crenshaw 1995; Gammie and Perdue 1990; Blenkisopp 1995.
12 This type of ethical theory is known as "deontic" or "deontological" from the Greek word for duty (*deonton)*. In modern ethical theory this approach is most characteristic of Kant. Jewish theologians and philosophers in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries who interpreted Judaism in terms of Kantian ethics presented Judaism primarily as ethics of duty to divine commands, overlooking the virtue ethics of the Jewish moral thinking.
13 The Hebrew noun *osher* appears in the Bible only once (Gen. 30:13). The verbal form *ashrei* captures the biblical approach to happiness as a state of being that emerges from a certain pattern of life, precisely as the Greek philosophers held.
14 For this reason in medieval Jewish philosophical vocabulary of Judeo–Arabic philosophy translated "happiness" (*eudemonia* in Greek and *sa'adah* in Arabic) as *hatzlahah*. Because the medieval Jewish philosophers endorsed teleological structure of Aristotelian philosophy, happiness was understood teleologically as the ultimate end of human life and thus synonymous with the words *takhlit* or *takhalit aḥaron*. In the Latin west the Greek *eudaimonia* was translated as *felicitas* (felicity) but that philosophical term was equated with the religious term *beatitudo* (beatitude), which was the translation of the Hebrew word *asher* as, for example, Jesus' speech in Matthew 5. As a result, in the late-Middle Ages, when Jewish philosophy was composed primarily in a Christian environment, the term *osher* replaces the term *hatzlaḥah*.
15 In ancient Egyptian religion the underlying order of the universe was known as *maat*. During the Hellenistic period, when biblical texts received their final form, *maat* was identified with the great Egyptian goddess Isis, whose cult was extremely popular throughout the Mediterranean world, especially during the Ptolemaic Empire during the third century BCE. Isis was believed to have presided over Creation as the eldest daughter of Re and she came down from her heavenly abode to search throughout the world for a place in which to establish her cult. She was known by the title "lawgiver" and proclaimed laws for humanity that maintained justice and righteousness and sustained the social order. The association of Wisdom and divine law was thus already in place in Egyptian religion; in Israelite Wisdom literature, Wisdom is identified with Torah.
16 On Torah and Wisdom in late biblical writings see Blenkisopp 1995.
17 It is important to note that although "righteousness" (*tzedaqqah*) is not identical with "virtue," the two terms would eventually overlap in Jewish moral discourse.
18 For analysis of the Psalms 1 see Sarna 1993a, pp. 26–47.

19 The agricultural connotation of the stem *tz-l-h* is further strengthened by the stem *p-r-ḥ* "to flourish" which Proverbs 11:28 and 14:11 uses with reference to fates of the righteous and the wicked. In Psalms 92 the verb *p-r-ḥ* is exclusively in reference to the righteous who will flourish like a palm tree. The organic imagery of the Bible more successfully conveys the association of the term "flourishing" than Greek philosophical terminology.
20 M. Goodman 1982, p. 74.
21 For an excellent recent analysis of rabbinic Judaism as character formation see Schoffer 2005. Although this study focuses on close reading of *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, its approach applies to rabbinic ethics in general especially as expressed in the aggadic stratum of the rabbinic corpus. This study shows how to integrate contemporary analysis of virtue ethics, with narrative ethics.
22 This notion of organic web of concept values was advanced by Kadushin 1932, 1938, 1969.
23 For analysis of the multivalent term *derekh eretz* see Kadushin 1964, pp. 39–57.
24 Hadot 2005, p. 240.
25 See Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 17a; Exodus Rabbah 52:3, and Genesis Rabbah 62:2.
26 On Philos' ethical theories consult H. Wolfson 1968; Winston 1984; Williamson 1989.
27 *Decalogue* XVI.81
28 *Special Laws II* XIV: 53.
29 Cherubim XXV: 86.
30 Allegorical Interpretation XXII:69.
31 For analysis of the "seeing God" see Birnbaum 1996, passim.
32 The Worse Attack the Better XVI:59.
33 See H. Wolfson 1968, pp. 165–321.
34 On the meaning of faith in the writings of Philo see Hay 1987, 1989.
35 Every Good Man is Free XIII:91.
36 On *adāb* culture and its literary genres see Hodgson 1974, vol. 1, pp. 444–72.
37 For overview of ethics in Islamic philosophy of the Middle Ages consult Butterworth 1983, 1985; Fakhry 1994, esp. pp. 78–130.
38 For overview of al-Fārābī's political theory consult Mahdi 2001. The relevant texts are available in an English translation by Butterworth in al-Fārābī 2001.
39 The central text of Muslim "science of character" (*Ilm al-Akhlāq*) was Misqawayh *Tahdhib al-Akhlāq*) (*The Refinement of Character*). For an English translation and useful introduction see Zurayk 2002.
40 On Saadia as a Jewish Mutazilite consult Ben Shammai in Frank and Leaman 1997, pp. 115–48.
41 *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs,* Saadia 1948, p. 242.
42 Ibid., p. 243.
43 On the Ikhwān al-Safā see Netton 1982 and idem 1989, pp. 203–255; Nasr 1993, pp. 25–106.
44 Isaac Israeli, *Book of Definition*, Altmann and Stern 1958, pp. 25–6.
45 *Improvement of the Moral Qualities*, Wise 1902, p. 31.
46 Ibid., p. 34. The medical analogy was developed in the writings of al-Fārābī and reflects the popularity of Galenic medical ethics among the Muslims.
47 The pseudo-Empedoclean tradition; see the entry "Anbaduklis" in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 483–4 and "Empedocles" entry in *Encyclopedia Judaica*.
48 Bar Ḥiyya 1968, p. 18.
49 On the impact of Sufism on Jewish Philosophy see Fenton 1996, pp. 755–68.

50 The text is available in an English translation by Field in al-Ghazālī 1980; for exposition of his ethical theories consult Sherif 1974 and Fakhry 1994, pp. 193–206.
51 *Duties of the Heart,* Ibn Paquda 1973a, p. 427.
52 Ibid., p. 181.
53 Ibid., pp. 410–1.
54 See Robert Winowsky in Adamson and Taylor 2005, pp. 99–102.
55 On Ibn Sina's contribution to the discourse on happiness, consult Fakhry 1994, pp. 85–8. On Ibn Daud's reliance on Ibn Sina consult Eran 1998, passim.
56 On Maimonides' reliance on al-Fārābī and the difference between them, consult Berman 1974, 1987, 1991; Galston 1978, 1978–1979; Melamed 2003.
57 On Ibn Bajja's conception of happiness consult Altmann 1965; E.I.J. Rosenthal 1971.
58 For an elaborate discussion of Maimonides' understanding of the sin of disobedience consult Klein-Braslavy 1986; Berman 1980.
59 For analysis of the final end see Frank 1985; Kellner 1990; Fox 1990, pp. 152–98.
60 Providing the empirical evidence for this claim is the purpose of the *Mishneh Torah*.
61 *Mishneh Torah,* Hilkhot Deot 28:9.
62 Maimonides 1975, p. 79. For further discussion of the point see Weiss 1991, pp. 93–131.
63 Maimonides 1975, p. 79.
64 Kreisel 1999, p. 63.
65 Ibid., p. 75.
66 Ibid., p. 77.
67 *Mishneh Torah,* Hilkhot Teshuvah 9:2.
68 On the dissemination of philosophy among the Jewish learned classes consult S. Harvey 2005; Saperstein 1997. The contribution of the scientific encyclopedia for the dissemination of philosophical knowledge is discussed in detail in S. Harvey 2000.
69 Jospe 1986, p. 195; Jospe 1988, pp. 133–46.
70 On gender as an obstacle to the attainment of happiness according to Jewish Aristotelians see Jospe 1986, p. 196, and Tirosh-Samuelson (forthcoming).
71 For overview of this scholar's translations see Berman 1967. The critical edition of the Hebrew translation of Averroes' *Middle Commentary on the Ethics* is Berman 1999. For overview of Ibn Kaspi's ethical and political theory consult Mesch 1975.
72 Ibn Kaspi's digest, or Epitome (*Kitzur)*, of the *Ethics* is mentioned in his ethical will. See Abrahams 1926, p. 144.
73 Ibn Kaspi used *Musrei ha-Philosophim*, the Hebrew translation of Ibn Hunain's *Adāb al-Falāsifa* mentioned above. For this reason it is understandable that this Arabic text was mistakenly ascribed to Joseph ibn Kaspi by modern Judaica scholars.
74 Abrahams 1926, p. 133.
75 Ibid., p. 141.
76 For analysis of Aquinas's opposition to Averroes' doctrine on the unity of the intellect in all humanity see McInnerny 1993. For a summary of Aquinas' moral theory consult McInerny 1997 [1982].
77 Albalag's philosophical treatise *Tiqqun ha-De'ot* is available in a critical edition by Vajda 1973, but Albalag's theory of knowledge still awaits systematic analysis. On Narboni's theory of intellectual perfection and his reliance on Averroes, consult Bland 1982a; Ivry 1967; Narboni 1977.
78 On the Active Intellect in the philosophy of Gersonides consult H. Davidson 1992. The Arabic philosophical tradition presupposed by Gersonides is analyzed in H. Davidson 1992a.

79 The doctrine was wholeheartedly accepted by Moses Narboni as shown by Bland and Ivry listed previously.
80 *Wars,* Introduction, Gersonides 1984, p. 96.
81 According to Gersonides to possess some knowledge of God does not lead to action in the political sphere; rather, the theoretical knowledge of the scientist-philosopher-prophet imparts knowledge to others through information about future events. The ordinary scientist-philosophers who are not prophets have to disseminate their knowledge to others, thereby making it possible for them to reach intellectual perfection and enjoy the immortality of the intellect. For further discussion of the educational activities of the philosophers according to Gersonides consult Kellner 1994b, 1995.
82 For analysis of Crescas' critique of the philosophical identification of happiness with perfection of the intellect see W. Harvey 1977; for an overview of this critique in the context of Crescas' philosophy see W. Harvey 1998b.
83 On the attribution of al-Fārābī's text to Aquinas see Berman 1978, pp. 300–2.
84 On Joseph ibn Shem Tov's works and philosophical orientation see Regev 1983. For summary of *Kevod Elohim*, see Tirosh-Rothschild 1998.
85 *Kevod Elohim* 1556, p. 20b.
86 See Septimus 1999, pp. 11–5.
87 For analysis of the humanist discourse on happiness consult Trinkaus 1965; the social context of this discourse is elaborated in Trinkaus 1970. For a philosophical analysis of humanist ethics consult Kraye 1988.
88 On Narboni's use of Ibn Tufayl see Hayoun 1987. Ibn Tufayl's political theory was most attractive to Jewish philosophers in the fourteenth century because it claimed that the philosopher can attain perfection of the intellect despite the imperfect political situation.
89 For a critical edition of the text and an English translation consult Lesley 1976. I prefer to translate the title of Alemanno's work as "*The Song of Solomon's Virtues*" to highlight its relevance to the discourse on virtue and happiness.
90 Alemanno held that the *Sefirot* are the instruments of divine activity. On this debate see Tirosh-Rothschild 1982–1983; Idel 1982a, 1982b. On the significance of this debate for the character of Italian *Kabbalah*, see Idel 1983.
91 For a recent biography and analysis of public activities, see Bnaya 1996.
92 Almosnino's commentary of the *Ethics* is available in a single manuscript MS Oxford-Bodleian Michael 409 (Neubauer 1435). The manuscript is incomplete and consists of commentary only on books I, II, and III of the *Ethics* but in his other extant works Almosnino refers to other books of the *Ethics*.
93 John Zemke published a critical edition of the *Regimiento de la vida* together with *Tratado de los suenyos* (*The Treatise on Dreams*). In 1729 the *Regimiento de la vida* was published in Amsterdam. The publishers' approbation indicates the high esteem that Jewish intellectuals in the Sephardic diaspora held Almosnino's work: "We find it is a work of great importance, worthy of its learned author who titled it Regime of Living. Therefore, in order to govern themselves with prudence and virtue, and be certain of meriting spiritual life, those who may be called alive in this material life should be careful in three principal matters. In Ethics, applying themselves to those things that will make them perfect. In Economy, searching out good education. In Politics, understanding good government for the republic. The mentioned author distributed carefully the topics of his learned discourse and salutiferous documents in three parts. In one he teaches with erudition and clear examples the rules for attaining perfection of one's ethical person. In another he advises with exactitude on good economy with true instructions that direct youth

towards the paths of virtue. In the last he manifests the median in legal justice, detailing the particulars of love on which the divine politic rests, for the preservation of the republic." Zemke 2004, p. 17, n. 48.

94 Extensive study of the spiritual practices of the kabbalists in Safed is available in Fine 2003.

95 On Spinoza's relationship to medieval Jewish philosophy see H. Wolfson 1934; Goodman and Ravven 2003.

96 The revival of Stoicism in sixteenth-century philosophy is analyzed by Morford 1991 and Kraye 1988, pp. 303–86.

97 *Ethics* IP15.

98 *Ethics* IIIP6.

99 Garrett 1996, p. 267.

100 *Ethics* IVP20.

101 *Ethics* IVP45c.

102 *Ethics* IIIP36s.

103 On Spinoza's biblical criticism see Preuss 2001; Smith 1997.

104 This essay is based on my 2003 book-length study. I thank Hebrew Union College Press for allowing me to use copyrighted material.

22

POLITICS AND THE STATE

ABRAHAM MELAMED

I. BETWEEN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Biblical and rabbinic literature deal with temporal political issues in various contexts. These canonical texts do have a clear position in the sphere of political theology; however, they do not contain any political philosophy in the strict sense of that term. What interests the writers are questions of the relationship between God and humans, often portrayed in political terms; God is called "king" and "judge," and agreements between God and humans are described in terms of legal agreements between rulers and their subjects (such as *brit* (covenant) and *amanah* (contract)). Experience with relationships between human rulers and their subjects in the temporal world is superimposed on the descriptions of human relationships with the divine. Because divine revelation is described as the giving of the law (Torah) to a specific group of humans, it has a clearly political context.[1] We also have more narrowly legal-*halakhic* discussions with their far-reaching political ramifications, but they do not constitute an organized body of political thinking per se in the strict Greek sense, which deals theoretically and universally with the political nature of men, classifies different kinds of government, and identifies the ultimate purpose of political existence. In any case, distinct Jewish political thought appears only when biblical and rabbinic political theology encounter Greek political philsophy. The first encounter, an isolated instance, takes place in the Hellenistic period, when Philo of Alexandria describes the leadership of Moses in terms of the Platonic philosopher-king.[2] Philo, however, although he influenced Christian thought deeply, was completely unknown in Jewish culture until the Renaissance, and thus his political thinking was irrelevant in their cultural world.

Like medieval Jewish philosophy as a whole, medieval and early-modern Jewish political philosophy is the outcome of the great encounter between Jewish culture, as it evolved in biblical and rabbinic literature, and the heritage of Greek science and philosophy as transmitted to medieval culture through the great Arabic translation enterprise of the eighth to tenth centuries C.E. This includes Arabic translations,

paraphrases of and commentaries on the main Greek political writings, notably Plato, by Muslim scholars such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Bajja, and Averroes. Like Jewish philosophy as a whole, political philosophy too strives to cope with this loaded encounter in varied ways.

Political theology deals with the political significance and implications of divine revelation, as manifested in the canonical writings of every monotheistic faith. Political philosophy, as first formulated in the writings of Plato and Aristotle, deals with the essense of every human sociey, the basic principles and purpose of its existence. The medieval monotheistic cultures – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – inherit the Greek political heritage. Their differences of opinion and consequently the difference in the manner they use the inheritance are in the realm of political theology. There is considerable agreement between Judaism and Islam on one hand and an essential difference between both of them and Christianity on the other, a result of the historically different circumstances in which each religion evolved.

According to their founding myths both Judaism and Islam were fashioned in the desert, a lawless place. It was essential to present their respective founding revelations as a revelation of the Law, an exclusive divine Law that embraces all aspects and levels of human existence from the most exalted spiritual realm to the basest physical needs of humankind. The worldview manifested in the *Halakhah* or the *Sha'ria* is essentially holistic. Christianity, on the other hand, develops within Roman–Hellenistic civilization in its peak years. To survive it must accept the existing political authority in temporal matters, and so narrows its interests to the realm of belief and opinions. It does not identify its revelation as one of a Law but essentially as one of religious dogma. Hence contrary to the essentially holistic attitude of Judaism and Islam, Christianity's solution is to differentiate between the two swords, temporal and spiritual, and consequently separates the practical political realm from the spiritual. The focus is on the latter, deemed apolitical or suprapolitical in essence. With the advent of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, this initial separation between spiritual and temporal matters, between church and state, crystallizes and makes possible the great secular political writings of early-modern times, of Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke.

Judaism and Islam, on the other hand, as Leo Strauss so forcefully emphasizes, (some say almost *ad absurdum*) focus on the political characteristics of their respective revelations, conceived to be a divine Law, bestowed upon the human association through the prophet-messenger, depicted also as a legislator and political leader. Consequently the main issues of religious thought, such as the divine attributes, the purpose of the Torah, the nature of revelation and of prophecy, and the essense of supreme human perfection, all become political. If one considers

creatio ex nihilo a political myth, a kind of Platonic "noble lie," then even creation becomes a political issue. Thus whereas Christianity develops a systematic division between temporal and spiritual, such separation is impossible in Judaism (and Islam). The Jewish theory of the Three Crowns (*Ketarim*) is an essentially different matter.[3]

The medieval Hebrew meaning of the terms *dat* and *Torah* clearly illustrate the political nature of revelation in Judaism. Whereas in modern Hebrew *dat* signifies religion in the broad sense, and *Torah* relates specifically to the Hebrew scriptures, in medieval Hebrew the terms are synonymous and limited specifically to law. Moreover, these terms do not necessarily signify divine law, but law in general, and can be subclassified into divine law (*dat elohit*, *Torah elohit*) or human law, the Greek *nomos* (*dat enoshit*, *Torah enoshit*). In modern Hebrew these terms receive a specific Jewish religious significance, whereas the word *hoq*, rare in medieval Hebrew, now stands for "law." The very fact that the term *dat* means what it does in modern Hebrew seems to stem from the influence of the Christian interpretation of revelation on modern Jewish thinkers.[4] On this background some scholars have erroneously translated Isaac Pollegar's *Ezer ha-Dat* and Elijah del Medigo's *Beḥinat ha-Dat*, for instance, as *The Defence of Religion* and *Examination of Religion*, respectively. In any case, the narrow legal meaning ascribed to the terms *dat* and *Torah* in medieval Hebrew terminology only proves again the essential political context of revelation in medieval Judaism (and Islam). For them, giving the *Torah* by divine revelation was the giving of the divine law.

These essential differences between Islam and Judaism on one hand and Christianity on the other also dictated the differences in the literary genres of political writing and the classical texts of which they made use. As a result of the separation between the temporal and the spiritual, medieval Christian thinkers could also separate political from general philosophical–theological thought. Consequently it developed a distinct political literature, like Aquinas' *De Regimine Principum*, Dante's *De Monarchia* or Marsilius of Padua's *Defensor Pacis,* although there are also political discussions in general theological writings, in Aquinas' great *Summas*, for instance. Not by chance do most of the Christian medieval political discussions appear in independent treatises. Modern Eurpoean political thought, starting with Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, is in many respects a direct continuation of this literature.

In Jewish culture, on the other hand, we cannot find even one treatise dedicated specifically to politics in the narrow meaning of the term. Due to the particular nature of Jewish political theology, its political discussions always appear in halakhic contexts such as Maimonides' *Code* or his three introductions to the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, and within the general theo-philosophical discussions, such as Philo's

Life of Moses, Saadia Gaon's *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, Joseph Albo's *Book of Roots*, Isaac Abrabanel's *Commentary on the Bible*, Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, and many others.

That led in the past to the conclusion that no political discussion of any significance and originality is to be found in the history of Jewish thought. This imagined state of affairs is explained by the apparent lack of relevance of the political arena for the Jews, who throughout most of their history lacked political independence and lived in exile.[5] Both assumption and conclusion, however, are erroneous. As for the assumption, there is a distinct political tradition in the history of Jewish culture, a partial picture of which will be described later. Regarding the explanation, the nature of the messianic period has a distinct political context (at least in the Maimonidean tradition), one that greatly interested Jewish scholars. Moreover, the varied forms of Jewish communal self-government throughout the ages, and the relationships with the gentile political systems within which these self-governing bodies operated, prove beyond doubt the great relevance of the political arena in Jewish history. Only when scholars start to seek the sources in their particular Jewish or Muslim background, and not from an external Christian vantage point that is irrelevant to them, is the rich reservoir of medieval Jewish political thought discovered, and becomes a legitimate field in the study of the history of Jewish philosophy. The very fact that there is no reference to this issue in classical histories of medieval Jewish philosophy such as those by Husik and Guttmann, while it is deemed natural to commission a chapter on it for this and other recent[6] general histories of Jewish philosophy – a step that would not have been taken half a century ago – only proves the topic has come of age.

II. BETWEEN PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

The difference in political theology also dictates the Greek political tradition on which religious traditions chose to base themselves. Medieval Christian political thought is largely based on Aristotle's *Politics* since the text was brought from Byzantium and translated into Latin in the mid-thirteenth century. The Aristotelian political discussion, which considers political issues separately from their general philosophical contexts, is well suited to the dualistic worldview that distinguishes the temporal from the spiritual. These thinkers were completely unacquainted with the Platonic political tradition until the Italian Renaissance. Even Reymond Klibansky, who emphasizes the continuity of the Platonic tradition in medieval Christian culture, stressed that this influence is exerted through dialogues such as *Timaeus* and

Parmenides.[7] There is no trace of the *Republic* in medieval Christian sources in the west. Thus Ernest Barker, who completely ignores Muslim and Jewish traditions and deals with the Christian tradition only, could state bluntly, "compared with the *Politics*, the *Republic* has no history. For a thousand years it simply disappeared."[8] In Muslim culture, and accordingly in medieval Jewish thought, however, the situation was in effect the reverse; their political thought is extensively influenced by Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, with modifications from the Aristotelian *Nicomachean Ethics*, in their Arabic translations, paraphrases, and commentaries, later translated into Hebrew. Erwin Rosenthal correctly entitles the second part of his *magnum opus* on medieval Muslim political thought *The Platonic Legacy*.[9] Although in all other branches of philosophy and science Muslim and Jewish scholars are massively based on the Aristotelian tradition the text of the *Politics* never reaches them. Although they knew of it, they barely use it even after the centers of Jewish culture in southern Europe move into the Christian–Latin environment, where the *Politics* has a decisive influence on political thinking in the later Middle Ages. The first direct and very short quotation from the *Politics* in a Jewish text, directly influenced by Christian political thought, is found in Albo's *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* (*Book of Roots*), toward the mid-fifteenth century. Even here the reference appears in the context of the discussion of the Platonic system.[10] The political Aristotle of Muslim and Jewish thought is not that of the *Politics* but that of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and is integrated with the Platonic tradition. This reliance of Muslim and Jewish political thought on Plato's *Republic* is not just a result of a coincidence in the transmittance of manuscripts, as happens so often in medieval culture. It follows the tendency of late-Hellenistic philosophy, which already prefers the *Republic* to the *Politics* as a basic text on politics. We have no commentary on *Politics* dating from this period; at the time there is also a tendency to integrate Platonic texts, especially the *Republic* and the *Laws*, and blur the differences between them. Muslim political philosophy inherits those writings prominent in late-Hellenistic culture and adapts them to its theological worldview. The Platonic holistic worldview places politics within its general philosophical framework, and is thus better suited to Muslim and Jewish perspectives than is Aristotle's *Politics*, and more relevant for understanding the political components of their theology.

In their great translation enterprise between the eighth and tenth centuries, the Muslims seek out and commission the translation of a great body of Greek texts into Arabic, including most of the Aristotelian corpus. Why do they not get hold of *Politics*, available in the libraries of Byzantium? Is this only a case of accidental transmission of manuscripts? For that matter, one could also ask why Christian scholars of the Latin west who brought a Greek copy of the *Politics* from Byzantium did not seek a copy of the *Republic* also. Why did the *Republic* have to wait until

the mid-fifteenth century, well into the Italian Renaissance, to be brought from Byzantium, translated into Latin, and introduced to contemporary scholars? When they translate so many texts from Arabic and Hebrew into Latin in the late Middle Ages, including much of the Averroist corpus, why do they not make the effort to translate Averroes' *Commentary on Plato's Republic* also? Why must this text too wait until it was translated (twice!) from Hebrew into Latin by Jewish scholars of the Italian Renaissance, at the request of Christian scholars?[11] Does this difference between the interests of scholastics and that of humanists go deeper than the casual transmittance of manuscripts? When Albertus Magnus commissions the translation of the *Politics* into Latin in the thirteenth century, it is for the relevance of the Aristotelian text to the political context of Christian theology. Likewise, when al-Fārābī and Averroes use the *Republic* as their basic political textbook and Maimonides follows suit, it is precisely because they all believe the Platonic text especially relevant to the political context of Muslim and Jewish political theology. Thus the difference in the textual traditions reflects the difference between the political theology of Judaism and Islam on the one hand, and of Christianity on the other.

In all three religious cultures, their holy scriptures and their respective theological interpretations precede the appearance of the particular Greek text and its concomitant influence. The text, whether it chances to find its way into their hands or is deliberately selected, serves mostly for the purpose of commentary on and on-going development of theological tenets.

The basic assumptions of Plato's *Republic* suit the theological worldview of Muslim and Jewish medieval scholars well. The principles and raison d'être of the Platonic philosophical state are easily translated into the theological terminology of the ideal Muslim imamite state or the Mosaic constitution. Plato's political point of departure was essentially philosophical. It considered the ideal state an integral part of a holistic metaphysical *Weltanschauung*, appropriate to the all-inclusive nature of Muslim and Jewish political theologies. Aristotle, however, at least in the *Politics*, is quite different. He looked at the political sphere as a political scientist rather than as a philosopher, and tends to separate the political discussion per se from any metaphysical consideration. This is why the *Politics* so appeals to medieval Christian thought, which separates the temporal from the spiritual realm. The spirit of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, however, is much more "Platonic" in essence, basing politics on a broad philosophical anthropology and offering a full theory on the supreme human good. This is why it has such a successful career in medieval Muslim and Jewish thought, in stark contrast to the *Politics*.

Platonic political philosophy, which so emphasizes the intellectual content of political existence, and hence identifies the philosopher as the perfect political leader, is extremely relevant for Muslim and Jewish political thinking. The

prophet-legislator of the Jewish and Muslim traditions can easily be identified with the Platonic philosopher-king. Plato's emphasis on the political duties of the philosopher correlates well with *halakhic* emphasis on the leadership responsibilities of the Sages. The monarchic nature of the Platonic theory of government is also more appropriate to the *halakhic* position than the more ambivalent Aristotelian position that tends toward a kind of moderate democracy.

Christianity, however, generally identifies its founder as one wholly detached from the life of political action. Moses and Muhammad may be depicted as Platonic philosopher-kings; for the understanding of the apolitical Jesus, however, this model is irrelevant. Following Augustine's *Civitas Dei*, medieval Christian political thought does not consider the possibility of actualizing the ideal community here and now. It is a matter for the world-to-come. In this world Christianity seeks no more than an attainable political community. In this sense the *Politics*, which sets practical political goals, as opposed to the ideal goals of the Platonic perfect state, suits it better. Judaism and Islam, however, pursue the possibility of the ideal community in this world. For both, the *civitas temporalis*, too, can and must be a perfect community, like the Jewish state to arise after the coming of the Messiah and the ideal Platonic state.

Thus, the difference between the political theology of Judaism and Islam, on the one hand, and Christianity on the other, cause them to produce different genres of political literature and to use different classical political texts. Significantly, however, in their political philosophy the three medieval religious traditions basically held the same philosophical position, influenced by the same classical writings, chiefly those of the "other" Aristotle of the *Metaphysics* and the *Nichomachean Ethics*. All concur that the supreme purpose of human existence is not the attainment of practical intelligence but rather theoretical intelligence – recognizing the intelligible God and loving Him.[12]

In this respect, Leo Strauss' attempt to interpret the whole body of medieval Jewish thought as Platonic political philosophy in monotheistic theological garb seems excessive. As Julius Guttmann correctly cautions, for the medieval mind as for its Greek predecessors, political philosophy is no queen of the sciences but a byproduct of the basic premises of ethics, metaphysics, and theology.[13] As the fifteenth-century Italian Jewish scholar Moses of Rieti puts it so succinctly, political philosophy is only "wisdom's little sister."[14] Al-Fārābī and Maimonides, however, following in Plato's footsteps, translate the limited theoretical knowledge of God available to humans, namely, the knowledge of His attributes of action, into a political imitation of divine activities by the philosopher-king. Thus even this originally Aristotelian definition of the final end of human existence undergoes a Platonic metamorphosis from the Aristotelian passive God who is known to the

active God of the monotheistic creeds whose attributes of action are imitated: from the sphere of theory to the sphere of praxis. Strauss' view, then, although somewhat exessive, is nevertheless not so far from the truth.

Like other branches of Jewish philosophy, political philosophy originates with Philo of Alexandria, the first scholar who endeavors to create a synthesis between the Torah and Greek philosophical teachings. As already noted, Philo portrays Moses in the image of the philosopher-king and explains the nature of the Mosaic constitution on the basis of Greek legal theory. This initial effort is not renewed until the second great encounter between Judaism and the dominant general culture. As with other branches of medieval Jewish philosophy, political philosophy is a direct outcome of the encounter between Jewish political theology and Greek political philosophy in Arabic translation. Medieval Muslim philosophy flourishes as a result of the great translation enterprise previously mentioned, which produced Arabic translations, paraphrases, and commentaries on Plato's *Republic* and the *Laws*, and on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics.* This material strongly influences the political thinking of Muslim philosophers, from al-Fārābī's *The Virtuous State* (*Medinah Fadilah*) to Averroes' *Commentary on Plato's Republic.*[15]

Jewish scholars active in the Muslim cultural environment between Bagdhad and Cordova between the tenth and twelfth centuries, from Saadia Gaon to Maimonides, are intimately acquainted with these developments. They read the Muslim paraphrases of and commentaries in al-Fārābī's *Virtuous State* and Averroes' *Commentary on Plato's Republic* and these deeply influence their approach to Jewish political theology. This state of affairs is well documented in Maimonides' *Treatise on Logic* concerning the classification of the practical sciences: "In all these matters [i.e., politics], the philosophers [i.e., Greeks] have written many books which were already translated into Arabic. The books not translated yet, however, are even more numerous."[16] There is an awareness that although many of the Greek philosophical writings on politics were not as yet translated into Arabic (Aristotle's *Politics*, for instance), others were already available. Maimonides obviously refers to the Platonic political dialogues, Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* and *Rhetoric* and the pseudo-Aristotelian *Economics*.

The writings of Maimonides and other Jewish authors of this period provide ample evidence of the influence of Greek political texts in Arabic translation, with the exeption of the *Politics*, of course. There is also much influence from Muslim political philosophy itself, like al-Fārābī's *The Virtuous State*, *On the Attainment of Happiness*, *On Political Governance*, *The Philosophy of Plato*, and *Aphorisms of the Statesman*, Ibn Bajja's (Avempace) exeptional *Governance of the Solitary*, Averroes' authoritative *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, and others.[17]

Because Platonic political philosophy accords with the basic premises of Jewish political theology, Jewish authors can and do make extensive use of these writings and interpret the Torah accordingly. The fact that the Muslim *falāsifa* refrain from phrasing their Platonic political teachings in a concrete Muslim context and prefer a more general philosophical approach[18] makes it easier for Jewish authors to adapt their teachings to Jewish political theology.

III. BEFORE MAIMONIDES

The first examples of political discussion in medieval Jewish philosophy are found in Saadia Gaon's *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (*Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot*) and Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*. Saadia bases the discussion of the purpose of the commandments (*ta'amei ha-mitzvot*) in his third chapter on the assumption that divine law corresponds to the law of reason, which he phrases in a language reminiscent of classical Stoic natural law.[19] Saadia's book ends with a detailed discussion of the thirteen "loves" the perfect individual must possess, with great emphasis on the need for a proper social and political framework in achieving the final end of human existence. It is not coincidental that Saadia identifies this perfect individual as a king, introducing the Platonic philosopher-king into Jewish thought for the first time since Philo.

Halevi's *Kuzari* can be well described as a Platonic political dialogue, in which the Khazar king is portrayed as a righteous ruler of sound intentions, seeking right action. The work may be seen within the literary genre devoted to the education of rulers from the Platonic political tradition, and later developed in the Islamic and Christian political literature of the "mirror of princes" (*speculum principum*). *Kuzari* represents one of Plato's alternatives for the establishment and maintenance of his ideal state, namely, that the existing rulers would become philosophers through education. This was his second choice: He preferred that philosophers would turn into perfect leaders, but he acknowledges the practical impossibility of this alternative and compromises. The Khazar king goes to the philosopher and then to the religious sages – Christian, Muslim, and Jew, in that order – in search of the right actions, until he finds the ideal teacher where he least expected, in the Jewish scholar. He approaches each potential master not simply as a private individual seeking the way of truth, but as a ruler in search of the true path for his community. He seeks not correct opinions proper for politically detached philosophers, but for action-guiding opinions relevant for a leader. He rejects the words of the philosopher as irrelevant not only for their content, but mainly because the philosopher, following Ibn Bajja, argues for the withdrawal of the perfect man from human society and rejects the Platonic connection between

intellectual perfection and public commitment. The Jewish scholar is preferred in part because he lays more emphasis than the others on right action.[20]

IV. MAIMONIDES: THE SYNTHESIS

The ultimate fruit of these encounters is Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, composed in the late twelfth century. Maimonides creates the full synthesis between the Platonic philosopher-king and the biblical prophet, who is identified, following al-Fārābī, as a philosopher and political leader. As in other branches of medieval Jewish philosophy, in political philosophy as well, Maimonides constitutes the apex of these developments. Consequently he also creates the terms of reference for subsequent Jewish thinkers up to early-modern times. Although there is already some treatment of political issues in the Jewish–Aristotelian tradition prior to Maimonides, notably in the last chapter of Abraham ibn Daud's *Sefer ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* (*The Exalted Faith*), Maimonides in the more philosophical sections of his halachic writings, and mainly in the *Guide*, brought Jewish political philosophizing to fruition. Maimonides' point of departure is the Aristotelian assertion (in the *Nichomachean Ethics* I.7, not *Politics*!) that the human being is a political animal by nature (*Guide* II.40, III.27). One can only survive and provide for one's essential material needs in an organized society, where labor and products are distributed according to the common good. One can also only fulfill emotional and spiritual needs and reach moral and intellectual perfection in the perfect political order. This is so first of all because with basic material needs unfulfilled one is unable to reach spiritual perfection, but also because the intellectual process itself is inherently social and provides Socratic spiritual cooperation between students and rabbis.

Although other animals also exist in a social framework, only for human beings is social cooperation indispensable, as they are the highest and therefore also the most complex organism in the hierarchy of living things. Their many essential needs and the great difference among individuals of the species, a negative aspect of human superiority, make organized social existence mandatory (*Guide* I.72, II.40). By insisting that other animals may also be social creatures by nature, Maimonides points out that human uniqueness lies not in man's political nature but rather in his intellectual capacity.[21]

The emphasis on the political nature of humanity, however, contradicts the theological premise that Adam was brought into being in a divine, secluded condition in Eden. His original nature was essentially nonpolitical. He fulfilled all his material and spiritual needs perfectly without effort, and consequently with no need for social cooperation. Such a theological attitude viewed political existence as an expression of human deterioration from original perfection, completely

contradicting the premises of Greek political philosophy that viewed political life as an essential means to elevate humanity from its primeval bestial state.

Maimonides, with most subsequent Jewish thinkers, tries to solve this contradiction by viewing the political nature of humanity not as its original but rather as an aquired nature, adapted as a result of the fall. After Adam was reduced to an almost bestial state (*Guide* I.2), only proper political organization could provide for his essential needs and elevate him again toward intellectual perfection.[22] Isaac Abrabanel alone deviates from this compromise, and urges a theocratic–utopian quest for the prepolitical, parasidical condition of man.[23]

To create and maintain the proper political organization, law is needed, with authority to implement and enforce it. A unique feature in Maimonides' presentation of the Mosaic prophecy is Moses' role as the first lawgiver, who conveyed the revealed Torah to the people of Israel (*Guide* II.39). The superiority of the Torah over any other (human) law is manifest both in its origin and its scope. Its divine origin means that the Torah will always offer sound guidance for avoiding evil and doing good. Human law is capable at best of approximating it. Furthermore, while the scope of divine law is all-inclusive and covers the material, social, and spiritual aspects of human existence, human law refers only to the (inferior) material and social spheres (*Guide* II.40, III.27–28).

In his classification, Maimonides follows the traditional twofold distinction between human and divine law. Although extremely critical of Saadia's assertion that most of the commandments are rational, and emphasizing that social laws are essentially *nomoi* based on "generally accepted opinions" (*mefursamot*), he nevertheless comes close to Saadia's position. Although Saadia, Halevi, and Maimonides all adopted the distinction between human and divine law, their theories hint at the idea of natural law. It is manifest in their assertions that one instinctively comprehends that only by social cooperation and the rule of law can one survive and provide for material as well as spiritual needs. The idea of natural law, however, would fully penetrate Jewish political philosophy only with Albo in the fifteenth century.[24]

If the Torah is a revealed divine law, then the prophet, whether as lawgiver (Moses) or one who exhorts the people and their rulers to obey the law (all other prophets), becomes a political leader. The prophet is first of all a philosopher, who knows God's attributes of action, the only divine attributes humanly knowable. Such knowledge of the attributes most remote from God's unknowable essence is not only a manifestation of human epistemological limitations but is also related to the prophet's political function.

By divine grace that cares for the well-being of all created things, the philosopher-prophet has knowledge of those attributes most relevant for the fulfillment

of his political duties. Having the knowledge, he must also practice what he has learned by attempting to imitate God through leadership of human society. Thus the governance of the state becomes a microcosmic reflection of the way God rules the universe by loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness (*Guide* I.54, III.53-54). When the whole cosmos is described in political terms as "the city of God" (*civitas Dei*), to borrow Augustine's phrase, then the earthly city should become its microscopic reflection (*Guide* III.51). Hence Maimonides presents "God" in Hebrew (*Elohim*) as an equivocal term referring primarily to every kind of ruler, king, and judge, and secondarily denoting God (*Guide* I.2). This is also why Maimonides, like Halevi before him, uses so many parables of kings to describe the relationships between humans and God (*Kuzari* I.19-24, 109; *Guide* I.46, III.51, etc.).[25]

Thus Maimonides' prophet, in contrast to the philosopher, must have a well-developed imaginative capacity. This is necessary not only to be able to experience prophetic visions but also so he can lead the masses, who are ruled by the imaginative soul. Not by chance is imagination the common denominator between the prophet and the king. With his developed rational and imaginative soul, the prophet combines the functions of the philosopher, who has a developed rational soul only, and the king, who has only a developed imaginative soul (*Guide* II.37).

Social existence, albeit limited, is a personal need of the philosopher himself. Without it he would not be able to fulfill his own material, emotional, and intellectual needs.[26] It is mainly his educational mission, however, that obligates him to engage in politics. Although the Aristotelian tradition emphasizes the theoretical knowledge of God, the Platonic–al-Fārābīan and Jewish traditions emphasize practical imitation of divine attributes. Maimonides oscillates between the philosopher's urge as a private person to isolate himself in his intellectual activities, and his duty as a "public prophet," to fullfil his educational and political mission. Like (the Socratic) Jeremiah, with whom he so identifies, Maimonides struggles as a philosopher and communal leader between Ibn Bajja's inclination toward the intellectual governance of the solitary individual, and the Platonic–al-Farābian – and very Jewish – emphasis on social involvement (*Guide* III.51, 54).

Ultimately Maimonides opts for social involvement. The *Guide* commences with the theoretical knowledge of God (I.1), ending with and climaxed by the practical *imitatio Dei* (III.54). Likewise, Maimonides' *Code*, or *Mishneh Torah*, starts with theoretical knowledge, in *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* (*Basic Principles of the Torah*), and ends with praxis in *Hilkhot Melakhim* (*Laws of Kings*). Dialectically, the very one who has reached the state where he can exist in complete intellectual isolation

is obliged to engage in political life. In Platonic terms, he who sees the light of the sun must return to the darkness of the cave to educate its ignorant dwellers and save their souls. In Maimonidean terms, he who reaches the uppermost rungs of the ladder attainable to humanity is compelled to descend "with a view to governing and teaching the people of the land" (*Guide* I.15). The Patriarchs who reached the highest possible degree of the knowledge of God nevertheless engage in material activities "to bring into being a religious community that would know and worship God" (*Guide* III.51). Likewise, Moses ascends Sinai only to descend "and communicate to the people what he had heard" (*Guide* III.22).[27]

The person charged with the daily operation of the state in the Maimonidean system is the king. Although, like most other Jewish thinkers, Maimonides' attitude toward monarchy is ambivalent from the *halakhic* as well as the philosophical point of view, he accepts monarchy as the preferred regime. He severely limits its powers, however, through the binding legal authority of the Torah and the moral authoriry of the prophets.[28]

Maimonides' messianic views are markedly naturalistic, political, and restorative. The perfect political community established by Moses and reaching its climax with the reign of Solomon, will be reestablished with the coming of the king-Messiah, son of David, who will again create a perfect, Platonic-type state in the land of Israel.[29]

V. AFTER MAIMONIDES

Maimonides' political philosophy, the issues it raises and the opinions it offers become the point of departure for all subsequent Jewish thinkers. The debate about the political functions of the philosopher-prophet are a bone of contention in future generations. Thinkers like Jacob Anatoli, Isaac Pollegar, and Yoḥanan Alemanno continue the Platonic–al-Fārābīan–Maimonidean emphasis on the prophet's political mission. Others, like Samuel ibn Tibbon, Moses Narbonne, and Joseph ibn Shem Tov, insist on his intellectual isolation.[30] Although most Jewish thinkers, albeit hesitantly, accepted limited monarchy either as the perfect regime or the lesser evil, Abrabanel stands in almost isolated opposition, insisting on the inequities of monarchy and advocating a republican theocracy. Likewise, in sharp contrast to the Maimonidean system, Abrabanel describes both humanity's original state and the messianic era in starkly antipolitical terms.[31]

In about the mid-twelfth century, the centers of Jewish culture started to shift gradually from the the Muslim to the Christian–Latin cultural environment in Christian Spain, Provence, and Italy. This process nourishes the great

Arabic-to-Hebrew translation enterprise initiated by Judah ibn Tibbon for a new public in southern Europe that does not read Arabic. The first works to be translated are the great Jewish writings, from Saadia Gaon's *Sefer Emunot ve-De'ot* (*The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*) to Maimonides' *Guide*. These are followed by the translation of Arabic versions, paraphrases of, and commentaries on Plato's political writings, and original Muslim compositions in political philosophy, such as al-Fārābī's *The Virtuous State*, significant parts of which are translated into Hebrew, twice, in the thirteenth century, once by Isaac ibn Latif in his *Sha'ar ha-Shamayyim* (*Gate of Heaven*) and again by Shem Tov ibn Falaquera in his *Sefer ha-Ma'alot* (*Book of Degrees*). Falaquera also includes in his *Reshit Ḥokhmah* (*The Beginning of Wisdom*) long paraphrases of al-Fārābī's *On the Attainment of Happiness* and his *Philosophy of Plato*. Moses ibn Tibbon translates al-Fārābī's *On Political Governance* (*Sefer ha-Hatḥalot*). There is also an anonymous translation of al-Fārābī's *Aphorisms of the Statesman*. Moses Narbonne translates and comments on Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqẓān* and Ibn Bājja's *Sefer Hanhagat ha-Mitboded* (*Governance of the Solitary*). Averroes' major political works, the *Commentary on Plato's Republic* and the *Middle Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, are translated in the early fourteenth century by Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles, and his *Middle Commentray on the Rhetoric* is translated at about the same time by Todros Todrosi. The translation of *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic* is of major importance because the Arabic original is lost, and the Hebrew translation is all that remains of Averroes' most important political writing. The Hebrew translation is recopied and paraphrased a number of times in the late Middle Ages, and during the Renaissance twice translated into Latin, in which language it has great influence.[32]

The translation enterprise created a philosophical and scientific Hebrew terminology, including, for the first time, Hebrew terms in political philosophy. In their translations from al-Fārābī and Maimonides, Samuel ibn Tibbon and his son Moses created terms such as *medini* ("political") to describe human political nature; *kibbutz medini* for "political community" or "state"; and Hebrew terms for the various kinds of regimes, as transmitted from the Platonic original by al-Fārābī, such as *medinah mekubbetzet* or *kibbutzit*, literally "an associated state," or *kibbutz ha-ḥerut*, literally "the association of the free," both of which stand for democracy, and many others. Subsequent Hebrew translators such as Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles and Todros Todrosi coin variants of these terms and others and gradually create a full Hebrew glossary of political philosophy to serve the political discussion in Jewish philosophy until modern Hebrew emerges.[33]

A typical case is the history of *nimus*, which can stand for law in general, or human law (*nimus enoshi*) and even divine law (*nimus elohi*) in particular, depending

on the context. This term comes into Hebrew from the Arabic *namus*, which is a transliteration of the Greek *nomos*. *Nimus* now joins and at times even replaces older Hebrew terms for law, such as *Torah*, *ḥoq*, and *dat*.[34]

These translations, and the new Hebrew political terminology they created, established the framework in which Jewish thinkers in southern Europe from the thirteenth century on gradually developed a body of Jewish political thought in Hebrew. Outstanding examples of this enterprise in the general theologico–philosophical literature can be found in Falaquera's *Book of Degrees*, Isaac Pollegar's *Ezer ha-Dat* (*Defence of the Law*), Joseph Albo's *Book of Roots*, Joseph ibn Shem Tov's *Kevod Elohim* (*The Dignity of God*), and Yohanan Alemanno's *Ḥai ha-ʿOlamim* (*Eternal Life*). In the literature of philosophical sermons, political discussions can be found in Jacob Anatoli's *Malmad ha-Talmidim* (*Goad of the Students*), Nissim of Gerona's *Sheteim Asar Derashot* (*Twelve Sermons*), Shem Tov ben Joseph ibn Shem Tov's *Derashot al ha-Torah* (*Sermons on the Torah*), Abraham Shalom's *Sefer Neveh Shalom* (*Abode of Peace*), and Isaac Arama's *Akedat Isaac* (*The Binding of Isaac*).[35]

Philosophical commentaries on the Bible offer an especially fertile ground for dwelling on political issues. Major but by no means isolated examples are the story of Eden and the description of the development of humankind (Genesis 2–11), Jethro's advice to Moses (Exodus 18, Deuteronomy 1), and the laws of Monarchy (Deuteronomy 17 and I Samuel 8). Some commentaries eagerly pursue the opportunity and do not hesitate to interpret the biblical text according to the most up-to-date philosophical currents and political develoments. Typical examples can be found in the commentaries of Joseph ibn Kaspi, Immanuel of Rome, and primarily Isaac Abrabanel, who enthusiastically contemplates the Bible in the light of his own times and views, almost *ad absurdum*.[36]

All these scholars base their political thinking on texts from the Muslim milieu that were based on a Platonic worldview and adapted to religious language by al-Fārābī, Averroes, and Maimonides. They continue centuries after the centers of Jewish scholarship move from the Muslim to the Christian–Latin environment. Jewish scholars are familiar with contemporary intellectual trends and the emerging scholastic philosophy has a growing influence on Jewish thought, at least from the late-thirteenth century, although it is barely felt in the field of political philosophy. Major developments in Christian political thought from the thirteenth century on, due mainly to the revolutionary impact of the translation of Aristotle's *Politics* into Latin (c. 1260), barely touched Jewish political thought.[37]

The effects of scholastic political thought can be detected, however, in the writings of late-medieval Jewish thinkers. Such influences should not be overlooked, although they are still largely uninvestigated. Albo, and others following him, insert

the scholastic triple classification of the law, mainly the term "natural law" (*lex natura*, *dat tivi'it*) into Jewish thought. In so doing they revolutionize late-medieval Jewish legal theory, until then based on a dual classification of law as divine or human.[38]

Abrabanel is well acquainted with the writings of Aquinas and other scholastic writers. He does not hesitate to quote them directly in his biblical commentary, and sometimes even prefers their opinions to those of Jewish Sages. His distinction between human government (*hanhagah enoshit*) and divine government (*hanhagah elohit*) appears influenced by the Christian distinction between temporal and spiritual authorities.[39]

There are a few translations into Hebrew of scholastic political texts, such as Aquinas' *Summa*. Another notable example is Egidius Romanus' (Giles of Rome) influential *De Regimine Principum*, anonymously translated into Hebrew in the fifteenth century as *Sefer Hanhagat ha-Melakhim* (*Book on the Governance of Kings*). The very fact that the anonymous Jewish scholar made the effort to translate so long a text demonstrates a well-grounded interest in scholastic political philosophy. There is, however, as far as we now know, no perceptible influence of this translation on Jewish political philosophy. The fact that only the original manuscript survives and we know of no copies made in subsequent generations, only reinforces this conclusion.[40]

The lack of references to Aristotle's *Politics* in late-medieval Jewish political thought aptly illustrates this state of affairs. The influence of the *Politics* penetrates Christian thought exactly at the time when Jewish culture moves from a Muslim to a Christian–Latin milieu. It could be expected that now at least, Jewish scholars would feel the powerful influence of the *Politics*. This, however, does not happen. Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles, and following him, Joseph ibn Kaspi in the fourteenth century, despite their acquaintance with contemporary trends in the surrounding Christian culture, still translate and summarize the Averroist commentaries of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Ethics*, and, following their Muslim masters, still assume that the text of the *Politics* is not yet available in the west.[41]

Meir Alguades of Castille in the early fifteenth century is the first Jewish scholar to inform us that he "saw" a copy of the *Politics*. Nonetheless he refrains from translating it because its standard, notoriously literal Latin translation was quite incomprehensible to him and he had no proper commentary on it. There are at the time several Latin commentaries of the *Politics*, by Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, and others, but Alguades apparently does not have access to them. He thus continues in the traditional path by again translating the *Ethics*, this time from the Latin, which in itself is a great novelty, as all previous translations were made from the Arabic.

From what Alguades informs us, however, he clearly has at least some knowledge of Aristotle's political philosophy and is definitely aware of the great influence *Politics* exerts on Christian political philosophy.[42]

No late-medieval or Renaissance Jewish scholar ever attempts to translate *Politics* or any of its many Latin commentaries into Hebrew, and very few ever use it. When Albo in the fifteenth and Simone Luzzatto in the seventeenth century do so, they refer mainly to Aristotle's critique of the Platonic system in the second book of the *Politics*. They prefer Aristotle's inductive and empirical approach to politics over the deductive idealistic approach of Plato's *Republic*. Both scholars, however, use the *Politics* more as a critique of the Platonic system than as an independent system in its own right. Their terms of reference are still essentially Platonic.[43]

Even Abrabanel, who is said to have made massive use of the third book of the *Politics* in his famous commentary on I Samuel 8, does not use the text directly at all. He is rather influenced by some scholastic commentators who interpreted it in accordance with their own political inclinations. Thus, Abrabanel mistakenly attributes to Aristotle's *Politics* a monarchic position he himself opposes. Were he better informed, he would surely notice that he, a professed "republican," was not far from Aristotle's real position. Like most other Jewish scholars of the late Middle Ages, Abrabanel knows the Aristotle of the *Ethics* and the *Metaphysics* well. His knowledge of the *Politics*, however, is still largely indirect and inaccurate, covered with a thick layer of scholastic misinterpretation. On the other hand, he is very familiar with Plato's *Republic* in its al-Fārābian and Averroist interpretations, and the Platonic political tradition strongly influences aspects of his political philosophy.[44]

So strong is the power of cultural traditions and of theological constraints that Jewish political thought remains attached to the *Republic* and the *Nichomachean Ethics* for a few hundred years after it moved away from the Muslim cultural milieu and into the orbit of Christian–Latin culture. Despite the enormous impact of *Politics* on late-medieval Christian political philosophy, only faint echoes penetrate Jewish thought. It continues to depend on the Platonic tradition up to the beginning of modern times. Alongside the canonical Jewish sources, al-Fārābī and Averroes, not Aquinas, continue to dominate Jewish political thought.

The full impact of scholastic thought on Jewish political philosophy remains to be investigated; however, even in the present state of our knowledge, it can be reasonably assumed that it was quite marginal. This assessment becomes even more plausible when we compare the marginal influence of scholastic political thought to the continuing influence of the Platonic–Muslim tradition on one hand, and the influence of scholastic philosophy on other areas of Jewish philosophy on the other.

That said, we cannot accept the theory presented a few decades ago by Ralph Lerner and Mushin Mahdi, who distinguish between two branches of medieval

Jewish political philosophy: one influenced by the Platonic–Muslim tradition and another by the Christian–Latin one.[45] Our conclusion is that there is but one tradition, the Platonic–Muslim one, and it continues to dominate up to the beginning of modern times. The influence of Christian–Latin thought was marginal. This state of affairs has already been explained as the result of the basic affinity between the Platonic political worldview, as interpreted by al-Fārābī and Averroes, with Jewish political theology. The Aristotelian–Christian political tendency will become relevant only with the secularization of Jewish culture in modern times.

This situation continued into the Renaissance. Jewish scholars contribute their medieval heritage to the humanist milieu. The Platonic tradition reappears now in Renaissance Italy, after the Greek text of the *Republic* is brought from Byzantium and translated into Latin in the early fifteenth century. After that the *Republic* exerts a strong influence on Renaissance political philosophy, culminating with Ficino's translation and commentary in the 1480s. This aroused interest in the Hebrew translation of the Averroist paraphrase of the *Republic* among Christian scholars. Jewish scholars twice retranslate the text into Latin for a Christian audience. The first, by Elijah del Medigo in the mid-1480s, is commissioned by Pico della Mirandola, and the second is made by Jacob Mantinus in the early sixteenth century, during which it is republished several times.[46]

Correspondingly, the Averroist text continues to dominate Jewish political thought. Now, however, it is well coordinated with the newly dominant trend in Christian political philosophy. Long sections of the Hebrew text dealing with the virtues of the philosopher-king were inserted, almost verbatim by Yohanan Alemanno into his eclectic *Ḥai ha-ʿOlamim* (*Eternal Life*).[47] This influence is also evident in del Medigo's rationalistic and antikabbalist treatise *Beḥinat ha-Dat* (*The Examination of the [Divine] Law*),[48] and in Abrabanel's biblical commentaries, composed in the late fifteenth century and the first decade of the sixteenth. Likewise, the Mantovan Rabbi Judah Messer Leon inserts long paragraphs from Todrosi's Hebrew translation of Averroes' paraphrase on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, dealing with politics and the classification of regimes, into his *Nofet Zufim* (*The Honeycomb's Flow*), a rhetorical treatise attempting to integrate medieval rhetorical tradition with the Ciceronian trends of humanism.[49]

Although these trends from the Middle Ages continue, new influences start to penetrate Jewish political thought with the advent of the Renaissance. Even some influences of Machiavelli's revolutionary political ideas find their way in, slowly and hesitantly. Machiavelli is truly a difficult influence to absorb. His assumed secularity, his fierce criticism of traditional religions (albeit Christian), and his strenuously advocated separation of politics from spiritual issues, make it extremely difficult for Jewish scholars to graft it onto their still medieval, theologically fixed

foundations. Still Abraham Portaleone in the late sixteenth century has a copy of Machiavelli's *Arte della Guerra* (*Art of War*) in his library. In the military discussion in his encyclopedic *Shiltei ha-Gibborim* (*Shields of the Mighty*), where the ancient Israelite army is described as a popular militia, a clear Machiavellian influence can be detected.[50] The same influence is manifest in Simone Luzzatto's *Discorso circa il stato degli Eberi in Venezia* (*Discourse on the Status of the Jews in Venice*) and his *Socrate*, written in the mid-seventeenth century. Here the Machiavellian key term *ragione di stato* (reason of state) appears for the first time in a Jewish writing and is used to analyze biblical history and the Mosaic constitution.

Reacting to anti-Jewish propoganda, and basing himself on Tacitus' *History*, so influential in late-Renaissance political thought, Luzzatto insists that Moses applied the principles of "reason of state" in the most perfect manner to solve political and military problems. If Tacitus, the wise politician (*statista ch'egli era*), were not hindered by his own antisemitism, he would have understood Moses' reasoning, and admired his political acumen. Here Luzzatto uses Tacitean political ideas to combat Tacitean antisemitism. The whole tradition of the *ragione di stato* is heavy with Tacitean influence, which, like Machiavelli, was republican in essence, and approaches politics from a secular and utilitarian angle.

Machiavellian and Tacitean influences force Luzzatto to deal with biblical history in a purely political context, devoid of religious overtones or moral considerations. A most apt illustration is his chilling description of Absalom's rebellion against his father David as a legitimate tactic in the struggle for political power, where all means are justified by the sucessful outcome. Moreover, he also comes close to the radical Machiavellian approach that considers religion a useful means in the service of temporal political ends. In this way Luzzatto explains to the gentile Taciteans the political raison d'être for such commandments as celebrating the weekly Sabbath and the sabbatical year, and the prohibition against eating pork.

Along with his Machiavellianism and Taciteanism, Luzzatto is also heavily influenced by the myth of the "perfect" Venetian constitution, and by the economic proto-capitalist mercantile ideas common in the political thought of his day. He also uses the most up-to-date scientific theories in physics, astronomy, and medicine to analyze political phenomena.[51]

Luzzatto is the most "modern" Jewish political thinker we have encountered thus far. Still, he can also be called the last of the medievals. For all the influence of contemporary political thought on him and others, they all still work within an essentially theological and medieval framework. No traditional Jew, however much influenced by contemporary intellectual trends, could ever reject the revealed nature of the Mosaic constitution. In this respect, prior to the onset of the Enlightenment,

Jewish political philosophy, like Jewish philosophy in general, was still essentially medieval, merely flavored but not revolutionized by Renaissance ideas.

It is Spinoza, following Luzzatto's ambivalent beginnings, who, in his *Theological-Political Treatise*, takes Jewish political philosophy out of the medieval framework. He no longer presents the Torah as the eternal divine law encompassing both temporal and spititual aspects of human life, but rather as a humanly established law, contingent in nature, and aimed at solving the temporal problems of a particular people at a particular juncture of their development.

In addition, for Spinoza, Moses is no longer a divinely motivated prophet-lawgiver, a theological analogue of the Platonic philosopher-king, but rather a shrewd Machiavellian politician who consciously exploited the mob's superstitions and their primitive fear of God to advance his own temporal political goals. By developing the myth of his divinely inspired mission and law, Moses secures the cooperation and obedience of the multitude in that formative period of the creation of the Hebrew nation. Thus Spinoza completely secularized Jewish political philosophy; indeed, although the *Theological-Political Treatise* is an inherently theological text, his later *Political Treatise* has no Jewish content at all.[52]

With Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* and Nahman Krochmal's *Moreh Nevohei ha-Zeman* (*Guide of the Perplexed of the Time*), written in the nineteenth century, there would be new attempts to create a synthesis of Jewish political theology and contemporary political philosophy. Modern Zionist literature, however, following Spinoza's lead, has attempted to complete the process of "secularizing" Jewish political philosophy.[53]

NOTES

1 Shulman 1992.
2 H. Wolfson 1947, chap. 13.
3 Melamed 1997; Melamed 2003, chap. 1; Melamed 2005. On the theory of the three Crowns see S. Cohen 1984.
4 E. I. J. Rosenthal 1966; Melamed 1997, pp. 418; Melamed 2005, pp. 45–6.
5 Lerner 1963, p. 181; Melamed 2005, pp. 34–6.
6 Melamed 1997; Lorberbaum 2003.
7 Klibansky 1981.
8 Barker 1964, p. 445.
9 E. I. J. Rosenthal 1968.
10 On the reception of the *Politics* in medieval Christian thought see Dundabin 1982; in Muslim thought see Pines 1975; in Jewish thought see Melamed 1992.
11 Melamed 1995; Melamed 2003, chap. 1.
12 Lerner and Mahdi 1963, the introduction; Melamed 2003, chap. 1.
13 Strauss 1987; Guttmann 1975; Melamed 2005.
14 Melamed 2005, p. 56.

15 E.I.J. Rosenthal 1968; Mahdi 2001.
16 Maimonides, *Treatise on Logic* 14:7.
17 See bibliographical details in Melamed 1997, nn. 18, 20. and recently also Mahdi 2001.
18 Berman 1974, p. 162.
19 Altmann 1944; Fox 1975; Melamed 1986.
20 Strauss 1952, pp. 95–141; Melamed 2003, chap. 1.
21 On Maimonides' political philosophy in general, see Altmann 1972; Berman 1959, 1961, 1969, 1974, 1980, 1981; Blidstein, 1983; Frank 1985; Galston 1978, 1978-9; S. Harvey 1991; W. Harvey 1980a; Kellner 1994c; Kraemer 1979, 1984, 2001; Kreisel 1999, 2005; Lerner 1963, 1991; Melamed 1994a, 2003; Pines 1979a; E.I.J. Rosenthal 1935; Strauss 1952, 1953, 1987. On the debate about man's political versus solitary existence in Maimonides' thought see Kreisel 1999; Lerner 1991; Melamed 1994.
22 Berman 1980; Klein-Breslavy 1986.
23 Baer 1937; Netanyahu 1972; Strauss 1937.
24 For Saadia's theory of law see n. 19; for Halevi's see Strauss 1952; for Albo see Lerner 1964; Melamed 1985b, 1986. There is considerable debate concerning Maimonides' view about natural law, see Fox 1972; Hyman 1980; Melamed 1986 with additional bibliography.
25 Berman 1959, 1961, 1974, 1981; Galston 1978; Melamed 1985a, 1998, 2003, chap. 3; Pines 1979; Strauss 1936, 1987.
26 Melamed 1994a, 2003, chap. 3.
27 For the political duties of the philosopher-prophet, see n. 25. For Ibn Bajja's influence on Maimonides, see Berman 1959. For the parable of Jacob's dream, see Klein-Breslavi 1988; Melamed 2003, chap. 3.
28 For Maimonides' attitude toward monarchy, see Blidstein 1983. On the attitude toward monarchy in general, see Blidstein 1982-3; Melamed 2003, chap. 1.
29 Blidstein 1983; Funkenstein 1977; Kraemer 1984; Ravitzky 1991.
30 Hayoun 1989; Melamed 2003, chap. 3.3.
31 Baer 1937; Netanyahu 1972, 2.3-4; Smoler and Auerbach 1972; Srauss 1937.
32 Generally on the translation enterprise, see S. Harvey 2003. For Falaquera see Jospe 1988, 3.5; for Narbonne and Ibn Bajja see Hayoun 1989. For the translations of Averroes see Berman 1967, 1978, 1988; for the Latin translations of Averroes' commentary from the Hebrew see n. 46. On the whole process see Melamed 2003.
33 Melamed 1993a, 1997.
34 See n. 4 and Kraemer 2001.
35 All these texts except Alemanno's have been published already. For Falaquera's political thought, see Jospe 1988, 3.5; for Shalom, Tirosh-Rothschild 1990; on the political discussions of all these thinkers see in detail in Melamed 2003.
36 Melamed 1985b, 1990; Smoler and Auerbach 1972.
37 For scholastic influences on Jewish philosophy, see Pines 1967; for the influence of *Politics* on Christian political philosophy see Dundabin 1982.
38 See n. 24.
39 Melamed 1990; Netanyahu 1972, 2.3.
40 Melamed 1994b.
41 Berman 1967; Melamed 1992.
42 Berman 1988; Melamed 1992.
43 Melamed 1992.
44 Baer 1937; Melamed 1992, 1993b; Netanyahu 1972, 2.3.
45 Lerner and Mahdi 1963, introduction; Melamed 1992.

46 On the Platonic tradition in the Renaissance see Hankins 1991. On the Platonic tradition in Renaissance Jewish political thought see Melamed 1995.
47 Melamed 1988b; Melamed 2003, chap. 6.
48 Melamed 1995.
49 Melamed 1978.
50 Melamed 1997 n. 56; Netanyahu 1972, 2.3.
51 Melamed 1983; Melamed 1984; Melamed 2003, chap. 9; Septimus 1987; Ravid 1978. For the treatment of the ancient Hebrew leaders by Machiavelli, see Melamed 2003, chap. 7.
52 Melamed 2003, chap. 9; Rosen 1969; Septimus 1987; Strauss 1952; Yerushalmi 1983.
53 For Mendelsshon's political thought see Altmann 1980; Rotenstreich 1953. For Krochmal see Harris 1991; Avineri 1982.

23

DIVINE LAW AND HUMAN PRACTICES

DANIEL H. FRANK

One may think of law and laws, whether divine or human, from the standpoint of origins. From this vantage point the focus of the discussion might be on God's imprimatur and commanding voice, or it might be on a study of human nature and the need for some restraint on it. The Sinaitic revelation or Hobbes' discussion in the early chapters of *Leviathan* should handily serve as clear examples of discussions of law whose primary focus is on the origins and starting points of law, its foundations. Such "genetic" discussions of the origins of law, with its apparent agenda to glorify the divine (monarchy) and degrade the (merely) human, is by no means the sum of the kind of discussion one might have about the nature of law and laws. In fact, in the tradition of legal speculation that will be the focus of this chapter, the Jewish philosophical tradition, one finds that "genetic" discussions of the origins of law are no more prominent than discussions focusing, teleologically, on the end or goal of the law. Divine law is divine not only because it was given by God, but also because it leads one to God. Human law is what it is not only because it arises from human nature, but also because it serves necessary sociopolitical and communal purposes.

It is important to distinguish, at least conceptually, the "genetic" and the "teleological" discussions of law, lest one imagine that in the monotheistic religious traditions, including of course Judaism, authorship of the law and its supposed deontic function exhausts what can be said. This is far from the case. In fact, it will be seen that Jewish philosophical discussions on the nature and purpose of law focus far more on the reasons and purposes for law and laws. It is vital to remember the simple fact that law is *for* human beings and their individual and collective well-being. To understand law as commandment, to translate *mitzvot* as "commandment," leads one in the wrong direction, for it too easily leads one to think in rather nonconsequentialist ways. The laws, divine or human, have reasons and purposes and help human beings achieve their goals. If one insists on understanding laws as commandments, commanded by God or the political authority, then one should at least understand such commands as subserving a demonstrable purpose and just the modality by which the goal is reached. One may be commanded or may be reasoned with, but both strategies subserve goals desired. In this

way one may perhaps begin to see that from the philosophical point of view the Nike-inspired motto – "Just do it" – has little purchase.

Mention has just been made of a "philosophical point of view." From this vantage point one sees in Jewish philosophical thought from Saadia on, from its very earliest stages, a penchant for *ta'amei ha-mitzvot*, speculation about the reasons for the law. The divine law, the commandments, are themselves as much to be studied as followed. Indeed, study of them, reflection on their meaning and purpose, heightens obedience, as one comes to see gradually the ways whereby they serve as vehicles by which God helps humankind reach its various goals. There is little of a fideistic attitude in such legal–philosophical discussions. Indeed, *emunah* (belief) is to be understood in this context as *reasoned* belief, attendant on argument. Only when the Jewish philosophical tradition ceases to be influenced in powerful ways by the Greco–Arabic tradition in the later medieval period does *emunah* begin to lose its argumentative and speculative overtones, taking on instead Latin-inspired senses of "trust" and "faith." Jewish dogmatics, the listing of cardinal principles that encapsulate Judaism, found from Maimonides on, needs to be understood aright. The principles are not presented to be taken on faith, without speculation. Rather, they are the demonstrable conclusions of (suppressed) arguments, understandable as such by those with the necessary rational acumen.[1]

This last point should be emphasized. Rational speculation into the very foundations of the law is an activity fraught with grave dangers. If undertaken by those without the requisite preliminary training in logic, language, cosmology, and metaphysics, the end result of inquiry into the foundations of the law and its ultimate purpose could be antinomianism. In failing to find reasons for the law, one may well conclude that there are none, and hence no reason to follow the law. In such cases, philosophers as manifestly different as Maimonides and Spinoza offer a political solution, grounded in biology, to counter the antinomian possibilities noted. They make appeal to a *difference*, a difference grounded in nature, between types of human being. Such a vertical ordering of humanity is perhaps less surprising in the premodern Maimonides than in Spinoza, but both share the fear that the majority of the political community, led by vain imaginings, is ill equipped to engage in the kind of abstract study of law at its deepest level.

A variety of solutions are on offer by those in the philosophical tradition. All are political solutions to a biological fact. A "modern" solution, offered by Spinoza, is to remove religious speculation from the political arena. This done, all are enabled to speculate on religious matters without danger to themselves, or others. In the medieval period, characterized by an all-encompassing religious framework, religion was not so easily sidelined. Instead, grave warnings are issued about the

speculative incapacities of the majority, and a variety of linguistic and semantic periphrases cater to the differing needs of the community as a whole. Throughout the medieval period, there is considerable discussion about the ultimate goal of human life, the *summum bonum* to which the law leads. Human law is distinguished from divine law, and the goals of the latter differ markedly from those of the former, as spiritual goals differ from mundane ones. For the Jewish philosophers of the medieval period, especially those writing in Arabic and influenced by the Greco–Arabic tradition, the solution to the aforementioned theological–political problem, bequeathed to them by Plato and al-Fārābī, is to understand the law as sufficiently porous, and multivalent, to be able to provide a fair passage for all. For medieval philosophers such as Maimonides, *all* members of the community have a share in the world-to-come, so long as they at least live in accord with the law. Living in accord with the law falls short of understanding its foundations, but this is the price to be paid for a community marked as a religious one. In this sense, then, modernity differs from its medieval counterpart: The former allows for freedom of thought by making such speculation relatively harmless, whereas the latter constrains such speculative freedom in the name of communal stability. Note that what has not changed is the deep awareness that the intellectual capacities of human beings are markedly different, and that *this* cannot be overlooked.

Enough is now out on the table to take a more fine-grained view of law, divine and human, in Jewish philosophy. The focus will be on Maimonides and Spinoza, unarguably the two most influential thinkers in the Jewish philosophical tradition. Seemingly poles apart on just about every philosophical and theological issue, from biblical hermeneutics to prophetology to the very possibility of miracles, it will be seen that they share much in common, a fine irony given Spinoza's critique of the rabbinic tradition. Finally, it is this critical stance toward tradition that positions Spinoza as *in* the tradition, at least for present purposes.

1. MAIMONDES ON THE LAW

Maimonides (ca. 1138–1204) was a preeminent legal scholar who commented on the Mishnah and later codified it in a highly influential way. His codification of the law, the *Mishneh Torah*, commences in its first book (*Sefer ha-Maddah*) with what has been aptly described as a "philosophical–theological prolegomenon."[2] Why? Again, why should a law code, a practical work for the community, contain, much less commence with, basic principles that underlie Judaism and Jewish law? The connection between philosophy and law is absolutely crucial for Maimonides. He is clearly suggesting that study as well as practice of the law is diminished by failing

to reflect on its foundations. The *Mishneh Torah*, thus, turns out to be more than a manual for legal adjudication, helping to sort out tough decisions. It is that of course, but the extralegal presumption underlying the foundational prolegomenon is that human beings should strive to transcend mere obedience to the law.[3] They should come to comprehend the law and its trajectory. In so doing, Maimonides points to an ideal of religious obedience and intellectual perfection, with the latter undergirding and providing motivational force for the former.

The next two parts of the *Sefer ha-Maddah* well reveal the connection just noted. *Hilkhot De'ot* (*On Moral Dispositions*) and *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* (*On the Study of Torah*) suggest at least by the very order of their presentation that moral dispositions (Aristotelian character traits), grounded in human nature and established through practice, are amplified through as much study of Torah as possible. In addressing an analogous problem in Aristotle about the role ethical *theorizing* plays in the development of a virtuous character in the young, Jonathan Lear writes, "The lectures [*Nicomachean Ethics*] are intended to help them to develop a self-conscious and coherent ethical outlook: to reinforce reflectively the lives they are already inclined to lead. Of course, the transition from unreflectively living a virtuous life to understanding the virtues and the life one is living is itself of practical value. For this self-understanding helps to constitute the good life . . . It is a reflective endorsement [of it] . . . So one's understanding of the ethical life reinforces ones motivation to live it."[4] Reflection joins hands here with practice, and the attainment of human moral perfection is advanced by an understanding that has motivational force. Maimonides' Aristotelian sensibility is apparent here in his linking the development of a moral disposition with the study of Torah.[5] Important to remember is that for Maimonides, "Torah" has a very broad sense. Although we may be inclined to identify Torah with a set of canonical religious texts, Maimonides has a much broader construal. He literally identifies physics and metaphysics with some classical rabbinic teachings.[6] To be sure, the grounding of the virtues in physics and metaphysics is rather more reminiscent of some post-Aristotelian thinkers of the Hellenistic period, and of Spinoza as well, but the general point about the (practical) importance of going beyond mere obedience and of "endorsing" the law and a life lived by it by reflecting on it stands firm.

Just as the *Mishneh Torah* adorns itself with extralegal presumptions, so the purpose of Maimonides' great philosophical *magnum opus*, *Guide of the Perplexed*, is "the science of the law in its true sense."[7] Perhaps Maimonides presents philosophy in the guise of law and traditional biblical commentary to cloak the radicality of some of his philosophical views, but better I think to believe that he is deeply committed to the foundational "philosophicality" of the tradition and that reflection

on the reasons for the law will allow one to come to see that the law supports supramundane ends. Sometimes one is presented with a view of Maimonides that is positively schizophrenic: Maimonides the legal scholar, on the one side, and Maimonides the philosopher, on the other.[8] Nothing could be farther from the truth. From beginning to end, Maimonides is committed to the foundational "philosophicality" of the tradition, the scriptural tradition. Woven into the fabric of the law is science, metaphysics, cosmology, and philosophical psychology, as well as practical philosophical issues in law, politics, and ethics. All this is available for a few, and for the rest the deepest secrets and meaning of the law are perforce hidden. For the unphilosophically inclined, the law provides a necessary constraint on their desires, while also calibrating the possibilities for communal interaction. For the few who are prepared both temperamentally and more importantly educationally, the law is not just followed but able to be studied, however studied not merely in a theoretical way. Study heightens motivation, and Maimonides is very clear at the beginning of the *Guide*, that the perplexity he is out to remove is one that will (re)position the student squarely back in the religious community, from which for awhile he was alienated. Communal sensibility is heightened by coming to see the "sense" of the tradition and its norms. I suppose it is not unlike the rekindled pride in tradition consequent on learning a bit of history, one's "roots."

The law, thus, for Maimonides caters to different sorts of human being. As noted, we await modernity for a more "horizontal" understanding of humankind, more egalitarian in some basic ways. For all that Maimonides says about the incapacity of human beings to understand the divine, as a result of which his celebrated "negative theology" takes shape, he is still deeply committed to a (Greek-inspired) aristocracy of mental capacities. Indeed, his entire discussion of prophecy and the *summum bonum* is hardly to be understood without noting the Greco–Arabic background of it, and ultimately its roots in the Platonic notion of the philosopher-ruler.[9]

II. A PHILOSOPHICAL–ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASIDE

Maimonides may be squarely placed in the Greco–Arabic philosophical tradition for a host of reasons.[10] At a schematic level consider the very order of the presentation of philosophical topics in the *Guide*. Logic and language commence, followed by cosmology and physics and philosophical psychology (prophecy), followed by metaphysics (providence), and then the practical sciences (law and morals and politics). The ordering of topics bears comparison with the (edited) Aristotelian corpus, and perhaps surprisingly, with the Hellenistic *cursus studiorum*, which undergirds achievement of the *summum bonum* by prior study of physics. The key to

salvation is to understand at a deep level the nature of reality and the language we use to describe it. The sacred texts stand for Maimonides as starting points, just as *ta endoxa* stand as starting points for Aristotle. Maimonides commences with prima facie puzzles and rabbinic disagreements, and over the course of the *Guide* overcomes the conundra, much as Aristotle generates puzzles out of the welter of opposing views on a topic, and then proceeds to overcome them.

Important for present purposes is that Maimonides has a view of human nature that seems indebted as much to Plato (and al-Fārābī) as to Aristotle, and a discussion of his (Maimonides') brief with Plato will be helpful in more precisely understanding the role that law plays in his program of reform. In this regard, let us turn now to Maimonides' celebrated discussion of idolatry in the *Mishneh Torah*, in *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah*, with a view both to seeing its philosophical forebears and, more importantly, its connectedness to the role of law in the development of humankind. First, however, we must detour through some familiar terrain.

"Idolatry" is derived from the Greek *eidolon*. An *eidolon* is an image or a likeness and stands opposed to that of which the image is an image, namely the "real" or the "genuine." For Plato, the sensible world is an image, a copy (an *eikon*) of a suprasensible reality (*Timaeus* 29b). This metaphysical claim has for Plato an immediate epistemological significance. As the image is not real or genuine, it cannot be a reliable guide to the truth or reality of what is (*Timaeus* 29c; cf. *Republic* 510a8–10); the image cannot provide the would-be knower with the certainty and knowledge that he desires. Given these considerations, the claim of "the lovers of sounds and sights" (*Republic* 476b), those who take the sensible world to be real, that they possess knowledge could not be more mistaken. Because the objects of their cognition are in fact images (mere appearances), the epistemic state of the lover of sights and sounds cannot be knowledge. Again, the lovers of sights and sounds' confusion of appearance and reality entails an analogous epistemic muddle between belief and knowledge. The love of appearances entails the lack of knowledge.

I believe that much of what Plato says here about knowledge and sense perception/belief, and between the philosopher and the counterfeit philosopher (the lover and sights and sounds), bears comparison with what Maimonides teaches us about monotheism and idolatry in the formative (pre-Sinaitic) stages of Judaism and in subsequent human history. Furthermore, these very comparisons will finally show us the role, the crucial role, that law plays in human development, according to Maimonides.

The similarities I am hinting at between Plato and Maimonides may not at first glance seem perspicuous, mainly for the reason that the contexts in which Plato and Maimonides offer their respective discussions of philosophy versus the "love of

appearances" and monotheism versus idolatrous worship seem so different. Plato's famous discussion is nested in his brief for the necessity of a philosopher becoming ruler, if ever the current political disorder is to be remedied. Maimonides' discussion of idolatry comes in the *Sefer ha-Maddah*, the first book of the *Mishneh Torah*. Yet Maimonides presents Abraham, the paradigmatic monotheist, as a philosopher; furthermore, Abraham is diametrically opposed to the idolaters, those who take sensible images to be real and efficacious. Both Plato and Maimonides share a belief in the supremacy of philosophy and philosophical wisdom over (mere) belief based on sense perception. Philosophy *alone* can lead one to the highest truths and to an awareness of something superior and irreducible to the sensible and the mundane. Although Maimonides does not denigrate (or deny the reality of) the sensible world, he does share with Plato the view that attachment to the mundane to the point of taking the sensible world to be the sum total of what there is is odious. Although Maimonides does not share with Plato a "degrees of reality" ontology, his epistemology (his arguments on behalf of Abrahamic monotheism) does bear comparison with Plato's.

The passage in Plato's corpus that is most significant in the present context is the end of *Republic* 5. The passage has received much commentary and the present discussion will just highlight what is necessary for present purposes. Plato thinks that, given current practice, there shall never be an end to political strife (473c-d). Power-mad people, ignorant of what is truly to be valued, control the leadership of states, and on account of this sorry situation Socrates puts forth the startling claim that philosophers must become kings and kings philosophers (473d). Until philosophy, the love of wisdom, and political power coalesce, humankind shall never escape the constant dissension that attends political life.

This surprising Socratic claim that political stability requires a marriage of philosophy and political power necessitates clarification. Who are the philosophers who should serve as leaders (474b)? What is philosophy and who are the lovers of wisdom? As with lovers of any sort, the philosophers' passion is indiscriminate, not selective but wide-ranging (474b). Are the philosophers then to be identified with those "lovers of sights and sounds" who take such great delight in learning that they rush about to every festival and show, "although they never willingly attend a serious discussion" (475d)? Socrates of course denies that the lovers of sights and sounds are true philosophers, but he admits that they do resemble them (475e). The lovers of sights and sounds' passion for learning, indeed the objects of their desire (beautiful sights and sounds), resembles the philosophers' passion for truth and the objects of their wisdom (the Forms), but for Socrates resemblance falls short of identity.

This preliminary discussion leads us to the threshold of some standard Platonic doctrine. Indeed, the immediately following discussion is a presentation of canonical Platonism. Despite appearances, the lovers of sights and sounds must be distinguished from the lovers of wisdom. The former are unaware of the existence of anything other than what they perceive. This incapacity leads Socrates in a memorable image to liken the lover of sights and sounds to one dreaming (476c). Like the dreamer, the lover of sights and sounds confuses appearance and reality. He takes what he perceives to be beautiful (what appears to him to be beautiful) to be what beauty is. Contrarily, the philosopher, and *only* the philosopher, is able (unlike the dreamer) to distinguish appearance and reality. Unlike the lover of sights and sounds, the philosopher countenances the existence of something beyond sensible beautifuls, beyond "apparent" beautifuls. He is aware of both sensible (ephemeral) beautifuls *and* an eternal, immutable beauty, and thus he never confuses appearance and reality (the apparent with the real beauty). It is no surprise that Socrates closes his "dream" analogy by asserting that the philosopher is awake relative to the dream-like slumber of the lover of sights and sounds (476d).

It is clear that this portion of argument against the counterfeit philosopher will convince the confirmed Platonist of the superiority of philosophy over the activity of the counterfeit philosopher. The argument depends on explicit reference to Platonic Forms (Beauty itself, etc.). Will it convince the nonbelievers, the lovers of sights and sounds? Because the latter do not countenance the existence of any suprasensible realities, they will not think that they are lacking in knowledge in any regard; after all, they think that what is perceived is all there is. As a result of this, Socrates offers (from 476d ff.) an ad hominem argument designed to prove to the nonbeliever (in Forms) that his purported knowledge is spurious.

The argument turns on forcing the lover of sights and sounds to see that the objects he takes to be real, namely beautiful sights and sounds and, generally, the contents of the empirical world (including "the many conventional opinions of the majority about beauty" [479d]), no more are what they purport to be than are not (479b). For example, the (beautiful) color that accounts for the beauty of a tree, green, will equally well account for the ugliness of someone's hair color. Again, my shortness relative to Wilt Chamberlain, that is, the size that accounts for my being short relative to Wilt Chamberlain, accounts for my being tall relative to Tom Thumb. In general, then, the argument that Socrates offers to the lovers of sights and sounds (and without reference to objects whose existence *they* would deny) forces them to see that no sensible sample is what it purports to be without qualification, always and invariably. For this reason no sensible sample (including "the many conventional opinions of the majority") can serve as an object of knowledge, an

object that provides the stability and certainty requisite for the would-be knower. In sum, the lover of sights and sounds cannot possess knowledge, given his ontic commitment to the reality and genuineness of the objects of sense perception. The lover of sights and sounds is indeed a counterfeit philosopher, and although he may be angry when informed by Socrates that his purported wisdom is spurious, Socrates has offered argument to show him his folly (479e).

Contrarily, the true philosopher is one who is able to transcend the mundane. He is aware of the existence of a reality nonidentical and irreducible to the perceptible. Furthermore, indeed correlative to this awareness of the suprasensible is his anticonventionalism, his distrust of the "the many conventional opinions of the majority." Like the historical Socrates, the Platonic philosopher goes his own way, refusing to follow the common; in so doing he transcends the mundane and achieves true wisdom. Unlike the lover of sights and sounds who takes as real the perceptible, the philosopher realizes that the vagaries and contingencies of the sensible world eliminate the candidacy of any and all perceptibles to be objects of knowledge (510a). Perceptible sizes and shapes, colors and sounds are all context dependent, mutable, and thus only an entity utterly unqualified by any context, utterly autonomous and self-sufficient, can qualify as an object of knowledge. For Plato, such objects are suprasensible Forms, entities one in nature and immutable. Given the nature of the objects that the philosopher takes as real, genuine, and of utmost value, he possesses knowledge, not mere belief (479e).

Now let us ask, what does Plato's distinction between the philosopher and the lover of sights and sounds, between knowledge and sense perception/belief, and finally between the world of appearances and the suprasensible realm of Forms have to do with idolatry? I think that what Plato says about the false wisdom of the lovers of sights and sounds, both the state of mind itself and its objects, is commensurate with that worship of idols, which is the issue at hand. Although Maimonides does not think of the sensible (created) world as mere appearance, he certainly does disparage that state of mind, idolatry, that confuses the sensible with the divine, and at a later stage, takes the sensible and the mundane to be the sum total of reality. Again, whereas Maimonides would deny that the sensible world is a copy of some suprasensible reality, he certainly agrees with Plato that being fixated upon (worshipping) idols, sensible objects whether natural or artificial, is folly. Furthermore, although the ontic status of the material world differs for the two philosophers, both are agreed that the material world does not exist causa sui (*Timaeus* 28b-c, *Guide* II.13, 25). To think otherwise is to confuse cause and effect, Creator and created. For Plato, the nonphilosopher's belief in the independent reality of what are mere appearances, his disbelief in the reality of any suprasensible

being, immediately entails that he possesses but a mere *appearance* of truth (*Republic* 476c). Contrarily, the philosopher, who countenances the existence of Forms, independent existents, possesses no mere appearance of truth, but true wisdom. As will be seen, Maimonides too juxtaposes the philosopher (Abraham, as will be seen) and the lover of appearances, the idolater, and like Plato, only the philosopher possesses knowledge about the true cause of what exists.

The most extended Maimonidean discussion of idolatry is to be found in *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah*. For present purposes, the first chapter is especially noteworthy, and we will do well to have it before us. Maimonides' discussion of idolatry in *Avodah Zarah* 1.1-3 is presented in the context of the history of religion, more precisely the history of the development of religious consciousness from idolatry to monotheism. The timeframe is from Enosh to Abraham and thence, briefly, to Moses. Three stages of degeneration from Adam's initial monotheism (cf. *Guide* I.2) are delineated. (1) In the time of Enosh (two generations after Adam) humankind fell into error by assuming that because God was the Creator of the heavens, it was God's wish that humankind worship the (divine) creation. Such worship of the divine creation, moreover, was not disinterested; it was proffered with a view to currying God's favor (*Avodah Zarah* 1.1.10). Thus, it was on the basis of this "misreading" of God's intention as well as their own greed that humans began to erect temples to the stars and to sacrifice to them. According to Maimonides, this was the root of idolatry, but it was not yet idolatry, for, as Maimonides explicitly asserts, at this initial stage humans did not imagine that the particular star that was worshipped was identical to God. Humankind did *not* imagine that there is no god other than the worshipped star. The error of humankind at this stage, their "idolatry," was compatible with a belief in one God, the God of creation. Yet this latter was hardly monotheism inasmuch as worship was not offered to God *alone*.

The situation worsened, however. (2) In time, what earlier had been worship of the creation of God, the heavens, became worship of a manmade (not divine) image. The cause of the degeneration was the rise of false prophets who declared that God had commanded them to create figures (idols; *tzurot*) of this or that star and to announce to the community that such figures possessed the power to benefit and to harm. These false prophets convinced humankind almost without exception, and thus idols were created, placed in religious shrines and on mountain tops, and began to be worshipped as beings possessing powers formerly believed possessed by God itself. We should note the major shift here from the first stage previously outlined. Although humans wished to win God's favor, the major focus in the first stage had been on an *honest* human mistake – the thought that God wished humans to worship its creation. As noted, this error was compatible with belief in

one God. Humans then worshipped the heavens knowing clearly that the heavens were a divine creation. There was absolutely no confusion between Creator and created. Now in the next, second stage dishonesty is manifest in the form of false prophets ("imposters," *kozvim* at *Avodah Zarah* 1.2.17). As a corollary, humankind's stupidity in believing such prophets is highlighted. Maimonides more than hints that humankind's wisdom wanes as it moves farther from God. Now humans have begun to worship an idol, a manmade image of the divine creation; no longer do humans worship a divine creation, much less the Creator itself, but rather a human artifact.

This was not the end of the matter. The situation worsened still more. (3) In time, and for a long time, until Abraham, the bond between humankind and God was utterly severed. From the first to the second stage we noted that humans had ceased to worship the heavens, a divine creation. False prophets had arisen and convincingly urged humans to put their trust in idols of their own making, images of the divine creation. Now in the third and final stage of degeneration such worship bears (evil) fruit. Any sense humanity had of God and its creation is completely destroyed. Human beings have become utterly secular and mundane: "All the common people and the women and children knew only (*'ella*) the figure of wood and stone and the temple edifice in which they had, from their childhood, been trained to prostrate themselves to the figure, worship it, and swear by its name. Even their wise men, such as priests and men of similar standing, also fancied that there was no other god but the stars and spheres, for whose sake and in whose similitude these figures had been made. The Creator of the universe was known to none, and recognized by none save a few solitary individuals, such as Enosh, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, and Eber. The world moved on in this fashion until . . . Abraham" (*Avodah Zarah* 1.2).

We have in this final stage of degeneration reached the nadir of religious consciousness, according to Maimonides. Humankind no longer recognizes God as the Creator and sustainer of the world. Even the wise no longer view the heavens as the creation of God; now the stars are identical to gods. The claim here is a very strong one; an identity is asserted: stars = gods. God is materialized, and with this materialization humankind becomes ipso facto idolatrous.

We can begin to see comparisons with Plato. Humanity's religious consciousness in this third and final stage of degeneration bears similarity with the state of mind of the lovers of sights and sounds. Like the latter, the idolater has no awareness whatsoever of the being of what cannot be perceived. The idolater takes the appearances, what appears to him, to be all that there is. Such a one could hardly agree with Maimonides that "[t]he basic principle of all basic principles and the

pillar of all sciences is to realize that there is a First Being who brought every existing thing into being" (*Mishneh Torah*, *Yesodei ha-Torah* 1.1). Like the counterfeit philosopher, the idolater is mired in the ephemeral realm of appearance.

Then came Abraham, "the pillar of the world" (*'ammudo shel 'olam*). Maimonides presents Abraham, the paradigmatic monotheist, not as the knight of faith, but as a philosopher, skeptical of the regnant norms. Unlike Moses, who exhorted the Israelites by divine commandment – a contrast of importance to which we shall return – "Abraham taught the people and explained to them by means of speculative proofs that the world has but one deity, that he has created all the things that are other than himself, and that none of the [figures] and no created thing in general ought to be worshipped" (*Guide* II.39). Abraham stands to the people of his day, the idolaters, as the Platonic philosopher (Socrates?) stands to the lovers of sights and sounds.

Abraham lived in Ur amongst idolaters, those who worshipped the heavens or worse, figures of the heavens as god(s). His parents and even Abraham himself (for a while) were idolaters, but as Maimonides says "[Abraham's] mind was busily working and reflecting until he had attained the way of truth, apprehended the correct line of thought, and knew that there is one God, that he guides the celestial sphere and created everything, and that among all that exists, there is no god besides him. He realized that men everywhere were in error, and that what had occasioned their error was that they worshipped the stars and the images [of the stars], so that the truth perished from their minds" (*Avodah Zarah* 1.3). Having come to these conclusions, Abraham smashed the idols (the images of the stars) and began to instruct the idolaters of the true cause of the universe and the true objects of worship. (Like Socrates, Abraham suffered for his attempt to instruct the masses, for in "prevailing over the idolaters with his [philosophical] arguments, the king sought to slay him. He was miraculously saved and emigrated to Haran" [*Avodah Zarah* 1.3; cf. *Guide* III.29]).

It is important to note again that according to Maimonides, Abraham was a philosopher, a speculative thinker, and thus rational argument, not (Mosaic) exhortation (on God's behalf), was the requisite mode of persuasion. This fact casts the entire historical picture offered by Maimonides of the formative, pre-Sinaitic period of Judaism in a light reminiscent of Plato. For Plato, the philosopher is the one responsible for leading the masses out of the darkness of the "cave." The many cave dwellers are "like us" (*Republic* 515a); like the mass of humankind, they confuse appearance and reality, and complacently, unreflectively, accept whatever opinion is currently in fashion. They take the objects of their immediate perception to be the sum of what there is. They have no inkling of the existence of a reality other

than the mundane, and, as we have seen, the result of this ontic commitment is that knowledge is an impossibility. Abraham stands to the idolaters of his day as the Platonic philosopher stands to the cave dwellers. The same intellectual elitism (and anticonventionalism) is apparent in both philosophers. Furthermore, Plato and Maimonides agree that the source of the nonphilosopher's, the idolater's error is the "worshipping" of the perceptible, the "believing" that the object of sense perception is all that there is. Finally, we should note that the "object" about which the philosopher, Platonic or Maimonidean, attempts to instruct the masses is importantly similar. A comparison of the nature of the Platonic form with the divine Creator of whom Maimonides speaks is revealing. In his "introduction" to *Pereq Ḥeleq* (*Sanhedrin*, chapter 10) Maimonides, in the course of presenting the principles, the foundations of Jewish faith, characterizes God, the ultimate cause of all, as one and indivisible (second principle), incorporeal (third principle), and eternal (fourth principle); as a result of these attributes, God, and it alone, is to be worshipped and obeyed (fifth principle). In sum, God's nature provides the ground for worship, for monotheism. Platonic Forms too are incomposite, invariant, indissoluble, divine, and immortal (*Phaedo* 80b); as a result of these attributes, the Form alone is a fit object of knowledge. As may be seen, analogous to the common nature shared by the Maimonidean divine Creator and the Platonic Form is the epistemology shared by Abraham and the Platonic philosopher: Both Abrahamic monotheism and Platonic philosophical knowledge stand opposed to the unreflective beliefs of the masses and depend on the nature of the suprasensible divine.

Let us grant the similarities noted previously. Nevertheless, differences remain. I mention two, one metaphysical, the other an important comment on the psychological state of the mass of humankind, which has important legal ramifications. First, then, although the Platonic Form and the divine Creator of whom Maimonides speaks share a number of attributes in common, as we have seen, the sensible realm that stands opposed to the eternal is viewed quite differently by Plato and by Maimonides. The difference may be captured by noting that Maimonides never suggests that this material world is a copy or image of God, a pale reflection of the eternal and of incomparably less value. For Maimonides, nothing (lit. "no thing") preexisted the created universe, save the Creator itself (cf. *Guide* II.13). Given this, it follows that the divinely created world cannot be modeled on anything.

Perhaps the most important and interesting difference is the following: Although the Platonic philosopher may be fruitfully compared with Abraham, the philosophical monotheist, Plato and Maimonides seem to disagree about the power of

philosophy by itself to radically transform humankind's unreflective beliefs. Indeed Plato is quite optimistic (at least in the *Republic*; cf. 518c-d) about philosophy's ability to turn the soul from darkness to light. Maimonides is far from optimistic. For him, the transformative power of philosophy, pure unadulterated philosophy, and of the philosopher is limited to a particular historical stage, to the formative (pre-Sinaitic) period of Judaism. For Maimonides, philosophy (and the philosopher, Abraham) prepares the soil for monotheism, which Torah and the lawgiver, Moses, ultimately bring to fruition. If the historical sequence, Adam – Idolatry – Abraham (and immediate successors) – Idolatry (except for Levites) – Moses, shows Maimonides anything, it is that philosophy by itself (as represented by Abraham) cannot sustain true belief (monotheism). The added, necessary ingredient is what Moses brought down from Sinai. Given this, the similarity that obtains between Plato and Maimonides on the power of philosophy is limited (from the Jewish side) to the pre-Sinaitic period.[11]

So, Plato and Maimonides are seen to draw instructively different conclusions from the fate of the philosopher at the hands of the unreflective masses. Plato continues to insist that the salvation of the political realm depends on a philosopher who will instruct the masses, each to her ability. Maimonides is rather less cheery about this possibility, referencing the history of his ancestors and their penchant for idolatry. Given this, the only remedy is a legal code, a divine beneficence whose "first intention . . . is to put an end to idolatry" (*Guide* II.29).[12] The law has something in it for every individual. For the unphilosophical, the law provides a sharp constraint on recalcitrant desires, while also binding together the community in ceremonial worship. For the more theoretically inclined, the law "inculcates correct opinions with regard to God" (*Guide* II.40). The congruence of the law, "Torah" in the widest possible sense, with science allows for reflective individuals such as Joseph, the addressee of *Guide* and erstwhile student of Maimonides, to find refreshment within his own tradition.

In sum, for Maimonides, human and divine law overlap, insofar as the latter builds on the former. Divine law is given to humans, and allows for a modicum of well-being for each and everyone. At its deepest level the law liberates one from its nomic and administrative functions, allowing the would-be philosopher at least a glimpse of its rational trajectory. Maimonides' celebrated discussion in the third part of the *Guide* of *taʿamei ha-mitzvot* (the reasons for the commandments, III.25ff.) is the gateway to his discussion of the *summum bonum*, giving clear evidence that through study of the law we achieve our ultimate goal, knowledge of the divine. Indeed, (knowledge of) God is in the details.

III. GOD IS IN THE DETAILS (SPINOZA, CRITIC OF MAIMONIDES?)

In answer to the parenthetical question, of course he is. Spinoza is the greatest critic of traditional religion, and there is no doubt that he has Maimonides in mind as the major spokesman for an indefensible set of superstitious customs undergirded by beliefs in miracles, divine election, and the like. Spinoza really is a vicious critic, and never more so when in the preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670) he accuses traditional interpreters of scripture of "lay[ing] down at the outset as a principle of interpretation that which would be far more properly derived from Scripture itself." The principle of interpretation assumed at the outset is the inerrancy of scripture, and this Spinoza asserts cannot be assumed in advance. One wonders about this charge if lodged against Maimonides. After all, Maimonides uses the scriptural text as his starting point and teases the truth from it, or at least he pretends to. He is committed to the view that biblical interpretation is a kind of archaeology, an unearthing of the foundations, and a project consonant with scientific inquiry. The truth is hidden to all but a few, and it is certainly not imposed on the text from the outside. Indeed, Maimonides takes the prophets to be metaphysicians and scientists (as well as consummate leaders[13]), offering a teaching that supports theoretical speculation for a few and communal well-being for all. For himself, Spinoza understands prophecy as an activity of the imaginative faculty, understanding imagination just as the medievals did, beholden in this regard to Plato, as quite fantastical.[14]

It would be a most worthwhile endeavor to adjudicate the fairness of Spinoza's critique of Maimonides. The relevant issue would be whether Maimonides is teasing the truth out of scripture and whether the teachings of the prophets support theoretical speculation, or, contrarily, whether, as Spinoza charges, Maimonides is reading into the text and is injecting "alien" ideas into it.

I shall not try to adjudicate the dispute on this occasion, but I wish to present some evidence of how much is common between the two antagonists. There is of course a fine irony here, given Spinoza's manifest critique of the rabbinic tradition. For present purposes, I shall focus on the fourth chapter of the *Treatise* and the discussion there of divine law. Ever the critic, Spinoza sets out to subvert the Mosaic legal code. For Spinoza, the particularism of the Mosaic code ill consorts with a (his own) notion of *lex divina* "that is universal or common to all men," "does not require belief in any kind of historical narrative," and "does not require ceremonies."[15] For Spinoza, the highest precept of the divine law, the *summum*

bonum and end of life, is knowledge and love of God. Accordingly, the divine law is "the rule of life which looks to this end."[16]

It would appear that for Spinoza the contrast with Maimonides on the nature of divine law is basic. For his part, Maimonides distinguishes between human and divine law, with the latter, unlike the former, being directed at more than just civic order. In *Guide* II.40 Maimonides declares that the divine law, emanating from God, is directed at rectification of belief, a law "that takes pains to inculcate correct opinions with regard to God . . . and that desires to make man wise, to give him understanding, and to awaken his attention, so that he should know the whole of that which exists in its true form." Note that the goal of divine law for Maimonides is wisdom and understanding, not so very different from the *summum bonum* for Spinoza. Furthermore, in *Guide* III.51, after a famous parable in which Maimonides outlines stages of worship according to (ascending) levels of intellectual apprehension, he quotes Deuteronomy 11:13 ("To love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul") in connection with the highest level of worship: "The Torah has made it clear that this last [highest level of] worship to which we have drawn attention . . . can only be engaged in after [intellectual] apprehension has been achieved." For Maimonides, love is proportionate to apprehension, and love of God leads to "worship in the heart."

Spinoza's critique of Mosaic particularism, divine law in its classical formulation, does not really undercut the Maimonidean understanding of it. For Maimonides, the divine law (Torah) extends well beyond (mere) ceremonies. It encompasses physics and science and has the capacity to lead the wise student to knowledge and love of God. To be sure, the Mosaic code has in it something useful for each person, and for the nonphilosopher it acts in large measure as a document for the social well-being of the Jewish state. In this latter regard, Spinoza can reasonably differentiate his understanding of *lex divina* from the classical version. Spinoza seemingly pays no attention to the ways that Maimonides connects divine law with worship in the heart, consequent on knowledge and love of God. Even if the prophets are not scientists, and prophecy is a function (solely) of an (over)active imagination, the *summum bonum* is knowledge and love of God. For Spinoza, the scientist takes the place of the prophet, and the study of nature replaces study of the law. The more important point, however, is that the goal of both activities remains the same.

In a way, Spinoza takes on the role that Maimonides took on himself, as providing a way beyond, out of, perplexity and superstition. Maimonides pens the *Guide* to aid

one who is perplexed about the sense of the law and leads the student to understand that the divine law is supported by, and supports, science. In so revealing the intellectual substructure of the law Maimonides heightens the emotional, affective involvement of the student in the very tradition from which he has been alienated. Again, love is proportionate to apprehension. The more one understands about creation, the greater the love, the appreciation for the Creator.

For his part, Spinoza writes the *Tractatus* and the *Ethics* as well for those who can make their way beyond the religious dogmas that beset them. Like the student for whom Maimonides writes, Spinoza's intended audience has had a taste of science, enough at least to engender a certain skepticism about miracles, revelation, and the nature of prophecy. In place of presenting "the science of the law in its true sense," Spinoza offers biblical criticism and the study of nature as the instruments for liberation of the mind. When we read "the more we come to understand natural things, the greater and more perfect the knowledge of God we acquire" and "[t]his then is what our highest good and happiness is, the knowledge and love of God," one is rather hard-pressed to guess the author. Is it Spinoza or Maimonides? (Answer: Spinoza.)[17]

Knowledge and consequent love of God entails for both philosophers assimilation to divine ways. Maimonides addresses this in the last chapter of the *Guide*. Quoting Jeremiah 9.23 ("That I am the Lord who exercises loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness"), Maimonides clarifies the mandated *imitatio Dei*. We should be like God, acting appropriately in the world, and from a divine disposition, not giving in to anger and any kind of irrationality.[18] For Spinoza, assimilation to divine ways entails following nature, the only divine substance, infinite and constant. Perhaps Epictetus, the manumitted slave, turned Stoic, captures the outlook best when he says "Do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do happen, and your life will go well" (*Encheiridion* 8). The recipe for happiness is to assimilate yourself to (live in accordance with) the inviolable laws of nature. After all, this is the divine law.

Torah gives way to Physics, and the science of the law gives way to the laws of science. In the end, Spinoza is left promising salvation to just a few ("for all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare"). In a way, Maimonides is just as much an elitist, holding that the highest forms of worship and love of God are keyed to a (scientific) understanding of the nature of the created world. Quite unlike Spinoza, however, Maimonides understands the divine law as fulfilling political functions, not just inculcating correct beliefs, but also providing communal stability. For Spinoza, nature provides no recipe for political chaos.

NOTES

1 Frank 2002, pp. 272–5.
2 Twersky 1972, p. 42.
3 Cf. *Guide* III.51.
4 Lear 1988, pp. 159–60.
5 Frank 1995, pp. 69–84.
6 *Guide*, Introduction to Part I.
7 *Guide*, Introduction to Part I.
8 For the classic corrective, see Twersky 1967, pp. 95–118.
9 Galston 1978, pp. 204–18.
10 Frank 2003, pp. 142ff.
11 Even if Plato's *Laws* shows him to be less sanguine than earlier (in the *Republic*) about the power of philosophy alone to transform society, there is still a distinction to be noted between Plato and Maimonides. Although both philosophers agree, *ex hypothesi*, about the necessity of law in human society, for Plato a constitution under the strict rule of law is a second best, inferior to the unfettered rule of the philosopher-ruler (*Laws* 875 c-d; cf. Aristotle, *Politics* II.13, 17). For Maimonides, contrarily, the paradigm *is* a nation under the rule of (divine) law. For Maimonides, all roads lead (inevitably) to Sinai; for Plato, Syracuse was a shock.
12 See *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Shabbat* 30.15.
13 *Guide* II.37.
14 *Theological-Political Treatise*, chap. 1.
15 Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, pp. 61–2.
16 Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, p. 60.
17 Spinoza 1972, vol. 3, p. 60.
18 Frank 1990, pp. 269–81.

BIOBIBLIOGRAPHICAL APPENDIX

The following concise presentations are intended as a convenience for readers of this volume alone. The list of philosophers should not be viewed as exhaustive, but rather as presenting the major figures discussed in the foregoing chapters. Nor is the information presented here meant to replace the more substantive accounts to be found in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, and the *Stanford Online Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Additional information can be found as well in Sirat 1990. In many cases, little of a personal nature is known about these figures. We have tried to provide, at the very least, the following information: author's name (along with most common variants); dates; and most important philosophical texts. Secondary material is provided in the comprehensive bibliography that follows.

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ABNER OF BURGOS (Alfonso of Valladolid, Alfonso of Burgos)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1270–1340. Anti-Jewish polemicist and apostate who converted because of difficulties understanding the suffering of God's chosen people. Many of his works engaged Jewish scholars in dialogue and debate over this and other similar theo-philosophical issues. Much of Abner's writings were written in Hebrew and later translated into Castilian. Abner wrote in efforts to formulate arguments for conversion from Judaism to Christianity. His philosophy accepts predestination, astrology, and determinism.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Moreh Zedek* [*Mostrador de Justicia*]; *Minhat Kena'ot*. [*Ofrenda de Zelos*].

ABRABANEL, ISAAC (Isaac ben Judah Abravanel, Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1437–1508. Theologian, biblical exegete and scholar, and statesman. First lived in Lisbon for 45 years, then Seguar de la Orden, Castile, followed by Alcalá de Henares, Naples, Corfu, Monopoli, and finally, Venice. He helped raise ransom money for captive Jews on several occasions. After being forced to flee Portugal for political reasons, Isaac became a wealthy tax official who offered his estate up for collateral in investments. Isaac Abrabanel was forced to flee a second time to Italy when Ferdinand and Isabella ordered the expulsion of all Jews in Spain in 1492. In Naples, he served the court of Alfonso II. While serving these public posts, Isaac managed to write several works on the correct interpretation of scriptures, arguing that biblical texts are arranged sequentially for a reason. In particular, Isaac concerned himself with commentaries addressing God's creation of the world, God's prophecy, cultural history and politics as they relate to the bible, and eschatology.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Rosh Amanah*; *Mifalot Elohim*; *Commentary on Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed*; *Ateret Zekenim*; *Shamayim Hadashim*.

ABRABANEL, JUDAH (Leone Ebreo, Leo Hebraeus)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1460–after 1523. Philosopher, poet, and physician. Son of Isaac Abrabanel, Judah was born in Lisbon and spent much of his youth studying under his father. Judah followed his father when Isaac fled from Portugal. During the Spanish expulsion of the Jews in 1492 Judah smuggled his infant into Portugal, but the infant was forcibly baptized, an event that influenced the writing of his poem *Telunah al ha-Zeman*. Judah later worked as a physician in Naples, although he continued his interests in philosophy. He was friendly with scholars of the Platonic Academy in Florence. He spent some time in Genoa and returned to Naples to teach medicine and astrology. He served as the physician to the Spanish viceroy, Don Gonsalvo de Córdoba. Like Plato, Judah wrote his major dialogue *Dialoghi di Amore* with the interlocutors representing the epitome of Platonic lovers. Judah's use of such interlocutors is evidence for his position that love elevates to wisdom.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Dialoghi di Amore*.

ABRAHAM BAR ḤIYYA (See BAR ḤIYYA, ABRAHAM)

ABRAHAM BIBAGO (See BIBAGO, ABRAHAM)

ABRAHAM IBN EZRA (See IBN EZRA, ABRAHAM)

ABRAHAM IBN DAUD (See IBN DAUD, ABRAHAM)

ABRAHAM SHALOM (See SHALOM, ABRAHAM)

ABULAFIA, ABRAHAM (Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1240–ca. 1291. Founder of the prophetic *Kabbalah*. Abulafia was born in Saragossa, Spain. From Saragossa, Abulafia moved to Tudela, and then Land of Israel, in search of the legendary Sambatyon river. His search was thwarted by the Mongol/Mamluk war, which drove him to return to Europe. In Capua, Abulafia studied with Rabbi Hillel ben Samuel of Verona. Shortly after returning to Spain, Abulafia began to study the *Kabbalah* and experienced a prophetic/messianic revelation. He traveled to Castile where he disseminated his prophetic *Kabbalah*. He later taught his *Kabbalah* and *Guide of the Perplexed* throughout Greece and then in 1279, Capua again. In 1280 Abulafia traveled to Rome to see Pope Nicholas III to discuss his view of the mysticism of Judaism; however, the pope died suddenly before a meeting could be arranged and Abulafia was imprisoned. A few weeks later, Abulafia went to Sicily where he spent a decade (1281–1291) teaching. By 1285 Abulafia found himself defending his claims that he was a prophet and the messiah against Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham ibn Adret of Barcelona. Abulafia's *Kabbalah* was then banned from Spanish schools. Abulafia wrote three commentaries on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, a commentary on the Pentateuch, as well as several prophetic/mystical textbooks.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sefer ha-Ge'ulah*; *Sefer Ḥayyei ha-Nefesh*; *Sefer Sitrei Torah*; *Ozar Eden Ganuz*; *Gan Na'ul*; *Sefer-Mafteḥot ha-Torah*; *Ḥayyei ha-Olam ha-Ba*; *Sefer ha-Ḥeshek*; *Imrei Shefer*; *Get ha-Shemot*; and *Mafte'aḥ ha-Re'ayon*.

ABU'L-BARAKĀT AL-BAGHDĀDĪ (Abu'l-Barakāt ibn Malkā)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: d. after 1164. An inhabitant of Iraq, al-Baghdādī converted to Islam in his old age, possibly for reasons of expediency. His influence on Jewish philosophy, unlike in the Islamic sphere, was practically nonexistent. His major philosophical work has few Jewish references; it concerns the doctrine of the soul, and is influenced by Avicennian themes.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Kitāb al-ʿMu'tabār.*

ALBALAG, ISAAC

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1380–ca. 1444. Philosopher and translator of important philosophical texts. Albalag concerned himself with determining the roles of philosophy and revelation in the life of the intellectual Jew. A strong proponent of Averroes' interpretation of Aristotle's teachings, Albalag opposed views of philosophers such as Avicenna and Maimonides. In his major work *Sefer Tikkun ha-Deʿot* (*Righting of Doctrines*), Albalag delineated four fundamental beliefs common to the Torah and philosophy: God's existence, punishment and reward, the soul's survival of the death of the body, and divine providence. Albalag viewed the Torah as a "political book" because it serves as a guide for how to live even though he thought it did contain truths inaccessible to humans.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sefer Tikkun ha-Deʿot.*

ALBO, JOSEPH

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: fifteenth century. Philosopher participant and Jewish community representative for Daroca in the famous Jewish-Christian debates at Tortosa and San-Mateo from 1413–1414. Born in the Crown of Aragon, Joseph studied as a youth with Hasdai Crescas of Saragossa. He moved to Soria around the time that Daroca was destroyed. In his major philosophical treatise *Sefer ha-Iqqarim* (*Book of Principles*), Albo addresses the following religious dogmas: God's existence, divine revelation, and punishment and reward. He discusses God's unity, incorporality, atemporality, and perfection. In addition to arguing for the divine attributes, Albo takes a critical look at Maimonides' proofs for God's existence. In a similar critical spirit, he warns his readers not to conclude hastily that his book contains errors of omission but rather to appreciate that such omissions are intentional.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sefer ha-Iqqarim.*

ALDABI, MEIR BEN ISAAC (Meir Aldai Shevilei)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1310–ca. 1360. Philosopher and religious adherent of the *Kabbalah*. Originally from Toledo, Aldabi was initially educated in the biblical and rabbinic tradition. As a young adult Aldabi refocused much of his studies toward philosophical and scientific studies. In 1348, Aldabi traveled to Jerusalem. There he pursued intellectual projects, such as a philological investigation of ancient Jewish texts and the texts of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle to try to establish religious influences on the ancient Greek scholars.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Shevilei Emunah.*

ALEMANNO, YOHANAN (Johanan ben Isaac Alemanno)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1435–after 1504. Biblical exegete, kabbalist, and philosopher. Born in Mantua and raised in the house of Jehiel of Pisa, Florence, Alemanno received an education in several disciplines. Alemanno taught throughout Italy until he settled again in Mantua when he was thirty-five years old. Alemanno's philosophical interests included the puzzle of how man might achieve eternal life and communion with God.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Heshek Shelomo*; *Einei ha-ʿEdah*; *Hei ha-ʿOlamim*.

ALGUADES, MEIR (Meir Alguadez)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: d. 1410. Chief rabbi of Castillian Jewry, and personal physician to multiple kings of Castile. Alguades devoted himself to rehabilitating the Spanish communities after the infamous massacres of 1391. Around this time, Alguades was very disappointed that his son-in-law accepted baptism under the persecution. Alguades translated Aristotle's *Ethics* into Hebrew from the Latin.

SELECTED TEXTS: Hebrew translation of Aristotle's *Ethics*.

ALMOSNINO, MOSES (Moses ben Baruch Almosnino)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1515–1580. Scholar, preacher, and rabbi of Salonika. Knowledgeable in rhetoric, history, science, as well as philosophy. Almosnino was a member of a delegation to Sultan Selim II to acquire confirmation of privileges and exemptions granted by Suleiman the Magnificent to the people of the Salonika community. Unfortunately, a decade later the evidence was destroyed and the local leaders in this area resumed oppressing its people. In 1568, Almosnino and others helped Salonika be recognized as a self-governing entity. His works include commentaries on the Pentateuch and supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Me'ammez Ko'ah*; *Penei Moshe*; *Pirkei Moshe*; *Tefilla le-Moshe*; *Sefer Hanahagat ha-Ḥayyim*.

AL-MUQAMMAṢ, Daud (Dawūd Ibn Marwān Al-Raqi Al-Shirazi Al-Mukammiṣ, David Ha-Bavli)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 820–ca. 890. Al-Muqammaṣ was born a Jew and converted to Christianity while in Nisibis. He became a long-term pupil of the accomplished philosopher and surgeon, Nānā. After many years of philosophical and religious study, Al-Muqammaṣ wrote two works attacking Christianity. In addition to writing his own work, which was influenced by the Mutazilites, Al-Muqammaṣ also translated Christian commentaries on the Bible.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Ishrūn Maqāla*.

AL-QIRQISĀNĪ, JACOB (Abu Yusuf Yaʿqūb al-Qīrkīsānī/al-Kirkisāni)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: Early-tenth-century Jewish Karaite exegete. Born in Circassia, he traveled throughout the Middle East. He was also instrumental in distinguishing various Jewish sects. Al-Qirqisānī's inclusion of groups as Jewish sects was wide, considering Christianity a sect of Judaism. Nonetheless, he was rather dogmatic in his acceptance of other groups, frequently attacking the Rabbinites. He was almost equally critical of his own sect, deploring the Karaites for neglecting to study

rabbinic literature. He thought that if the Karaites were familiar with the rabbinic works, they would have more ammunition with which to argue during religious debate and controversies. Al-Qirqisānī was also the first Karaite who endorsed the sciences. He felt that reason grounds faith and knowledge; its importance cannot be overlooked. Socially, he was particularly outspoken against certain practices such as incest.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Kitāb al-anwār wa-l-marāqib* [Hebrew*: Sefer ha-Me'orot*]; *Kitāb al-riyād* [Hebrew*: Sefer ha-Gannim we-Pardesim*].

AL-QŪMISĪ, DANIEL (DANIEL BEN MOSES AL-QŪMISĪ)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ninth-century Karaite who publically encouraged pilgrimages to the Holy Land. He found Muslim leaders to be cooperative in his efforts. Al-Qūmisī was born in Damahn and was one of the first Karaites to settle in Jerusalem. His written works were influential in the renewal of a Jewish settlement in Jerusalem. His major work *Pitron Sheneim-Asar* contained a bitter critique of the rabbinate.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Pitron Sheneim-Asar.*

ANATOLI, JACOB (Jacob ben Abba Mari ben Samson Anatoli)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: thirteenth-century translator, homilist, and physician. Anatoli was born and raised in France and left for Naples in 1231. He was Samuel Ibn Tibbon's son-in-law and pupil, and worked as physician to Frederick II. Anatoli was a close friend to the philosophical translator, Michael Scot. Anatoli was known to use philosophy texts in sermons and frequently espoused Maimonides' views. He translated into Hebrew: *Compendium of the Almagest* by Averroes; Averroes' Intermediate Commentary on the first five books of Aristotle's *Organon*; Ptolemy's *Almagest*; and the astronomical work of al-Farghāni's *Elements of Astronomy.* His only original work *Malmad ha-Talmidim* (*Incentive to the Pupils*) is a series of philosophical sermons.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Malmad ha-Talmidim.*

ARAMA, ISAAC (Isaac ben Moses Arama)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1420–1494. Spanish. Preacher, rabbi, and philosopher. Taught in Zamora, Tarragona, and Fraga. Became the rabbi of Calatayud, where he wrote many of his works. His philosophical works address problems such as reconciling man's free will with God's foreknowledge, the inferiority of human reason compared to divine truth, miracles, the immortality of the soul, creation, and many others. In particular, Arama is noted for criticizing Maimonides' rationalistic view of faith. In his major work *Akedat Yitzhak* (*The Sacrifice of Isaac*), Arama also analyzed and criticized the articles of faith established by his predecessors: creation, miracles, revelation, providence, repentance, and the immortality of the soul. Aside from his religious and metaphysical views, Arama had many established positions in political theory and ethics. For instance, Arama believed that society's purpose was to protect its individuals and honor justice between them so that each member may fulfill his potential. Although such a society is necessary at present, Arama affirmed that in the period of the End of Days no human government will be needed as human nature will become capable of accepting the reign of the kingdom of heaven. He set such an example during a period when many Jews were being converted. Arama made it a point to give public lectures on the principles of Judaism and he even engaged Christian scholars in public debate.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Akedat Yizhak*; *Yad Avshalom*.

AZRIEL OF GERONA

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: Early-thirteenth-century member of the kabbalist center in Gerona, Spain. Azriel is often confused with an older contemporary, Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona. A later scholar, Graetz, declared that the two's views and writings were so similar that they ought not be distinguished from one another. For this reason, there is no biographical data describing Azriel's life and only little evidence of his personal positions have been established via authentication of his works. It has been suggested by Azriel's teacher, Isaac the Blind, that Azriel propagated kabbalistic doctrines openly to wider circles than was traditionally encouraged. He is rumored to have been a kabbalist leader of his community and teacher of individuals, including the poet, Meshullam Dapiera of Gerona. From the works that have been determined to be his, it appears that Azriel was familiar with many Neoplatonic philosophers and espoused the Neoplatonic manner of thought. For example, Azriel pays close attention to the coincidence of opposites in the divine unity. He addresses the differences between the Neoplatonic god, whose attributes may only be described negatively, and the biblical God, about whom positive claims are often made.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sha'ar ha-Sho'el*; *Commentary on the Sefer Yetzirah*.

BAḤYA IBN PAQUDA (Baḥya ben Joseph ibn Paquda/Pakuda/Bakuda)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: eleventh-century Jewish philosopher and rabbi who lived in Saragossa, Spain. Baḥya was a judge at the rabbinic court. An extremely learned man, Bahya's texts show evidence of knowledge of Arabic, Greek, and Roman science and philosophy as well as a clear grasp of traditional Jewish texts. Baḥya aligned with Neoplatonic mysticism and may have been an ascetic. In addition, he is believed to have followed the method of "the Brothers of Purity," a group of Arabian encylopedists. Baḥya is best known for his system of Jewish ethics, which appeared in 1040 in Arabic and later translated into Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon. His work *Ḥovot ha-Levvavot* (*Duties of the Heart*) is one of the first attempts to present ethical laws and duties espoused by Judaism in a coherent philosophical system. Baḥya describes his motivation for compiling his ethical system in the introduction of the work. It was his impression that many Jews either paid little attention to the duties of Jewish law or paid exclusive attention to duties to be performed by the body. He was underwhelmed by the evidence that people were obeying and cultivating duties of the heart, from which his book gets its title.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Kitāb al-Hidāya 'ilā Farā'iḍ al-Qulūb* [Hebrew*: Ḥovot ha-Levavot*].

BAR ḤIYYA, ABRAHAM (Abraham Bar Ḥiyya Ha-Nasi (the prince), Savasorda)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1065–1136. Spanish Jewish astronomer, astrologer, mathematician, and philosopher. Bar Ḥiyya is believed to have held civic office in the Muslim administration of Barcelona, although this is not well documented. He translated many scientific books from Arabic to Latin and also Hebrew, and he wrote the first scientific encyclopedia in Hebrew, as well as a mathematics book that later became a widely used text in western European schools. Bar Ḥiyya is known for being instrumental in the widespread dissemination of the quadratic equation. His major philosophical work *Hegyon ha-Nefesh ha-'Atzuvah* (*Meditation of the Sad Soul*) deals with the nature of good and evil, good conduct, and repentance. He also outlined his view of history, which was partially influenced by his astrology.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Hegyon ha-Nefesh ha-'Atzuwah*; *Ḥibbur ha-Meshiḥah ve-ha-Tishboret*; *Megillat ha-Megalleh*; *Sefer Tzurat ha-Aretz*.

BEN ABRAHAM BEN ḤAYYIM (See LEVI BEN ABRAHAM BEN HAYYIM)

BEN DAVID YOM TOV BONJORN, JACOB (See BONJORN, JACOB)

BEN GERSHOM, LEVI (See LEVI BEN GERSHOM)

BEN JOSEPH, SAADIA (See SAADIA BEN JOSEPH)

BEN JUDAH, SAMUEL (See SAMUEL BEN JUDAH)

BEN JUDAH IBN AKNIN, JOSEPH (See IBN AKNIN, JOSEPH BEN JUDAH)

BEN JUDAH IBN TIBBON, SAMUEL (See IBN TIBBON, SAMUEL BEN JUDAH)

BEN SAMUEL, HILLEL (See HILLEL BEN SAMUEL OF VERONA)

BEN SOLOMON IBN MATQA, JUDAH (See JUDAH BEN SOLOMON IBN MATQA)

BIBAGO, ABRAHAM (Abraham ben Shem Tov Bibago)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: fifteenth-century Spanish philosopher and preacher. Born in the province of Aragon, Bibago first lived in Huesca. Reference by other writers suggests he had a wife and children by 1446. Sometime afterward, he was forced out of his community for his intense affinity for Greek texts. Bibago was extremely well read in ancient Greek philosophy as well as medieval Christian philosophy and he knew several languages, including Arabic and Latin. Before being forced out of his residence, Bibago completed a commentary on the Middle Commentary of Averroes on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. By 1465 issues had been resolved in Huesca, where he apparently resumed residence. From there he moved to Saragossa and was head of the yeshivah by 1470. He preached publicly, and engaged in disputations with Christian scholars at the court of Juan II, king of Aragon. In his major work *Derekh 'Emunah* (*The Way of Faith*), Bibago was concerned with the nature of faith. He accepted the traditional view that ancient prophets and rabbis knew the sciences and that faith is rational in content; however, he maintained that faith is superior to reason in that reason is only a tool to discovering truth, whereas faith is a means of cultivating and subscribing to it. He suggests in his writings that the Torah actualizes the Jews' intellects, thus providing the people with national providence. Therefore, faith provides both individual and national salvation. The work *'Etz Ḥayyim* (*Tree of Life)* presents arguments against the doctrine of eternity.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Derekh 'Emunah*; *'Etz Hayyim*; *Ma'amar be-Ribbui ha-Tzurot*.

BONJORN, JACOB (Jacob ben David Yom Tov Bonjorn)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: fourteenth century. Son of the Catalan Jewish astronomer David Bonet Bonjorn who lived at Perpignan. His father authored several astronomical tables in 1361 that were well

received and later translated into Latin; he also manufactured astronomical instruments for Pedro IV of Aragon. Jacob Bonet drew up astronomical tables for the year 1361 for the city of Perpignan. Jacob's son David Bonet Bonjorn was baptized in 1391, allowing him to practice medicine.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Astronomical Tables of Jacob ben David Bonjorn*

CRESCAS, ḤASDAI (Hasdai ben Judah Crescas)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1340–ca. 1410. Catalonian philosopher, rabbi, statesman, and amateur poet. Born in Barcelona, Hasdai studied philosophy and Talmud under Rabbi Nissim ben Reuben Gerondi. He served as secretary of the Jewish community in Barcelona. Crescas became the local authority on talmudic law, and was asked by King Peter IV of Aragon to adjudicate cases concerning Jews. When King John I and Queen Violante took the throne, he befriended them and enjoyed a strong social connection with the royal court. He served as a rabbi of the main royal court at Saragossa in 1389, and by 1390 Crescas was considered the "judge of all the Jews of the Kingdom of Aragon." Crescas worked closely with the royal family in 1391 when anti-Jewish riots commenced in efforts to protect Jewish communities. After the turmoil, he was given the king and queen's blessing to organize the reconstruction of destroyed communities. Philosophically his interests lay in distinguishing the fundamental beliefs, or religious concepts that follow analytically from his view of the nature of the Torah. In his major work *'Or Hashem (Light of the Lord)*, Crescas argues that the Torah is a product of voluntary action from the Commander (lord), and certain concepts follow from this fact undeniably. For example, man's power to choose must follow; for if man did not have choice, there would be no sense in producing commandments for humans to obey or disobey. The nonfundamental obligations are those that must be learned empirically, according to Crescas. For example, that the soul should survive death does not follow from the understanding of the bare essential nature of the Torah.

SELECTED TEXTS: *'Or Ha-Shem*; *Sefer Bittul 'Iqqarei ha-Notzrim*; *Derashat ha-Pesaḥ*.

DEL MEDIGO, ELIJAH (Elijah ben Moses Abba del Medigo, Elijah Cretensis)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1460–1493. Philosopher and talmudist born in Candia, Crete. From Candia, del Medigo moved to Italy, where he was educated in Islamic and Jewish philosophy, as well as classical literature. While in Padua, he was the head of the yeshiva. Venetian authorities asked him to mediate philosophical disputes between two philosophical schools in Italy; alas, del Medigo and the rabbi of Padua fell into a bitter dispute over a *halakhic* question, and he was compelled to leave Padua. Returning to Candia where he was warmly received, del Medigo wrote his major philosophical work *Beḥinat ha-Dat* (*The Examination of Religion*). His interests in this work related to the relation between philosophy and religion and how to handle conflicts between the two. Del Medigo concludes that philosophers ought to interpret, when possible, religious beliefs so that they accord with philosophical truth. He also doubted the antiquity of the Kabbalah, denying that it had been known by the heads of Judaism as long as people had thought. Finding discrepencies in events mentioned and the timeframe of the piece, he denied that Simeon ben Yoshai wrote the *Zohar*. In addition to his critical eye, del Medigo was known for spreading the teachings of Averroes throughout Italy and translating Averroes' works into Latin.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Beḥinat ha-Dat*; *Commentary on Averroes' Ma'amar be-'Etzem ha-Galgal*.

DONNOLO, SHABETAI

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 913–ca. 982. Italian medical author and physician. Born in Oria, Italy. When he was twelve years old, Donnolo had the traumatic experience of being captured by Saracen raiders, but he was ransomed by relatives in Taranto. Later he studied medicine, pharmacy, astronomy, astrology, the Talmud, and several languages including Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. He practiced medicine for over forty years, although he appeared to know nothing of Arab medical strategies. He wrote medical books containing elements of medicine he learned through various cases. His were the first medical works written in Christian Europe in Hebrew. In his philosophical work *Sefer Ḥakhmoni*, Donnolo was preoccupied with certain doctrines of Judaism that led Jews to anthropomorphize God, such as the view that man was made in God's image. Donnolo thought that this had to be wrong, for God is unseen. He proposed the theory that man is made in the image of God's creation; that is, man is a microcosm of the entire universe, which is the macrocosm.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sefer Ḥakhmoni*; *Sefer ha-Mirkahot*; *Pizmon*.

DUNASH IBN TAMIM (Adonim, Abu Sahl)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 890–ca. 956. North African scholar from Kairouan who studied with Isaac Israeli. Ibn Tamim had some medical knowledge as well as competence with theories of Arabic grammar and phonetics. He was particularly familiar with theology, philosophy, astronomy, physics, and the natural sciences. In 955/6 Ibn Tamim wrote a commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*, in partial response to an earlier commentary of this work, written by Saadia Gaon. It is likely that Ibn Tamim offered his commentary as a replacement for that which he considered misguided.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* (*Book of Creation*)

DURAN, PROFIAT (Isaac b. Moses ha-Levi, Efodi)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: d. ca. 1414. Born in Perpignan(?), he was the son of Duran Profiat. He was the author of two polemical tracts against Christianity, written in response to anti-Jewish persecutions in Spain. That he was forcibly converted to Christianity (along with his friend David Bonet Bonjorn) is known; what is not clear is whether he remained a Christian, or subsequently reverted to Judaism. In addition, his grammatical work *Ma'aseh Efod* contained not only innovative grammatical and linguistic analysis, but philosophical views as well.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Ma'aseh Efod*; *Al-Tehi ka-Avotekha*; *Kelimat ha-Goyim*.

ELIJAH DEL MEDIGO (See DEL MEDIGO, ELIJAH)

GERSONIDES (See LEVI BEN GERSHOM)

HALEVI, JUDAH

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1074–1141. Hebrew philosopher, physician, and poet. Born at Tudela, he moved to Córdoba, Lucena, Granada, Christian Toledo, and finally the Land of Israel. In the works of others, Halevi is often referred to as "the Castilian." He participated in poetry contests and won at least one of them for a poem he wrote in imitation of one of Moses ibn Ezra's more complicated poems. He subsequently befriended Moses ibn Ezra, and the two remained close throughout his life.

Halevi was also close friends with Abraham ibn Ezra. While in Granada, Halevi wrote close to 800 poems, including eulogies, poetical letters, wine poems, and love poems. Halevi had to leave Granada shortly after 1090 due to the arrival of the Almoravides of Africa, who conquered Muslim Spain and persecuted the Jews of Andalusia. Eventually, Halevi became overwhelmed with an urge to see the land of Israel, for in his (philosophical) view it was the "Gate of Heaven" and the only place where prophecy occurred. He thus embarked on a long and arduous journey (by way of Alexandria and Cairo) for the land of Israel in his old age. He is said to have made the journey, but to have died shortly thereafter. His major work *Kuzari* is presented in the form of a dialogue between a rabbi and the king of the Khazars, who, so impressed by the description of the rabbi, converts his entire tribe to Judaism. Philosophically, Halevi's interests lay in defending the truth of Judaism and the essential superiority of the Jewish people. He denied Aristotelianism even though, like Aristotle, he thought truth (of Jewish doctrine) can and ought to be defended by rational means and an empirical basis.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Kitāb al-Radd wa'l-Dalīl fi'l-Dīn al-dhalīl* [Hebrew: *Sefer ha-Kuzari*]

HILLEL BEN SAMUEL OF VERONA (Hillel of Verona)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1220–1295. Italian philosopher, physician, and talmudist. Grandson of Eleazar ben Samuel of Verona. Hillel spent his youth at Barcelona studying natural science and the Talmud. There, his instructor of the Talmud, Jonah Gerondi, recanted publically his disapproval of Maimonides' philosophy, making a tremendous impact on Hillel. For a time, he studied and practiced medicine at Montpellier, Rome, and Capua, where he also lectured on philosophy. From there he moved to Ferrara and then Forli. At Forli, he heard of Solomon Petit's intention to resurrect anti-Maimonidean sentiments among the orthodox. Hillel began a campaign to counter this movement, first writing letters imploring Maestro Isaac Gajo to resist the temptation to accept Petit's arguments. Then he volunteered to defend Maimonides by explaining the troubling passages and how they remain well outside the bounds of heresy. Finally, he devised a plan to settle the issue that consisted of organizing a council, composed of important rabbis of the East, to convene in Alexandria for a hearing concerning Maimonides' works. Hillel proposed that the rabbis could listen to Maimonides' opponents and examine their objections finally to rule on whether or not the philosophy was to be accepted. Hillel's vision was that all of Jewry would accept the decision of the council once and for all. His major work *Tagmulei ha-Nefesh* included a review of the current Jewish and scholastic philosophical literature, with constant references to biblical, talmudic, and scholastic works.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sefer Tagmulei ha-Nefesh*

IBN AKNIN, JOSEPH BEN JUDAH BEN JACOB

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1150–1220. Jewish physician and poet, born in Barcelona. He spent much of his life in Fez, where he met Maimonides. He is not to be confused with Joseph ben Judah ibn Shim'on, who was a disciple of Maimonides. Little is known of his life. Ibn Aknin wrote several works, including his *Tibb al-Nufūs al-Salīma wa-Mu'ālajat al-Nufūs al-Alīma* (*The Hygiene of Healthy Souls and the Therapy of Ailing Souls*), an ethical compilation in Arabic. His *Sefer ha-Musar* was written in Hebrew, and is a commentary on the mishnaic tractate *Pirkei Avot*; it is influenced by Maimonides' own commentary. In his *Inkishāf al-asrār wa-tuhūr al-anwār* (*The Divulgence of Mysteries and the Appearance of Lights*), a commentary on the Song of Songs, Ibn Aknin offers an interpretation of the work in terms of the mutual cravings of the rational soul and the active intellect.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sefer ha-Musar*; *Tibb al-Nufūs al-Salīma wa-Muʿālajat al-Nufūs al-Alīma; Inkishāf al asrār watuhūr al-anwār.*

IBN DAUD, ABRAHAM (Rabad)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1110–1180. Spanish astronomer, historian, and philosopher who published works in all three areas. He is best known for his history of the Jewish people *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* and his philosophy *'Emunah Ramah* (*The Exalted Faith*). In his work on the history of the Jews, he speaks against the Karaites, Muslims, and Christians who challenge or doubt that rabbinic tradition records the revelation given to Israel at Sinai. The purpose of the work is to justify rabbinic tradition rather than simply record historical events. Ibn Daud writes that his entire major philosophical work was written to solve the problem of necessity and human choice. He is the first Jewish philosopher to incorporate the works of Aristotle in his justification of the Jewish faith.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Kitāb al-ʿaqīda al-rafīʿa* [Hebrew: *Emunah Ramah*]; *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*.

IBN EZRA, ABRAHAM (Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1089–1164. Abraham ibn Ezra was a very accomplished scholar. He was an astronomer, astrologer, biblical exegete, grammarian composer of piyyutim, philosopher, poet, and translator. Of all of his talents, his greatest were his skill and command of biblical doctrines and religious philosophy. In addition, he became a professional poet and made a living from donations. His professional career made it necessary to wander quite a bit. Born in Tudela, he lived in Cordoba, Seville, Christian Toledo, Italy, England, Gabes (Tunisia), Algeria, and Morocco. Although he may have lived in other areas as well, he is not believed to have traveled to Egypt or the Holy Land. Despite his travels, Ibn Ezra managed to maintain many close friendships with fellow poets, notably Judah Halevi. In addition, his mobility did not seem to hinder his level of scholarly precision, evidence of which is found throughout his biblical commentary in which he carefully makes precise linguistic clarifications in accordance with the style of the Spanish school of Hebrew philology. As a philosopher, Ibn Ezra was a Neoplatonist. He argued that revelation is a rational process and not merely an event. The angels involved in revelation were a species of the human intellect. From such rationale coupled with a philological reading of the text, Ibn Ezra argued that creation was not *ex nihilo*, but instead God created the universe out of Himself. Ibn Ezra concludes that God did this in three major divisions: the One (God), the heavenly realm, and the terrestrial realm. Ibn Ezra was one of the earliest Jewish astrologers, whose works were incorporated into scholastic sources. His astrological theories are contained both in his commentaries on the Pentateuch, as well as in close to forty astrological treatises, composed once he left Spain.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sefer Yesod Mora ve-Sod ha-Torah*; *Reshit Ḥokhmah*; *Commentary on the Torah*.

IBN EZRA, MOSES (Moses ben Jacob ibn Ezra, Abu Harun)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1055–ca. 1140. Spanish Hebrew poet and philosopher. Moses was born in Granada and studied in Lucena, "the city of poetry." There he was educated in Jewish and Arabic subjects. As an adult, he was an encouraging mentor to Judah Halevi, with whom he enjoyed a life-long friendship. In 1090, Granada was captured by the Almoravides, who destroyed the Jewish community. He eventually moved to Christian Spain. From this point on, very little is known about Moses, although what is known through the works of others and his own poetry is quite morose. He suffered many

hardships, including the desertion of his own brother, Joseph. Although a successful poet, Moses was not a very accomplished philosopher, only producing one major work, *Kitāb al-Ḥadīqa fi Ma'nā al-Majāz wa al-Ḥaqīqa*, a portion of which appeared in Hebrew as *Arugat ha-Bosem* (*Bed of Spices*). In this work, he addresses issues such as man's place in the universe, the mystery of God, and the intellect. Moses had neoplatonic leanings. He viewed man as a microcosm; man is good as God's creation, but still imperfect and incapable of knowing or understanding its Creator.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sefer ha-Anak; Kitāb al-Muhādara wa al-Mudhākara; Kitāb al-Ḥadīqa fi Ma'nā al-Majāz wa al-Ḥaqīqa* [Hebrew] *Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem*.

IBN FALAQUERA, SHEM TOV (Shem Tov ibn Joseph Falaquera)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1225–1295. Poet and Jewish philosopher who was interested in spreading philosophy and science to his fellow religionists. Although little of his life story is known, scholars believe that Falaquera lived in Spain. From his writings we may infer that he supported Maimonides' principles, considered himself an Aristotelian, and valued the teachings of Averroes. Falaquera considered knowledge of philosophy and science integral to a full understanding of scripture. Falaquera saw the Torah as a source of truth; however, he believed that it was compatible with the teachings of philosophy and science, which are provable by demonstration. Therefore, Falaquera saw both venues of information as authoritative. He encouraged the study of the sciences by those who are wise, as he did not believe that philosophy was for everyone. Those who are not wise were instructed to stick with tradition, despite inferior understanding of the issues. Falaquera sought to make the writings of the Islamic and Greek philosophers available in Hebrew, even translating some himself. His commentary on Maimonides' *Guide* was written in 1280 (*Moreh ha-Moreh*). His translations were partially commentaries and summaries, typically lacking reference to their source. His style changes when he writes his Hebrew encyclopedias of science and philosophy, including his *De'ot ha-Filosofim* (*The Opinions of the Philosophers*), *Sefer ha-Ma'alot* (*The Book of Degrees*) and *Reshit Ḥokhmah* (*The Beginning of Knowledge*). He explicitly states that he intends to compile the works of other philosophers so that readers can find them in one volume. His work *Sefer ha-Mevaqqesh* (*The Book of the Seeker*) is a popular compendium of philosophy.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Moreh ha-Moreh*; *De'ot ha-Filosofim*; *Sefer ha-Ma'alot; Reshit Ḥokhmah*. *Sefer ha-Mevaqqesh*.

IBN GABIROL, SOLOMON (Solomon ben Judah ibn Gabirol, Avicebron)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1021–ca. 1058. Jewish philosopher and poet. It is likely that he was born in Malaga and was raised in Saragossa. There are about 400 extant secular and religious poems by Gabirol, including the well-known *Keter Malkhut (Crown of Glory)*, and he may have written as many as twenty books (although most are lost). In many of the extant works, Gabirol complains of his small stature, susceptibility to illness, weakness, and ugliness. At an early age, Gabirol remarked that he was a sixty-year-old with the heart of an octogenarian. He was a scholar of logic at an early age, although his existing philosophy is both ethical and metaphysical. Although Gabirol was familiar with Neoplatonic philosophy, it is evident that he was both knowledgeable and influenced by Aristotelianism. His own philosophical views, presented in the work *Meqor Ḥayyim* (*Source of Life*), present a unique cosmology in its own right. Gabirol's most unique contribution to philosophy is his doctrine of universal hylomorphism: the belief that all beings, whether corporeal or spiritual, are hylomorphic composites of form and matter. In his ethical treatise *Tikkun Midot ha-Nefesh*, Gabirol extrapolates further on man's purpose with his original theory of twenty personality traits, which correspond to one of the five senses.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Yanbūʿ al-Ḥayāt* [Hebrew: *Meqor Ḥayyim*]; *Tikkun Midot ha-Nefesh; Keter Malkhut*.

IBN ḤASDAI (Abraham ben Samuel ha-Levi ibn Ḥasdai)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: Early-thirteenth-century Hebrew poet and translator. From Barcelona, Ibn Ḥasdai was one of Maimonides' most loyal adherents, writing to scholars who spoke out against Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* in attempts to persuade them to retract their opposition. Two such individuals were Judah ibn Alfakhar and Meir ha-Levi Abulafia. He and his brother, Judah, wrote letters to various communities deploring those who opposed Maimonides. He also defended those who were criticized for supporting Maimonides, such as David Kimhi. Only fragments of Ibn Ḥasdai's poetry have survived. His translations were of important scholarly works in Arabic, which he translated into Hebrew.

SELECTED TEXTS: Translations (from Arabic to Hebrew) of: *Moznei Zedek*; *Sefer ha-Tappuʾaḥ*; *Sefer ha-Yesodot*; *Ben ha-Melekh ve-ha-Nazir; Sefer ha-Mitzvot*; *Iggeret Teiman*.

IBN KASPI, JOSEPH (Joseph ben Abba Mari ben Joseph ben Jacob Caspi/Kaspi)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1279–1332 or later. Philosopher known for his remarkable temperament and personality, Ibn Kaspi often incorporated stories about his life in his works. As a man of moderate wealth, Ibn Kaspi could afford to make numerous trips and excursions. He lived at Tarascon, and visted Arles, Aragon, Catalonia, Majorca, Egypt, and, allegedly, Fez. He indicated that his travels were for the purposes of broadening his horizons. Father of three, Joseph wrote works for his children in attempt to guide them through life. One of these, a moralizing treatise (*Sefer Ha-Musar*) written for Solomon, his youngest, provides us with the last date Kaspi was known to be alive. A prolific author, Ibn Kaspi wrote over thirty works, many of which contain (in a play on his name Kaspi) the word *kesef* (silver) in their title. His works are primarily exegetical in character, and he was well-known as a Biblical exegete.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Kevutsat Kesef*; *Adney Kesef*; *Tirat Kesef*; *Tam ha-Kesef*; *Sefer Ha-Musar*; *Sharshoth Kesef*.

IBN LATIF, ISAAC (Isaac ben Abraham ibn Latif)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1210–1280. Spanish Jewish philosopher and biblical commentator who lived mainly in Toledo. Ibn Latif was an ardent proponent of Neoplatonism, whose philosophical interests were mainly the philosophical sciences of logic and metaphysics. Fluent in both Arabic and Hebrew, he was the first known Jewish scholar to translate parts of al-Fārābī's *Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Righteous City* into Hebrew. Influenced by Maimonides, Ibn Latif incorporated comments on *Guide of the Perplexed* in much of his works, making him one of the first commentators of this work. His first work *Shaʿar ha-Shamayim* (*Gate of Heaven*) was written in 1238 and incorporated Scripture, Talmudic commentary and Neoplatonic metaphysics. As the *kabbalah* trend gained popularity, ibn Latif became one of its critics. He criticized the philosophers of his city for abandoning their religious observances, and the kabbalists in particular for conflating the intellect with imagination.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Shaʿar ha-Shamayim*; *Tzurat ha-ʿOlam*.

IBN MATQA, JUDAH BEN SOLOMON (Judah Ben Solomon ha-Kohen)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1215–? Spanish astronomer, mathematician, and philosopher. Born in Toledo, he is believed to have spent roughly the first thirty years of his life there until 1247, when he moved to Tuscany by invitation. While in Toledo, Ibn Malqa studied under the anti-Maimonidist, Meir Abulafia. Although he agreed with Abulafia that Maimonides was widely incorrect, he was attracted to study of the "Moreh" of Maimonides. Ibn Matqa became known as the intermediary between philosophy and mystical doctrines because of his somewhat sympathetic attention to Maimonides, his knowledge of Aristotle, and his intimate relationship with mysticism. Ibn Matqa had many famous and elite correspondences, including Johannes Palermitanus and Theodorus of Antioch, the Roman Emperor Frederick II's personal philosophers. Around 1247 he published an encyclopedia *Midrash ha-Ḥokhmah* (*Exposition of Science*), which contains a survey of Aristotelian philosophy, astronomy, and astrology.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Midrash ha-Ḥokmah*.

IBN PAQUDA, BAḤYA (See Baḥya ibn Paquda)

IBN SHEM TOV, JOSEPH (Joseph Ben Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1400–ca. 1460. Spanish philosopher devoted to secular studies and, unlike his father, Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov, he preferred these to studies of faith. He served in the court of King John II and then later as a physician and auditor of accounts for King Henry IV. He was known to have debated religious and philosophical issues with Christian scholars. In 1452 Henry sent Ibn Shem Tov to Segovia to try to suppress anti-Semitic activity. In 1456, he fell out of favor with King Henry and began wandering the country, providing lectures to various communities. It is believed that, at some point, ibn Shem Tov lost his vision and had to dictate many of his writings to a scribe. His major work *Kevod Elohim* (*Glory of God*) was written in 1442. Ibn Shem Tov's philosophy addressed issues such as the *summum bonum* (greatest good) in both Aristotle's philosophy and Judaism. He did not, however, endorse forcing compatibility between these two systems. He agreed with Nahmanides that the true meaning of religious commandments is inaccessible to rational investigation and comprehension. In essence, his view was a compromise between Aristotelian–Maimonidean rationalism and religious antiphilosophical views. Although he preferred secular studies, he admits that they ought not be considered in religious matters of faith, such as salvation of the soul. He wrote numerous commentaries on the works of Aristotle and Averroes.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Kevod Elohim*; *Ein ha-Kore*; *Commentary on Profiat Duran's Al Tehi ka-Avotekha*; *Commentary on Hasdai Crescas' Bittul Ikkarei ha-Nozerim*.

IBN SHEM TOV, SHEM TOV

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1380–ca. 1441. Father of Joseph ben Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov and Spanish anti Maimonidean polemicist, kabbalist, and rabbi who blamed Maimonidean Aristotelianism for apostacy. Although he respected Maimonides for his talmudic writings, Shem Tov railed against *Guide of the Perplexed*. Unlike other scholars who attempted to undermine the philosophical arguments to Maimonides' *Guide*, Shem Tov argues in his major philosophical work *Sefer ha-Emunot* (*The Book of Beliefs*) completely from faith. Examples of Shem Tov's interpretation of Maimonidean doctrines that contradicted faith are that the soul is nonsubstantial, there is neither reward for the righteous nor

punishment for the wicked, there will be no resurrection, and that human immortality depends on the development of the intellect. Few people adhered to Shem Tov's fideism. His unphilosophical attacks against Maimonides earned him a reputation of being a fanatic.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sefer ha-Emunot*.

IBN TIBBON, JUDAH (Judah Ben Saul ibn Tibbon)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1120–1190. Judah b. Saul ibn Tibbon was born in Granada, fled, and resettled in Lunel. There he worked as a physician and merchant. He was called the "father of translators" and translated many works from Arabic into Hebrew, including Bahya ibn Paquda's *Duties of the Heart*, Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Improvement of Moral Qualities*, Halevi's *Kuzari* and Saadia Gaon's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, among others. He did write an ethical testament, which was an attempt to educate his son about cultural and literary ideals.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sefer Sha'ar ha-Yihud*.

IBN TIBBON, SAMUEL BEN JUDAH (Samuel ibn Tibbon)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1165–1232. Merchant, physician, and translator. Born in Lunel, Samuel ibn Tibbon moved to Arles, Toledo, Barcelona, Alexandria, and then Marseilles. His son-in-law and most famous disciple was Jacob Anatoli. Ibn Tibbon translated Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* into Hebrew as well as Aristotle's *Meteorology* and Averroes' *Three Treatises on Conjunction*. He produced several original philosophical works, including *Ma'amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayyim*, which dealt with topics such as immortality, the skeptic claim that conjunction with the active intellect is impossible, and the question concerning how or why the earth is not completely covered by water.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Perush ha-Kohelet; Perush ha-Millot ha-Zarot*; *Ma'amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayyim*; *Otot-ha-Shamayim*.

IBN TZADDIQ, JOSEPH (Joseph Ben Jacob ibn Tzaddiq)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. early twelfth century–1149. Poet and philosopher. Ibn Tzaddiq was *dayan* of Córdoba beginning in 1138. Although it was lost, he wrote a treatise on logic, indicating his interest in the philosophical sciences. In his major work *Sefer ha-Olam ha-Katan* (*The Book of the Microcosm*), Ibn Tzaddiq addresses the question of what constitutes the human state of the good and perfection. He maintains that knowing God and God's will is instrumental to man's happiness. According to Ibn Tzaddiq, man learns of God via introspection, as he is made in the image of God and the universe. He downplays the importance of the senses as, for him, they only access the accidental qualities of things. Only the intellect can gain knowledge of the genera and the species. Ibn Tzaddiq's philosophy has notably Neoplatonic undertones. In addition, he appears to have been influenced by Isaac Israeli and Ibn Gabirol, because he adheres to a universal hylomorphism: all beings, both corporeal and spiritual, have an ontological duality of matter and form. Saadia appears as well to have had a significant influence on Ibn Tzaddiq, as reflected in his adherence to Saadia's distinction of commandments of reason and commandments of revelation. Overall, Ibn Tzaddiq was quite familiar with the philosophies of his predecessors and elected aspects from each that he found plausible and compelling.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Kitāb al-'alām al-ṣaghīr* [Hebrew: *Sefer ha-Olam ha-Katan*].

IMMANUEL OF ROME (Immanuel ben Solomon, "Immanuel the Jew," Emanuelle Giudeo)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1261–v. 1335. Poet born in Rome, Immanuel was in charge of the correspondence of the Roman *Jewish* community. He was known to address his community on festive occasions. After having left Rome, he lived in Perugia, Fabriano, Fermo, Camerino, Ancona, Gubio, and Verona. His poetry is known for its light, uplifting mood, which could be frivolous at times, but was also often witty. He sometimes applied an Arabic meter to Italian verse to construct a new method in poetry. Immanuel was the first to introduce the fourteen-line Petrarchian sonnet to Hebrew literature. He appears to have been significantly influenced by Dante, as some of his works (*Mahbarot*) recounts Immanuel's journey through both hell and paradise. In fact, some believe that the guide in the poem is intended to represent Dante. The introduction to his work *Even Bohan* (*The Touchstone*) has been published.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Maḥbarot Immanuel*; *Even Bohan*.

ISAAC ALBALAG (See ALBALAG, ISAAC)

ISAAC ARAMA (See ARAMA, ISAAC)

ISRAELI, ISAAC (Isaac ben Solomon Israeli)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 855–ca. 955. Philosopher and physician, the father of Jewish Neoplatonism. Born in Egypt. When he was approximately fifty years old, Israeli moved to Kairouan, the capital of the Maghreb. There, Israeli was appointed court physician. He never married. He wrote many works on medical topics, including urine, fevers, the pulse, and drugs. In his philosophical writings, he offers fifty-six definitions and appears to invoke Aristotle's four types of inquiry: whether, what, which, and why. Israeli also appears to have been influenced by al-Kindī as well as by Plotinus, because Israeli discusses the series of emanations from the intellect as the various stages of being. Israeli distinguishes three forms of prophecy: the created voice, the spirit (vision), and the speech.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Kitāb al-hudūd* [Hebrew: *Sefer ha-Gevulim*]; *Kitāb al-rūḥ wa-l-nafs* [Hebrew: *Sefer ha-Ru'aḥ ve-ha-Nefesh*]; *Kitāb al-usṭuquṣāt* [Hebrew: *Sefer ha-Yesodot*]; *Chapter on the Elements by Aristotle* [Hebrew: *Sh'ar ha-Yesodot le-Aristo*].

JOSEPH IBN ZADDIK (See IBN TZADDIQ, JOSEPH)

JUDAH BEN SOLOMON IBN MATQA (See IBN MATQA, JUDAH BEN SOLOMON)

LEVI BEN ABRAHAM BEN ḤAYYIM (Levi ben Abraham of Villefranche)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1240–ca. 1315. French encyclopedist who was also a supporter of the liberal party of Provence, which championed the authority of secular sciences. Levi was born at Villefranche-de-Confluent, Roussillon, and later lived in Perpignan, Montepellier, Narbonne, Beziers, and finally Arles, where he died. While in Montpellier, he made a living teaching languages and lecturing, and spent much time conducting his own scholarly research. While staying with a friend,

Samuel Sulami, in Narbonne, Levi first experienced political persecution for his scientific leanings and was eventually excommunicated. Levi was less bold in his two major encyclopedic works, *Battei ha-Nefesh ve-ha-Leḥashim* and *Livyat Ḥen*, in which he defers to expert scholars almost exclusively. In particular, Levi relies on Maimonides and Abraham ibn Ezra's astrology throughout his works. He does, however, provide some bold conjectures on behalf of Judaism, such as the hypothesis that the Greeks and Arabs owe their entire scientific culture to the ancient Hebrews.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Livyat Ḥen* (also called *Sefer ha-Kolel*).

LEVI BEN GERSHOM (Gersonides, Levi ben Gershon, Ralbag)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1288–1344. French scholar and author of works on astronomy, philosophy, and trigonometry. Born in Bagnols, France, Gersonides was fortunate enough to have been taught philosophy during Ben Adret's ban on the subject. Gersonides was influential as a mathematician, philosopher and astronomer. In 1321 he wrote *Sefer ha-Mispar (Book of Numbers),* which deals with algebraic operations. He also wrote *Sefer ha-Heqesh ha-Yashar,* a treatise on syllogisms. Much of his philosophical work deals with reconciling contradictions found in Aristotle. His major work *Milḥamot Adonai (Wars of the Lord),* finished in 1329, was written in response to Maimonides' *Guide* and addresses all the major philosophical issues of the day. In addition to his mathematical and philosophical writings, Gersonides invented the Jacob's staff, an instrument that measured the angular distance between celestial objects. He based his theories on scientific observations, such as the solar eclipse of 1337 and a lunar eclipse on October 3, 1335. His astronomical work was contained in Book V of his *Milḥamot.* Much philosophical material can be found in his commentaries on the Pentateuch, as well as in his commentaries on Averroes.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Milḥamot Adonai*; *Commentary on the Pentateuch*; *Commentary on Job*; *Sefer ha-Heqesh ha-Yashar*; *Ma'aseh Hosheb.*

LUZZATTO, SIMONE BEN ISAAC SIMHAH

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1583–1663. Italian author and rabbi who is believed to have been born in Venice. His family was of German origin, although they had been established and acquired significant wealth over the course of generations in Italy. Luzzatto served as rabbi in Venice for fifty-seven years. Because his affluence allowed him to pursue any career of his choosing, Luzzatto devoted most of his efforts and energies to rabbinic duties. He was known to have objected to the attendance of gentiles at his sermons given in synagogues. One of seven members of the *yeshivah kelalit,* in 1648 he became the leader of the group. Shortly after, it appears that Luzzatto engaged in a lively dispute with lay leaders over rabbinic ordination; Luzzatto demanded to have a deciding voice on the matter. His writings deal with a variety of issues; the treatise *Socrate ovvero dell'humano sapere* argues for the impotence of man's reason absent revelation. In his 1638 text, *Discorso circa il stato del gl'hebrei et in particular dimoranti nell'inclita città di Venetia* Luzzatto offers many economic arguments for the toleration of the Jews. Luzzatto argues that Jews perform functions that could be achieved by no other group. For example, Luzzatto argues that foreign merchants acquire economic wealth, disobey the government, and bring their new wealth elsewhere. It has been suggested that Luzzatto's refutation of Tacitus' position concerning Jews may indicate that these economic arguments are direct refutations of arguments or complaints lodged against Jews of the time.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Socrate ovvero dell'humano sapere*; *Discorso circa il stato del gl'hebrei et in particular dimoranti nell'inclita città di Venetia.*

MAIMONIDES, MOSES (See MOSES BEN MAIMON)

MESSER LEON, DAVID BEN JUDAH

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1470–ca. 1526. Religious philosopher and rabbi born in Mantua, Italy. Messer Leon studied with his father Judah Messer Leon in Naples and was ordained at the age of eighteen. From Naples, he lived in Padua, Florence, Salonika, Valona (Albania), and back to Salonika, where he died. He spent some time in Valona and was appointed rabbi there. Valona was a tense region at this time because many exiles from Spain and Portugal were actively trying to impose their customs on the local communities. Once immersed in these disputes, Messer Leon began to dominate his opponents by unorthodox means. He excommunicated one opponent, Meir ibn Verga. On another occasion, he was insulted during a quarrel on the day of atonement. In response, he banned two scholars who were also heads of the community and happened to oppose him. Philosophically, he was a defender of Maimonides and made several direct attempts to answer objections to Maimonidean philosophy. Messer Leon also engaged in *Kabbalah*, although he had to initiate his studies in secret at an early age, as his father disapproved of exposing youths to its mysteries.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Kevod Ḥakhamim*; *Tehillah le-David*; *Sod ha-Gemul*.

MESSER LEON, JUDAH (Judah ben Yehiel Messer Leon)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: Fifteenth-century rabbi and author. Judah Messer Leon was a consummate product of the Italian Renaissance. He received both a Jewish and secular education, studied classical Latin literature, was head of a yeshivah, and was familiar with Greek and Arabic works in translation. He lived in Venice, Bologna, Ancona, and Naples. He wrote a number of works pertaining to philosophy, including a work in Hebrew rhetoric (*Nofet Zufim*); Hebrew grammar (*Livnat ha-Sappir*); a compendium of Aristotelian logic ((*Mikhlal Yofi*); a supercommentary on Averroes' Middle Commentary; commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics*, *Ethics*, *De Anima*, and *Metaphysics*; a commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* (lost). Many of these are no longer extant.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Nofet Zufim*; *Livnat ha-Sappir*; *Mikhlal Yofi*.

MOSCATO, JUDAH BEN JOSEPH

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1530–1593. Rabbi, author, and preacher of Italian Jewish Renaissance. Forced to leave his native town of Osimo in the time when Jews were expelled from the papal states, Moscato relocated to Mantua where he soon became the official preacher of the Mantua community and was nominated to the post of chief rabbi. Moscato had a vast range of knowledge spanning from Jewish and rabbinic literature to Jewish medieval philosophy and classical philosophy. He often approached subjects from a mystical standpoint, frequently quoting from the Zohar (albeit without mentioning the source). Moscato believed that all great philosophers were descendants of ancient Jewish kings and prophets; as this philosophy was all lost during the Jewish exile, the only way to retrieve the ideas was through the writings of non-Jewish students of Jewish teachers. For this reason, Moscato respected the ideas of non-Jewish writers such as Pico della Mirandola. Moscato is most famous for his commentary on the *Kuzari*, *Qol Yehuda*, which cites a remarkable wide range of authorities and sources, Jewish and non-Jewish.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Qol Yehuda*; *Nefuzot Yehudah*.

MOSES BEN ISAAC DA RIETI (See RIETI, MOSES BEN ISAAC DA)

MOSES BEN MAIMON (Maimonides, Rambam)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1138–1204. Influential philosopher, talmudist, and physician, Maimonides is unarguably one of the greatest figures in the medieval Jewish period. His works consist in a conjunction of philosophical inquiry and *halakhic* authority. Born in Córdoba, Spain, Maimonides' family was forced to flee the region when he was young due to the Almohad conquest. The family is believed to have wandered through southern Spain and North Africa until about 1158, when they settled in Fez. In 1165, Maimonides set out himself for Morocco and the Land of Israel, where he was confronted with the inhospitality of the Crusades. From there he traveled to Acre, Jerusalem, Hebron, and al-Fustāt. In al-Fustāt, Maimonides became a physician and served as one of the physicians to Saladin's vizier. In a short time, Maimonides was viewed by his community as a leading physician and general advisor. Although he served as a rabbi and assumed the position of appellate judge, responsible for official appointments, and administrator of philanthropic foundations, he never accepted remuneration for such services. In addition to his political affairs, Maimonides had a rich and important role in both philosophical and Jewish scholarship. Many of his treatises dealt with practical matters, such as medicine and law. Perhaps most importantly, Maimonides responded to the need to integrate traditional study of the Torah and philosophy. Many of his contemporaries doubted the compatibility of the two, and Maimonides sought to resolve apparent contradictions. He endeavored to illuminate the nature of God, in particular, His freedom, incorporeality, unity, and existence. In his major philosophical work *Moreh Nevukhim* (*Guide of the Perplexed)*, Maimonides applies Aristotelian principles of mathematics and logic to religious doctrines in such ways that his intended audience, the devout religious who also admire science and law, could potentially assuage their "perplexities."

SELECTED TEXTS: *Dalālat al-Hā'irīn* [Hebrew: *Moreh Nevukhim*]; *Mishneh Torah*; *Perush ha-Mishnah*; *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*.

MOSES BEN NAḤMAN (Ramban, Moshe ben Naḥman/Nahman Gerondi, Bonastrucça Porta, Naḥmonides)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1194–1270. Catalan kabbalist, philosopher, physician and Torah scholar born at Gerona. One of the foremost halakhists of his time, Nahmanides was an intellectual revolutionary in many ways. He also wrote biblical commentaries that hinted at the mystical teachings of *Kabbalah*. In addition to his originality in writing, Nahmanides was known for his aggressive personality during debates with Christians. In particular, he is believed to have been quite forceful in his refutation of Pablo Christiani, a converted Jew. Their debate took place in 1263 before King Jaime I of Spain. Nahmanides believed it to be a commandment for Israel to take possession of the Holy Land and reside there. Nahmanides himself moved to the Holy Land after being expelled from Spain. An author of over fifty works, the majority of which are devoted to commentaries on the scriptures, Nahmanides combined mystical with philosophical insights into scripture.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Milḥamot Hashem; Perush 'al ha-Torah*.

MOSES OF NARBONNE (Narboni, Moses ben Joshua ben Mar David of Narbonne, Maitre Vidal Belsom)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: Late-thirteenth or early-fourteenth century–before 1362. Born at Perpignan, Narboni began to study Maimonides' works at an early age. He also studied medicine and became

a professional doctor. In 1344, Narboni began to travel and is believed to have made stops in Cervera, Barcelona, Toledo, and Burgos. In 1349 in Cervera, he fled from anti-Jewish persecution, literally leaving behind all that he owned (including books). The author of over twenty books, he is known primarily for his commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. He also composed commentaries on works of al-Ghazālī, Ibn Tufayl, and Averroes. Steeped in Averroism, Narboni criticized many of Maimonides' Neoplatonic views.

SELECTED TEXTS: *'Oraḥ Ḥayyim*; *Commentary on the Guide of the Perplexed*; *Iggeret Shiur Qoma*; *Ma'amar ha-Beḥira*; *Ma'amar bi-Shelemut ha-Nefesh*.

NAHMANIDES (See MOSES BEN NAḤMAN)

NARBONI (See MOSES BEN JOSHUA OF NARBONNE)

NISSIM, YEHIEL DA PISA (See YEHIEL NISSIM DA PISA)

NISSIM BEN MOSES OF MARSEILLES

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: fourteenth century. Very little is known about Nissim of Marseilles. His major work, *Ma'aseh Nissim* (*Miraculous Works*), probably composed after 1315, is a commentary on the Torah in which he tries to provide a naturalistic explanation for supernatural occurrences in the scriptures. In the introduction to the commentary he deals with a number of philosophical topics, including divine providence, miracles, reward and punishment, and the principles of faith. Science and philosophy are clearly delineated, each with its own sphere of topics. The work was preserved in several manuscripts. Although many of his successors (including Gersonides and Moses of Narbonne) used his ideas, he was never mentioned by name.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Ma'aseh Nissim*.

NISSIM BEN REUVEN OF GERONA (Rabbenu Nissim, Rabbi Nissim ben Reuven, Ran)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1320–1380. From Gerona, Nissim was a very influential talmudist and expert on Jewish law. He was also a physician and scholar of astronomy. He was outspoken against mysticism and reproached Nahmanides for devoting too much time to the *Kabbalah*. In his own writings, Nissim espoused the importance of practicality. He is known to end each exposition with a recapitulation and an explanation of the work's relevance to practical decision-making. A devoted proponent of Alfasi's view, Nissim spent much effort defending Alfasi's *Halakhot*.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sheteim Asar Derashot ha-Ran*.

PHILO (Philo of Alexandria, Philo Judaeus)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 20 BCE–50 CE. Hellenized Jewish philosopher. Born in Alexandria, Egypt, little is known of Philo's travels and biography. Philo was selected by the Alexandrian Jewish community as the primary representative of the embassy sent to meet with the Roman emperor, Gaius Caligula. During this time, there was much civil tension between the Alexandrian Jews and the Hellenized Alexandrian community, and at least one of the purposes of the embassy was to confront the emperor about these problems. Philo is reported to have led his community in refusal to recognize the emperor as a god, erect statues in his honor, and build religious venues such as temples or alters to him. We

know a great deal more about Philo's philosophical life. Philo used primarily allegory to express his harmonization of Judaism and Greek philosophy. In particular, he used Stoic philosophy in his melding of the two. Philo's religious works were later embraced by prominent Christian scholars, some of whom insisted that Philo was, in fact, Christian. In addition to his interpretation of the Bible, Philo extracted from it a theory of number, cosmology, anthropology, and ethics. Philo distinguishes the principle of *Logos* as God's "blueprint" of the world, according to which God created the sublunar spheres. In addition to his numerology and cosmology, Philo determined an anthropology and from it, an ethics.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Treatise on the Eternity of the World*; *De Somniis*; *De Vita Contemplativa*; *De Abrahamo*; *Quæstiones in Genesin*; *Legum Allegoriæ*; *De Specialibus Legibus*; *De Decalogo*.

POLLEGAR, ISAAC (Isaac ben Joseph ibn Pollegar/Polgar / Pulgar)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: Early-fourteenth century. Spanish philosopher and scholar who was a disciple of Abner of Burgos. His major work *Ezer ha-Dat (Support of the Faith)* was written in defense of Judaism on issues such as the superiority of Moses, the superiority of the Torah, the afterlife, and the Messiah. Pollegar spoke out against the astrological principle that human affairs are affected by the movement of heavenly bodies, in particular as espoused by his master, Abner of Burgos. He tries to solve the problem of free will and God's foreknowledge, specifically addressing it as it was posed by Abner. In addition, Pollegar held the Platonic principle that pure intellectual activity is the best of all activities, even though it can only be fully developed in the next world.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Ezer ha-Dat*.

PORTALEONE, ABRAHAM (Abraham ben David II Portaleone)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1542–1612. Italian author and physician who received formal schooling in both philosophy and medicine at the University of Pavia, from which he graduated in 1563. After graduation in 1566, Portaleone continued to the College of Physicians at Mantua and was appointed the position of physician of the ducal house. In 1591 the papacy granted him permission to see Christian patients. Afterward, his practice grew and he had many Jewish and non-Jewish patients. Many of his writings were of a medical nature. He also made use of his impressive competence in ten languages in his writing, making translation of his works a difficult task requiring much care and expertise. In his works he also combines his scientific knowledge with his knowledge of the Temple, devoting chapters to the cubic measurements of solids and liquids with regard to Temple sacrifices. In addition, he was scientifically intrigued by the properties of salts and the ingredients of explosives. His main work, *Shiltei ha-Gibborim*, contains all of the aforementioned discussions as well as instructions for his children on how to live, including topics such as reading, writing, printing, and various other skills children ought to perfect.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Shiltei ha-Gibborim*; *Dialoghi tres de duro.*

PROFIAT DURAN (See DURAN, PROFIAT)

RIETI, MOSES BEN ISAAC DA (Moses de Rieti, Moses ben Isaac da Rieti)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1388–after 1460. Fifteenth-century Italian Jewish scholar. Moses was a polemicist, logician, and rabbi, born in Rieti. He served as the physician to Pope Pius II Piccolomini. His main work *Miqdash Me'at* is a poem modeled on Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Reflecting the Neoplatonist strain of Ibn Gabirol, the poem describes the hierarchical chain of beings that comprises the universe. In the poem, the poet is released from his embodied condition only after achieving intellectual and moral

perfection. Throughout the poem, it is evident that Moses believed that paradise is reserved for Jews alone.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Miqdash Me'at.*

ROMANO, JUDAH BEN MOSES BEN DANIEL (Leone de Ser Daniel)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: ca. 1286–after 1330. Philosopher and translator. Praised in the poetry of Immanuel of Rome (Italian–Jewish scholar and satirical poet), Judah produced the first translations of philosophical Latin works into Hebrew to make such manuscripts accessible to the Jews. He is the first Hebrew translator of texts such as those of Thomas Aquinas, and he supposedly gave public orations of his translations of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Judah also produced several written works of his own, including a philosophical commentary of the creation in Genesis, explanatory notes of the *Kaddish* and *Kadushah,* as well an introduction to prophetical books. Judah is also thought to have prepared translations for Robert II of Anjou, King of Naples, who studied the Hebrew Bible under his tutelage.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Ben Porat*; *Commentary on Genesis.*

SAADIA BEN JOSEPH GAON

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 882–942. Philosopher and Babylonian leader of Jewry. Born in Pithom, Egypt, little is known about his life from 905 to 921. In 921 he was a leading opponent of Aaron ben Meir, who argued that the Jewish calendar was inaccurate and proposed to have holidays and new moons reestablished in light of his findings. The dispute resulted in a schism, wherein the Jews in Eretz Israel and those in Babylonia celebrated Rosh Hashanah on different days. Once the schism was resolved, Saadia composed a detailed account of the events by request. In 928 he was given the appointment of head of the Sura academy, where he made it his personal mission to increase student enrollment and acquire funds to maintain the academy. After a stormy period of years, Saadia turned to philosophical writings, living the life of the intellectual rather than a political one. His major work *Kitāb al-Amānāt wa-al-I'tiqadāt* (*The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*) was written in Arabic, and was translated into Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon in 1186 under the title *Sefer ha-Emunot ve-ha-De'ot*. In this work he attempted, along Mutazilite lines, to establish a rational basis for the dogmas of the Law. He also wrote an Arabic commentary on the *Sefer Yetzirah* (*Book of Creation*).

SELECTED TEXTS: *Kitāb al-Amānāt wa'l-'Itiqādāt* [*Sefer ha-Emunot ve-ha De'ot*]; *Perush Sefer-ha-Yetzirah*.

SAMUEL BEN JUDAH OF MARSEILLE

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: Thirteenth Century. French physician and translator, primarily of scientific works from Arabic into Hebrew.

SELECTED TEXTS: Translations of Averroes' *Commentaries*.

SHALOM, ABRAHAM BEN ISAAC

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: Early fifteenth century–1492. Philosopher and translator of philosophical writings from Spain. Although he translated from Latin into Hebrew, there is evidence that he was competent in Greek and Arabic as well. He was known to argue against opponents of secular-scientific studies. Despite his love of science, he insisted that scripture too was accurate and went to great efforts

to reconcile the two. In his major work *Nevei Shalom* (*Dwelling of Peace*) he defended Maimonides against Levi ben Gershom, who opposed Maimonidean philosophy, and Hasdai Crescas, who felt that Maimonides partially compromised scriptural religion. It was Abraham Shalom's mission to disprove Gersonides' account and to assuage Crescas' concerns by showing the complete compatibility of Maimonides' works, science, and the Jewish religion.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Sefer Neveh Shalom*.

SPINOZA, BARUCH (Benedictus, Bento)

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: 1632–1677. Contending with Maimonides for the title of most influential Jewish philosopher of all time, Spinoza is also one of the most unique and important early-modern philosophers. Spinoza was born in Amsterdam and grew up in the Portuguese–Jewish community. Spinoza was forced to abandon his studies at the age of seventeen to help run his family's importing business. By 1656, Spinoza was excommunicated via the writ of *ḥerem* by Amsterdam's Sephardic community. This excommunication was never rescinded. Although this event took place prior to the publication of Spinoza's works, scholars speculate that the excommunication was a result of Spinoza's radical views. For instance, Spinoza rejects central religious notions such as the immortality of the soul, a providential God, and human free will (as it is typically construed as standing outside of nature). He held that adequate understanding of God's nature was possible for humans. Perhaps most unique to his philosophy was Spinoza's pantheism: the universe contains only one substance, which is infinite, uncaused, and necessarily exists. All that exists is in God and God is the underlying substance that sustains all that exists. All particular, individual things are "affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way." (*Ethics*, part I, proposition 25 corollary). As an ethical egoist, he thought it was right for each of us to pursue the path that was in our best interest; it just so happens that the best path for each of us is this rational understanding of God. Although he was still quite spiritual, Spinoza's views diverged from Judaism, and he left Amsterdam a few years after being excommunicated. He later lived in Rijnsburg, Voorburg, and finally, The Hague.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Ethics*; *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*; *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being*; *On Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*; *Theological-Political Treatise*; *Political Treatise*.

TODROSI, TODROS

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: Translator of philosophical works. He studied with Sen Astruc of Noves. He was imprisoned in the fort of Rodorta at Beaucaire circa 1321.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Commentary on the Almagest*. translations: several of the works of al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes.

YEHIEL NISSIM DA PISA

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: d. 1574. Eminent scholar and direct descendant of the da Pisa family. A well-established family of bankers, financers, and international merchants, the da Pisas successfully ran banks in cities throughout Tuscany, including Florence and Pisa. Nissim lived on his family's vast farming estate in Pisa. The author of several works, he retained profound knowledge of scriptures, philosophy, *Kabbalah*, and astronomy. Also a philanthropist, Nissim kept his house open to aid the needy. In his major work *Minḥat Kena'ot* (*Offering of Jealousy*) he argued for the superiority of religion over philosophy.

SELECTED TEXTS: *Minḥat Kena'ot*; *Ma'amar Ḥayyei 'Olam*.

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