

THE GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED

A NEW TRANSLATION



MOSES MAIMONIDES

TRANSLATED AND WITH COMMENTARY
BY LENN E. GOODMAN AND PHILLIP I. LIEBERMAN

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Moses Maimonides

Translated and with commentary by

LENN E. GOODMAN

and

PHILLIP I. LIEBERMAN

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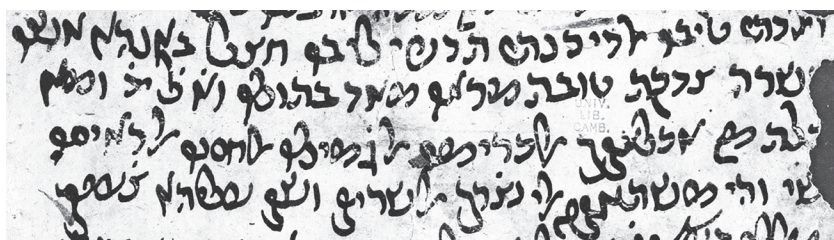
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My work in this book is dedicated to my wife Roberta Walter Goodman. She was a specialist in truth and honesty in her years on Wall Street, a faithful and astute judge of character. She has graduated to houyhnhnms now. But she knew that the *Guide* was on my wish list from the days I first began work on it in 1970, and she did not let me leave it on the back burner in the past decade and more. She lived the making of this book with me, and I am proud that she will soon see it in print and hold it in her hands. It is as much hers as mine.

—LEG

I dedicate this volume to my life partner in all things, Dr. Yedida Chaya Eisenstat, who showed extreme forbearance during the long years I gave over to this joint project with a scholarly partner. I am fortunate to have found someone who fits the description seen in the fourteenth-century Geniza fragment below written by a man to his mother about his love—lacking no lofty benevolent quality (*mā khalat min akhlāqiki al-karīma al-jamīla al-ḥasana al-rāʾisiya shay*).



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Readers of this volume will find repeated reference to the insights I gleaned from the work of José Faur, whose warm sympathies with the Maimonidean spirit shed light in much the way that Maimonides' own insights retrace the pathways of philosophical Judaism trodden by Philo, whose spirit Maimonides

shared, although he had no access to Philo's texts. Readers will also see the profit I have gleaned from the penetrating scholarship of Jim Diamond in tracing the often tacit midrashic linkages of Maimonides' biblical prooftexts to his philosophical themes.

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—Lenn E. Goodman

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—Phillip I. Lieberman

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I

The Object of the *Guide*

LENN E. GOODMAN

Moses Maimonides is known in Arabic as Mūsā bin Maimūn. In traditional Jewish circles, he is the Rambam, a copyist's acronym of his Hebrew name, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon. His father, Maimon, was himself a learned rabbi, but Moses would come to be widely recognized as the greatest Jewish thinker of the Middle Ages and one of the great philosophers in the Western tradition. The name Maimonides was introduced by Latin translators, who added the Greek patronymic to link Rabbi Moses to his father's name.

A practicing physician, Maimonides was the author of ten works in the Galenic tradition of scientific medicine, some in multiple volumes. Adept in geometry and at home in the most advanced astronomy of his day, he was the author of the *Mishneh Torah*, a systematic code of Jewish Law still authoritative and widely studied today. His medical writings and his other halakhic works, including his pioneering commentary on the Mishnah and his distinctive collation of the 613 commandments traditionally expected in the Pentateuch, were written in Arabic. But his code, often called the *Yad Hazaqah*, or Strong Hand, alluding to its fourteen volumes (the numerical value of the letters in the word *yad* being fourteen), was written in Hebrew, emulating the Hebrew of the original halakhic code, the Mishnah, compiled roughly a millennium earlier.

The Guide to the Perplexed, translated here from the Arabic original, was written to help a religiously committed inquirer navigate the straits between religion and philosophy. The reader Maimonides hopes to aid has studied logic, philosophy, and the sciences and practical arts sheltered under philosophy's aegis. Maimonides is all too cognizant of the challenges serious inquirers face at the confluence of the two great streams of thought and learning that Arabic writers labeled *'aql* and *naql*, reason and tradition. The Arabic title he gave the

work, *Dalālat al-Ḥā'irīn*, reflects his sensitivity to the quandary faced by a religiously invested Jew who is also scientifically and philosophically aware.

Samuel Ibn Tibbon translated the *Guide* during Maimonides' lifetime and with his advice. Ibn Tibbon brilliantly chose the title by which the work is best known in Hebrew: *Moreh Nevukhim*, using the word *nevukhim* to reflect the angst often pressing those who felt caught between science and philosophy on the one hand and religious texts and traditions on the other. The same word had been used in the Book of Esther (3:13) to give some sense of the consternation Jews felt at Susa on hearing Haman's genocidal decree against the Jews of ancient Iran. And the same word was used long before to convey Pharaoh's sense that his fleeing slaves were trapped (*nevukhim*, Exodus 14:3) between the sea and the charge his chariots would make against the desperate Israelites. There is some irony in both biblical accounts. In the Persian case, Esther's courage made her the unlooked-for agent of salvation for her fellow Jews. And at the Sea of Reeds, the retreating (and then returning) waters mocked Pharaoh's boast: The trap proved not quite as tightly locked as Pharaoh had expected. It was he and his forces who were caught in it. Here, too, in the intellectual realm, Maimonides hoped, serious use of one's intellectual powers might show religion and philosophy to be not quite so starkly at odds as a less philosophically astute and spiritually sophisticated reader might assume. Indeed, the exposure of biblical piety and rabbinic lore to the crosscurrents of logical, philosophical, and scientific scrutiny might prove healthy for religion—and for philosophy as well.

Many of the arts and sciences that claimed the authority of reason in Maimonides' day were anchored in Greek and Hellenistic literature and culture, although some had Indian, Iranian, or even Babylonian roots. Hundreds of classic works of Greek philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, musical theory, and other disciplines had been translated into Arabic before Maimonides was born. Readers of Arabic knew well that the ancient Greeks were not monotheists like them. Some reacted negatively to the very idea of formal logic, dismissing it as the mere grammar of the Greeks. Others sought to devise alternative schemes of inference, or rival accounts of physical theory and human agency, meant to reflect their ideas of God's power. But many Muslims, Christians, and Jews saw in the translated classics a treasure house of universal truths and precious practical knowledge. Many, Maimonides included, saw in the newly accessible literature an ancient heritage regained. And many worked, ably and creatively, to expand and deepen the newfound disciplines, leaving clear markers of their efforts in the numerous Arabic names and terms studding today's astronomy, mathematics, and chemistry. Arabic was the Latin of an early

renaissance that came several centuries before its European counterpart and contributed substantially to Western philosophy, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and other disciplines before classical works were directly translated from their Greek originals, sparking a new humanism and a spirit of inquiry comparable to what had been assayed in lands under Islamic rule.

The object of the *Guide*, as Maimonides declares near the start of the work, is to probe the mysteries of physics and metaphysics. But mysteries, for him, are not conundrums to be celebrated for their impenetrability but problems to be solved. He tags the two domains with the phrases the rabbinic sages used to mark off terrain they deemed dangerous for the unwary and ill prepared: *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. The names allude to two biblical passages emblematic of the problems the *Guide* will confront: the account of creation in Genesis and Ezekiel's report of his vision as an exile on the banks of the river Chebar. We can readily see why that vision troubled the Rabbis: Ezekiel seemed to say that he had seen God seated on His throne, rabbinically called a chariot. That thought would naturally alarm the Sages: Even Genesis avoids describing God, and many a biblical text, not least the Decalogue, rejects attempts to represent God physically. As for creation, familiarity may render that idea less striking to those raised with biblical phrases. But the Rabbis were all too cognizant of the issues the idea opened up. As Maimonides writes,

Given the immensity and sublimity of the idea of creation and our incapacity to grasp such ultimates themselves, the profundities that divine wisdom saw we need were broached obliquely and poetically—in words quite baffling. As the Sages say, “It is impossible to convey to flesh and blood the power of the Creative Act, so Scripture baldly tells you, *In the beginning God created. . .*” (Midrash Sh'nei Ketuvim, Batei Midrashot 4)—putting you on notice that these things are ineffable. You know Solomon's words: *Far off it was, and deep, deep—who can plumb it!* (Ecclesiastes 7:24). Everything about it is couched in multivalent terms. So the masses take it as best their limited understanding permits, but the astute, if they are learned, take it otherwise. (1.5ab)

First among the questions the Genesis account opened up for inquiring minds was just *how* God had created heaven and earth. For nature is physical and God is not. Philo, the first Jewish philosopher to seek an extensive synthesis of biblical and Greek thought, sought an answer to that question by appealing to Stoic notions of a *word*. The Torah had represented creation as taking place at God's word of command. Abandoning Stoic materialism for a more Platonic

conception of God's plan, Philo reasoned that an incorporeal idea is manifested bodily by its expression in a word. Later philosophers, in the Neoplatonic tradition so prominent in the Arabic philosophy Maimonides studied, relied on the idea of emanation, the projection of an idea, giving pattern and thus form or essence to otherwise unformed matter.

Maimonides was drawn to that idea and relied on it systematically. But emanation brought with it serious problems that he would have to deal with: It seemed to imply that not only God's ideas but matter, too, was eternal. Did that make God's creative act itself eternal? If so, was it an act at all, willed or chosen by free grace—or a mere necessity, like the flow of light from the sun or, as the Neoplatonist Proclus had put it in the fifth century, an implication, as necessary as the entailment of theorems by their premises in geometry? If creation was necessary and the world, therefore, was eternal, as al-Ghazālī, had argued in his trenchant critique of the Muslim Neoplatonists, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, then those philosophers were unwitting atheists: an eternal world seemed to have no need of God.

Clearly, 'physics,' as Maimonides understood it when he placed *Mā'aseh Bereshit* under that heading, meant far more than the study of matter in motion. Physics, in Aristotelian terms, included all studies of nature and change. But physics in the *Guide* meant cosmology par excellence. And, like cosmology today when it starts to deal with ultimates, it impinges on theology (1.5a)—first when it seeks to deal with ultimate origins but then more broadly. For physics plunges neck-deep into metaphysics when it begins to wonder, radically, about causality, asking if causality is at work in nature at all and, perhaps more profoundly, whether all causes are physical or if there are not some beyond the material and mechanical, such as purposes, reasons, intentions, ideas, and plans. A plethora of questions, then, lay behind and beneath the rubric *Mā'aseh Bereshit* that the Rabbis had introduced and warned about. The *Guide* will ignore none of them.

As for metaphysics, the term was unknown to Aristotle. It was introduced long after his time. But he was the founder of the discipline. He called it First Philosophy, conceiving it as the broadest study of reality at large, seeking to understand what it is for anything to be. But he also called it theology (using the term Plato had coined to describe the effort to say what is worthy of the divine). It was natural to call first philosophy theology, since metaphysics does concern ultimates. As the Muslim philosopher al-Fārābī had explained, it asks about ultimate reality. But it also seeks ultimate causes and ultimate value.

Philosophers in Plato's wake saw reality, causality, and value as intimately intertwined, united ultimately in divinity (see *Phaedo* 97c–99c; *Republic* VI

509d–511e; *Timaeus* 29, etc.). Here again was an idea that Maimonides found compelling. Where Plato had argued that what is good must be real, the Torah had reached a corresponding conclusion: what is most real must be good. Truth and goodness, reality and value, for Maimonides, unite in the biblical idea of God as the Source, Ruler, and Judge of all things, the Cause of all causes and Ultimate of all ultimates, beyond all impermanence, appearance, and relativity. Here, for Maimonides, was the absoluteness revealed to Moses at the burning bush, when God called Himself I AM THAT I AM (I 63).

In metaphysics, too, then, as in cosmology, a host of questions opened up. Prominent among them were the many issues raised by the disparity between God's infinite transcendence and the finite capacities and capabilities of human beings and all things in nature. How was it possible for one to know God, or for God, in His transcendence, to communicate with human beings? How was it possible, indeed, for the All-perfect to reveal a law spelling out what is demanded and expected of finite subjects by God's absolute perfection? Ezekiel's vision was a peak paradox here. It seemed to scale divinity to the limits of a visionary's fancy. But the issues grow beyond that question and ramify out of control.

The Sages betray their embarrassment at the juncture between the finite and the Infinite by trying to fence off discussion of the troublesome verses where the discrepancies seem to loom most large. But in the cosmopolitan milieu of a new, intellectually aggressive society (not unlike the environment Philo faced in Alexandria at the dawn of the Common Era), one could not safely duck such questions. Maimonides gives us a taste of the sort of challenges thoughtful Jews must face in such times when he alludes (I 2) to questions raised by a scholarly but hardly parochial acquaintance who asked, If Adam and Eve were punished for their disobedience, why were they given moral knowledge, humankind's greatest distinction? Was this not like the Greek tales of titans punished for their rebellions by being made stars and constellations?

Maimonides does not grace the pagan mythic background by spelling out the allusion. He will, indeed, scotch the objection, finding it captious and hasty, offering in its place a brilliant and telling exegesis of the biblical story, revealing how the narrative in Genesis pinions the human condition. But the tone taken by his questioner clearly troubled him, and the tenor of the objection stuck in his craw. Recalling that conversation near the beginning of the *Guide*, he gives us a good idea why he thought Jewish theology could no longer remain under wraps. The time had come to address a crisis here just as Judah the Patriarch, in codifying the Mishnah, had seen the need to address the crisis facing Halakhah

in his own time. Maimonides' project in the *Guide* is a vital reminder to Jewish thinkers today who fancy they can somehow sidestep like questions raised in our own far freer, more open society if they expect Judaism to survive as more than the fossil relic Arnold Toynbee imagined it to be.

Questions about revelation—or the nature and degrees of prophecy, as Maimonides prefers to call it—are emblematic of the issues raised by the disparity between the Infinite and the finite, determinate world we live in, the world that Scripture tells us God created, rules, and judges. Making an opportunity out of a problem, Maimonides exploits the biblical account of Ezekiel's vision to propose a Neoplatonizing account of the interface between God and nature. His model of that nexus, heavily reliant on the cosmology of the celestial spheres and the incorporeal "intelligences" presumed to guide and power them, is just as speculative as Ezekiel's vision itself was projective. Maimonides knows and acknowledges that his reading of Ezekiel's report is personal and conjectural (3.2b). He makes no pretense of calling it authoritative. But his treatment illuminates the learning and the skills he brought to bear in his concerted effort to integrate visionary poetry with science as he knew it.

After just seven chapters eliciting a specific sense from Ezekiel's vision, Maimonides, confessing that his account may have gone "somewhat overboard," promises to say no more on the subject, content to have shown that the figure seen in the prophet's vision represented not God Himself but something created, identifiable, perhaps, as "God's created glory." Ezekiel, he writes, "beheld the Chariot, not the Rider!" (3.10b–11a).

Dusting the stardust from his clothes, Maimonides moves on to what seemed more tractable issues at the interface of finitude and the Infinite: the problems of natural and moral evil; questions as to the wisdom and the warrants of God's mitzvot; the nature of prophecy, worship, and prayer; and questions about God's knowledge. For if God's knowledge, in His unity, is God Himself, how could God know, let alone govern, mutable things without Himself becoming mutable? And how could God's knowledge, as His plan and word of command, leave room for human freedom?

Emanation gave Maimonides his answer to the two great problems he confronted in the *Guide*: If God created by imparting forms, the same answer could explain God's governance. It was by way of forms—mediated by the angelic, incorporeal intellects that rule the stars and speed the motions of the spheres—that God controlled nature's rhythms. And the determinations of God's will—identical, in His unity, with His wisdom, timelessly framing the laws of nature—built into the natures of things the special exceptions that

would one day prove critical in the production of miracles. The same reliance on God's will that preserved miracles and creation itself by distinguishing ordained natural necessities from logical necessities, secured nature from the determinism implicit in the rationalist intellectualism of the Neoplatonists. Maimonides' expedient—holding fast to natural necessities but not letting them be submerged in logical necessity, as they tended to be in Neoplatonic intellectualism—left room for the empiricism long recognized as indispensable in medicine and increasingly critical in the scientific explorations that would pave the way for the modern age.

What, then, of providence? Clearly general providence, Maimonides could say, attends all sublunary nature through the forms, which are the essences of the species of all things. But beyond the general providence that sustains nature at large and the living species in it, through nature's cycles and the dependence of one natural kind upon another, there is, Maimonides argues, an individual providence over human beings. For if God rules by way of emanation, he reminds us, species exist only in their members. Individuals come first. And in the human case, the form that reaches us, most distinctively as the human mind, is unique in each of us. It links each one of us to God with a bond that we ourselves can attenuate even to the breaking point or strengthen even to the point that it becomes unbreakable and restores us to the tree of life (3.124b–125a, II n. 433).

Emanation, for Maimonides, opens the door, too, to an understanding of God's knowledge: God can know human individuals through the unique form in each of us, the mind that binds each human being to Him. Providence *is* that bond. And although God knows not by following but by creatively projecting the natures that make things real, God respects the dignity of human choices at the heart of our uniqueness: He could have given us a nature incapable of deviance from His will. But He never has done that and never will so infringe on our individuality (3.71b). In knowing all things, then, God knows what we will do and how we will choose. But it is still we who act and choose. Were that not so, it would not be *our* choices or *our* actions that God knows.

Philosophers, ancient and modern, Maimonides argues, had shunned the notion that God knows natural particulars, lest that view implicate God in natural and moral evil. Their denial of God's knowledge of particulars was their response to the Epicurean dilemma: if God is good and governs nature, He must not know how badly ordered human fortunes prove (3.30b). In falling victim to such reasoning, Maimonides argues, Neoplatonist philosophers have forgotten the foundational place of matter in their own philosophical edifice.

The problem of evil troubles every religious thinker—and many who are nonreligious or antireligious. It had troubled Maimonides all the more intensely and directly after the loss of his brother at sea. But despite this deeply personal loss—and the many other losses that he knew of, through war and famine, depredations and disease—Maimonides possessed powerful ripostes to the Epicurean challenge to God's benevolent governance. And again, it was his emanative ontology that gave him the means to frame his responses. Having an answer did not, of course, dim his loss or somehow erase the pain and suffering of any victim. But it did help allay the doubts of providence that grave losses spark.

Evil, moral and natural, was privation. Maimonides takes the Neoplatonic philosophers to task for losing sight of that key teaching of theirs and not turning to it when they sought to absolve the Deity of responsibility for natural calamities and human failings. Matter, he argues, is the doorway to privation. It is personified in the Book of Job by the figure of the *Saṭan*, introduced there not as one of the "sons of God" but as coming along with them, as if uninvited. Matter, in other words, is not evil in itself. Indeed, it is not itself a reality. Form, the intellectual principle, is the basis of reality in nature. Matter, in its purity, the notional "prime matter" of Aristotelians, has no form of its own at all. Still, matter is, as Neoplatonists like Proclus stoutly affirmed, a critical concomitant of finite being. Indeed, it is the first expression of divine generosity, if anything is to exist besides the Highest.

Matter, then, is a gift. But since even God cannot create another infinitely perfect being, matter is inseparable from privation. The shifting dynamic of matter as the elements jockey with one another over forms underlies all natural evils, be they floods or fires, earthquakes or tornadoes. Death itself reflects the impermanence of any one form in the body in which it resides. Yet the destruction of one thing is the generation of another. Hence the stability of nature, its ongoing cycles ensuring the permanence promised by God's providence.

Moral evil, too, is a privation, ultimately intellectual: it is lack of knowledge, lack of the understanding and the wisdom to recognize where real value lies and how wise choices can be made. (Even the Epicurean dilemma itself reflects such ignorance when it treats the genuine evil of suffering as though pleasures and pains were the true coin of ultimate value.) Every human vice and failing reflects some form of ignorance. Hence the stress on wisdom in scriptural texts like the Book of Proverbs and the Torah's more immediate concern with the training of human character through actions that foster habits and an ethos of love and caring.

If the gift of form gives things their reality and the natural parameters of their governance, Maimonides finds it is emanation, once again, that makes

revelation possible—here, too, by imparting ideas. For the concepts we gain are forms, subjectively apprehended, letting reason frame hypotheses that do not fall short of the universality science demands but that experience unaided can never attain. Philosophers, natural scientists, and mathematicians stand at the forefront among the human recipients of such forms. Our sound concepts are prompted by the cues gleaned in experience but boosted to universality by the objective and objectifying ideas flowing inexhaustibly from the divinely charged Active Intellect that gives subjects their understanding even as it gives objects their reality. Discovery is the matchup of the subjective rationality of the mind with the objective rationality that forms and thus governs nature.

But in the special cases of a chosen few, where brilliant minds have been purified by moral chastity and elevated by discipline and training, a divine gift of extraordinary brain stuff allows the projection of pure concepts onto the sensuously inflected backdrop of the imagination. Imagination for Maimonides, as for his Muslim predecessors al-Fārābī and Avicenna, is a faculty embodied in the brain. In all of us, it functions in memory and dreaming, preserving and projecting the images of objects seen or experiences desired or feared. It is in that sense that Maimonides can brand imagination the true “Evil Inclination,” since it can elevate appetites and passions beyond rational control. Yet dreaming, as the Sages suggest, in a remark that Maimonides cites tellingly, is continuous with prophecy (2.78a). Here ideas, rather than mere sense impressions or bodily urges, take on symbolic form in words or symbols and are even projected in symbolically fraught moral practices, rituals, and legal and ceremonial institutions capable of conveying the ideas and ideals that are the special province of philosophy. Symbols, in this way, become the eyelets in the silver-chased golden orb of a well-wrought image (see Proverbs 25:11). For the poetic symbols of prophecy and the institutions that enshrine those symbols lift them beyond the bourne of the sensory materials they employ, making higher ideas accessible to the populace of a nation or to humanity at large.

Language, imagination, and poetic, rhetorical, and legislative imagery lean toward the physical side of the mind-body divide for Maimonides. So prophecy is more readily related to what we think of as God’s will than to His wisdom. And the dependence of prophecy on the material side of the human soul—evident in the reliance of prophets on imaginative tropes, on language, and on resonance with the tones of popular culture—speaks to God’s exercise of discretion in the choice of prophets from the ranks of human beings otherwise qualified by moral character and intellectual discipline and training. A prophet must have

the imagination of a poet, the eloquence of an orator, and (in the highest phase of prophecy, as seen in the prophecy of Moses), the wisdom of a statesman and a lawgiver. Yet here, too, with revelation, as with governance and creation, emanation was the answer to the question at the heart of the topos of *Ma'aseh Merkabah*. If the prophets of Israel must resort to human language, as the Rabbis say they must, then we can understand their dreams and visions (and, indeed, their laws) by unpacking the poesy in which their ideas were delivered—undressing their imagery, if we dare, so that we, too, may gaze on beauty bare.

If emanation enables one to explain how a transcendent, incorporeal God can speak to human beings, it also helps us see how we can commune with God in turn. To Maimonides, the highest worship never lay in the sacrificial cult that God's grace gave Israel in the nation's spiritual infancy (3.69b–73a). The Torah's sacrificial laws served to regulate public worship but at the same time to wean Israel away from the barbaric, orgiastic, superstitious practices and scabrous beliefs of pagan piety.

Prayer outflanked sacrifice as a mode of worship. But even prayer, for Maimonides, was not the ideal mode of worship. True, we are to call on God in times of crisis, lest we forget where our hope and trust rightly reside (3.77b). But even praises fall short of God's infinite perfection and are wisely restrained by rabbinical precept, and by the self-deconstruction of the Torah's poetic tropes, when prophetic boldness licenses and emanative exigencies compel inspired minds to apply to God epithets derived from human experience and better befitting creatures than their Creator (1.52b–53a). It is in meditation that the wise open their hearts to the highest form of worship (3.126ab), learning of God's perfection by discovering the marks of His wisdom and grace in nature and strengthening the link to Him that God gave us in the human mind.

God's commands, Maimonides argues, are scaled to human finitude (and, indeed, as the Torah itself reveals, to the circumstances, historical and cultural, of its recipients). What the mitzvot call for, when inviting emulation of God's holiness, is not the pursuit of an infinitude of our own but transcendence of our limitations by perfecting our humanity, cultivating the moral virtues (the main focus of the biblical mitzvot, Maimonides urges), and thereby laying a foundation for the perfection of the mind.

Reason, Maimonides declares, is the true self, the substantial form that makes us what we are. It is God's image and likeness, in which all human beings, male and female, are created (I 1). It is here that Maimonides finds the biblical roots of the idea of human perfectibility. Reason, the rational intellect, as perfected, is the true guide of human choices, and reason finds a perfection all

its own in the loving contemplation of God, the final goal of human wisdom. So it is here that Maimonides finds the key to the wisdom that warrants God's commandments. Their aim is to guide us, through cultivation of the moral and intellectual virtues, toward knowing and loving God. It is here again that we perfect our humanity and learn, ever more deeply, how to emulate God's grace in generosity toward others (3.135a).

II

Maimonides' World

PHILLIP I. LIEBERMAN

Based on Maimonides' own attestation, we may conclude that he completed his famous commentary on the Mishnah when he was thirty years old, in the year 1479 of the Seleucid chronology (corresponding to 1167/68 CE), a date that would mean that he came into the world in the year 1137/38 CE.¹ Indeed, both a report from Maimonides' grandson and one from the fifteenth-century Granadan scholar Se'adyah² Ibn Danan even give us the date—the fourteenth of Nisan³—although we should not dismiss the possibility that this is pure hagiography given the place of that date in the Jewish calendar, ushering in the Passover festival.⁴ An appreciation of the “Great Eagle,” as he would come to be called, demands an understanding of the much larger intellectual, cultural, and political context in which he lived and wrote. Sarah Stroumsa, for example, goes so far as to identify Maimonides as a “Mediterranean thinker” and points out that Maimonides “saw himself throughout his life as an Andalusian, and identified himself as such by signing his name in Hebrew as ‘Moshe ben Maimūn ha-Sefardi’ (‘the Spaniard,’ or in less anachronistic terms ‘al-Andalusī’).”⁵ Oliver Leaman, in turn, explains in his “Introduction to the Study of Medieval Jewish Philosophy” that “the medieval period is one in which the debate

1. H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 9; Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 23.

2. As noted by Adolf Neubauer in 1890, the proper spelling of this name is Se'adyah, which I will use throughout this introduction (Neubauer, “Post-biblical Biography,” 191–204). However, we will use the better-known spelling “Saadiyah” in the translation.

3. H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 6–9.

4. Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 24.

5. Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, 6–7.

between philosophy and religion is regarded as having dominated the cultural atmosphere of the times. The main area of intellectual life was the Iberian Peninsula, and especially al-Andalus, the Islamic territories on the peninsula, with its large and well-integrated Jewish community.⁶ Despite such emphases on the Mediterranean and the Iberian Peninsula, the philosophical materials that engaged Maimonides and his Andalusian fellows were, in fact, the product of philosophical movements that we may locate far to the East—in particular, in Damascus of the seventh century CE and Baghdad of the eighth: “As Muslim acquaintance grew with the urban civilization of the Near East, with its Hellenistic legacy which had deeply shaped the earlier monotheisms, some Muslims began to develop a high form of religious, doctrinal or theological discourse known as *kalām*.”⁷ Many of the earliest group of *kalām* thinkers came from southern Iraq. It was the anti-Aristotelian practitioners of *kalām*—known collectively as the *Mutakallimūn*—who threw down the gauntlet that Maimonides, among others, would pick up centuries later on the other side of the Mediterranean.⁸ Before that happened, however, the Islamic ‘Abbāsīd dynasty (750–1258 CE) rose to power. From their newly founded seat of Baghdad, the Greek philosophical tradition would capture the minds of a movement of translators who would make the philosophical works of Aristotle and Galen among many others, as well as the commentators on this entire literature, available to an Arabic-speaking audience. These translations were not, as some have argued, the result of the patronage of a few caliphs seeking adoration and glory through their support of philosophy; rather, translation of this massive library was a phenomenon sustained by the entire elite of ‘Abbāsīd society.⁹ That the Greek philosophical classics were transmitted into Arabic, in many cases through a Byzantine Christian Syriac or Zoroastrian Persian intermediary, was for some a return to philosophy’s ancient roots: Al-Fārābī (872–951 CE) “located the birthplace of philosophy in Iraq, whence it was transmitted to Egypt, then to Greece, and finally rendered into Syriac and Arabic.”¹⁰ Transmission was more than simple translation; for example, Arabic versions read Aristotle “through the prism of a Neoplatonic tradition, that is, as interpreted by Plotinus, Porphyry, and

6. Leaman, “Introduction,” 4–5.

7. Blankinship, “Early Creed,” 45.

8. For the specific philosophical positions of the *mutakallimūn*, see Goldziher and Lewis, *Introduction*, 67–115; for the role the *mutakallimūn* would play in subsequent Jewish philosophy, see Harry Wolfson, *Kalām*.

9. Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 1–8; see also Goodman, *Translation*, 477–97.

10. Kraemer, “Islamic Context,” 39.

Proclus.”¹¹ Indeed, since Plato himself was translated infrequently relative to Aristotle, it was primarily through the Neoplatonic prism that his ideas were known.

The ‘Abbāsids’ massive library of Arabic versions of Greek philosophical classics was slow to make its way to the West, and the nature of its reception in the West was very different from what it was in the East. Rather than being the cultural production of an entire stratum of society, the early development of the philosophical library of al-Andalus—Islamic Spain—was primarily centered on the efforts of the Umayyad caliphs of Spain to establish their place as authorities in the temporal and cultural/literary domains independent of their erstwhile overlords, the ‘Abbāsids, in Iraq. Circumstances greatly favored these endeavors, and by the middle of the tenth century, “almost all branches of science and philosophy [were] imported from the East . . . [and] . . . al-Andalus [became] a major exporter of knowledge”¹² in the centuries following. The development of a massive library of scientific literature by the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III (r. 929–961) and especially by his son al-Ḥakam II (r. 961–976)—which has been said to have run to some four hundred thousand volumes¹³—facilitated this venture and helped establish the Andalusian ruling family as major players in competition with the ‘Abbāsids in the East in the domain of science and philosophy. Indeed, the library “served as the focus of a whole nexus of cultural activities which helped lay the foundations for the massive explosion of literary productivity in Islamic Spain associated with the century and a quarter following al-Ḥakam’s death.”¹⁴ This institution more than any other allowed the Umayyads “to distance themselves from Baghdad, the capital of their rivals, and to compete with it as the centre of their own world.”¹⁵ Classics such as the compendia of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ (Brethren of Purity) found their way into al-Andalus in the early eleventh century, and all the sciences began to grow apace. The development and patronage of knowledge in al-Andalus engendered a florescence that extended beyond confessional lines as Jewish and Christian literateurs found support in the court of the Umayyads and their successors. And while in the early period of this development the main focus of the sciences was

11. *Ibid.*, 44.

12. Heath, “Knowledge,” 115.

13. Wasserstein disputes this figure yet nonetheless notes that its significance does not rest upon its historical accuracy (“Library,” 99).

14. *Ibid.*, 101.

15. *Ibid.*, 102.

practical—mathematics, astronomy, and medicine¹⁶—the twelfth century saw patrons and clients alike in al-Andalus take a particular interest in philosophy. This is the world into which Maimonides was born.

It is difficult to separate the fate of philosophy in al-Andalus from the political, cultural, and religious developments of the time. The Umayyad caliphate disintegrated less than a century after 'Abd al-Raḥmān III declared himself independent of 'Abbāsīd rule, followed by a period in which the rulers of fragmented states “encouraged literary and artistic creativity as likely to magnify their achievements and perpetuate the memories of their petty dynasts.”¹⁷ As the Umayyad caliphate experienced the establishment of a great repository of knowledge as defining its place in the intellectual life of Islam, then these “petty dynasts,” the *Mulūk al-Ṭawā'if* (Hispanized as “reyes de taifas”), led to the dissemination of that knowledge beyond the library located in the Umayyad palace of Madīnat al-Zahrā' on the outskirts of Cordoba and expanded it through the encouragement of not only literature and the arts but also science and philosophy. This patronage seems to have benefited a Jewish elite, some of whom rose to prominent government posts and some of whom also made important contributions to knowledge both sacred and secular.

The late eleventh century saw Christian rulers in the Iberian Peninsula capitalizing on the weakness of the fissiparous *ṭā'ifas*, with many of the local leaders paying tribute to Christian overlords who nonetheless continued to chip away at the Muslim domination of al-Andalus. The Christian takeover of Toledo in 1085 represented a watershed leading local dynasts to appeal southward for assistance from an emerging Islamic pietist/revivalist movement substantially made up of Berber peoples known as the al-Murābiṭūn (“those from the desert fortresses,” typically rendered in English as *Almoravids*) from the deserts of what is modern-day Morocco. The Almoravid advance into al-Andalus—intended to wrest control from the hands of both Christian rulers and petty Muslim rulers seen by their more ascetic North African brethren as dissolute and irreligious and hence more focused on poetry, literature, and philosophy than on Islam itself—lasted until the early twelfth century, when the Almoravids were replaced by another Berber dynasty known as al-Muwaḥḥidūn (“those who affirm the unity of God,” generally rendered in English as *Almohads*). The rise of these pietist movements represented a volte-face for the Jewish elites of al-Andalus who had fared well under the *ṭā'ifas*. Although the sobriquet al-Muwaḥḥidūn

16. Heath, “Knowledge,” 117.

17. *EI*, s.v. “Mulūk al-Ṭawā'if” (David J. Wasserstein).

suggests the importance of *tawhīd*, the uniqueness and oneness of God, the religious reforms of the Almohads were not simply a valorization of monotheism. Rather, the arrival of the Almohads witnessed a period of forced conversion and oppression of *dhimmīs*—that is, the “protected peoples” who lived under the agreement often known as the Pact of ‘Umar, in this case, Jews and Christians.¹⁸ These attacks on *dhimmīs* began in earnest within a few years of Maimonides’ birth, as Almohad forces occupied his birthplace of Cordoba in 1148 CE, and in many ways, Maimonides’ life may be seen as encompassing both the heights of Islamicate engagement with the timeless and universal problems of classical philosophy and the depths of religious persecution under a radical regime.

Maimonides’ family left Cordoba shortly after the arrival of the Almohads and seems to have remained in the Iberian Peninsula for some twelve years.¹⁹ The details of the family’s travels during this time are spotty, although it appears that they did sojourn in Seville, during which time Maimonides seems to have become particularly interested in astronomy. During this period, he appears to have met the son of the astronomer Jābir b. Aflah (1100–1150), author of a famous commentary on Ptolemy’s *Almagest*. He also studied under a pupil of Ibn Bājja²⁰ (Latin, Avempace, ca. 1085–1138). Ibn Bājja himself wrote a work on astronomy, not presently extant, to which Maimonides refers (*Guide* II 24). Exchanges with these scholars may have contributed to one of Maimonides’ earliest compositions, a treatise on the calendar, completed in 1157–58.²¹ It is during this period that Maimonides must also have perfected his training in classical rabbinic literature under his father, the rabbinic judge (*dayyan*) Maimūn b. Joseph (ca. 1110–ca. 1170),²² something that would have begun early on in Maimonides’ life. Moses’ father himself studied under the talmudist Joseph Ibn Migash (1077–ca. 1141), whose own teacher Isaac al-Fāṣī came to lead an important rabbinic academy at Lucena some forty miles from Cordoba at the end of the eleventh century. We may say, then, that Maimonides came from a distinguished line of Andalusian rabbinic leaders stretching back to the *ṭāʾifa* period. Amid the continued depredations of the Almohads, some Jews converted and stayed in al-Andalus, but others chose to flee to Christian Spain, North Africa, or southern France. Maimonides’ time in al-Andalus came to an end around

18. Fierro, “Conversion,” 155–73.

19. Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 41.

20. Cf. *Guide* II 9.

21. For details concerning the treatise on the calendar, see Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 76–79.

22. H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 4.

1160, when his family, for reasons not entirely clear to us, decided to move from the Iberian Peninsula to Fez in Northwest Africa (Arabic, Maghrib), itself the very cradle of the Almohads.

The Maghribī period in Maimonides' life, which would extend for some five years, has been the source of great controversy among scholars, mainly because it is puzzling that his family would move from one Almohad domain to another rather than taking the path of less resistance to Christian Spain or southern France. In his monumental biography *Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds*, Joel Kraemer challenges traditional explanations that the family's relocation was due to their search for a teacher for their favorite son and speculates instead that conditions for *dhimmīs* may have been more favorable in Fez than elsewhere, since Almohad persecution was not uniform across its domains.²³ Alternatively, the family may have decided to live as crypto-Jews, and Morocco may have put sufficient distance between their place of origin in Cordoba and their adopted place of residence in Fez to guarantee that they would not be recognized as Jews.²⁴

Despite the difficulties of living life as a Jew, Maimonides' study of classical rabbinic literature continued apace. Like his father, who wrote commentaries on the Bible and Talmud,²⁵ Maimonides contributed early on to the study of rabbinic literature by commenting on the Mishnah, the code of early rabbinic law that underpinned the Talmuds—starting this work in Fez when he was twenty-three and completing it in his Egyptian phase at the age of thirty. Moshe Halbertal identifies Maimonides' decision to comment on the *Mishnah*

23. Note that Davidson is less sanguine than Kraemer about using the Arabic prosopographical literature, to include the work of al-Qiftī, for biographical data about Maimonides; see *ibid.*

24. Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 84. It is worth noting that while the Maimonides family may have moved to Fez to assume a Muslim identity and distance themselves from their Andalusian Jewish roots, it seems that the family's subsequent move to Cairo was not sufficient to distance them from their time spent as crypto-Jews: as Kraemer explains, around the year 1190, a man living in Fuṣṭāṭ / Old Cairo named Abū 'l-'Arab Ibn Mu' ṣha al-Kinānī publicly accused Maimonides of having converted to Islam back in al-Andalus. Any return to life as a Jew would mean the crime of apostasy, punishable by death. It was only through the intervention of Saladin's chief administrator and Maimonides' patron al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, making the legal argument that Maimonides' conversion had been made under duress and could therefore be reversed, that the family was saved from the long arm of the law. Davidson is skeptical of the accuracy of this narrative.

25. *Ibid.*, 59.

as “an original idea; prior to Maimonides, no such attempt was made either by any of the Babylonian *Geonim* or by leading halakhists in Spain, Provence, Germany, or France. The only known commentary on the entire *Mishnah* that preceded Maimonides’ was written in the eleventh century by R. Nathan, the head of the Yeshiva of the Land of Israel.”²⁶ Halbertal describes the Commentary on the *Mishnah* (hereafter *CM*) as a building block laying the groundwork for his comprehensive compendium of Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah*—presenting the material systematized and organized to illuminate later talmudic understandings of the earlier mishnaic material.²⁷

Maimonides also pursued other studies in Fez, obtaining practical medical training. The great Andalusian doctors and medical theorists Ibn Zuhr (Latin, Avenzoar, 1090/91–1161/62) and Ibn Rushd (Latin, Averroes, 1126–1198) may not have been his teachers, but local physicians nonetheless opened up the world of medicine to him. Jewish physicians had actually served the Almoravid dynasty, but the Almohad persecutions enveloped the Maghrib, with the devastation being quite comprehensive. It is during this period that Maimonides wrote his “Epistle on Forced Conversion” (Hebrew, *Iggeret ha-Shemad*), a pastoral circular composed in the guise of a communique to a friend. Later communal letters provided support on similar matters to communities as far afield as Yemen.²⁸ The “Epistle on Forced Conversion” provided spiritual succor for those who chose forced conversion over death, over and above the objections of a heretofore unidentified rabbinic authority who regarded Islam as polytheism. Maimonides’ counsel was “to accept Islam provisionally and avoid martyrdom, to observe the commandments as far as possible, and to depart to a place where one can live openly as a Jew.”²⁹ And biding his time until early 1165, Maimonides may have done exactly that. Exactly how close Maimonides came to living an

26. Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 97. In fact, *pace* Halbertal, Maimonides was not the first post-talmudic figure to comment on the *Mishnah*. Halbertal himself notes the commentary of Rabbi Nathan b. Abraham (d. ca. 1045–51), but eminent scholars of the Babylonian academies such as Hayya Ga’on (939–1038) and Se’adyah Ga’on (882–942) both penned commentaries on the *Mishnah*. Thus, Brody writes that “many references to such works, on the *Mishnah* as a whole or on selected tracts, are also to be found on ancient booklists” (*Geonim*, 269).

27. Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 97–99.

28. For a discussion of Maimonides’ Epistle to Yemen and a translation of the text of the epistle itself, see Hartman and Halkin, *Crisis and Leadership*, 91–208.

29. Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 111.

outward life as a Muslim and an inward life as a Jew during his interlude in Fez is a matter scholars have debated for nearly two centuries.³⁰

Departing the Maghrib with his father and brother David, he arrived in the Land of Israel in the middle of May, surviving a journey made arduous by rough seas. In the thick of a storm, Maimonides took a vow imposing on his family two days of fasting and charitable giving as well as a day of prayer and study in seclusion for himself.³¹ Maimonides arrived safely in the port of Acre on May 16, 1165. What followed was a pilgrimage with stops in Tyre, Jerusalem, and Hebron. A year later, the family left for Egypt—despite Jewish legal traditions prohibiting one's departure from the Land of Israel.

In Egypt, the Maimonides family found an environment free from both the persecutions of the Almohads in the West and the Crusaders in the East. Religiously diverse, Fustāt / Old Cairo maintained a Jewish community of around four thousand souls in Maimonides' time, a community well known to modern scholars for its *Nachlass* known as the Cairo Geniza. This massive collection of manuscript fragments—which is, in fact, the largest collection of documentary materials from the medieval Islamic world—contains scraps and manuscripts extending as far back as the ninth century. The documents of the Geniza made their way from their hiding place in a back room of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustāt into various libraries and into the hands of private collectors from the middle of the nineteenth century.³² Fustāt was also an important entrepôt in the Mediterranean trade of the eleventh century and the Red Sea trade of the twelfth. The Maimonides family itself quickly became involved in this trade, and *CM* reveals Maimonides' familiarity with the commercial practices of the twelfth century.³³ Moses' younger brother David seems to have taken the lead in the family business, traveling east by caravan to the Red Sea port of 'Aydhāb and from there by ship to the Malabar Coast of India, a burgeoning trading diaspora that involved Jewish and Muslim merchants alike. But a shipwreck in 1177 swept David away and left Moses bereft of both his sibling and a key player in the family business.³⁴

30. For this debate, see the discussion in H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 17–28. For a recent counterargument, see Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 116–24.

31. For a translation of Maimonides' own words, see Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 127.

32. For an introduction to the Cairo Geniza, see Cole and Hoffman, *Sacred Trash*.

33. Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 162. For a discussion of how commercial practices shaped Maimonides' later legal *magnum opus*, the *Mishneh Torah*, see Mark R. Cohen, *Maimonides and the Merchants*.

34. My dating here relies on the reading of Maimonides' correspondence by Isaac Shailat, who claims that David returned from an earlier trip in 1169–71 and died on

David's shipwreck affected Maimonides deeply. His words, in a letter now famous, depict a man "in a state of disconsolate mourning."³⁵ By this time, Kraemer argues, Maimonides had already ascended to the position of *ra'īs al-yahūd* ("Head of the Jews"),³⁶ a role that he would have taken on just as the Jews' Fāṭimid overlords in Cairo gave way to the Ayyūbid dynasty, which would control Egypt from 1171 to 1250. After a brief stint in this position in 1171 and 1172, Maimonides would return to scholarly pursuits, although it seems that he would again serve as *ra'īs* around 1198 or 1199.³⁷ But when free from the burden of high public office, Maimonides was able to write and think about academic law and to serve as a jurisconsult (Arabic, *muftī*) to the members of his community. Hundreds of his collected responsa survive, shedding light on daily life in his world.

In addition to his legal writing about practical cases, it is during this period that Maimonides wrote what he would come to call his *magnum opus* (Judeo-Arabic, *ta'lifunā al-kabīr*)—that is, his comprehensive legal compendium *Mishneh Torah* (hereafter *MT*). This followed on the heels of another book, the *Book of the Commandments*, a milestone en route to the more expansive work, classifying and enumerating the 613 commandments in a manner that improved upon earlier attempts by legal authorities (including Se'adyah Ga'on) and even liturgical poets.³⁸ But the *Book of the Commandments* does more than just present a list; Maimonides supplies general rules (Judeo-Arabic, *uṣūl*) "for determining what should and should not be included in the enumeration of 613 Mosaic commandments."³⁹ Organizing the commandments in the *Book of the Commandments* laid the groundwork for the further restructuring of the

a second voyage to India in 1176–77; cf. Maimonides, "Epistles of Maimonides," ed. Shailat, 72–73, 198, cited in Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 544 n. 38. Although Kraemer notes Shailat's identification of a second voyage, his biography does not specifically introduce the notion of a safe return and second voyage.

35. Maimonides, "Epistles of Maimonides," 228–30, tr. Kraemer in Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 255–56.

36. Pace Davidson in H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 54–57, who questions whether or not Maimonides occupied the role of *ra'īs al-yahūd*.

37. Kraemer, "Goitein," 227.

38. Non-Rabbanite Jewish figures also composed books of the commandments, including the proto-Karaite 'Anan b. David and Benjamin al-Nahāwandī. For these and other non-Rabbanite Jewish figures and their writings, see Ben-Shammai, "Karaism"; and Astren, "Non-Rabbinic."

39. H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 175. See also Friedberg, *Crafting the 613 Commandments*.

Law into thematic sections and then into individual laws in *MT*: "I have seen fit to divide this compilation by laws according to topic; and I shall divide the laws into chapters according to that topic; and each and every chapter I shall divide into smaller laws so that they might be committed to memory."⁴⁰

In reorganizing the chaos of talmudic law into the clearly systematized passages of *MT*, Maimonides introduced a paradigm shift in the study of the Law. No longer would one need to wade through the sea of the Talmud in order to reveal the *halakhah* (i.e., the Law). Rather, the well-organized content and straightforward language of Maimonides' composition found an eager audience in the diverse and dispersed Jewish communities on both sides of the Mediterranean in the twelfth century.⁴¹ But the clarity and relative brevity of *MT* came at a price—namely, that Maimonides generally refrained from citing the sources on which he relied in ascertaining the Law. Almost instantly, this gave rise to a cottage industry attempting to identify the sources of Maimonides' rulings and occasionally challenging the Great Eagle's decisions.⁴²

In the wake of his brother's death, the study of the Law and the sciences sustained Maimonides.⁴³ But the study of the sciences did more than strengthen Maimonides' spirit; it prepared him for employment in the practice of medicine. Through his relationship with al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, he was even chosen to treat the "King of the Franks" in Ashqelon early on in his time in Egypt, and when the Maimonides family lost its financial nest egg on David's second India voyage, Maimonides took to practicing and writing about medicine in earnest. He drew on both his theoretical medical knowledge, relying on sources extending back to Arabic translations of Galen and his Hippocratic predecessors, and his early practical medical training in Cordoba. While serving as a medical

40. "Introduction to the Mishneh Torah," tr. Lerner in *Maimonides' Empire of Light*, 140, cited in Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 318; and Twersky, *Introduction*, 30.

41. For example, for the reception of the *Mishneh Torah* in Italy, see Ta-Shma, "Acceptance of Maimonides' 'Mishneh Torah,'" 79–90. The penetration of *MT* into Ashkenaz, beyond the Mediterranean, may not have been so deep.

42. Cf. *EJ*, s.v. "Arms Bearers (Nosei Kelim)" (Menahem Elon), in *EJ*, s.v. "Codification of Law." Elon explains that the starting point for this literature was the *Hasagot* of Maimonides' contemporary Abraham b. David of Posquières (ca. 1125–1198). The endeavor of the *Nosei Kelim* continues in the work of scholars such as Mark Cohen, who identified the practices of the medieval marketplace to find their way into *MT* (cf. M. R. Cohen, *Maimonides and the Merchants*).

43. Thus, Maimonides writes, "Were it not for the Torah, which is my delight, and for scientific matters, which let me forget my sorrow, *I would have perished in my affliction*. (Psalms 119:92)." Tr. and cited in Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 256.

practitioner,⁴⁴ Maimonides also contributed to the medical literature with his *Medical Aphorisms* as well as some nine other medical works.⁴⁵ Thus, in the field of medicine, he combined the theoretical with the applied and practical—as he had in his legal work, complementing his composition of *MT* with responsa that engaged the populace at large looking for practical guidance in the Law. Maimonides also seems to have been involved with the training of other medical practitioners.⁴⁶

Just as the goal of *MT* was to present a legal synthesis to an audience daunted by the meandering logic of the Talmud, the third pillar of Maimonides' literary oeuvre may be seen as a philosophical and theological synthesis—a *Guide to the Perplexed*. In this work, Maimonides' interests in the theological focus first and foremost on the Bible itself rather than the overlay of rabbinic materials whose lens for reading the Bible was itself the interest of *CM*, the *Book of Commandments*, and *MT*. It is in the *Guide* that Maimonides' writings come full circle and his training in the secular literature of al-Andalus is made apparent: The philosophical literature that was the staple of the elites of Cordoba provides the rhythm on which Maimonides composes his melody. This was the starting point for the *Guide*, upon which Maimonides would have been able to build throughout his life. The North African interlude of a quarter century (Maimonides began the *Guide* in 1185), with its emphasis on the sciences of astronomy, medicine, and law, had not dampened the master's ardor for philosophy; nor had a deep involvement in the marketplace and the practical arts of healing diminished his love of the speculative and theoretical. Maimonides' putative audience for the *Guide* was his student Joseph b. Judah Ibn Simeon, who departed Fustāṭ for Aleppo and left the master with no alternative but to send him lessons—which he did *seriatim*. But the actual audience for the *Guide* was much broader—as Kraemer explains: "The first purpose of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides explained, is to instruct a religious person, who believes in the law and has studied philosophy and is perplexed by the contradictions between the two. . . . For these people and others, Maimonides wanted to make the law respectable to philosophy and make philosophy compatible with the law. This dual endeavor required showing the true meaning of the law and

44. See the famous letter of Maimonides to Samuel Ibn Tibbon describing his daily schedule of interactions with an ailing public in Forte, "Back to the Sources," 47–90.

45. For these, see the editions and translations of Gerrit Bos.

46. Goitein, "Medical."

the true nature of philosophy.⁴⁷ In the *Guide* itself, Maimonides lays out the curriculum that ideally leads the initiate to understand difficult passages in the Bible: the natural sciences (physics), cosmology, and mathematics.⁴⁸ Only after mastering these sciences may one venture to metaphysics, which is “beyond physics” (Judeo-Arabic, *ba‘da ’l-ṭabī‘a*). Yet a background in the classical sciences presents the student with only half the picture. Implicit in the *Guide* is the reader’s familiarity with not only the Bible itself and its rabbinic complement but also a library of heresiographical, theological, and quasi-anthropological literature of his time from outside the philosophical canon. This library included such important works as the *Nabatean Agriculture*, ascribed to the ninth/tenth-century writer Ibn Waḥshiyyah,⁴⁹ as well as lesser-known writings such as the still-unidentified *Book of Ṭumṭum*. These works provided Maimonides with a context for the biblical world and its cult of animal sacrifice, which was ancient Israel’s primary vehicle for communion with God. Although historical and theological developments took ancient Israelite religion far afield from the prescriptions of the “Written Torah” itself as that religion took shape in its rabbinic guise, Maimonides’ gaze in the *Guide* is focused on the Bible and its world. Thus, his readings of biblical law in the latter sections of Part III of the *Guide* are more attentive to the ancient law than its late-antique Rabbanite manifestation as he laid it out in *MT*. The *Guide* provides not an apology for rabbinic religion per se but instead an explanation of how the Bible itself can lead the individual to knowledge of God and ultimately to human perfection.

Even in Maimonides’ lifetime, the *Guide* had a complicated reception, the history of which was made even more difficult to decipher by Maimonides’ own revisions to the Judeo-Arabic text revealed by the fragments of the Cairo Geniza. The work was translated into Hebrew almost immediately by Samuel Ibn Tibbon (ca. 1165–1232) and Judah al-Ḥarīzī (ca. 1165/66–1225), and material differences in the philosophical arguments of the *Guide* persist in these various translations.⁵⁰ But the *Guide*’s focus on a rational or philosophic mysticism⁵¹ shines through the silver casing on his apple of gold.

47. Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 366–67.

48. Cf. Maimonides, *Guide* I 34.

49. See Hämeen-Anttila, *Last Pagans of Iraq*, for a partial translation and discussion of this work.

50. On these translations, see Shiffman, cited in Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 569 n. 38.

51. For a discussion of Maimonides’ mysticism, see Lenn Goodman’s “The Object of the Guide” in this volume.

Maimonides completed the *Guide* around 1191 and for the rest of his life remained involved in a host of pursuits: continuing to provide legal counsel as a rabbi despite his attestation that he composed *MT* “to be released from study and searching in his old age,”⁵² attending the Ayyūbid sultans as court physician and engaging in medical writing, serving the members of his community by healing body and soul, and mentoring his son, Abraham (1186–1237), to take the helm as communal leader. Fatigue and weakness restricted him in his old age, and death took him in the year 1204. His body was reportedly removed to Tiberias in the Land of Israel for burial,⁵³ but the legacy of Andalusian Jewry lived on in the dynasty he established in Cairo, and his intellectual inheritance is no less powerful today than it was when he put pen to paper in the twelfth century.

52. Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 321.

53. H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 73.

III

The Story of the *Guide*

PHILLIP I. LIEBERMAN

Judaism, *Kalām*, and Philosophy

As Solomon Zeitlin explains in opening his review of Daniel Jeremy Silver's *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy*, "No writings in the history of the Jews have evoked such controversy as Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* and his *Moreh Nebuchim*."⁵⁴ Yet as Zeitlin also notes, Maimonides was not the first to seek a synthesis between philosophical rationalism and Judaism. Indeed, as the reader will find in our notes, Maimonides often draws on themes reflected in Jewish philosophy in the writings of Se'adyah Ga'on b. Joseph al-Fayyūmī (882–942), Solomon Ibn Gabirol (ca. 1020–1052/57/58), Judah b. Samuel ha-Levi (ca. 1050–1141), Baḥya b. Joseph Ibn Paqūdah (1075–1141), and Abraham b. David Ibn Da'ud (ca. 1110–1180). The latter, like Maimonides, was born in Cordoba and fled with the conquests of the Almohads. The engagement of these and other medieval Jewish thinkers with the ideas of Hellenistic philosophy filtered through the prism of Islamic culture represented a sea change from the approach of the rabbis and thinkers of late antiquity, who—with the exception of Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BCE–50 CE)—do not seem to engage Hellenistic philosophy.⁵⁵ The Islamic dialectical theologians known as the *mutakallimūn* took on the logic of Hellenism, at least a version of that logic intermingled with the ideas of its Christian tradents;⁵⁶ by the tenth century, the absorption of Greek science

54. Zeitlin, "Review," 154.

55. Ivry, "Jewish Philosophy."

56. For an introduction to the *Mutakallimūn*, see Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy*, 6–72.

into the Islamic world had given rise to another class of thinkers known as *falāsifah*, for whom God's will was expressed through the semiautonomous realm of nature. The Jewish interaction between these schools of thought—that of the *mutakallimūn* and that of the *falāsifah*—shaped Jewish philosophical writing in the period leading up to Maimonides.⁵⁷ As for the *Guide* itself, as Alfred Ivry explains, “Maimonides dilates upon the issues treated more summarily in his rabbinic writings and is concerned to offer a stalwart philosophical alternative to beliefs rooted either in kalām theological principles, fundamentalist literalisms, or even certain key tenets accepted by his Muslim philosophic mentors.”⁵⁸ Ivry argues that Maimonides had little respect for the philosophical activity of his Jewish predecessors,⁵⁹ and so we might think of the *Guide* outside of the tradition of Maimonides' Jewish antecedents and instead see him primarily in dialogue with the Islamic philosophers and teachers he mentions explicitly in the *Guide*.⁶⁰ At the same time, Resianne Fontaine has identified important connections between Maimonides and Ibn Da'ūd, seeing references to “Andalusians” in the *Guide* (e.g., in I 71) as veiled allusions to Ibn Da'ūd *inter alia* and identifying parallels between the *Guide* and Ibn Da'ūd's *Emunah Ramah* (*The Exalted Faith*) even in their form (as a missive to a friend or pupil).⁶¹ Thus, she sees the *Guide* as the “culmination of a trend,” which nonetheless set the stage for “later epigones of Jewish philosophy who were inspired by Maimonides' study and disseminated his work.”⁶² In method as well as form, then, the *Guide* preserves what may be found in Maimonides' predecessors, Jewish and Islamic. Engaging the *mutakallimūn*, “he can abide neither their non-necessary, since

57. For an introduction to these various strains of Jewish thinkers, see Ivry, “Jewish Philosophy.”

58. *Ibid.*, 818.

59. Ivry even writes, “Actually, Maimonides does not recommend reading any of his Jewish predecessors, as for him the ostensibly Peripatetic school of Greek and Islamic thought is sufficient, mostly, to acquaint one with the basic teachings of philosophy” (“Strategies,” 113). See also Pines's “Translator's Introduction” to his own translation of the *Guide*, lvii–lxi.

60. Pines *does* adduce allusions (albeit very, very scant) to Se'adyah, “certain Gaonim,” and to ha-Levi, although he notes (like Ivry) that Maimonides “had no use for a specific Jewish philosophic tradition” (Pines, *Guide*, cxxxiii).

61. See Fontaine, “Was Maimonides an Epigone?” Thus, Fontaine writes, “Maimonides elaborated on an existing model and followed the trend rather than set it” (*ibid.*, 23).

62. *Ibid.*, 25.

non-demonstrative argumentation, nor their anti-Aristotelian science.⁶³ Yet Ivry notes the hybrid nature of the work in discussing divine providence and revelation, “using a combination of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic themes to avoid succumbing to theological or *kalām*-style discourse, but falling back upon it repeatedly.” So even if in the substance of Maimonides’ arguments the *Guide* represents a shift away from his Jewish predecessors, it is important to see the work as the pinnacle of a long trend rather than as a creation *ex nihilo*.⁶⁴

Early Attempts

Maimonides clearly brought his own philosophical training to bear in composing the substance of his arguments in the *Guide*, not hesitating to make direct reference to a host of his Greek or Arabic predecessors.⁶⁵ And if we may find some of the roots of the *Guide* in Maimonides’ predecessors, we may also find them in the master’s own writing: *CM* alludes to Maimonides’ having begun a *Book of Prophecy* that would detail the nature and character of prophecy in general and Moses’ prophecy in specific—topics that we find in the *Guide*.⁶⁶ Maimonides himself even presents some of the topics it would include both there and elsewhere—in the Eight Chapters, his ethical introduction to Mishnah Avot.⁶⁷ Likewise, Maimonides alludes in *CM* to a *Book Explaining the Derashot* (*Kitāb Ta’wīl al-Derashot*),⁶⁸ in which he intends to “show how rabbinic aggada reflects the truths on which men of science and philosophy have expended endless time and energy.”⁶⁹ Yet each of these works would change over the decades, and eventually Maimonides would abandon both of them, writing the *Guide* in their place.

63. Ivry, “Strategies,” 114.

64. *Ibid.*, 125.

65. For these, see Pines’s full essay on Maimonides’ philosophic sources (*Guide*, lvii–cxxxiv) as well as other subsequent additions to Pines’s list—for example, the historian and philosopher Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Miskawayh (932–1030), author of a work on ethics (*Tabdhīb al-Akhlāq*) identified by Steven Harvey as one of Maimonides’ sources (S. Harvey, “New Islamic Source of *The Guide of the Perplexed*”).

66. For these topics in the *Guide*, see, for example, II 32–48.

67. H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 323.

68. Cf. *CM* Sanhedrin 10:1 (seventh principle), ed. Kafīh IV:209.

69. H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 324.

Thus, while Maimonides describes the *Book of Prophecy* in *CM* as a book *about* prophecy, Davidson points out that by the time Maimonides discusses the work in his introduction to the *Guide*, it looks somewhat different, having become “an allegorical reading of prophetic texts which would lay bare their scientific core.”⁷⁰ Davidson notes that the two aims of the *Book of Prophecy* need not strictly conflict with one another—Maimonides could have achieved both in his book, had it ever been completed. But the development is worth noting, and both of the desiderata Maimonides expressed with respect to the *Book of Prophecy*—understanding prophecy itself and the allegorical reading of prophetic books—are addressed in the *Guide*.

The other book Maimonides mentions in *CM* is the *Book Explaining the De-rashot*; here, it is the title rather than the substance that seems to have changed over the decades separating *CM* from the *Guide*—in which he mentions instead a *Book of Correspondence* (*Kitāb al-Muṭābaqah*), which was intended to explain “all the troubling midrashim, irrational on the surface and very much at odds with the truth, all of them poetic” (Introduction to Part I, 1.5b). Thus, *ta’wīl* (interpretation, explanation) has given way to *muṭābaqah* (alignment), laying bare Maimonides’ aim of aligning the rabbinic tradition with what he believes to be the truth.

As Davidson notes, both of these works planned by Maimonides in his youth were intended for a broad audience,⁷¹ while the aim of the later *Guide* is subtly different—“the intellectual awakening of a religious, morally and spiritually mature person who is settled of mind and committed to the Torah’s truth, who has studied and absorbed the philosophical sciences” (Introduction to Part I, 1.3a). It would seem, then, that Maimonides wrote, or began to write, these two works—one seemingly focused on Scripture and the other focused on the rabbinic literature that encircles Scripture—with an eye toward illuminating “the exoteric lessons of the prophets and the *midrashim*.”⁷² Whether because he was unsatisfied with the fruits of his labors or simply because his pedagogical goals changed, Maimonides abandoned these works.⁷³ In *CM*, he alludes to what may have been a third book, unnamed there and simply described as “a book in which I shall explicate these principles”;⁷⁴ this one seems to have

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid., 324–25, *nn.* 72 and 77.

72. Gorfinkle, *Eight Chapters*, 46 *n.* 3.

73. Thus, Maimonides writes, “I dropped the two book projects I had in hand in that earlier vein” (*Guide*, I.5b–6a).

74. “*kitāb uwallifuhu fī sharḥ hādha al-qawā’id*”; *CM*, ed. Kafih, IV:213.

fallen from view even before Maimonides embarked on the *Guide*. Yet it seems likely that material from all three of these earlier works was incorporated into what would eventually become the *Guide*.⁷⁵ Indeed, Hannah Kasher argues that there is an “early stratum” of the *Guide* in chapters 1–49 of Part I, with some subtle differences from the later material that shows a development in Maimonides’ own thought—for example, in his understanding of prophecy. Such a shift in Maimonides’ thought may be important for challenging the idea that Maimonides sought to bury in the *Guide* philosophical positions he held that could not be reconciled with rabbinic Judaism, leading to contradictions within the text—that is to say, some of these internal contradictions may be due to the fact that the *Guide* itself was composed over a long period, during which time Maimonides’ own views changed.⁷⁶ Y. Tzvi Langermann explains that the *fuṣūl* (chapters) Maimonides wrote may in fact have been taken from writings in the pages of his own notebooks composed over a very long time, a process that Maimonides also seems to have followed in composing his final work, *Fuṣūl Mūsā fī ’l-Ṭibb* (Medical Aphorisms).⁷⁷ This may explain the phenomenon noted by Davidson that “as the book advances from chapter to chapter, it is poorly organized, and Maimonides’ train of thought repeatedly meanders into byways.”⁷⁸ And yet, Maimonides writes, “Nothing is out of place unless to shed light elsewhere” (Introduction to Part I). Acknowledging his apparent meandering, Maimonides often signals to the reader that he is “returning to his main thought” (“*arji’ ilā gharaḍī*” or “*narji’ ilā gharaḍī*”).⁷⁹

Maimonides’ Sources

Much work has been done highlighting Maimonides’ sources—Shlomo Pines’s introduction to his 1963 translation of the *Guide* bears the subtitle “The Philosophic Sources of *The Guide of the Perplexed*,”⁸⁰ and Ivry’s chapter

75. Gorfinkle outlines precisely where he believes this earlier material made its way into the *Guide*; cf. Gorfinkle, *Eight Chapters*, 46 n. 3. Davidson believes that Maimonides gave up on these projects early on, finding himself in an “impossible predicament” of setting forth the meaning of texts “too sensitive to be disclosed to the unenlightened” (H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 326).

76. For this viewpoint, see Kasher, “Is There an Early Stratum?”

77. Langermann, “*Fuṣūl Mūsā*.”

78. H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 334.

79. Cf. *Guide* I 15, 28, 62; III 13, 29, 32, 49, 51.

80. Pines, *Guide*, lvii–cxxxiv.

in the *Cambridge Companion to Maimonides* titled “The *Guide* and Maimonides’ Philosophical Sources”⁸¹ fills in the scholarship on this matter. As Ivry explains, Maimonides mentions many of these sources in the *Guide* itself and lists still others in a letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon.⁸² Yet Ivry claims that Maimonides’ thought reaches beyond these sources. For instance, Shīʿī reliance on allegory in exegesis would have been appealing to Maimonides, and the Ismāʿīlī theologian Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, who flourished during the rule of the Fāṭimid imam al-Ḥākim (r. 996–1021), according to Ivry, “expresses his opposition to predicating attributes of God in the same language that Maimonides later adopts.”⁸³ Even if the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwah* (mission) had been on its wane as Fāṭimid rule gave way to that of the Ayyūbids, the persistence of Ismāʿīlī thinkers and thought would have given Maimonides the opportunity to be exposed to such language and ideas. Ivry’s reminder that “the Shīʿites in general were supreme esotericists, the laws of Islam having meaning on both the literal level, commanding observance, and on a deeper spiritual level that was known only to the educated initiates,”⁸⁴ may provide a useful lens through which to see the *Guide*.

The scholarship of the past few decades on the *mutakallimūn* has shed light on Maimonides’ presentation of their principles, particularly in *Guide* I 73. Reviewing these findings, Ivry explains, “Maimonides may thus be seen as having shaped a large body of disparate theological teachings according to an internal logic he discerns in them. In so proceeding, he could have been influenced by the approach he adopted in writing the *Mishneh Torah*, culling a dominant tradition from the competing voices of the rabbis of an earlier age.”⁸⁵ His approach to the *falāsifah*, too, is synthetic, turning to the Peripatetics, to their reception in Arabic translation of their Byzantine Christian guise, and to their subsequent revision through Islamic philosophers. In identifying a number of “un-Aristotelianisms” in Maimonides’ thought, Daniel H. Frank argues that “either we can accept his explicit views at face value and reinterpret Maimonides’ Aristotelianism accordingly, or we may conclude that Maimonides is being pretty consistently disingenuous, even duplicitous,

81. Ivry, “*Guide* and Maimonides’ Philosophical Sources.”

82. *Ibid.*, 59. For further detail on this letter, including a useful and critical discussion of the sources mentioned therein and a synoptic edition of the various manuscripts of the letter to Samuel itself, see Forte, “Back to the Sources.”

83. Ivry, “*Guide* and Maimonides’ Philosophical Sources,” 63–64.

84. *Ibid.*, 63.

85. *Ibid.*, 73.

with a view to hiding his doctrinaire Aristotelianism.”⁸⁶ Frank argues that Aristotle is Maimonides’ starting point—and for this, Maimonides should be called “Aristotelian,” but he is such not as much for his agreement with Aristotle per se as for his use of the latter “for the explication of his own religious tradition.”⁸⁷

Although the Bible is Maimonides’ starting point for that tradition, he does not hesitate to incorporate the Bible’s rabbinic accompaniment—the “Oral Torah”—in all its glory. Yet the *Guide* also responds to Jewish materials outside the rabbinic canon. In adducing Karaite influence, Daniel J. Lasker points out that Maimonides’ recounting of Karaite law is cursory at best, and his sole mention of Karaites in the *Guide* (in I 71) suggests that the Karaites were not his primary target. However, Lasker believes that Maimonides knew Karaite thought and the points of continuity between the thought of Karaites such as Yūsuf al-Baṣīr (late tenth to early eleventh century) and the *mutakallimūn*.⁸⁸ Maimonides’ frequent reserve in attacking Karaites led some later Karaites even to claim that the author of the *Guide* had himself been a Karaite but had not wanted to express this publicly! Maimonides’ persistent claim that rabbinic law was indeed normative keeps him out of the Karaite camp, but he was nonetheless aware of Karaite philosophical thinking in a number of discernible ways. For instance, Lasker muses about the taxonomy of prophecy composed by the tenth-century Karaite Japheth b. Eli that “Maimonides recognized Yefet’s taxonomy and his explanation of the prophetic degrees, saw in them theological errors which undermine rabbinic Judaism, and polemicized subtly against the Karaite position.”⁸⁹ Lasker argues that in the environment of Ayyūbid Egypt, where Karaites were not a serious threat to Rabbanite Judaism, Maimonides addressed the Karaite challenge through implicit rather than explicit polemic. Despite this coldness, Karaite reception of Maimonides—discussed later—was decidedly warm.

Maimonides’ recourse to Greek and Arabic philosophical sources as well as the sources of the classical rabbinic tradition was surely complemented by his study of Jewish philosophers—even if he suggests in the introduction to part III of the *Guide* that an ancient tradition of philosophical knowledge is “extinct in our nation.” Although Pines and Ivry shed little ink on this matter,

86. D. Frank, “Maimonides and Medieval Jewish Aristotelianism,” 145.

87. Ibid.

88. Lasker, *From Judah Hadassi to Elijah Bashyatchi*, 158–59.

89. Ibid., 166.

Maimonides was in dialogue with—if critical of—the prominent Jewish philosophical figures I have mentioned: Seʿadyah Gaʿon, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Judah ha-Levi, Bahya Ibn Paqudah, and Abraham Ibn Daʿud. Well known for his attacks on Seʿadyah for his reliance on *kalām*, Maimonides was also dismissive of Isaac b. Solomon Israeli (ca. 855–ca. 955), whose introduction of Neoplatonism into Jewish thought had an important influence on subsequent Jewish philosophy.⁹⁰ Likewise, ha-Levi is often presented as a counterpoint to Maimonides,⁹¹ yet Howard Kreisel considers points of complementarity or even continuity between the two thinkers in their conceptions of God.⁹² Ibn Daʿud, too, whose *ha-Emunah ha-Ramah* was “quickly forgotten after Maimonides wrote his masterpiece,”⁹³ has much in common with the *Guide*, even if the latter treats the same matters in a more thorough and profound manner. Although not cited by Maimonides, Harry Austryn Wolfson sees “traces” of Ibn Daʿud’s influence there.⁹⁴

The *Guide*’s Audience

Although Maimonides abandons his first intention because of the difficulty of producing something appropriate to a broad audience,⁹⁵ he does not relinquish hope of achieving at least some of the desiderata of those planned works. On the contrary, he holds that correcting the misconceptions of the masses *is* important: “God’s incorporeality and transcendence of all likeness and passivity . . . should be plainly discussed and openly explained to everyone, as his capacity permits” (I 35, 1.42a). In explicating Scripture’s use of anthropomorphic imagery as metaphorical, Maimonides has not only resolved a perplexity for the astute student of the Bible who has begun to be exposed to philosophy; he has presented an agenda for teaching the public at large. While he is aware that some individuals will not be capable of appreciating the multivalent nature of Scripture—for some, the rejection of corporealism alone is a sufficiently difficult hurdle to overcome—he nonetheless argues that the idea of metaphorical exegesis should

90. *EJIW*, s.v. “Israeli, Isaac ben Solomon” (Daniel Lasker).

91. See, for instance, Harry Wolfson, “Maimonides and Halevi.”

92. Kreisel, *Judaism as Philosophy*, 3–18.

93. Fontaine, “For the Dossier of Abraham Ibn Daʿud,” 35.

94. Harry Wolfson, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*, 323.

95. As Maimonides writes, “But if I explained what calls for explanation the end product would ill suit a popular audience”—“*lā yaliq bi-jumhūr al-nās*” (Introduction to Part I, 1.5b).

be taught to all commensurate with their ability to understand it. Yet Davidson points out that few readers of the *Guide* have taken Maimonides at his word as having simply written a treatise designed to resolve the difficulties of scriptural imagery; he is more than an exegete, even if the number of biblical quotations in the work exceeds 1,500.⁹⁶

As Maimonides writes in his Epistle Dedicatory, his intended audience is an individual ready to be opened up to some of the mysteries of Scripture and to some of the puzzling passages of the rabbinic sages—two distinct yet intertwined themes reminiscent of the works Maimonides abandoned. He singles out Joseph b. Judah as the addressee of the *Guide* for his having studied *both* Scripture and the sciences, the latter to include both mathematics and astronomy, as well as for his poetic aptitude. The latter, which indicates a yearning for speculative matters, will come to serve him in learning the poetics of Scripture discussed throughout the *Guide*. But Kraemer notes that there are flashes of light suggesting that Maimonides saw a broader audience for the *Guide*. Some are explicit, such as his mention that “any beginner who is no thinker at all, can profit, I am sure, from some chapters in this work” (Introduction to Part I, 1.9a); and some are implicit, such as his lexicographic chapters that “appear especially suited for the common folk.”⁹⁷ We may say, then, that Maimonides saw his audience as the *potential* philosopher, “who had the capacity to develop if brought gradually and systematically along the way of enlightenment.”⁹⁸ At the same time, Maimonides makes it clear that some of his material is *not* for the masses. Following the rabbinic injunction (B. Hagigah 11b) not to teach the Account of Creation (*Ma’aseh Bereshit*) and Ezekiel’s Account of the Chariot (*Ma’aseh Merkavah*) publicly—nor privately, even to one capable of receiving its message, except by presenting it schematically via “chapter headings”—he adopts methods of concealment appropriate to the material, presenting it in a manner that he hopes a wise disciple will be able to piece together. Kraemer identifies Maimonides’ technique of “semantic equivalence” as a key to this message and indeed a key to understanding the work as a whole. The Account of Creation and the Account of the Chariot are perhaps the most obvious examples of an entire lexicon Maimonides used. A case in point is his decision to use these terms to refer to physics and

96. H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 333–34.

97. Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 363.

98. *Ibid.*

metaphysics as he understands them.⁹⁹ In the seventeenth century, Baruch Spinoza would draw on this same technique, having “evidently learned the technique of metaphorical equivalence from Maimonides.”¹⁰⁰

The Structure of the Work

The epistle dedicatory encourages the reader to consider the *Guide* a *risālah*—an essay—sent to Maimonides’ beloved student Joseph. The genre is an important one in medieval Arabic literature, and indeed, the aforementioned Ibn Bājjah had a particular predilection for writing treatises styled *risālāt*. Likewise, we may see a reflection of the *risālah*, a work sent to a specific individual, in the aforementioned *Emunah Ramah* of Ibn Da’ud, a philosophical work in the guise of a dispatch to a friend.¹⁰¹ Yet despite their form as missives sent to individuals, *risālāt*, which could have their origin in actual letters, came to be anything but letters—neither like letters in terms of their length nor in terms of their actual audience. They could run to several volumes, and they were composed for an audience well beyond their addressees, just as (for example) the legal responsa of rabbinic authorities were copied and disseminated broadly despite their composition as a reply to a specific questioner. Thus, even if Maimonides himself might have had a narrow audience in mind, placing a manuscript in the hands of a scribe could result in its further copying and dissemination even beyond that intended narrow audience.¹⁰² In fact, Joseph mentions in a letter to Maimonides that others received copies of the *Guide* even before he did!¹⁰³

Throughout the *Guide*, Maimonides refers to the work as a *maqālah* (a treatise or monograph), a term conflated with *risālah* in philosophical works from the last quarter of the ninth century onward, complementing his explanation in the epistle dedicatory that he will send Joseph chapters of the

99. Ibid., 373–75.

100. Ibid., 374.

101. See *EI*₂, s.v. “*risāla*” (A. Arazi and H. Ben-Shammai), in which the *Guide* is discussed in specific. For the use of the literary form *risālah* in medieval Jewish philosophy, see Manekin, “Philosophical Epistle.”

102. Davidson writes that Maimonides was indeed writing for a group of people—those who resembled Joseph in background and education. See H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 332.

103. *Moses Maimonides: Igrot (Epistles)*, ed. Baneth, no. 6, pp. 67–68, cited by Kraemer in “How (Not) to Read *The Guide of the Perplexed*,” 357.

treatise in sequence, as they are written. Maimonides clearly differentiates between the genre of the *Guide* as a *maqālah* and that of *MT* as a *ta'lif* (“composition”; most commonly styled throughout the *Guide* as *ta'lifunā al-kabīr*, “my great work”). He refers throughout the *Guide* to the different “books” and sections of *MT* by name. But when referring to material in the *Guide*, he only refers to “chapters” (*fuṣūl*). Although Maimonides himself did not write down the chapter numbers for the *Guide*, this does not mean he was unaware of the chapter numbers; nor does it mean that the chapters lack an order.¹⁰⁴ On the contrary, Maimonides even refers to specific chapters by number in his letter to his early translator Samuel Ibn Tibbon on translating the *Guide*.¹⁰⁵ Lawrence Berman identifies a logic to the tripartite structure of the *Guide*; he says it follows a progression that “mirrors the ascent to truth of a philosopher living in an imperfect state, but of course this is man’s fate, and then finally the descent from the theoretical truths of metaphysics, physics, and politics by the philosopher-statesman.”¹⁰⁶ In his account, the chapters are understood to be in dialogue with one another, but the higher level of dialogue is among the three parts of the work. With this in mind, Strauss’s alternative division of the *Guide* into chapters concerned with views (I 1–III 24) and actions (III 25–III 54) breaks down in light of Berman’s claim that the *Guide* is not “concerned with actions *per se*, but rather with views about actions.”¹⁰⁷ The preeminence of the Bible in Maimonides’ discussion of law there supports Berman’s view; that is, in attending to the internal logic of biblical law largely naked of its rabbinic complement, he is certainly not concerned

104. Pace Davidson, who, arguing against Strauss’s claim of a “deeper meaning” to the chapter numbers (see Strauss, “How to Begin to Study,” in the Pines translation of the *Guide*, xxix–xxx), claims that Maimonides “undoubtedly gave not the slightest thought to whether he was engaged in writing the fifteenth, seventeenth, or nineteenth chapter” (H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 397). As for the assigning of chapter numbers themselves, Colette Sirat points out that they are as early as Maimonides’ early translators—see Sirat, “Une Liste De Manuscrits,” 18. Raphael Jospe points out that Samuel Ibn Tibbon mentions in his preface to the translation that he himself added the chapter numbers to facilitate cross-reference (Jospe, “Number and Division,” 390). Jospe also notes that Shem Ṭov Falaquera (ca. 1225–1295) explained that Ibn Tibbon subsequently revised his chapter divisions to make the total some 178 chapters (*ibid.*).

105. Kraemer, “How (Not) to Read *The Guide of the Perplexed*,” 381.

106. L. Berman, “Structure of Maimonides’ *Guide*,” 11.

107. *Ibid.*, 12.

with the day-to-day actions of his rabbanite Jewish contemporaries.¹⁰⁸ For those interested in the logic of rabbinic law, *MT* provides rich fodder. But for those of Joseph's ilk—trained in at least the rudiments of philosophy and science and perplexed as to how to align these disciplines with the language and law of the Bible—the *Guide* provides direction.

The Text of the *Guide*

The *Guide*'s epistle dedicatory gives the sense that Maimonides wrote the *Guide* chapter by chapter and dispatched it to Joseph in sections, and Maimonides' own correspondence with Joseph gives us some evidence that this is what happened.¹⁰⁹ However, Kraemer explains that some of the manuscripts of the *Guide* that we have are but early drafts of the work: "We know from Maimonides' precept and practice that he wrote at least two drafts before writing a fair copy and carefully redacted everything. He sometimes wrote draft copies rapidly when pressed for time, and early drafts were occasionally copied by scribes before they had been corrected by the master, and were circulated in this defective form."¹¹⁰ We do not have Maimonides' final redacted copy of the entire work. There *are* manuscripts of the complete work in Judeo-Arabic dating to the fourteenth century,¹¹¹ and a preliminary list of manuscripts of copies and fragments was prepared by Colette Sirat in 1991.¹¹² Some of these fragmentary manuscripts are in Maimonides' own hand,¹¹³ with the master's own corrections to the Judeo-Arabic text. As Sirat points out, the *Guide* has been published in its original Judeo-Arabic some four times, but the desideratum of a "critical" edition based on all the materials currently available has never been achieved. Maimonides' practice of writing and rewriting sections over a period of some five years, interspersed with scribes taking and disseminating parts of the work, raises the possibility

108. For the idea that Maimonides focuses on biblical law to the exclusion of its rabbinic complement, see Lieberman, "Criminal Law and Punishment."

109. Kraemer, "How (Not) to Read *The Guide of the Perplexed*," 357, citing Baneth, *Moses Maimonides: Igrot (Epistles)*, no. 6, pp. 67–68.

110. Ibid., 352.

111. For Judeo-Arabic manuscripts of the *Guide* in its entirety, see Langermann, "India Office Copy."

112. Sirat, "Une Liste De Manuscrits."

113. See, for example, the manuscripts mentioned in Hopkins, "Unpublished Autograph Fragment."

that “there may not have been an original” of the work at all.¹¹⁴ Even modern editors/translators such as Salomon Munk have seen fit to revise Maimonides’ texts as they found them in manuscripts.¹¹⁵ As in the case of many medieval works whose text was revised by their authors—not to mention later copyists or commentators—we may say that producing an original text of the work is a chimera.

114. Kraemer, “How (Not) to Read *The Guide of the Perplexed*,” 374–75. Pace Hopkins, who argues that “variants are few and insignificant, a circumstance which emphasizes the fact that the manuscript (and printed) tradition of Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* is in general a very faithful reflection of what the Sage of Fustat himself wrote” (“Unpublished Autograph Fragment,” 466).

115. Kraemer, “How (Not) to Read *The Guide of the Perplexed*,” 351.

IV

Translations, Reception, and Commentary

PHILLIP I. LIEBERMAN

Medieval Translations of the *Guide*

As James T. Robinson notes, “The Hebrew translation of Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* is the best-documented translation we have from the Jewish Middle Ages.”¹¹⁶ Translation was part and parcel of the history of the *Guide* from its very beginnings: Maimonides himself wrote to the community of Lunel in southern France authorizing Samuel Ibn Tibbon to translate the work, and he instructed Samuel directly in the translation of certain difficult words.¹¹⁷ Lunel had emerged as a center of Jewish philosophy and translation in the second half of the twelfth century. This was due in no small part to the migration of Samuel’s father, Judah Ibn Tibbon (1120–after 1190 BCE), who had come to Lunel to escape the very same Almohad persecutions that had pushed the Maimonides family into North Africa. Judah was himself a prolific translator—translating important philosophical works by Se’adyah Ga’on, Bahya Ibn Paqudah, and Judah ha-Levi as well as works of grammar. Judah was responsible for creating “a technical scientific terminology that would continue to serve translators and original authors throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern period.”¹¹⁸ Samuel followed in his father’s footsteps as a translator, his practice shaped by a rigorous training described in Judah’s famous ethical will that included

116. Robinson, “*Moreh ha-Nevukhim*,” 35.

117. Shiffman, “Differences between the Translations.” Maimonides had his own ideas about translation that come to the fore in his letter to Samuel, discussed by D. Z. Baneth in D. H. Baneth, “Maimonides Translating.”

118. Robinson, *First*, 38.

regular reading of Se'adyah's Bible translation (called *Tafsīr*).¹¹⁹ Indeed, Judah saw Se'adyah's *Tafsīr* as a key to the development of Samuel's Arabic vocabulary.¹²⁰ Like the *Guide* itself, the translation was produced iteratively, with a first edition completed in 1204 and a revised edition with a glossary in 1213, with work continuing thereafter as well: The addition of marginal glosses and further explanations as well as the composition of a short treatise providing a reason for one of the commandments Maimonides himself could not provide.¹²¹

Ibn Tibbon's first translation was reviewed by Maimonides (who died in December of the same year). Seeing at least bits of the translation, Maimonides expressed some reservations concerning Ibn Tibbon's work for a number of reasons. First, the text Samuel translated was Maimonides' unrevised text; Kraemer notes that "in many places where Maimonides objected to Samuel's translation, the problem was with the faulty text that Samuel had received."¹²² But beyond this, the two figures also had different theories of translation. Maimonides had requested that Samuel translate for sense rather than provide a word-for-word translation; Kraemer explains that "Maimonides' translation technique was to reformulate the content of the source language as befits the natural idioms of the target language."¹²³ On the other hand, Ibn Tibbon relied on the technique utilized by his father, Judah, seeking to retain word order and to use the same word in Hebrew for a particular Judeo-Arabic term throughout.¹²⁴ Yair Shiffman argues that Samuel's "literal and accurate" approach "is one reason why Ibn Tibbon's rendering became the standard Hebrew version of the *Guide*."¹²⁵ Where Maimonides proposed alternative translations employing his own semantical technique, Samuel did not accept them.¹²⁶

119. For an analysis of the ethical will and a discussion of these formative practices, see Pearce, *Andalusi Intellectual Tradition*, particularly 78–100.

120. *Ibid.*, 87.

121. Robinson, *First*, 38–39.

122. Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 437.

123. *Ibid.*, 439.

124. *Ibid.* Note that this debate between translators has persisted to the modern period—cf. *ibid.*, 590 *n.* 66, where Kraemer explains that Pines and Strauss had different ideas as to how to translate the *Guide* ahead of the publication of Pines's 1963 translation.

125. Shiffman, "Differences between the Translations," 47. In this vein, Kraemer explains that "ironically, Ibn Tibbon succeeded precisely because he rejected Maimonides' advice not to translate literally but to render concepts in the idiom of the target language" (*Maimonides*, 438).

126. Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 439.

Further, there is undoubtedly a gap between Maimonides' and Ibn Tibbon's philosophical lexicons in Hebrew; we may observe this gap firsthand by noting the differences between philosophical terms that appear in *MT* and terms used by Samuel in his translation of the *Guide*.

Ibn Tibbon completed a revised translation of the *Guide* in 1213, to which he appended a glossary (known as *Perush ha-Millim* or *Perush ha-Millot ha-Zarot*, "Explanation of Abstruse Terms") that addressed the Hebrew philosophical lexicon of his period and explained some of the technical terminology in the *Guide*.¹²⁷ He composed glosses on the *Guide* and continued writing about the work even after the revised translation was completed. In this subsequent work, he did not hesitate to express disagreement with Maimonides. Carlos Fraenkel has unmasked Ibn Tibbon's critique of Maimonides in a number of areas: "From the commandment to know God's existence, which Maimonides characterizes as 'the foundation of all foundations and the pillar of the sciences,' to the concepts of providence and prophecy, to subjects related to cosmology, ontology, ethics, and political philosophy"—¹²⁸ even if many of Ibn Tibbon's modern interpreters have seen his glosses to be refinements rather than deviations from Maimonides' thought.¹²⁹

Ibn Tibbon's work was not the last word in the translation of the *Guide*. Not only did Maimonides have some qualms about Ibn Tibbon, but some of the sages of Provence may have hoped that Maimonides would translate some or all of the work himself—perhaps in the clear rabbinic Hebrew of *MT*.¹³⁰ Maimonides demurred, but Ibn Tibbon's translation was quickly followed by the work of Judah al-Ḥarīzī (ca. 1165/66–1225), a belletrist and translator born in an Arabized Toledo under Christian rule who made his way to Provence and then to the Islamic East.¹³¹ Imagining al-Ḥarīzī's reaction to Ibn Tibbon's translation, Raymond P. Scheindlin writes that al-Ḥarīzī "must have clucked to himself about the un-Hebraic character of the work and its clumsy diction. . . . He

127. On Ibn Tibbon's efforts to expand the audience for the *Guide* by providing a lexicon of technical terms, see Fraenkel, "From Maimonides to Samuel Ibn Tibbon: Interpreting," 177–212.

128. *Ibid.*, 36.

129. Samuel's glosses have been a particular interest of Carlos Fraenkel in his doctoral dissertation and in his book *From Maimonides to Samuel Ibn Tibbon: The Transformation of the "Dalālat Al-Ḥā'irīn" into the "Moreh Ha-Nevukhim."*

130. Scheindlin, "Al-Ḥarīzī's Translation," 61–62.

131. For Judah's life, see *EJIW*, s.v. "Ḥarīzī, Judah b. Solomon al-" (Jonathan Decter).

would have seen that the son had written in a style even more rigidly Arabized than that of his father.”¹³² Al-Ḥarīzī completed his own translation in 1213, the same year as Ibn Tibbon’s revised translation. Sources from the period are not quite clear on precisely who the audience for al-Ḥarīzī’s translation was; al-Ḥarīzī wrote in his own preface that his work was for the “nobles and sages of Provence,” while elsewhere he mentions that it was undertaken for someone in Spain, and Maimonides’ own son, Abraham, claims that it was done for the Tosafists Joseph and Meir of Clisson in northern France. Any or all of these seem to have been possible.¹³³ Scheindlin notes that readers’ difficulties with Ibn Tibbon’s translation “consisted not in his use of rare words or overly refined diction but in his diligent and principled adherence to Maimonides’ Arabic syntax and word usage.”¹³⁴ Al-Ḥarīzī’s native knowledge of Arabic, his reputation as a poet, and his experience translating other works of Maimonides and even corresponding with Maimonides all recommended him for the task, even if his detractors might claim that his philosophical knowledge was weak.

The completion of al-Ḥarīzī’s translation was not the end of the dialogue between these two early translators; al-Ḥarīzī’s inclusion of a glossary seems to have provided the impetus for Ibn Tibbon to do the same, suggesting that perhaps he had actually wanted to do this with the first version of the translation some nine years earlier. Ibn Tibbon also openly attacked al-Ḥarīzī’s work, referring to the glossary and the chapter summaries the latter attached to the translation as “The Chapter of Nonsense” and “The Chapter of Blasphemy” (respectively).¹³⁵ Abraham Maimonides picked up the same cudgel about a quarter of a century later, declaring that al-Ḥarīzī’s translation was “full of errors and distortions.”¹³⁶ Further criticism was heaped on al-Ḥarīzī’s work by Shem Ṭov Falaquera, one of the earliest commentators on the *Guide* and one of the first Hebrew translators of Islamic philosophers altogether.¹³⁷ Despite the opprobrium, al-Ḥarīzī’s translation of the *Guide* was the source for

132. Scheindlin, “Al-Ḥarīzī’s Translation,” 55.

133. Scheindlin provides all these sources in *ibid.*, 59–60.

134. *Ibid.*, 61.

135. *Ibid.*, 64–65.

136. *Ibid.*, 65. Note that this attack does not appear in all versions of Abraham Maimonides’ *Wars of the Lord* (*Milḥamot ha-Shem*). *Ibid.*, 65 n. 44.

137. See, for example, Falaquera’s *Reshit Hokhmah*, which includes paraphrases of al-Fārābī’s trilogy on the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Note that Falaquera also criticized Samuel’s translation of the *Guide*, including a detailed critique of the latter’s translation in the third appendix to Falaquera’s *Moreh ha-Moreh*.

Maimonides' thoughts in the Christian world; the first complete printed Latin translation of the work published in Paris in 1520 and Pedro de Toledo's Spanish rendition—the first translation of the work into a “modern” language—were both based on al-Ḥarīzī's translation.¹³⁸ The *Guide* first circulated in Latin translation in 1223–24, shortly after the Hebrew translations appeared, although we may call this *Liber de Parabola* a compendium rather than a translation per se. This work was based on Ibn Tibbon's version and—suggestive of a Christian audience—included no references to the Talmud.¹³⁹ Shortly thereafter, a partial Latin translation appeared as *Liber de uno Deo benedicto*. But it is the *Dux Neutrorum* that received widespread attention. The dissemination of these translations stimulated interest not only in the *Guide* throughout Europe but also in “Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition and other cognate literature needed to understand the *Guide*.”¹⁴⁰

Although we may see Ibn Tibbon himself as the founder of a commentarial tradition because of his own glosses,¹⁴¹ it is with the *Moreh ha-Moreh* (*Guide to the Guide*) of Falaquera that we see most clearly the overlap of translation and commentary. Falaquera set out to “comment on the words which were not properly translated, and therefore cannot convey the ideas they were meant to express,”¹⁴² and so we may see Falaquera's work as a corrective to Ibn Tibbon's translation. But Falaquera's work does more, retranslating substantial swaths of Maimonides' Judeo-Arabic as well as commenting on it. Many traditional printings of the *Guide* include *Moreh ha-Moreh*, this commentary having been included in printed editions from the *editio princeps* in Italy before 1480.¹⁴³

138. Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 365. It is worth noting that José Fernández López argues that Pedro de Toledo's translation did not in fact come from al-Ḥarīzī's translation but perhaps relied on Latin texts as well (which themselves relied on al-Ḥarīzī). See Fernández López, “Intertextual Argument”; and Di Segni, “Early Quotations,” 191–93.

139. Di Segni, “Early Quotations.”

140. J. Robinson, “Translations,” 515.

141. Aviezer Ravitzky, “Samuel Ibn Tibbon.”

142. Shiffman, “Differences between the Translations,” 48.

143. De Souza, *Rewriting Maimonides*, 288.

Modern Translations

The rise of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in the nineteenth century brought about an interest in the history of the text of the Jewish canon,¹⁴⁴ and Salomon Munk (1803–1867) “turned to the tools of philology as a means to reconstruct the history of Jewish thought and establish its relevance to the humanistic study of Western philosophy.”¹⁴⁵ Munk produced not only a critical text of the Judeo-Arabic of the *Guide* based on his study of the Judeo-Arabic manuscripts but a French translation and notes, realized in three volumes from 1856 to 1866. Paul B. Fenton explains that Munk established Maimonides’ text by relying both on manuscripts of the *Guide* and on the translations of Ibn Tibbon and al-Ḥarīzī, as well as on a host of commentators, many of whom are discussed below. Munk’s work included a list of variant readings emerging from medieval translations. The volumes of the *Guide des Égarés* were well received, and despite the pitfalls to which Munk’s attempt to establish a “correct” text may have been vulnerable—among them the possibility noted above that there never *was* a “correct” text of the *Guide*—his work remains the standard for a scholarly version of the Judeo-Arabic text. Munk’s labors were reproduced both in an edition containing the Judeo-Arabic text alone (edited by Issachar Joel in 1930/31) and as a stand-alone French translation in various forms in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁴⁶

Modern translations of the complete text of the *Guide* into two other languages bear mention here: the English translations of Michael Friedländer and Shlomo Pines and the Hebrew translations of Joseph Kafih and Michael Schwarz.¹⁴⁷ Like Munk’s translation, Friedländer’s was published both with (1881–85) and without (1904) notes; as Warren Zev Harvey explains, the latter was produced for a broad audience and included some changes to the translation as well.¹⁴⁸ One might draw parallels between al-Ḥarīzī’s method as a translator and that of Friedländer, aiming to capture the flow of the *Guide*, and likewise between Ibn Tibbon and Pines, maintaining a fierce loyalty to Maimonides’ *language*. Yet Harvey rebuffs such a comparison. He labels

144. For an introduction to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, see *EJ*, s.v. “Wissenschaft des Judentums” (Benzion Dinur).

145. Fenton, “Second Ibn Tibbon,” 183.

146. *Ibid.*, 202–3.

147. For other partial translations into English, see W. Harvey, “Michael Friedländer’s Pioneering,” 211 and 213.

148. *Ibid.*, 212.

Friedländer as having “no anxiety about accuracy”; as he describes it, the translation is more concise than that of Pines—which came three-quarters of a century later—but also less accurate.¹⁴⁹ Although “much less a poet than al-Harizi,”¹⁵⁰ Friedländer translates with a dramatic quality that perhaps contributed to its enduring popularity—if it was not the low price of the Dover paperback. Yet as Harvey points out, “Pines’s . . . text, which tries to reproduce the complexity of Maimonides’ Arabic, is more suited for analysis in a philosophy seminar.”¹⁵¹

If Friedländer was critical of Maimonides’ esotericism, striving to minimize it or even push it aside in his translation,¹⁵² Pines seems to have appreciated it. Out of a commitment to “let[ting] the *Guide* speak for itself, each reader expected to react to it in proportion to his or her philosophical sophistication,”¹⁵³ Pines offered a translation that Alfred Ivry argues retained the ambiguity of Maimonides’ text and preserved the master’s pedagogic goals: “Pines’ translation was intended, then, to be as objective as possible, free from tendentious readings, an accurate rendition in English of a medieval Judeo-Arabic text. The technical terms would be offered as Maimonides would have wished to present them, in language that his readers would have recognized, in varying degrees of comprehension.”¹⁵⁴

Pines’s 1963 translation was published with a minimum of notes, primarily consisting of citations. But it *did* include a substantial “translator’s introduction” by Pines himself as well as an additional essay running to more than ninety pages by Leo Strauss entitled “How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*.” Strauss himself had published extensively on Maimonides for nearly three decades prior to the publication of Pines’s translation, “paint[ing] a portrait of a bold, radical, and subversive Maimonides, who was very different from the pious, tame, harmonizing theologian often conveyed by historians of medieval philosophy.”¹⁵⁵ While the translation is Pines’s, the presence of Strauss’s essay in the published volume provides a lens through which to view Pines’s translation, which focused on Maimonides’ dissimulating design. Harvey suggests that the Jerusalem-Athens dichotomy is “presented by Strauss

149. *Ibid.*, 221.

150. *Ibid.*, 210.

151. *Ibid.*, 222.

152. *Ibid.*, 215–16.

153. Ivry, “Pines’ Translation of the *Guide*,” 242.

154. *Ibid.*

155. W. Harvey, “How to Begin to Study,” 228.

in such a convincing way that it was widely accepted by both Straussian and anti-Straussian interpreters of the *Guide*.¹⁵⁶ Yet Harvey himself maintains that seeing only two layers of meaning in the text is a trap. Indeed, Harvey points out that the difficulty of reading Strauss—himself a recondite and idiosyncratic writer—leads many readers to miss the point that Strauss understood the *Guide* to contain *multiple* (not just two) layers of meaning.¹⁵⁷ As we shall see, Pines's willingness to produce a text with two layers of meaning produces as many problems as it solves, resulting in a translation that is not always concerned with helping the reader comprehend Maimonides' line of argument nor with helping the reader understand Maimonides' *words*. As we shall see, the attempt to treat every Judeo-Arabic term as if it were a *Leitwort* with a semantic range so narrow that it could be reproduced with the same English word each time it appears produces logical difficulties faced by the reader of the *Guide*—difficulties with which Pines was unconcerned because he was willing to leave contradictions in the text itself.

Less than a decade after Pines's translation, in 1972, Mossad ha-Rav Kook published the *Guide* in a volume that included both an edition of the Judeo-Arabic text and the Hebrew translation of Rabbi Joseph Kafih (1917–2000), part of a project initiated in 1950 by the press to publish the entire Maimonidean corpus outside of the master's medical writings.¹⁵⁸ The press also published the Hebrew translation on its own in 1977. Langermann describes Kafih's work as a “modern medieval” translation, hearkening back to the comment of S. D. Goitein (1900–1985)—doyen of the social history of the Jews in the medieval Islamic world—that Goitein himself “was once a medieval man.”¹⁵⁹ Langermann explores the friendship between Goitein and Kafih, pointing to interconnections between scholars and rabbis in Kafih's time. Drawing on translations both medieval and modern as well as both Munk's text and Yemenite manuscripts that Kafih consulted, Kafih also drew on his native proficiency in Arabic to produce a translation that Langermann argues is closer at times to Maimonides'

156. Ibid., 229.

157. It is worthwhile to point out that Strauss's reading was challenged in the 1930s and 1940s by the “coherentist” view of Julius Guttmann; for this debate, see the literature cited in D. Frank, “Maimonides and Medieval Jewish Aristotelianism,” 154 *n.* 3.

158. Langermann, “Rabbi Yosef Qafih,” 260. This was not the first translation of the *Guide* or parts thereof into modern Hebrew; for these, see Aviram Ravitzky, “Michael Schwarz's Hebrew,” 280.

159. For Goitein's statement, see Goitein, *Religion*, 4.

own intention—"committed to the philosophical tradition, but . . . not by any means strictly or exclusively in the philosophical idiom."¹⁶⁰

If Langermann styles Kafih's translation as "medieval," Michael Schwarz's 2002 translation is very much a modern one. Aviram Ravitsky points out that "The philosophical-Hebrew linguistic tradition is one dimension of the language from which most speakers of modern Hebrew have become estranged."¹⁶¹ Schwarz felt that a familiarity with rabbinic literature was a prerequisite to comprehending Kafih's translation; his own translation was composed in order to be "accessible to the contemporary Hebrew-educated reader."¹⁶² Schwarz appended a critical apparatus to the translation as well as notes referring the reader to the contemporary scholarly literature—this in itself being an innovation. The notes also point to the complicated, hybrid nature of Schwarz's venture, with the notes being of primary interest to his scholarly readers and the translation meant for a modern Hebrew-speaking public at large.¹⁶³ Indeed, in 2008, Yedi'ot Books published a one-volume edition of Schwarz's translation without the notes, including an introduction by Dov Schwartz. Finally, Schwarz included a survey of other translations of the *Guide* at the end of his work.

Like Schwarz's translation of the *Guide*, the present translation has been prepared with the modern reader in mind. The eminent Arabist Franz Rosenthal is said to have quipped that every "Arabic word has a basic meaning, a second meaning which is the exact opposite of the first, a third meaning which refers to either a camel or a horse, and a fourth meaning that is so obscene that you'll have to look it up for yourself."¹⁶⁴ The breadth of the semantic range of Arabic implied by Rosenthal's statement points to the difficulty of implementing a "literal" mode of translation from Judeo-Arabic to English, given that the semantic range of any Judeo-Arabic word will not align with that of any English term. In his essay "Theories of Modern Bible Translation," Edward L. Greenstein points to the inseparability of form and sense in art, explaining that the biblical translation of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig (begun in 1925) "at first blush has

160. Langermann, "Rabbi Yosef Qafih," 267.

161. Aviram Ravitsky, "Michael Schwarz's Hebrew," 282.

162. *Ibid.*, 284.

163. See Harvey's comment, cited by Ravitsky, that he would have preferred Schwarz to have provided more insight into the translation itself and fewer citations to the scholarly literature. *Ibid.*, 285–86.

164. Cited in Schmidt, *(Re-)Framing the Arab/Muslim*, 38–39, in the name of Roger Allen.

appeared to many as a literal, word-for-word version.”¹⁶⁵ Yet rather than being a “literal” translation, as Greenstein explains, the Buber-Rosenzweig translation aimed to capture literary style and form as a critical component contributing to the meaning of the biblical text. Translation poses unique difficulties. The effect of a transfer of a work of art from one medium of representation to another—say, a poem or a painting into music, or even the reproduction of a polychromatic painting as a black-and-white image—is visible. But translation changes a text in ways not immediately apparent. Thus, “since most readers of translation are not conversant with the source language, they cannot measure the gap between the original and its surrogate.”¹⁶⁶ Knowing that a translator cannot duplicate all the linguistic and stylistic features of a text, Friedrich Schleiermacher suggests in his 1813 lecture “On the Different Methods of Translation” that the translator “select for special treatment those features that strike him as most expressive and significant.”¹⁶⁷ For Buber and Rosenzweig, this was the oral nature of the biblical text, particularly manifest in recurrent *Leitwörter*: “In order to convey these meaningful repetitions Buber and Rosenzweig, for the most part, rendered Hebrew stems by the same German stem even in contexts where the German word was partly inapposite.”¹⁶⁸ The effect of this choice is to “make the German alien by means of the Hebrew.”¹⁶⁹

To Pines and Strauss, the “most expressive and significant” feature of Maimonides’ text was its esoteric nature, professing an overt fealty to the rabbinic tradition while maintaining a covert loyalty to Aristotelian philosophy. Strauss’s essay, from the opening pages of Pines’s edition, is entitled “How to *Begin* to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*” (emphasis mine—with Strauss hinting that a sophisticated reader might read the *Guide* differently); therein, Strauss highlights an emphasis that may inform how we read Pines’s translation:

[Maimonides’] written explanation of the secrets of the Law is not a public but a secret explanation. This secrecy is achieved in three ways. First, every word of the *Guide* is chosen with exceeding care; since very few men are able or willing to read with exceeding care, most men will fail to perceive the secret teaching. Second, Maimonides deliberately contradicts himself, and if a man declares that both *a* is *b* and *a* is not *b*, he cannot be said to declare

165. Greenstein, “Theories of Modern Bible Translation,” 12.

166. *Ibid.*, 16.

167. *Ibid.*, 22.

168. *Ibid.*, 24.

169. Batnitzky, “Translation as Transcendence,” 87.

anything. Lastly, the “chapter headings” of the secret teaching are not presented in an orderly fashion but are scattered throughout the book.¹⁷⁰

The present translation acknowledges the esoteric nature of the *Guide* but does not share Buber and Rosenzweig’s aim—seemingly accepted by Pines and Strauss—of alienating the reader from the text. The present translation refrains from an allegiance to *Leitwörter* where English equivalents would be “partly in-apposite,” generating difficulties for the reader in understanding Maimonides’ text. For the English-speaking scholar of Judeo-Arabic, reliance on *Leitwörter* in translation is extremely useful in helping the scholar understand and return to the original Judeo-Arabic. But the present translation—produced jointly by an eminent scholar of Jewish and Islamic philosophy and a social, economic, and legal historian of the Jews of the medieval Islamic world—follows Maimonides’ own guidance to Ibn Tibbon in “first try[ing] to grasp the meaning of the subject, and then stat[ing] the theme with perfect clarity in the other language.”¹⁷¹ The reader we have in mind is not unlike Maimonides’ Joseph b. Judah, who—familiar with the Jewish tradition—has done some of the preliminary work but asks for more (Introduction to Part I, 1.2a). The notes, as in Schwarz’s volume, are designed for the reader who seeks clarification of Maimonides’ argument or references to the philosophical and rabbinic literature that precedes the *Guide* or builds on it. We also make regular reference to the scholarly literature where that literature brings to light Maimonides’ sources, explains his argument, or points to how those who follow in Maimonides’ footsteps use the *Guide*. Ibn Tibbon and al-Ḥarīzī—or, perhaps, Pines and Friedländer—place the reader between Scylla and Charybdis. This translation was composed in the hopes of guiding the reader between the two safely.

The Commentarial Tradition

In his book *Rewriting Maimonides*, Igor De Souza identifies five distinct stages of commentary on the *Guide*, all of which happen to fall along regional and cultural boundaries. The first in Spain, the south of France, and Italy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; the second in Spain in the late fourteenth and

170. Strauss, “How to Begin to Study,” xv.

171. This translation is that of Leon Stitskin, “Letter of Maimonides to Samuel Ibn Tibbon,” 93; for the Hebrew text, see Maimonides, “Epistles,” 27. Subsequent portions of this letter have been analyzed in detail, though there does not seem yet to be a critical edition of this section of the letter; see Forte, “Back to the Sources.”

fifteenth centuries; the third in Spain, Italy, and the Levant in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; the fourth in Christian Europe (i.e., Ashkenaz) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and the fifth and final in Ashkenaz in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁷² De Souza notes that the commentarial tradition is “one shelf of the Maimonideanist library”—which would also include summaries, glossaries, indexes, dictionaries, and propaedeutic manuals. In fact, the commentarial tradition is even broader than De Souza’s schema describes it; as early as the second half of the thirteenth century, we find an Arabic commentary on the *Guide* by the Muslim writer Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Tabrīzī—which was itself subsequently translated into Hebrew (twice).¹⁷³

While De Souza’s typology describing “commentaries” is useful from a literary point of view, the commentarial tradition itself must be seen as including some of the other genres he mentions. The translated passages in Falaquera’s *Moreh ha-Moreh* with the included commentary were but one example of the connections between translation and exegesis; so, too, did Latin works emerging in the decades immediately after Maimonides’ death utilize translation to their commentarial ends. One might just as well include the aforementioned early “translations” of the *Guide* into Latin such as the *Liber de Parabola* and the *Liber de uno Deo benedicto* as commentaries, since they select, epitomize, or analyze as much as—or as well as—translate. Although these works do not fit neatly into De Souza’s typology of commentary, they shed light on the reception of the *Guide* and, like al-Tabrīzī’s commentary, attest to the importance of the *Guide* for readers outside the Jewish community. Such readers included Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), whose works include a large number of quotations from the *Guide*.¹⁷⁴

Commentaries on the *Guide* put the work to use for different aims from the very founding of the genre—aims that were philosophical, kabbalistic, or exegetical.¹⁷⁵ As “the first sustained attempt to interpret Judaism in philosophical terms,”¹⁷⁶ the *Guide* itself immediately engendered controversies among Jews and Christians alike. But a favorable reevaluation of the work among kabbalists of southern France led to a florescence in kabbalistic commentaries in the last quarter of the thirteenth century.¹⁷⁷ The esoteric nature of the work and the

172. De Souza, *Rewriting Maimonides*, 1–18.

173. See *EJ*, s.v. “Tabrizi, Mahomet Abu-Bekr-At-Ben-Mahomet.”

174. Rubio, *Aquinas and Maimonides*, 3.

175. De Souza, *Rewriting Maimonides*, 8–9.

176. Idel, “Maimonides’ *Guide*,” 198.

177. *Ibid.*, 198–99.

idea that the *Guide* might contain “secrets” were taken up by the first stage of commentators, laying the foundation for enduring controversies surrounding its translation and meaning. Yet some commentaries also added to this by engaging Maimonides’ philosophical questions in light of his Muslim interlocutors. Prominent in this latter group is the commentary of Moses of Narbonne (also known as Maestre Vidal Bellshom, ca. 1300–after 1362).¹⁷⁸ Moses of Narbonne’s commentary would be cited heavily in the work of later commentators, although oddly it would remain in manuscript all the way until 1791.¹⁷⁹

Interestingly, what De Souza terms the second stage of commentary—from the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—is characterized by writers who “do not presuppose extensive philosophical knowledge on the part of the reader, and tend to explain the letter of the text rather than the implications of problematic passages.”¹⁸⁰ These works are from Spain, with the notable exception of the commentary of Solomon b. Judah ha-Nasi (second half of the fourteenth century), the first exposition of the *Guide* produced in an Ashkenazic milieu before the sixteenth century. Solomon himself was from Lunel in Provence and composed his commentary for an Ashkenazi patron.¹⁸¹ Among these commentators is Profayt Duran (ca. 1358–1433). Maud Kozodoy identifies in Duran’s work, first, a “responsiveness to difficulties in the text and the central fact that many of his glosses are primarily aimed at clarification; second, the salience of Duran’s mathematical and astronomical interests.”¹⁸² Duran’s commentary, popularly called “Efodi,”¹⁸³ draws heavily on the work of the philosophically minded commentators who preceded him, such as Moses of Narbonne. One might place Duran in the category of “radical Maimonideans” who held that no matter that Maimonides’ writing appeared to align with Jewish tradition on its surface, the master’s real beliefs were in line with Aristotle’s even where the latter could not be made commensurable with Jewish tradition. But Kozodoy (disagreeing with

178. On Moses and his interpretation of the *Guide* in light of the thought of Ibn Rushd/Averroes (1126–1198), see Manekin, “Maimonides on Divine Knowledge”; on Moses and his connection to Islamic philosophy generally, see Ivry, “Al-Ghazālī, Averroes and Moshe Narboni.”

179. De Souza, *Rewriting Maimonides*, 288–89.

180. *Ibid.*, 9.

181. *Ibid.*

182. Kozodoy, *Secret Faith of Maestre Honoratus*, 51.

183. The word *efod* is an acronym of *Amar Profayt Duran*, which Duran used to mark his marginal notations, later taken as a pen name after Duran’s forced conversion to Christianity. (Thanks to Maud Kozodoy for pointing this out.) *Ibid.*

the fifteenth-century figure Isaac Abravanel) defangs the claim to radicalism, revisiting Duran's explanation of Maimonides' comment in *Guide* II 26: "Duran's suggestion—that the hidden doctrine here is the everlastingness, not the eternity, of the universe—means that the 'secret' turns out to be thoroughly anodyne."¹⁸⁴ Duran's work, like the *Moreh ha-Moreh*, is included in many printings of the *Guide*, perhaps because the commentary may have "emerged out of a pedagogical engagement with the text."¹⁸⁵

It is surprising, perhaps, that commentaries to the *Guide* were penned in the first place, since (as De Souza reminds us) "Maimonides explicitly forbids his readers from explaining anything about the text to one another, orally or in writing,"¹⁸⁶ thereby "render[ing] the practice of commentary on the *Guide* the philosophical-literary equivalent of a religious sin"¹⁸⁷ (cf. Introduction to Part I). Yet De Souza describes the practice of studying the *Guide* with its commentaries "the *de facto* manner of studying the text," with the Italian kabbalist Yoḥanan Alemanno (ca. 1435–after 1504) even providing a curriculum for its study.¹⁸⁸ That the commentaries of Duran and Falaquera were both written for a broad audience and required little philosophical background contributed to their popularity. To these two commentaries should be added a third, that of Asher Crescas, which was written explicitly for very young students and is found in many printed editions along with that of these other two commentators.

The third stage of commentaries identified by De Souza includes those "put in the service of theological goals."¹⁸⁹ As they had in previous stages, Spanish writers played a key role here, although Italy and the Levant were also active. One of the outstanding exponents of the stage, which runs from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries, is Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508), whose work has also found its way into common printed editions. Abravanel's approach toward Maimonides' philosophy has been viewed variously by scholars, with Strauss arguing that Abravanel rejected earlier philosophical interpretations of the text and Eric Lawee arguing that he actually selectively accepted such interpretations.¹⁹⁰ Like Abravanel, exponents of De Souza's fourth stage—from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Ashkenaz, notably Poland and Prague, drew on earlier

184. *Ibid.*, 59.

185. *Ibid.*, 62.

186. De Souza, *Rewriting Maimonides*, 4.

187. *Ibid.*, 285.

188. *Ibid.*, 288.

189. *Ibid.*, 10.

190. *Ibid.*, 10 *n.* 26.

stages of commentary. This stage of commentary represented a late florescence of philosophy in Ashkenaz that had taken hold in southern Europe and Islamic lands centuries before, with jurists such as Moses Isserles (1520–1572) and Mordechai Jaffe (ca. 1535–1612) giving the *Guide* a place in Eastern European rabbinical culture that harmonized Maimonides with rabbinic Judaism.¹⁹¹ In its final stage, in the modern period, the traditional commentary form gives way to scholarly literature about the *Guide*, although the *Giv'at ha-Moreh* of Solomon Maimon (1753–1800) represents an important last gasp of the genre of running commentary. Highly reliant on and indeed modeled after the commentary of Moses of Narbonne, with which it was printed (at least in Part I)—the first time Moses of Narbonne's commentary had ever been printed in its history of more than four centuries—the *Giv'at ha-Moreh* responds to Solomon Maimon's time as much as to Maimonides' own, drawing connections between the *Has-kalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) and Maimonides' notion of perfection.¹⁹² Yet while Maimon's work is the last exemplum of running commentary, Ivry's *Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed: A Philosophical Guide*, published in 2016, is a close cousin to this genre, since the work paraphrases and analyzes Maimonides' work.¹⁹³

The Reception of the *Guide* I: The "Maimonidean Controversies"

Like *MT*, the *Guide* was steeped in controversy from its beginnings.¹⁹⁴ Debate surrounding the *Guide* should be seen as part of a host of controversies surrounding Maimonides' oeuvre in general, including controversies within Maimonides' own lifetime on his position on matters such as bodily resurrection.¹⁹⁵ While much scholarship on these various squabbles has focused on the reception of the *Guide* in the West, Elisha Russ-Fishbane has taken important steps toward providing a corrective to this tendency.¹⁹⁶ The burgeoning of Geniza studies in the second half of the twentieth century has opened up materials

191. *Ibid.*, 11.

192. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

193. Ivry, *Maimonides' "Guide of the Perplexed."*

194. For criticism of *MT* and its controversial reception, see Kraemer, *Maimonides*, 324–25.

195. For the controversy surrounding Maimonides' views on resurrection in the East, see Stroumsa, "Twelfth-Century Concepts."

196. See, for example, Russ-Fishbane, "Maimonidean Controversies," citing Blumenthal, "Was There an Eastern Tradition of Maimonidean Scholarship?"

previously inaccessible to scholars, allowing Russ-Fishbane to contextualize what had been seen as the “first” or the “actual” controversy as part of a host of interconnected responses to Maimonides’ philosophical work. The Maimonidean Controversy in Montpellier in 1232, leading to the banning of the *Guide* and the first book of *MT*—*The Book of Knowledge* (*Sefer ha-Madaʿ*)—has been seen as a leading cause of the burning of the *Guide* by mendicant friars the following year. Yet Yossef Schwartz has recently challenged the idea that friars burned the *Guide*—he describes it as “Maimonidean propaganda and a Jewish fantasy that reveals a great deal about Jewish images of Christian control mechanisms and Christian-Jewish relations during the nascent stages of the Inquisition.”¹⁹⁷ Russ-Fishbane reconfigures the stages of the conflict as beginning with resurrection controversies in the East (Iraq and Yemen)¹⁹⁸ and West (Castile); turning to halakhic criticism in the East (Iraq and Syria), including antirationalist backlash in Egypt; and only finally progressing to the “Montpellier phase.”¹⁹⁹

As Russ-Fishbane points out, controversies surrounding the *Guide* were preceded by those surrounding *MT*—although Maimonides *did* receive “skeptical philosophical questions” even in his own lifetime from at least one individual.²⁰⁰ Early controversies in the East with Samuel b. ‘Alī Ibn al-Dastūr Gaʿon (fl. before 1164–ca. 1197) addressed the question of resurrection, but this matter, while touched upon in the *Guide*, is the subject of Maimonides’ later “Treatise on Resurrection.”²⁰¹ These early controversies were, according to Russ-Fishbane, more a struggle for primacy in the halakhic domain than they were about philosophy or ideology. Indeed, Brendan Goldman has recently shown that this tendency continued: The public condemnation of Maimonides’ works by a group of rabbis in Acre under the leadership of Solomon b. Samuel Peṭiṭ in 1288–89 was “as much (or more) about politics than ideology. It was, at its most

197. Y. Schwartz, “Persecution and the Art of Translation,” 56. Likewise, Russ-Fishbane even identifies “Catholic luminaries with close ties to the Dominican and Franciscan orders” who look favorably upon the *Guide*. See Russ-Fishbane, “Maimonidean Controversies,” 196 *n.* 33.

198. For the resurrection controversies in the East, see also Stroumsa, *Beginnings of the Maimonidean Controversy*; Langermann, *Yemenite Midrash*, 297–302; and Langermann, “Epistle of Rabbi Samuel b. ‘Alī.”

199. See Russ-Fishbane, “Maimonidean Controversies,” 161, and the literature cited there in the notes.

200. *Ibid.*, 163 *n.* 9.

201. *Ibid.*, 163 *n.* 10, citing the work of Sarah Stroumsa.

fundamental, a struggle over who should be the regional leader over the Jews of Latin Syria.”²⁰² Thus, while there are strains of these controversies that were centered on the philosophical or theological questions in general and on the *Guide* in specific, these strains should be seen in their broader context.

In Egypt, the communal authority assumed by Abraham Maimonides after his father’s death extended to composing responsa, at least one of which included clarification of some of the points of the *Guide*.²⁰³ But challenges to the communal authority of the Maimonides family continued, and in the 1220s, these took a literary turn that began to focus on the *Guide* when a student of Samuel b. ‘Ali by the name of Daniel b. Se’adyah ha-Bavli spearheaded a further confrontation to the family’s authority. Although the details of this dispute are cloudy, it seems that Daniel ha-Bavli critiqued Maimonides’ view of demons, a subject referred to in the *Guide* (III 46) and not in *CM*. Russ-Fishbane sees philosophy here as a proxy war for wrangling between Babylonia and Fustāt for dominance, though the shifting literary target of that proxy war also betokened a move from “a focused critique of the code toward a sustained rejection of the master’s philosophical orientation and the rationalist legacy it spawned.”²⁰⁴

The new direction of these controversies did not take aim at the *Guide* in specific so much as the positions it supported: Maimonides’ discussion of divine agency and natural causation (the latter seen in *Guide* I 73) led to the composition in 1223 of a polemic by Daniel Ibn al-Māshiṭa entitled *Taqwīm al-adyān* (*The Rectification of Religion*) and a response by Abraham Maimonides. Ibn al-Māshiṭa’s innovative approach in this work was to use Scripture to parry the synthesis drawn by Maimonides between philosophy and Scripture, “juxtapos[ing] the heretical exegesis of the philosophers with the bare words of revelation, exposing the manifest absurdity of all rationalist interpretation by holding it up to the light of Scripture itself.”²⁰⁵

In the 1230s, the center of gravity of the Maimonidean controversies shifted from Egypt to Montpellier; the rise of debate over the study of philosophy erupted in Provence as an expansion of earlier philosophical debates in Spain.²⁰⁶ Here, too, though, philosophical questions were yoked with questions

202. Brendan G. Goldman, *Among the Camps of the Uncircumcised: Everyday Syrian Life in the Ports of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem* (forthcoming), part 4.3, “The Maimonidean Controversy and the Fall of Acre (1285–1291).”

203. Russ-Fishbane, “Maimonidean Controversies,” 164.

204. *Ibid.*, 171.

205. *Ibid.*, 189.

206. For these debates, see Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture*, 61–63.

of communal leadership and allegiance to that leadership.²⁰⁷ As Bernard Septimus explains, “Spanish rationalism represented a fundamental challenge to the theological presuppositions and educational ideals of Franco-German talmudic culture.”²⁰⁸ Bans and counterbans spread throughout France, Provence, and Iberia, with Maimonides’ philosophical writings (the *Guide* and the aforementioned *Book of Knowledge*) at the center of the debate. Even if these writings were not burned by Christians, from his perch in Egypt, Abraham seems to have *believed* that they had been.²⁰⁹ Abraham saw Christianity as a corrupting influence upon the Jews of Provence (some of whom had migrated to Egypt in the early part of the thirteenth century),²¹⁰ with the *Guide* and the *Book of Knowledge* providing a corrective. Tying the fate of Egyptian Jewry to that of its French immigrants, Russ-Fishbane notes that the controversies were quelled by “the presence of respectable French scholars and the gradual integration and acculturation of the sizeable French cohort in Egypt.”²¹¹ In the West, tensions between the opposing factions were certainly exacerbated by antirationalist agitation in the Christian environment.²¹² The situation in Provence would settle down by 1235, but controversy surrounding the Greek sciences in any language would persist into the early fourteenth century. A compromise banning the study of the Greek sciences for students under twenty-five would be negotiated in 1305 but would be ignored.²¹³ And while writing about the ideas in the *Guide* continued beyond these controversies,²¹⁴ this final controversy was not focused on the *Guide* in specific so much as the study of philosophy in general.²¹⁵

207. Ibid., 63.

208. Ibid., 64.

209. Russ-Fishbane, “Maimonidean Controversies,” 195–96.

210. For literature on these immigrants, see Cuffel, “Call and Response.”

211. Russ-Fishbane, “Maimonidean Controversies,” 201.

212. Jospe, *Jewish Philosophy*, 557.

213. Fraisse, “Jewish Philosophy and Thought,” citing Stern, *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture*; Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture*.

214. For writing connected to the *Guide* in the immediate wake of these controversies, see, for example, the *Light of the Lord* of Hasdai b. Judah Crescas (ca. 1340–1410/11), composed with Maimonidean Aristotelianism in mind, although this work was conceived (initially, at least) as an attack on *MT*; see also Lasker, “Chasdai Crescas,” 339–40.

215. Jospe, *Jewish Philosophy*, 566–70.

The Reception of the *Guide* II: From the Medieval Period to the Modern

Reverberations of the *Guide* were felt beyond these controversies as well. The Karaite community was sharply affected by the *Guide*'s challenge to *kalām* and its valorization of Aristotelian philosophy. Lasker outlines the impact of Maimonides' approach to prophecy on subsequent Karaite thought, which unseated the approach of Japheth b. Eli. Just as Maimonides responded to Karaite thought in his outline of prophecy in the *Guide*, so, too, did Karaites after Maimonides transcend earlier Karaite ideas in absorbing the *Guide*.²¹⁶ Maimonides' impact may be felt as early as the writings of the Crimean Karaite Aaron b. Joseph the Doctor (ca. 1250–1320), which describe a typology of prophets (other than Moses) that relies on Maimonides' distinction between dream and vision—though Aaron sees an infinite number of degrees rather than Maimonides' eleven (*Guide* II 45).²¹⁷ Likewise, in understanding Hosea's marriage to a harlot (Hosea 1) to have taken place in a vision, for example, Aaron defends the *Guide*'s position that the pericope “was entirely within his prophetic vision” (II 46, 2.98b). Half a century later, Aaron b. Elijah (the Younger) of Nicomedia (1328/29–1369) continued the tendency of his Karaite predecessor to maintain the Maimonidean stance that prophecy may be stratified as a vision, a dream, or Mosaic prophecy (*sui generis*).²¹⁸ Lasker points to the staying power of the Maimonidean prophetic typology through the sixteenth century.²¹⁹

Maimonides' approach to prophecy also had an important impact on the Karaite understanding of law and revelation, a key area of difference between Maimonides' Karaite predecessors and their Rabbanite interlocutors. Whereas Karaite thinkers prior to Maimonides had turned to *all* the books of the Bible for their halakhic content rather than the Pentateuch alone, “by denying a legislative role to post-Mosaic prophets, Maimonides, in effect, disallowed this legal methodology.”²²⁰ The acceptance of Maimonides' approach by most Karaites had the effect of bringing the Karaite community closer in line with its Rabbanite rivals. The fifteenth-century Karaite authority Elijah Bashyatchi (ca. 1420–1490) reinforces the dividing line between the prophecy of Moses and that of his successors. While subsequent prophets could *reinforce* the laws

216. Lasker, *From Judah Hadassi to Elijah Bashyatchi*, 174–79.

217. *Ibid.*, 176–77.

218. *Ibid.*, 177–78.

219. *Ibid.*, 178–79.

220. *Ibid.*, 179.

of earlier prophets or interpret Mosaic law, their prophecy could not reveal new legislation.²²¹ In Lasker's account, this Karaite synthesis contributed to a Rabbanite-Karaite rapprochement stretching back to the claim of Nissi b. Noah in the twelfth century that rabbinic literature was itself Karaite!²²²

The impact of the *Guide* was felt beyond the Jewish community as well. Composing his *Summa Theologiae* less than a century after the completion of the *Guide*, Aquinas is understood to have relied on the Latin translation of the *Guide* known as *Dux Neutorum*.²²³ Idit Dobbs-Weinstein has explored what she calls a "dialogue" between the two with respect to a number of central questions in the *Guide*—creation, matter and evil, and providence among them.²²⁴ Likewise, Aquinas often agrees with Maimonides in his analysis of biblical language and prophecy, but he also disagrees at times. Warren Zev Harvey presents the following (if controversial) example: "With Maimonides, he holds that it is impossible that names be predicated of God univocally; but against Maimonides, he holds that names are not predicated of God 'purely equivocally' (*pure aequivoce*). Rather, he contends, they are predicated of him 'analogously,' imperfectly: there is at least some small area in common between the meaning of a name predicated of God and the meaning of the same name when predicated of a created thing. Aquinas' position is in general the same as that of Avicenna, Averroes, and all the philosophers in the Arabic Aristotelian tradition, save Maimonides."²²⁵ While some Jewish kabbalists of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries could not find spiritual succor in the *Guide*,²²⁶ Muslim and Christian mystics did study the work.²²⁷ Albert H. Friedlander's statement regarding the early fourteenth century that "the Latin text [of the *Guide*] was in the library

221. Ibid., 180–88. It is worthwhile pointing out, as Lasker does, that Rabbanites were not in universal agreement that one may not derive halakhic conclusions from books of the Bible other than the Torah (ibid., 179 n. 90).

222. Ibid., 189.

223. See, for instance, W. Harvey, "Maimonides and Aquinas," 59 n. 1. For more on Maimonides' influence on thirteenth-century Christian readers, see Hasselhoff, "Maimonides in the Latin Middle Ages."

224. Dobbs-Weinstein, *Maimonides and Aquinas*. For more work on the connections between Aquinas and Maimonides, see Dienstag, "Selected Bibliography," passim.

225. W. Harvey, "Maimonides and Aquinas," 67. Note that Harvey's implication that Maimonides rejects analogous predication is not universally accepted; see Manekin, "Medieval Jewish Philosophy," 136.

226. Idel, "Maimonides' *Guide*," 203.

227. For one such Muslim mystic, see Goldziher, "Ibn Hūd," 218–20.

of every scholastic” is certainly overly sanguine,²²⁸ but he points to the influence of the work on the thought of Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260–ca. 1328). Here, Maimonides’ use of allegory to produce a synthesis between philosophy and exegesis fed Eckhart’s own biblical-based mysticism: “Underneath all the words and letters there exists a Divine mystery which allegory can discover as it goes beneath the surface.”²²⁹ The influence of Maimonides’ rationalist mysticism would continue to feed Christian mystics in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as well: The humanist Hebraist Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522) turned to the *Guide* in his own study of both the Bible and mysticism. For instance, in annotating the *Liber S. Athanasii de variis quaestionibus* along with his translation of the work, Reuchlin quotes the *Guide* some ten times.²³⁰

Reuchlin was remarkable among Christian scholars for having read the *Guide* in Hebrew, whereas others would have read the widely circulated Latin translation. Richard Popkin actually argues that the Latin *Guide* “became an acceptable substitute for Saint Thomas Aquinas’s writings, since it tried to reconcile science and religion, and was written by a non-Catholic.”²³¹ Yet Steven Nadler wonders “whether it was not the other way around: that early modern philosophers used Aquinas’s widely available summaries of what ‘Rabbi Moses’ said as a substitute for a direct acquaintance with the *Guide*.”²³² Nadler shows that the *Guide* was *not* the subject of writings by Nicholas Malebranche (1638–1715) or Isaac Newton (1643–1727) despite tantalizing titles in their compositions like “a treatise on idolatry.” But Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) is explicit that he read the *Guide* in Latin—not the *Dux Neutrorum* but Johannes Buxtorf’s 1629 translation titled *Doctor Plexorum*.²³³ In fact, Leibniz not only read the *Guide* but composed notes to it.²³⁴ It seems that Part III of the *Guide* was of particular interest, given its attention to the problem of evil—a matter of concern to Leibniz as well; Nadler says of Maimonides’ account of theodicy, “Its resemblance to Leibniz’ theodicy, formulated 500 years later, is unmistakable.”²³⁵

228. Friedlander, “Meister Eckhart,” 81.

229. *Ibid.*, 82.

230. Price, *Johannes Reuchlin*, 303 n. 19. For more on Reuchlin and the *Guide*, see Leicht, “Johannes Reuchlin,” 411–28.

231. Popkin, “Religious Background,” 408.

232. Nadler, “*Guide of the Perplexed* in Early Modern Philosophy,” 367.

233. *Ibid.*, 369.

234. For these, see Goodman, “Maimonides and Leibniz,” 225–36, as well as Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften Und Briefe*, ed. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften.

235. Nadler, “*Guide of the Perplexed* in Early Modern Philosophy,” 372.