The Idea of God in the Philosophy of Moses Maimonides

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THE IDEA OF GOD IN THE PHILOSOPHY
OF MOSES MAIMONIDES

by

James H. Fleming

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of Master
of Arts in Loyola University

June
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James Hamilton Fleming was born in Chicago, Illinois, October 24, 1921.

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PREFACE

Commentaries on the writings of Maimonides are not, for the most part, actually commentaries on his writings, but rather attempts either to show him completely dependent on the Jewish tradition or as a premature Spinoza. Since his writings are an important factor in the history of medieval and modern philosophy, the lack of objective examination of his thought is extremely regrettable. For this reason, the author determined to attempt a consideration of Maimonides' philosophy based, so far as possible, upon the philosopher's own works, rather than upon commentaries.

The mere mass, alone, of Maimonides' writings preclude the author's giving a detailed account of the former's philosophy as a whole; hence, the examination of the concept of God, a fundamental point in Maimonides' thought, has been chosen as the main purpose of this thesis.

To avoid the confusion which might be attendant upon differences in translation in Jewish and Catholic versions of the Old Testament, all quotations from Scriptures are those used in the work in which such quotation appears. Further, since this thesis is primarily a study of Maimonides rather than of St. Thomas Aquinas, all quotations from the latter's writings, except those made by authorities cited in the thesis, are from the Basic
Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. This edition was chosen as a representative and readily available selection from his works and because its system of indexing references makes it most suitable for the purposes of this paper.

1St. Thomas Aquinas, Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), I-II.
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CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS

Karl Pearson begins his study of the relationship between Maimonides and Spinoza by saying:

I shall omit all matter which has no direct bearing on Spinoza's Ethica, however interesting it may otherwise be, and endeavour to make allowance for the age and theologico-philosophical language in which Maimonides wrote. We have rather to consider the spirit in which Spinoza read the Yad than that in which the Yad itself was composed.²

It is certainly true that, if one is attempting a study of the influences which led to Spinoza's philosophy, one will be more concerned with what Spinoza got out of Maimonides' works than with what Maimonides himself intended to say. However, it is foolish to consider or name such an essay as in any respect a study of Maimonides.

Any thinker is, to some extent, influenced by the age in which he lives; the history of thought sets the problems he must answer, the points he must emphasize, the points he may take as

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¹The reference is to Maimonides' Yad Ha-Hazakah, or Book of Mishrah Torah.

axioms. Not even the philosopher is wholly exempt from the spirit of his time. To abstract from the "age and the theologico-philosophical language" of the thinker is also to abstract from his very thought.

It is true in the study of philosophy generally; it is even more true in the case of such a philosopher as Maimonides. From the very fact that he is a "theologico-philosopher" it follows that a study of his work must also include a study of the condition of the Jewish theology on which his work is based.

For example, his most famous work, the Guide of the Perplexed, devotes the whole of the first volume to the explanations of anthropomorphisms in the Old Testament, but only one chapter of the second volume to proving the existence of God. Apparently, this is a complete reversal of the importance of the two problems.

It is in order to explain such problems in emphasis as this one that we must provide at least a brief sketch of the history of Jewish religion and philosophy prior to Maimonides, from the beginning of the Christian era to the twelfth century. This period may be roughly divided, in terms of the development of Jewish thought, into two sections: the age of faith and the age of

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reason; that is, the age of explication and codification of Jewish dogma and law and the age of speculation on the nature of man and the universe. The first period ends and the second begins at approximately the beginning of the ninth century.

At the beginning of the Christian era, the Jewish faith was centered about the Temple at Jerusalem. There the sacrifices were celebrated, there the priesthood was established, there were made the official decisions concerning all matters of Jewish law. It was, as one historian says, "the capital of a vast spiritual empire."^4

However, the established priesthood of the Temple had, in some instances, over-reached itself in assuming power over the whole community of Jews, and there had arisen the class of Pharisees, who set themselves the task of interpreting the Mosaic laws and acting as a check upon the priests. These Pharisees, by virtue of vast learning in the Torah (Old Testament), eventually became the dominating force in Judaism. Their leaders, the rabbis, formed a Sanhedrin, or Parliament, of seventy-one which made all decisions on Jewish law.

Hence, when the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., and with it the organized priesthood, the Jewish religion remained alive, under the leadership of the rabbis. The physical center, Jerusalem, was no longer a link for the race; the Laws took its place as

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a binding force.

At first, the Sanhedrin remained in Palestine, moving from the rabbinical school at Jabre, on the seacoast, which Johanan ben Zakkai had founded at the beginning of the persecution, to various other towns. The movement of the Sanhedrin would be occasioned either by the hostility of a local government or by the rise to fame of some new teacher. When Palestine as a whole became too hostile for the Jews, the Sanhedrin moved to Babylonia.

While Palestine was still in the ascendant, however, the Rabbi, Judah the Prince, formulated and published the Mishna, the "Repetition". This six-volume work was a compilation of four thousand decisions in rabbinical law, second in importance only to the Torah. It appeared in the second century, and shortly became the major authority in the interpretation of the Mosaic law.

Soon, however, even this massive text became insufficient. The continual addition of new decisions and new applications of the law required a new text of rabbinical decisions, the Talmud or "Teaching".

Actually, there were two Talmuds, the Palestinian, completed about 450, and the Babylonian, compiled under the direction of Solomon Grayzel, A History of the Jews (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), especially pp. 194-195.

Ibid., pp. 205-207.
of Rav Ashi, head of the academy at Sura, about 500 A.D. The Babylonian became the more influential and authoritative of the two; it consisted of sixty-three volumes of commentary on the Mishna, and contained legal material, ethics, history, legend -- in effect, an encyclopedia of Jewish life.

With the completion of the Talmud, there was also completed the dogma of the Jewish religion. All further religious writing was merely expanded or explained Mishnaic or Talmudic commentary. The Jews, for the next three centuries, were continually on the move. Whether in Christian or Mohammedan countries, they were hunted and persecuted; they could concern themselves only with remaining alive and remaining Jews.

For the second of these purposes, the trilogy of the Law became the standard. There was not time, in the constant flight, to revise or clarify texts, only to learn the laws and attempt to follow them. Accordingly, the Mishna and Talmud, confused and complicated clutter of decisions though they were, became the dogmatic expression of Judaism, which had to be followed literally under all circumstances.

In the eighth century, however, Mohammed's death removed one of their more ardent persecutors, and the Jews began to gain power and influence in Islam. The academy at Sura regained some of its old vigor; attempts to systematize the faith began.

An early attempt was made by Aran ben David, about the year 762, when he founded the sect known as the Karaites. This
Sect wanted to overthrow the Talmud and Mishna completely and return to the 'old-time religion', based entirely upon the Torah. The Karaites were influential for a short time, but soon lost strength through the contradictory views held by various members as a result of the individual interpretation of Scriptures. They became, eventually, merely a minor sect in Judaism.7

The schism had, however, pointed up one of the faults of this basing of all Judaism on the observation of the laws. The three compilations had, indeed, provided the Jews with a definite statement of their duties and obligations under almost any imaginable circumstances; but it had also so formalized the practice of the faith that little of the personal element, or even of true religious feeling was left.

It was this complete formalization of religion which Arar had attempted to overthrow; it also became one of the problems with which Maimonides had to deal.

The Mosaic law, consolidated in the Torah, Mishna and Talmud, had held the Jewish people together in their wanderings; in Europe, Palestine, Babylonia, they had remained one people, distinct from the natives of those countries. Now, however, that they were no longer fleeing, the law began to lose its efficacy as

7Ibid., pp. 267-270.
a uniting element, not because the laws had become too few but because the *Talmud'*s sixty-three volumes had become too many.

In learning and applying these rabbinical decisions and laws, the Jewish people were beginning to forget the inner meaning of their religion.

This period, from the beginning of the Christian era to the end of the eighth century, is almost completely a dark age for Jewish philosophy. Philo of Alexandria was born approximately 25 B.C.; the next name which occurs in the history of Jewish speculation is Isaac Israeli, born approximately 855. In the intervening period there is, indeed, some speculative thought, but it is found almost entirely in the context of Mishnaic or Talmudic interpretation.

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8 Some scholars were said to have memorized the whole of the *Talmud* and to have been able to quote any part of it, given page number, volume and location on the page. This, to show somewhat of the spirit of the time, was considered more praiseworthy than the ability to explain the meaning of the decisions.


It is reasonable to presume that the continual dispersion of the Jews is the explanation of the emptiness of this period so far as philosophy is concerned. It is difficult to speculate 'on the run'; one needs time to study, to read and to think quietly and deeply. With the increase of Jewish security in Islam came a corresponding increase in speculative thought; the Jews could turn from the study of laws to the study of principles.

Pre-Maimonidean Jewish philosophy may be divided, in general, in accordance with the history of Greek philosophy. As Husik points out:

The development of the three religious philosophies in the middle ages, Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan, followed a similar line of progression. In all of them it was not so much a development from within, the unfolding of what was implicit and potential in the original germ of the three respective religions, as a stimulus from without, which then combined, as an integral factor, with the original mass, and the final outcome was a resultant of the two originally disparate elements. We know by this time what these two elements were in each case, Hellenic speculation, and the Semitic religion in the shape of sacred and revealed documents. The second factor was in every case complete when the process of fusion began. Not so the first. What I mean is that not all of the writings of Greek antiquity were known to Jew, Christian and Mohammedan at the beginning of their philosophical career. And the progress in their philosophical development kept equal step with the successive accretion of Greek philosophical literature, in particular Aristotle's physical, psychological and metaphysical treatises, and their gradual purgation of Neo-Platonic adhesions.\(^{12}\)

As an example of the first stage of the union of the Jewish faith and Greek philosophy, we may consider the writings

\(^{12}\text{Ibid., p. 199.}\)
of Saadia ben Joseph al-Fayyumi\textsuperscript{13} (892-942), Gaon or dean of the academy at Sura. Born in Egypt, he travelled extensively in the Near East and acquired some knowledge of the philosophy of the Greeks, which was beginning to occupy the Arab thinkers. He was a mathematician, grammarian and theologian.

His major work, the \textit{Emunot ve-Deot}, is the first great work of Jewish philosophy. Its main purpose is, indeed, apologetic, the defense of the faith, yet there is much philosophic content. He follows no one of the major schools; though showing acquaintance both with Plato and Aristotle, he argues against them equally when they tend to contradict the Jewish faith. In general, he follows the postulates of the Arab theologians, the Mutaikal-limum, though apparently not holding their atomistic theories.

In general Saadia is a realist in his theory of knowledge.\textsuperscript{14} He is one of the first to discuss the complementary uses of faith and reason,\textsuperscript{15} his arguments being later amplified by Maimonides and St. Thomas; he argues against Aristotle's eternal universe and gives a number of proofs for the creation \textit{ex nihilo}.\textsuperscript{16}

Solomon ibn Gabirol\textsuperscript{17} (ca. 1021-1058), known to the Christian Scholastics as Avicebron or Avicebrol, is not so impor-

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., pp. 23-47.


\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., pp. 43-47. \textsuperscript{16}Ibid., pp. 49-73.

\textsuperscript{17}Husik, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 59-79.
tant in relation to Maimonides, since he holds that everything outside of God Himself is composed of a universal matter, emanating from God's essence. Maimonides characterizes all such pseudo-Empedoclean philosophy as unworthy of study, having been rendered obsolete by the works of Aristotle.

Gabirol is important, however, for several other reasons. First, he illustrates the change of the center of Jewish culture from Babylonia, where Saadia taught and wrote, to Spain, where Maimonides was born. Second, his *Fors Vitae* had a good deal of influence on Christian thought, as evidenced both by Aquinas' attacks and Scotus' defense of his position.

The mystical philosophy is exemplified by Judah Halevi\(^\text{18}\) (ca. 1080-1140), one of the classical Jewish poets, who concerned himself mainly with attacking the philosophical investigation of faith and its principles. He holds that philosophers are incompetent to consider matters of revelation and doctrine. His philosophy embodies some of the more ethereal elements of Neo-Platonism.

Lastly, mention should be made of Abraham ibn Daud\(^\text{19}\) (1110-1180), a native of Toledo, who is, according to Husik, the first Jewish philosopher who shows an intimate knowledge of the works of Aristotle and makes a deliberate effort to harmonize the Aristotelian system with Judaism. . . . Maimonides does nothing more than repeat the effort of Ibn Daud in a more brilliant and masterly fashion.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{18}\)Ibid., pp. 150-183.  
\(^{19}\)Ibid., pp. 197-235.  
\(^{20}\)Ibid., p. 199.
It would be going too far to say that, in any one of these four instances, the particular stage arrived at was no more than a fusion of the religious dogma with whichever stage of ancient Greek philosophy the thinker was acquainted. Certainly, in each philosopher's work there is individual and original thought, beyond the mere sum of Greece and Israel.

Yet, as a brief schema of the development of the Jewish school, we may classify the four by their relation to the Greeks: Saadia, though acquainted with the later Greek schools, is, in general, related to the Stoics, through his association with the Arabian Kalam; Gabirol follows generally the Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought; Halevi represents a fusion of the Neo-Platonic mysticism with the tendency, common in all periods of the history of philosophy, to exclude reason entirely from the matter of revelation.

Ibn Daud, finally, marks the entrance of the specifically Jewish philosophy into its highest period with the attempt to show complete consistency between the work of Aristotle and the traditions and laws of the Jewish faith.21

There are, then, two distinct elements to be considered in the understanding of Jewish philosophy: the background of faith and that of reason. Let us now synopsize these two as they affect

21 For general data on medieval Jewish philosophy, cf. Ueberweg, op. cit., pp. 405-428; Husik, op. cit., pp. xiii-235. The latter gives a detailed exposition of each philosopher's work.
the philosophy of Maimonides.

The first element, the faith, is represented by the three books of revelation and law; the second element, the reason, is represented by the various developments of Jewish philosophy exemplified by Saadia, Gabirol, Halevi and Ibn Daud.

The books of faith affect Maimonides' philosophy in that they contain the Mosaic law, given by God and, according to tradition, unalterable; they had been followed by the Jews for so many years that an unquestioning belief in the literal meaning of every word had become almost second nature for the Jewish people.

On the other hand, the increase in scientific knowledge and in philosophic speculation following upon their dark age of wandering and resulting from the temporary abatement of persecution had led many of the more learned Jews to the Greek writings and to a conviction of the conflict between Jewish faith and intellectual truth. How can Aristotle's 'unmoved mover' be reconciled with the 'angry God' of the Israelites?

Two hundred years before Maimonides, Abu'l-Ala, a contemporary of Saadia commented thus on the intellectual life of his time:

Muslims, Jews, Christians and Magians, they all are walking in error and darkness; there are only two kinds of people left in the world; the one group is intelligent, but lacking in faith; the other has faith, but is lacking in intelligence. 22

22Cited in trans. introduction. Saadia. op. cit., p. 11.
One need only substitute "a rational explanation of the universe" for "intelligence" and the judgment will apply equally to the Jews of Maimonides' time.

The materials with which Maimonides worked, then, were a religion bound up in seventy volumes of laws and commentaries of laws, all of which, traditionally, had to be followed to the letter, plus a reborn passion for speculation and investigation, plus the corpus of Greek speculation as translated and expanded by Jewish and Arab philosophers.

This material and this attitude of respect for tradition determine, to a great extent, where the emphasis falls in his philosophical and theological writing.
CHAPTER II

MOSES MAIMONIDES

We are concerning ourselves rather with particular points in Maimonides' philosophy than with a complete survey of his life and work. However, a brief biographical note seems required to set the stage for the discussion of his philosophy.

Maimonides, known variously as Abu Imram Mousa ben Maimon ibn Abd Allah (or Obeid Allah), Moise ben Maimon, Maimuni, Moyses Aegyptiacus and Rambam,1 was born March 30, 11352 in Cordova and died December 13, 12043 in Fostat (Old Cairo). His father, Maimon ben Joseph, was a noted talmudic scholar, interested in mathematics and astronomy; the father's learning and desire for knowledge greatly influenced his son's pursuit of wisdom. The boy began his studies early, reading in both the rabbinical books and the writings of the Greek and Arab philosophers.

In 1148, the Almohades, one of the more fanatical sects of Islam, entered Spain; Maimon and his family at first travelled from town to town in Spain fleeing persecution, then, in 1160,

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1Abbreviated from the initials Rabbi Moise ben Maimon.
214 Nissan 4895 in the Jewish calendar.
320 Tebheth 4964.
they moved to Fez. Here again they met with trouble; indeed, Maimonides was in danger of execution for his zeal in the Jewish faith and the letters on theology he had begun writing to the various Jewish communities. Only the intervention of the Arab poet, Ibn Moischa, saved him.4

Accordingly, in 1165, the family quitted Fez for Palestine. Upon arrival, they found that this region, too, was one of misery for the Jews, and moved on to Egypt, where they finally settled. They were in the midst of one of the most secure Jewish colonies; the Jews of Egypt were both numerous and relatively free. They were allowed to practice their religion, to form communities, and to administer their own community affairs. Maimon and his family joined the community at Fostat, but, shortly after they had settled there, in 1166, Maimon died.

With their father's death, Moses and his younger brother, David, became pearl-merchants. However, David, who was the more active partner in the business, perished on a voyage, and Moses took up the practice of medicine, becoming within a short while one of the court-physicians of Saladin.

Not only his fame as a physician but his influence among the Jews increased rapidly. Through his writings on theology, which had first drawn upon his head the wrath of the author-

ities at Fez, and through his work in the community, he had become a sort of unofficial ruler of the Egyptian Jews. In 1175, he was officially named rabbi of Cairo; by 1190, he was named head of all the Jewish communities in Egypt.

When he died, the Jews and Mohammedans at Fostat observed public mourning for three days; at Jerusalem, the funeral was the occasion of a general fast. Legend\(^5\) has it that, while his body was being buried at Tiberias, in Palestine, the passage from the first book of Samuel narrating the capture of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines was being read in his honor at Jerusalem, concluding with the words: "The glory is departed from Israel, for the Ark of God is taken."\(^6\)

WORKS\(^7\)


Iggereth ha-Schemad (1160). Letter on Apostasy. Also known as Maamar Qiddousch ha-Sohem. Essay on the sanctification of God. A letter to those threatened with death if they did not embrace Islam, explaining to them their duties as Jews.


\(^7\)All works written in Arabic, unless otherwise noted.

Shemarah Perakim. The Eight Chapters on Ethics. This work is the introduction to the book Aboth in the above commentary, an application of Aristotle's Ethics to the laws of the Jews. It has frequently been published as a separate volume.

Iggereth Teman (1172). Letter to the South. A letter of encouragement and exhortation to the Jews of Yemen, who were being led astray by a false Messiah. Also known as Petah Tiqvah, Gate of Hope.


Dalalat al-'Hairin (1190). Guide of the Perplexed. Synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy and Jewish dogma; this is the only major work of Maimonides in general use by the Christian schoolmen. Hebrew title: Moreh Nebuchim.

Maamar Te'hiyath ha-Methim (1191). Treatise on Resurrection. In answer to accusations of heresy, Maimonides protests his belief in resurrection, though stating it is impossible to prove philosophically.

Makala fi al-Taou'hid. Treatise on the Unity of God.


The above two works are doubtful, both as to date and authenticity.

Miscellaneous correspondence, diaries and Responsa to questions of rabbinical, theological and philosophical matters.

Numerous medical treatises, the most famous being:


CHAPTER III

PROOFS OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

As we have mentioned,¹ Maimonides devotes only a small portion of his writings to proofs of the existence of God. The Guide is the only one of his major works in which he bothers to discuss this problem, and in that work he spends only one chapter on proofs. Before taking up the various arguments, we should, perhaps, attempt to discover why so little importance seems to be placed upon them.

The main reason is, of course, that, for the twelfth century, God's existence was no problem. The question of the middle ages was not so much the existence of God as His essence. Certainly there was confusion and, to some minds, a conflict between faith and reason, but the conflict was on the latter ground rather than on the former.

Whether the philosopher was a Jew, a Mohammedan or a Christian, it never (so far as one can tell) seriously entered

¹Cf. supra, p. 2.
his mind that there might not be a God. There were divergences between Platonists and Aristotelians as to whether the universe was real or merely an image of the Ideas, but even the Idealists held that those Ideas were in the mind of God, an infinite Good. The Muta-kallimun, in opposition to the Aristotelian theory, held that all matter, all time was composed of indivisible atoms, but they also held that those atoms were created and continually upheld in existence by an omnipotent Deity.

The question that agitated the philosophers and theologians was not whether God existed but what He might be. Here occurred the basic conflicts between faith and reason, and here lay one of the major problems of philosophy. We may note that, in the Mishnah Torah, Maimonides' major work in the field of theology, it is taken for granted that the reader believes in God and has no need of proofs for His existence. It is stated as bald fact, with no reasons deemed necessary:

1. The foundation of foundations and firmest pillar of all wisdom is, To know that there is a First Being, that He caused all beings to be, and that all beings from heaven and earth and from between them, could not be save for the truth of His Own Being.

2. Thus, supposing that He is not, none else could have been called into existence.

3. Conversely, supposing all other beings, save He alone non-existent, His Being alone remains; for, He does not cease to be because of their non-existence, as all beings are dependent upon Him, but He, blessed is He! is not dependent upon them nor upon a single one of them; therefore, the truth of His Being is incomparable to the truth of any other individual being.²

Belief in the existence of God is also listed by Maimonides as the first of the Thirteen Roots of Faith,3 and the first of the Positive Commandments of the Mosaic law: "We are commanded to acknowledge the existence of the Deity, as it is said, I am the Lord thy God. . ."4

With these points in mind, the casual way in which the Rabbi presents the proofs of God's existence becomes more reasonable. One might almost say that they are included in the Guide only because Maimonides wished to make this work a complete synthesis of Aristotelianism, not because he felt any need for stating them.

That Maimonides presents these proofs casually is evident from the very beginning of the second book of the Guide, in which he lists the twenty-five propositions employed in his arguments. These propositions, he says, "have been fully established, and their correctness is beyond doubt. Aristotle and the Peripatetics who followed him have proved each of these propositions." Having stated them as proven, he lists them and proceeds to apply them to the problem.

We will present here a brief summary of the twenty-five propositions, together with the twenty-sixth (on the eternity of the universe) which, Maimonides says, "we do not accept. . .but we

3Cf. infra, Appendix I. 4Cf. infra, Appendix II.

will admit it for the present, because by doing so we shall be enabled clearly to demonstrate our own theory."6

The propositions7 are:

1. An infinite magnitude cannot exist.
2. An infinite number of finite magnitudes cannot co-exist.
3. An infinite series of causes cannot exist.
4. Four categories can change, the changes being named as follows: Substance, genesis and destruction; Quantity, increase and decrease; Quality, transformation; Place, motion.
5. Motion implies change from potentiality to actuality.
6. Motion is either essential or accidental to the moving thing, or due to an external force, or to the participation of the thing in another's motion.
7. What is changeable is divisible; what is indivisible cannot move and therefore cannot be corporeal.
8. Accidental motion cannot continue forever.
9. A body which moves another must at the same time move itself.
10. A thing contained in a body must either cause the body's existence or be caused by it, as an essential property or an accident.
11. Among the things which exist through the body, some are accidentally divisible; among the thing which form the essential elements of the body, some are indivisible. An example of the first type is color, of the second, the soul.
12. A force which occupies all parts of a finite body is itself finite.
13. The only kind of change which can be continuous is circular motion.
14. In the natural order of change, locomotion is first, since cause must approach thing to be changed before changing it.
15. Time and motion are inconceivable apart; what does not move has no relation to time.
16. Incorporeal forces can only be numbered when in a body; purely spiritual beings can only be counted as causes and effects.
17. Anything which moves is moved by an agent, either within or without itself.
18. A potentiality is actualized only by an agent external to it.

6Loc. cit. 7Ibid., pp. 1-11.
19. A thing which exists through another has in itself only possible existence.

20. A thing which exists necessarily cannot have any cause for its existence.

21. A composite thing is dependent for its existence on its component parts and their combination.

22. All bodies are composites of matter and form and are subject to accidents.

23. Everything which exists potentially may at some time be non-existent.

24. Whatever is potential is material.

25. Any compound substance requires an agent for its existence; matter does not move itself.

26. Time and motion (circular) are eternal, constant and in actual existence. 8

Taking these first twenty-five propositions as proven, Maimonides now makes use of them to demonstrate the existence of God. In order to state the arguments in their most basic form, we shall omit illustrations and examples, except where necessary to explain the sense. Numbers in parentheses refer to the propositions on which the argument is based.

The first argument is based on motion. 9 The existence of material things posits a mover (25). The existence of the mover requires an agent (4). But an infinite series of motions is impossible (3). Therefore, the locomotion of the sphere is posited as the cause of all other motions (14).

The sphere's motion must come from a force either inside or outside itself (17). If inside, it will be a force existing either indivisibly or throughout the whole sphere divisibly (10-1). If outside, it will be either corporeal or incorporeal, and if in-

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8Cf. infra, Chap. VII, for further discussion.

9Maimonides, Guide II, 11-16.
corporeal it must be referred to not as 'outside' but 'separate
from' the sphere, since the incorporeal cannot be delimited by
space.

The force moving the sphere, then, must be one of four
possibilities:

a. A corporeal object outside the sphere. This is im-
possible, because a corporeal body must be moved by another (9),
and we would again be led into an infinite series (2).

b. A force existing divisibly through the whole sphere.
This is impossible, because the sphere is corporeal, and therefore
finite (1). The force, then, would also be finite (12), since
each part of the sphere would contain part of the force (11). But
a finite force cannot produce an infinite motion.

c. An indivisible force within the sphere. (An example
of an indivisible force in a corporeal body is the human soul).
This explanation is impossible, because if this force were the
cause of the sphere's motion, the prime motor would have acciden-
tal motion (6). But accidental motion must come to rest (8), and
therefore cannot cause infinite motion.

d. Therefore, if the motion of the sphere is to be con-
tinual ad infinitum, the cause must be incorporeal and separate
from the sphere or any other corporeal object. It must move
'neither of its own accord nor accidentally; it must be indivisible
and unchangeable (7, 5).
This first cause, God, must be incorporeal and not a force in a body; He must be One, because spirits are countable only as cause and effect (16); He must be unchangeable and, because He is unchangeable, He will also be independent of time.

The second argument is based on the nature of compounds. If a thing is composed of two elements and one is known to exist alone, the other also exists alone. Therefore, since we see objects which set others in motion, themselves being moved, and moved objects which move nothing else, there must exist an object or class of objects which is unmoved itself, but moves others.

The third argument is one based on change. There is no doubt that things exist. This being so, there are three ways in which they can exist:

a. All things exist without beginning and without end. This is obviously false, from common experience.

b. All things exist with a beginning and end. This is inadmissible, since, if the existence of all things were temporary, the possibility of destruction would be part of the nature of each species. Since the species is constant, the cause of destruction would be present in the first moment of existence. There would, then, be nothing existing; but things do exist.

c. There must therefore be an eternal being, not sub-

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10 Ibid., pp. 16-18.  
11 Ibid., pp. 18-20.  
12 Ibid., p. 18, n. 3.
ject to destruction.

The existence of this being is necessary, either on account of itself or of another; if through another, that other would be the absolute existence (19). This independent existence cannot be dual, since then it would not be essential, but a common property of both existences. Yet independent existence must be absolutely simple, in order to be uncaused (25).

The fourth argument is one from causality.13 Things pass from potentiality to actuality. This requires a cause, which again requires a cause for its activity. This series of causes, since it cannot be infinite, requires, eventually, a cause which is without potentiality, since if it were potential, the first cause would never operate (23). It must be spiritual (24) and incorporeal, and therefore One (16).

Thus, says Maimonides, without denying the eternity of the universe, which "is admissible, but neither demonstrative, as the commentators of Aristotle assert, nor, on the other hand, impossible, as the Mutakallemin say,"14 we can still prove the necessary existence of the First Cause, the Prime Mover.

These four arguments for the existence of God15 are, as can be seen, independent of the teachings of the Jewish religion,

13Ibid., pp. 20-22. 14Ibid., p. 11.

15St. Thomas Aquinas uses the first, third and fourth arguments as his first, third and second proofs. Cf. Summa Theologiae, I, Q. 2, a. 3.
being based entirely upon the Aristotelian physics and metaphysics so far as known. Indeed, throughout that portion of the Guide in which he lays down his principles and their application in the proof of God's existence, Maimonides does not once refer to a Biblical or Talmudic authority. This is an unusual occurrence, whether in Maimonides or in any other of the medieval Jewish philosophers, since they make a practice of presenting a concurrent text from the Tradition for almost every purely philosophic postulate.

Quite obviously, then, what Maimonides is doing here is attacking the anti-theistic Aristotelians on their own grounds. Taking no principle which cannot be found in the writings of their master himself, he has shown that the existence of the First Cause is demonstrable, abstracting entirely from the words of revelation and dogma.

What, then, can we decide about the nature of God at this stage in our investigation? First, that He exists, as First Cause and Prime Mover of all other beings. Second, that He is.

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16Cf. Samuel Nirestein, The Problem of the Existence of God in Maimonides, Alanus and Averroes (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society Press, 1924), p. 48: "Maimonides' proofs are clearly the most scientific and intellectual."; ibid., p. 49: "All this, no doubt, involves an obsolete philosophy and the value of such disquisitions may be questioned, since Aristotelianism is now completely discarded."

(The author of this work does not state the grounds on which he thus dismisses both Aristotle and Maimonides as "obsolete" or does he attempt to show any contradictions within the arguments themselves; the book is purely one of summarization).
CHAPTER IV

THE ANTHROPOMORPHISMS

We have taken the proofs for the existence of God in the Guide out of their proper sequence, since, in attempting to define God's nature, it seems to us necessary to show that He is before determining what He is. However, Amaimonides, in writing the work, begins instead with the consideration of the anthropomorphic terms applied to God in the Jewish Scriptures and dogma.

The reason for this is clear from the historical background of the problem. As we noted, the Jewish religion had become so dogmatic that literal interpretation of its doctrinal writings was almost always the official method. It was not merely a case of the common phenomenon of the imagination forming a picture of God as "an old man with a long white beard", a phenomenon common alike to the present day and to the representations of God the Father in the religious art of the Middle Ages.

This phenomenon, we might say, is almost instinctive. Men have a tendency to picture anything they can in its simplest terms, and the Fatherhood and Eternity of God combine to form an image of a man of great age. However, except among small children whose main acquaintance with the idea of God is in such portraits,
there are few people who hold such a picture to be accurate.

The Jewish people, however, did seriously and convincingly hold such an opinion. Since, for them, every word of the Torah was literally and exactly true, man's being made 'in the image and likeness of God' had, as its corollary, God's being made in the physical image and likeness of man. The problem is indicated by Maimonides at the very beginning of the Book of Knowledge, the first tractate of the Mishna Torah:

8. ... it is clearly indicated in the Torah and in the Prophets that the Holy One, blessed is He! is Incorporeal.

9. If so, wherefore is it written in the Torah. . . "under his feet" (Ex. 24, 10). . . and more like expressions?"

Maimonides here immediately and briefly gives his answer to the whole problem:

All such terminology is in accordance with the conception of the sons of man who cannot recognize aught but corporeal things, and the words of the Torah is [sic] like human speech, but they are all attributes; for example, it is said, "If I whet My glittering sword," (Deut. 32, 41); Hath He a sword, or doth He slay with a sword? But it is a metaphor, so is all metaphorical. . . He hath neither form nor image, but all is a vision of prophecy and a mirage, the absolute truth of the matter no human mind comprehends or is able to fathom it or penetrate it. It is even this what [sic] it says in Scripture: "Canst thou find out the deep things of God? Canst thou attain unto the purpose of the Almighty? (Job. 11, 7)"

Why is it necessary that all such terminology be metaphorical? In the Mishna Torah, unlike the Guide, Maimonides has already stated some of the properties of God, before considering the anthropomorphic attributions; he has already posited God as

1Ibid., pp. 122-123.
2Ibid., pp. 122-123.
3In distinction to "attributes".
Incorporeal, so that he can logically deny the attributions of changeability on that ground:

11. Since it is clear that He is Incorporeal, it clearly follows that no e of the corporeal changes happen to Him; no joining and no separation, no place and no measure, no ascent and no descent. . . neither is His being dependent on time to attribute to Him either a beginning, or an end, or number of years; nor is He undergoing any change as there is naught to cause any change in Him; He is neither subject to death nor to life similar to the life of a living body; to Him cannot be attributed either folly or wisdom of a wise man; no sleep and no awakening, no anger and no laughter.

12. All such and other similar expressions in the Torah and in the words of the Prophets are merely proverbial and figurative. . . if He could sometimes be angry and sometimes mirthful, He would be subject to changes. Indeed, such and all kindred attributes are not present in any save in darkened, lowly bodies, inhabitants of houses of clay, whose origin is of dust; but He, blessed is He! in blessings is exalted above all this.

Thus, in the Mishna Torah, he briefly dismisses all such attributes on the basis of the incorporeality of God. In the Guide, however, he considers the problem more thoroughly, not merely to prove that corporeal terms cannot, other than metaphorically, be applied to God, but also to explain what the metaphorical sense of such terms is.

The terms discussed in this first part include: (1) the nouns and verbs used in reference to God, Chaps. I-XLIX; (2) the attributes of the Deity, Chaps. L-LX; (3) the expressions commonly

4Cf. supra, p. 29.

5Maimonides, Mishna Torah, pp. 124-125.
regarded as "names of God, Chaps. LXI-LXX."

As an example of the first type of term, let us take the discussion of "Let us make man in our form." The word זֶלֶם (form), he says, is understood by some to mean shape or figure. Accordingly, they hold that either one must believe God to be corporeal or reject the Bible. Maimonides, however, holds that generally the word יָפֵן, te'ar (shape) is used in this meaning, and that the term זֶלֶם refers to specific form, in this case "intellectual perception."8

On this account, i.e., on account of the Divine Intellect with which man has been endowed,9 he is said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty, but far from it be the notion that the Supreme Being is corporeal, having a material form.10

Maimonides uses this general method throughout the first section of this volume, explaining the terms on a basis of etymology or analogy. The second section, concerning the attributes of the Deity, deserves more careful consideration, since here he considers the attributes in general, and which of them can and which cannot be properly applied to God.

The section begins with an introductory chapter, on the subject of faith.11 By faith, he says, "we do not understand merely that which is uttered with the lips, but also that which is

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8Ibid., p. 30 9Ibid., cf. p. 33, n. 1.
10Ibid., pp. 32-33. 11Ibid., pp. 171-172.
apprehended by the soul, the conviction that the object of belief is exactly as it is apprehended. Accordingly, you find many people expressing in words articles of faith which they do not really believe.

If, however, you have a desire to rise to a higher state, viz., that of reflection, and truly to hold the conviction that God is One and possesses true Unity, without admitting plurality in any sense whatever, you must understand that God has no essential [real or non-metaphorical] attribute in any form or in any sense whatever, and that the rejection of corporeality implies the rejection of essential attributes. Those who believe that God is One, and that He has many attributes, declare the unity with their lips, and assume plurality in their thoughts.

Anyone, therefore, who holds the Unity of God and His Incorporeality, and yet holds that He has real attributes, is not a true believer, but rather he is merely using a form of words, since the meanings are contradictory.

He continues by considering the necessity for proof that God has no attributes. He points out that, if man had been left in his primitive state, such things as the existence of motion, of man's free will, of the things known by the senses would require no proof; yet, either through error or for some ulterior motive,

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12 Ibid., p. 171.

13 Ibid., pp. 171-172.

14 Here Maimonides makes one of his infrequent references to Christianity, to the fact that the Christians say "He is one and... three; the three are one." The Trinitarian doctrine is dismissed on this very ground of implying plurality in God.
men have established theories contrary to these obvious truths. Philosophers, therefore, must prove things which are self-evident, and disprove things which exist only in the imagination.\textsuperscript{15} To this class belongs the rejection of essential attributes in God, since it is evident that "the attribute is not inherent in the object to which it is ascribed, but it is superadded to its essence, and is consequently an accident."\textsuperscript{16}

The only way in which an attribute can be more than a mere accident of the being is its being part of the essence, and then its attribution is merely an explanation of the essence. If you admit attributes as accidents to God, you have many eternal beings.

To say that the attributes of God are neither His essence nor anything extraneous to that essence is something which "exists only in words, not in thought, much less in reality."\textsuperscript{17} Since nothing "has ever been found that consists of one simple substance without any attribute",\textsuperscript{18} it has been thought that God is corporeal. This error results from adherence to the literal sense of

\textsuperscript{15}As examples are given Aristotle's proof of motion and disproof of the existence of atoms.

\textsuperscript{16}Maimonides, Guide, I, 174.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 178. As a contradiction, it can exist only verbally.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 177.
the text of Holy Writ.

The next chapter classifies the five possible types of affirmative attributes and explains why they cannot be predicated of God: definition, because it requires a genus, which cannot be given for God; a part of its definition, since this would be considering His essence as compound; quality, because it is an accident and there can be nothing accidental in God; relation, since God has nothing in common with any other being; action, which can be employed in describing God,

especially since we know that these different actions do not imply that different elements must be contained in the substance of the agent, by which the different actions are produced. On the contrary, all the actions of God emanate from His essence, not from any extraneous thing superadded to His essence.

The attributists, he continues, make their error in setting man as the standard for judging God. That is, because they see in man that the actions resulting from intellect and those resulting from will come from two different sources, they argue that God, whose actions manifest what would in man be called both intellect and will, must therefore be compound.

19Ibid., pp. 176-185. These five attributes include all the Aristotelian categories: definition and part of a definition, substance; quality includes quantity and passion; relation, place and time and property; action includes position.

20Ibid., p. 181. Maimonides' four qualities are: (1) intellectual or moral; (2) physical; (3) emotions; (4) quantitative

21Ibid., p. 183: "existence is applied by homonymity."

22Ibid., p. 185. 23Ibid., pp. 185-191.
If we, therefore, perceive in God certain relations of various characters—for wisdom in us is different from power and power from will—it does by no means follow that different elements are really contained in Him, that He contains one element by which He knows, another by which He wills, and another by which He exercises power, as is, in fact, the signification of the attributes according to the Mutakallemim.24

In God, different actions can be caused by one substance; the attributes found in the Torah are either "qualifications of His actions, without any reference to His essence, or indicate absolute perfection, but do not imply that the essence of God is compound of various elements."25

Some believe that life, power, wisdom and will are different elements in God;26 we believe that He is a simple essence, that "He created the universe, and knows it, but not by any extraneous force."27 These elements, therefore, are not distinct and different, but merely different ways of considering the same essence.

Again, the "Thirteen Attributes" or middoth which God revealed to Moses, by which He might be known,28 are actions

24Ibid., p. 187.  
25Ibid., p. 188.  
26One of the thinkers he refers to here is Saadia. Cf. op. cit., pp. 89: "Our Lord (be He exalted and glorified) has informed us through the words of His prophets that He is One, Living, Powerful and Wise, and that nothing can be compared unto Him or unto His Works. They established this by signs and miracles, and we accepted it immediately. Later, speculation led us to the same result."

27Maimonides, Guide, I, 190-191. 28Ex. 34, 6.
emanating from God, meaning that "He performs actions similar to such of our actions as originate in certain qualities, i.e., in certain psychical dispositions." These thirteen middoth include "those acts of God which refer to the creation and the government of mankind." "The principal object of this chapter was to show that all attributes ascribed to God are attributes of His acts, and do not imply that God has any qualities."

The four general classes of terms which cannot be predicated of God include, then, any which imply corporeality or emotion, non-existence or similarity to any one of His creatures.

These terms existence, wisdom, power, will, life, then, are applied to God and to other beings by way of "perfect homonymity, admitting of no comparison whatever." "There is, in no way or sense, anything common to the attributes predicated of God, and those used in reference to ourselves; they have only the same

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30 Loc. cit.  
31 Ibid., pp. 191-198.  
32 Ibid., p. 198.  
33 Since these imply change, which implies a prior agent.  
34 Maimonides means here that we cannot say that any perfection is at one time absent in God and later present, since the potential is relatively non-existent and requires another existing thing in order to become actualized.  
names, and nothing else is common to them." 37 It is not proper, therefore, to believe that these properties add anything to God's essence, as our properties add to ours. 38

In anything whose existence is due to some cause, existence is an accident superadded to the essence.

But as regards a being whose existence is not due to any cause--God alone is that being, for His existence, as we have said, is absolute--existence and essence are perfectly identical; He is not a substance to which existence is joined as an accident, as an additional element. His existence is always absolute, and has never been a new element or an accident in Him. Consequently God exists without possessing the attribute of existence. 39 Similarly, He lives, without possessing the attribute of life; knows without possessing the attribute of knowledge; 40 is omnipotent without possessing the attribute of wisdom; all this reduces itself to one and

37 Ibid., p. 203; but cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, op. cit., I, Q. 13, a. 5: "Neither, on the other hand, are names applied to God and creatures in a purely equivocal sense, as some have said. Because if that were so, it follows that from creatures nothing at all could be known or demonstrated about God; for the reasoning would always be exposed to the fallacy of equivocation. Such a view is against the Philosopher, who proves many things about God, and also against what the Apostle says: The invisible things of God are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made (Rom. i. 20). Therefore it must be said that these names are said of God and creatures in an analogous sense, that is, according to proportion."

38 Ibid., pp. 201-203.

39 That is, in Him it is neither an attribute nor an accident, but His very essence; in Him essence and existence cannot be distinguished.


It is, indeed, an axiom of the science of the divine, i.e., metaphysics, that God (may He be blessed!) does not know by means
the same entity; there is no plurality in Him, as will be shown.41

Even in considering the attribute of unity, Maimonides distinguishes between the common meaning of the term and its meaning as applied to God;42 in God unity is not accidental or superadded, but "He is One without possessing the attribute of unity."43

In general, then, we may conclude by saying that God has no positive attributes distinct from His essence.44

At this point,45 one of the major Maimonidean innovations is presented: the Negative Attributes.

Know that the negative attributes of God are the true attributes: they do not include any incorrect "otios" or any deficiency whatever in reference to God, while positive attributes infer polytheism, and are inadequate, as we have already shown.46

of knowledge, and does not live by means of life, so that He and His knowledge may be considered two different things in the sense that this is true of man; for man is distinct from knowledge, and knowledge from man, in consequence of which they are two different things. If God knew by means of knowledge, He would necessarily be a plurality, and the primal essence would be composite, that is, consisting of God Himself, the knowledge by which He knows, the life by which He lives, the power by which He has strength, and similarly of all His attributes. I shall only mention one argument, simple and easily understood by all, though there are strong and convincing arguments and proofs that solve this difficulty. It is manifest that God is identical with His attributes and His attributes with Him, so that it may be said that He is the knowledge, the knower and the known, and that He is the life, the living, and the source of His own life, the same being true of His other attributes. This conception is very hard to grasp, and thou shouldst not hope to thoroughly understand it by two or three lines in this treatise."

41Maimonides, Guide, I, 204-205. 42Cf. infra, Chap. V.
43Guide, I, 205
44Ibid., pp. 207-208.
These negative attributes may be validly used to describe God, since they exclude from the description certain ideas which would otherwise be included.

God's existence is absolute, (that) it includes no composition, as will be proved, and (that) we comprehend only the fact that He exists, not His essence. Consequently, it is a false assumption to hold that He has any positive attribute; for He does not possess existence in addition to His essence; it therefore cannot be said that the one may be described as an attribute (of the other); much less has He (in addition to His existence) a compound essence, consisting of two constituent elements to which the attribute could refer; still less has He accidents, which could be described by an attribute. Hence it is clear that He has no positive attribute whatever. The negative attributes, however, are those which are necessary to direct the mind to the truths which we must believe concerning God; for, on the one hand, they convey to man the highest possible knowledge of God; e.g., it has been established by proof that some being must exist besides those things which can be perceived by the senses, or apprehended by the mind; when we say of this being, that it exists, we mean that its non-existence is impossible. 47

Thus with all the negative attributes: by God's existence is meant the impossibility of His non-existence; 48 by 'living', that He is not dead; 49 by 'incorporeal', not material; 50 by 'first', not caused. 51 When we say He has power, wisdom, will, 52 we mean that He is not limited, not feeble, ignorant nor hasty. 53 When we say that He is One, we mean that there are not more gods than one. 54

Thus, "every attribute predicated of God either denotes the quality of an action, or--when the attribute is intended to convey some idea of the Divine Being itself, and not of His

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actions--the negation of the opposite. 55

55 Loc. cit. Cf. St. Thomas, Summa Theo., I, Q.13, a.2:

"Names which are said of God negatively or which signify
His relation to creature manifestly do not at all signify His sub-
stance, but rather express the distance of the creature from Him,
or His relation to something else, or rather, the relation of
creatures to Himself.

But as regards the names of God said absolutely and af-
firmatively, as good, wise, and the like, various and many opinions
have been held. For some have said that all such names, although
they are applied to God affirmatively, nevertheless have been
brought into use more to remove something from God than to posit
something in Him. Hence they assert that when we say that God
lives, we mean that God is not like an inanimate thing; and the
same in like manner applies to other names. This was taught by
Rabbi Moyses. Others say that these names applied to God signify
His relationship towards creatures: thus in the words, God is good,
we mean, God is the cause of good ness in things; and the same
interpretation applies to other names.

Both of these opinions, however, seem to be untrue for
three reasons. First, because in either of them could a reason
be assigned why some names more than others should be applied to
God. For He is assuredly the cause of bodies in the same way as
He is the cause of good things; therefore if the words God is
good signified no more than, God is the cause of good things, it
might in like manner be said that God is a body, inasmuch as He is
the cause of bodies. So also to say that He is a body implies
that He is not a mere potentiality, as is primary matter. . .
Thirdly, because this is against the intention of those who speak
of God. For in saying that God lives, they assuredly mean more
than to say that He is the cause of our life, or that He differs
from inanimate bodies.

Therefore we must hold a different doctrine--viz., that
these names signify the divine substance, and are predicated sub-
stantially of God, although they fall short of representing Him.
When we say, God is good, the meaning is not, God is the cause
of goodness, or, God is not evil; but the meaning is, Whatever
good we attribute to creatures pre-exists in God, and in a higher
way."
What, then, can be the result of our efforts, when we try to obtain a knowledge of a Being that is free from substance, that is most simple, whose existence is absolute, and not due to any cause, to whose perfect essence nothing can be superadded, and whose perfection consists, as we have shown, in the absence of all defects. All we understand, is the fact that He exists, that He is a Being to whom none of all His creatures is similar, who has nothing in common with them, who does not include plurality, who is never too feeble to produce other beings, and whose relation to the universe is that of a steersman to a boat; and even this is not a real relation, a real simile, but serves only to convey to us the idea that God rules the universe; that is, that He gives it duration, and preserves its necessary arrangement.\(^56\)

The way of negation is the way of knowledge of God, since "every time you establish by proof the negation of a thing in reference to God, you become more perfect, while with every additional positive assertion you follow your imagination and recede from the true knowledge of God."\(^57\) The negations are the only terms which can be truly predicated of Him, for:

God, praised be His name, exists, and His existence has been proved to be absolute and perfectly simple, as I shall explain. If such a simple, absolutely existing essence were said to have attributes, as has been contended, and were combined with extraneous elements, it would in no way be an existing thing, as has been proved by us; and when we say that that essence, which is called 'God', is a substance with many properties by which it can be described, we apply that name to an object which does not at all exist.\(^58\)

A number of names for God are used in the Scriptures; these are generally derived from His actions, except the Tetra-

\(^{56}\text{Ibid.}, p. 212.$

\(^{57}\text{Ibid.}, pp. 214-215.$

\(^{58}\text{Ibid.}, p. 225.$
grammato", which consists of the letters yod, he, vau, he. This name is applied to God alone, the "distinct and exclusive designation of the Divine Being," while the other names are common nouns, appellatives, similar to those applied to men.

Among the names of God which Maimonides considers in the first volume of the Guide is that which God spoke to Moses, when Moses said that he might have to prove the existence of God before the people would accept his as a messenger. Then, says Maimonides:

God taught Moses how to teach them, and how to establish amongst them the belief in the existence of Himself, namely, by saying ה' א"ח [Ehyeh asher Ehyeh], a name derived from the verb ה' in the sense of 'existing', for ה' denotes 'to be', and in Hebrew no difference is made between

59Cf. Charles and Dorothea W. Singer, "The Jewish Factor in Medieval Thought," The Legacy of Israel, ed. Edwyn R. Bevan and Charles Singer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), pp. 262-263: "He [Albertus Magnus] agrees with Maimonides that if attributes be predicated of both Creator and created, then predication must be in wholly different senses. He accepts too the Maimonidean teaching that while no name is adequate to the Divinity, that which is Irre effable (i.e., the Tetragrammaton) is the least inadequate."

Maimonides, Guide, I, 226-231. Cf. also Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, p. 154: "Whosoever willfully destroys an inscription of any of the Holy and Pure Names by which the Holy One, blessed is He! is called, is guilty of a sin punishable under the laws of the Torah with flogging. . . . There are seven such names: Tetragrammaton, but written to be pronounced Lord; All Powerful; God; God of the universe; God of our Fathers; Almighty; and Hosts.

Ibid., p. 155: "All other attributes by which the Holy One, blessed is He! is praised, such as Graceful, Merciful, Great, Powerful, Awe-inspiring, Faithful, Jealous, Mighty and the like, are like other words of Holy Writ which may be erased."

61Ex. iii. 13.
the verbs 'to be' and 'to exist'. The principal point in this phrase is that the same word which denotes 'existence' is repeated as an attribute. The word  transliterated 'that', corresponds to the Arabic  and '  , and is an incomplete noun that must be completed by another noun; it may be considered as the subject of the predicate which follows. The first noun which is to be described is ; the second,  the identical word, as if to show that the object which is to be described and the attribute by which it is described are in this case necessarily identical. This is, therefore, the expression of the idea that God exists, but not in the ordinary sense of the term; or, in other words, He is 'the existing Being which is the existing Being,' that is to say, whose existence is absolute.

This passage from Scripture is, of course, one of the basic texts for any consideration of God's nature which guides itself by the Bible. Here, God Himself states His own nature, in answer to Moses' question, "And they say unto me, What is His name? What shall I say unto them?" It is interesting to note the strictly scientific way in which Maimonides attacks the statement; he gives a detailed grammatical exposition of the sentence, in order that we may be sure precisely what God did say. However, instead of interpreting it to mean that God is Existence, or Being, he takes the phrase as a mere statement that God exists and exists absolutely.

He has, of course, already pointed out that, in God, existence is not distinct from essence, yet it would seem that

\[\text{62Maimonides, Guide, I, 239.} \quad \text{63Ex. iii. 13.} \]

\[\text{64Cf. supra, pp. 37-39 and nn. 39-40.}\]
he has here missed an obvious opportunity to quote a most authori-
tative text in support of his argument.

For the remainder of this third section, Maimonides considers and explains other names of God, with two views: to show that they do not deny the Unity or Incorporeality of God and that they are either attributes of His actions or negative attributes. For example, he says that the intellectus, intelligens and intelligible of the philosophers are in God "one and the same, and do not in any way constitute a plurality," since the intellect in action [sic] is the thing known, and God comprehends His own essence.


67 Ibid., p. 253.

68 Ibid., pp. 253-259. Cf. Maimonides, Shemonah Perakim, pp. 101-102: "From what we have said, it has been demonstrated also that we cannot comprehend God's knowledge, that our minds cannot grasp it all, for He is His knowledge, and His knowledge is He. This is an especially striking idea, but those who raise the question of God's knowledge of the future fail to grasp it to their dying day. They are, it is true, aware that the divine essence, as it is, is incomprehensible, yet they strive to comprehend God's knowledge, so that they may know it, but this is, of course, impossible. If the human reason could grasp His knowledge, it would be able also to define His essence, since both are one and the same, as the perfect knowledge of God is the comprehension of Him as He is in His essence, which consists of His knowledge, His will, His life, and all His other majestic attributes. Thus, we have shown how utterly futile is the pretension to define His knowledge. All that we can comprehend is that just as we know God exists so are we cognizant of the fact that He knows."

Cf. also Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, p. 129: "The Holy One, blessed is He! recognizes His own Truth and knows it as it really is; and He does not know with an intelligence which is apart from Himself, as we know, for we and our intelligence are
We have devoted much space to Maimonides' handling of the problem of the anthropomorphisms in Scripture and to attributes predicated of God for two reasons. The first is that, to quote Roth:

It is only within the confines of a rigid and uncompromising theological monotheism that subterfuge is impossible. The supreme unity cannot suffer diversity; but the diversity, to all appearances, is more real than the unity itself. The long discussion of the attribute problem therefore is the essential preliminary to the positive exposition.

Since Maimonides is working within the boundaries of a religion which held as a basic tenet the Unity of God, in contradiction to the polytheism so common in the pre-Christian world, a tenet which Maimonides considers the second root of the Jewish Faith, after the existence of God, he must dispose of this problem before he can make any philosophic examination of the universe.

For, if God is One, yet has many really distinct attributes, if He is One, yet has corporeal form and is subject to the

"not one, but the Creator, may He be blessed! and His Intelligence and His Life are One from every lateral, angle and manner of Unity."

Roth seems to mean here not only unity and diversity within the Divine Being, but also the unity of God as opposed to the diversity in the universe. We refer here only to the first of these two problems.


Cf. Appendix I, Second Principle; Appendix II, Second Positive and First Negative Commandments; *Mishnah Torah*, p. 120: "Whosoever supposes there is another god besides this One... is an atheist, denying the great principle upon which everything depends."
changes which these anthropomorphic terms imply, then the mystics are right, and it will be impossible for the human reason to know anything of Him.

Maimonides, however, as a basis of his whole system, has postulated that faith and reason are not contradictory, but work hand in hand to further the knowledge of God. Indeed, he often goes so far as to imply that the Holy Scriptures are a sort of metaphysics text for the ignorant and unlearned. 72

The Scriptures explain in language understandable by all the existence, incorporeality and unity and incomparability of God; 73 those who are more intelligent and have gone through the proper course of preparation 74 may study the science of Metaphysics and learn of the existence and nature of God through the use of reason. 75

If, then, faith and reason are not contradictory but complementary, 76 it must be shown that the unity of God and the many attributes applied to Him in the Bible are not contradictory.

72 Maimonides, Guide, I, 7. 73 Ibid., pp. 106-129.
74 Ibid., pp. 120-1. The course includes the study of logic, the various branches of mathematics and physics.
75 Ibid., p. 11.
76 The theory of faith and reason as complementary has one of its beginnings in Saadia (op. cit., pp. 43-47, 103-104), is expanded by Maimonides (Guide, loc. cit.; Levy, op. cit., pp. 49-63) and St. Thomas (Summa Theo., I, Q.1). Since this theory is outside the limits of our subject, no discussion of it will be attempted here.
This consideration will account also for the fact that, systematic and logical thinker as he was, he perpetrates what might appear at first sight as a logical blunder. Instead of first proving the existence of God and then discussing his nature and attributes, as Saadia, Bahya, Ibn Daud and others did before him, he treats exhaustively of the divine attributes in the first book, whereas the proof of the existence of God does not appear until the second book. This inversion of the logical order is deliberate. Maimonides's method is directed ad hominem. The Jews for whom he wrote his 'Guide' did not doubt the existence of God. But a great many of them had an inadequate idea of his spiritual nature. And apparently the Bible countenanced their anthropomorphism. Hence Maimonides cast logical considerations to the wind, and dealt first with that which was nearest his heart. The rest could wait, this could not.77

Secondly, the discussion of the various attributes predicated of God is important not only in relation to His unity but in relation to the very knowledge of His nature. Obviously, any statement concerning His nature will be predicated of Him, so Maimonides' opinion, that any term attributed to God will be either an attribute of His actions, classified as would be a human action, or else merely negative in meaning, sets definite limits on Maimonides' concept of Him. Any human knowledge of God that is to say, is eventually only a statement of what He is not.

Yet, this negative knowledge does not therefore mean that its object is also negative, "not only non-describable, but non-existent." . . . That human descriptions are inadequate to express the nature of God does not mean that God has no nature."78

77Husik, History, p. 241.
78Roth, op. cit., p. 77.
We assert that He is "on-huma", incorporeal, "on-dual or diverse; that in Him nothing is accidental, nothing is superadded; that He is not compound, that His existence is not other than His essence. "That God exists, therefore, and exists in the absolute sense, is the end of the whole discussion," says Roth. 79

79Loc. cit. He says further, pp. 77-79: "As a conclusion it may be invalid, but it shares its invalidity with the causa sui of Spinoza. The one as much as the other stands or falls by the argument that if there is anything existing at all, then there is a 'necessary existent'. Leibniz stated the argument . . . "A being the essence of which is existence necessarily exists; God is a being whose essence is existence; therefore God necessarily exists." . . . this reasoning appears again and again in the pages of Maimonides. . . . One of the opinions of Maimonides which found acceptance in the work of Aquinas was precisely that under discussion: the illegitimacy, namely, of ascribing any attribute but that of existence to God, who alone in the contingent world is possessed of absolute existence. Not the trend of the argument only, but the very words are reproduced; and the doctrine which in one place is given dogmatically as Aquinas', is given in another in the name of Maimonides.

Roth's references to St. Thomas in substantiation of the last statement are: S.C.G., I, c. 12 & 22; quaestiones disputatae De Potentia Dei, Q. 7, a. 2: "ipsum divinum esse et sua essentia seu natura; Rabbi Moyses dicit, quod Deus est ens non in essentia . . . ergo in Deo non est aliud essentia quam esse." The implication of plagiarism by Aquinas is obviously merely a personal and warranted impression of Roth's.

If the quotation from Spinoza is intended as a statement of the nature of God, the references to Maimonides and St. Thomas are somewhat justifiable, although St. Thomas' "essentia (est) esse" is not the same as Maimonides' "illegitimacy of ascribing any other attribute but that of existence to God." Maimonides means that all we can say of God is "He exists", and even by this we mean only "the impossibility of His non-existence"; St. Thomas is saying that existence is the essence of God, but not limiting what can be said of Him to this one term.

However, if the statement is taken for an ontological proof of God's existence, it has no counterpart in either Maimonides or St. Thomas.
Ever this, although a valid conclusion from the words of Maimonides, is not all that can be drawn from his discussion. Pearson, for instance, though he builds on the passage from the Mishnah Torah rather than on those in the Guide, raises an amazing structure of speculation, apparently on the sole basis of the negative attributes. Since, as far as one can gather, he is one of the recognized authorities of the 'Maimonides was a Spinoza' group, we will quote him rather fully.

That God has similitude or form in the Scripture is due only to an 'apparition' of prophecy; while the assertion that God created man in his own image refers only to the soul or intellectual element in man. It has no reference to shape or to manner of life, but to that knowledge which constitutes the 'quality' of the soul. . . . Maimonides' conception of the Deity, without being professedly pantheistic, is yet extremely anti-personal and diffused. Still more striking is the coincidence with Spinoza when we turn to the denial of human affections. Maimonides tells us that with God 'there is neither death nor life like the life of a living body; neither folly nor wisdom, like the wisdom of a wise man; neither sleep nor waking; neither anger nor laughter; neither joy nor sorrow; neither silence nor speech, like the speech of the sons of men.'

There would be some danger of self-contradiction in this matter, if their [Maimonides and Spinoza] conception of the

82Italics mine. 83Italics mine.
84Italics in original; no explanation is given for emphasis on this phrase.
85Pearson's quotations are from an edition "in 1832 translated by Herman Hedwig Bernard" and published in Cambridge under the title: The Main Principles of the Creed and Ethics of the Jews exhibited in selections from the Yad Hachazakah of Maimonides," op. cit., p. 126.
Deity had not ceased to be a personal one, and become rather the recognition of an intellectual cause or law running through all phenomena—which, showing beneath a material succession an intellectual sequence or mental necessity, is for them the Highest Wisdom, to be acquainted with which becomes the end of human life. This intellectual relation of man to God forms an all-important feature in the ethics of both Maimonides and Spinoza; it is in fact a vein of mystic gold which runs through the great mass of Hebrew thought.

Note especially the two phrases we have italicized: "without being professedly pantheistic", which assuredly is intended to give the impression that Maimonides' real concept of God is just that, and extremely anti-personal and diffused." It would seem that Pearson has here effected a transferral of meaning from "anti-human" to "anti-personal", which are by no means synonyms, by arguing from the absence of human attributes in God to this "anti-personal and diffused" conception.

Neither of these phrases is at all justified by the evidence. Indeed, even Roth, who is of the same general school of thought, says "that the universe as a totality is God could never have been affirmed by Maimonides." As one simple proof, we may point out that the very doctrine of the creation ex nihilo, on which Maimonides contradicts even his master, Aristotle, and the simplicity of God must necessarily rule out the possibility of a

86 Pearson, op. cit., pp. 128-129.
87 Roth, op. cit., p. 105.
88 Ibid., p. 93: "But to say that the universe had a beginning does not mean that there was a time when the universe was not, because time... has no existence apart from the universe."
pantheistic system. If God is the world, what was He before He created the world? If He is simple, how can there exist in Him this multiple universe?

Roth and Pearson both refer to Maimonides' analogy of man and the universe\(^{89}\) in which he speaks of the universe as "one individual being",\(^{90}\) and says that "it is impossible that one part of the Universe should exist independently of the other parts."\(^{91}\) This chapter Roth, at least, takes as proof that Maimonides held some sort of real simplicity in the universe, this unity being the thought of God; he ignores completely the concluding phrase of the above quotation, "in the existing order of things as here considered." That is, Maimonides is saying that all existing things in the universe are inter-related and inter-dependent as they now exist. The unity, therefore, is one of order in existence, not necessarily of essence.

This being so, the "conception of the Deity" has not become "the recognition of an intellectual cause or law running through all phenomena," as Pearson puts it; the law and order in the universe, the inter-dependence of its parts are not the nature of God, but rather the result of His intelligence and will. It may be a "diffused" concept, in that it is not positive; it is certainly not yet classifiable as either "personal" or "anti-personal."

\(^{89}\)Roth, op. cit., p. 85; Pearson, op. cit., p. 134.
It is entirely outside the province of this paper to consider Maimonides' relation to Spinoza; the evidence certainly seems sufficient to conclude that Spinoza read both the Guide and the Mishnah Torah, quoted from both and perhaps even based his philosophy on what he read into Maimonides. What we are considering here is the tendency to read Spinoza into Maimonides; as in Pearson's remarks in reference to arriving at the knowledge of God: "Separate the notions of this paragraph from the Talmudic language and they contain almost the exact thought of Spinoza."\(^92\)

In other words, remove from Maimonides any argument which is not found in Spinoza and the result will be very much like Spinoza's own thought; but not very much like Maimonides'. Pearson, and such other commentators as consider Maimonides and Spinoza as members of the same school seem to postulate that any two men who are against the same things are necessarily identical. God, for Maimonides, is not human, nor does He have any human traits or characteristics. The universe was made by Him, but He is not the universe or mind nor some vague "recognition of an intellectual cause or law." If this is the idea of God for Spinoza, it is certainly not so for Maimonides.

The basic conclusions to be drawn concerning God's nature from the discussion of the anthropomorphisms are these: no positive attribute can be predicated of God in the same sense that

\(^{92}\)Pearson, op. cit., pp. 132-133.
it is predicated of His creatures; such a term, if applied to Him
and to any other being, would be entirely equivocal. The only
attributes which may be predicated of God are those which refer
to His actions and those which are negative.

So far as obtaining a true knowledge of God is concerned,
then, we have two routes: we can predicate of His actions those
attributes which like human actions would indicate, so long as we
realize that we are speaking of His actions rather than Himself;
we can say what God is not. The former of the two routes will be
of little assistance, aside from explaining the use of the Biblical
terms; the latter, apparently, no matter to what detail it may
be carried, will give us only a statement of what must be excluded
from our concept of God, with nothing on the positive side.

If this interpretation of Maimonides were literally
exact, and to be taken in the strictest sense, however, there
would be no point in further consideration of God's nature, either
by Maimonides or by his commentators; there would be, in the most
exact sense of the words, nothing we could say about Him.

Maimonides, however, did write further of God, so that,
apparently, whether consciously or not, he did not take this com-
pletely negative aspect of the attributes as applying to all that
can be said of God. When he denies attributes to God, in order to
understand his meaning, we must necessarily first consider the
meaning of the term attribute, as he uses it. Let us then con-
sider more carefully the passage quoted on page 59, supra:
God's existence is absolute, it includes no composition . . . we comprehend only the fact that He exists, not His essence. Consequently,\textsuperscript{92} it is a false assumption to hold that he has any positive attributes.\textsuperscript{93}

Here is the first note to consider: the positive attributes are proved false by reason of the fact that God's existence is absolute, "it includes no composition." Accordingly, then, to say He has positive attributes is to add something to His existence; not merely to add something to it, but to make it a composite.

Again, Maimonides considers the attributes in reference to various predicables:

He does not possess existence in addition to His essence it therefore cannot be said that one may be described as an attribute; much less has He. . . a compound essence, consisting of two constituent elements to which the attribute could refer; still less has He accidents, which could be described by an attribute. Hence, it is clear that He has no positive attribute whatever.\textsuperscript{94}

If God's existence is absolute and without composition and is yet not possessed in addition to His essence, it must follow that His existence and His essence are considered as identical and simple; the existence is not an addition to the essence nor the essence an addition to the existence.

The idea of the simplicity of God is further emphasized

\textsuperscript{92}Italics not in original.

\textsuperscript{93}Maimonides, \textit{Guide}, I, 209.

\textsuperscript{94}Loc. cit.
in the words, "much less has He a compound essence, consisting of two constituent elements," i.e., genus and specific difference, by which any composite essence would be defined.

Further, "still less has He accidents, which could be described by an attribute." This type of attribute would be one which depended on mutability in God, on His having potentiality.

It would seem, then, that when Maimonides denies the application of positive attributes to God, he is not denying the possibility of knowledge concerning God, which denial would invalidate all his theological writings, but rather denying any possibility of composition in Him.

Indeed, he says, "the attribute is not inherent in the object to which it is ascribed, but it is superadded to its essence, and is consequently an accident."95 "The attribute must be one of two things, either the essence of the object described... or something different from the object described, some extraneous superadded element; in that case the attribute would be an accident."96

He has already stated that, aside from the fact that God's essence is not different from His existence, we cannot comprehend it.97 Any attribute we apply to Him, then, will be a non-essential one. Yet, if God is simple, how could non-essential

95 Ibid., p. 174.  
96 Ibid., p. 174-175.  
97 Ibid., p. 174; cf. supra.
attributes be present in Him? Obviously, they cannot.

The real point which Maimonides is here attempting to make, then, is not that "nothing can be said of God, but that nothing can be said of Him which in any way contradicts His unity and simplicity; if we state the attribute as a property or accident, we say there is in Him something not essential, and that, therefore, He is composite; if we say that the attribute is something essential to Him, we say that some concept predicated of created things can also be predicated univocally of the Creator. Yet the created things are all composite, of essence and existence if nothing else, so that here, also, we would be considering the Divine Being as composite.

His arguments against positive attributes, then, are based on the fact that in God essence and existence are not a composite; his failure is in "not making the leap from this conclusion, one justifiable on the basis of philosophy, to the conclusion that God's essence is Existence, Pure Act, in which simplicity are contained all perfections.

This latter conclusion, indeed, is one which could have been arrived at with the material to his hand. He had the Aristotelian corpus and he had, as we have noted, the 'Ehyeh asher Ehyeh, "the existing Being which is the existing Being" or the "I am Who Am." But the passage from Aristotle to the essence which is Existence, even with the aid of Scripture, is not so self-evident,
except by hind-sight. It is one 'leap' which Maimonides could not make.

It is probably for this reason, also, that he did not arrive at the analogical concept of Being, since it is the "essence is Existence" which makes the analogy requisite. Yet I think we might say that he used the analogy in practice, though he did not explicitly formulate the theory.

God exists without possessing the attribute of existence. Similarly, He lives, without possessing the attribute of life; knows, without possessing the attribute of knowledge. . . .98

These statements are meaningless, without some principle of analogy underlying them. Even the further explanation, that by God's existence is meant the impossibility of His non-existence and the other definitions, is meaningless in the same way, for existence and non-existence are contradictories and Maimonides was well acquainted with the Organon.99 Indeed, he says that "there is, in no way or sense, anything common to the attributes predicated of God and those used in reference to ourselves; they have only the same names, and nothing else is common to them."100 But then, how can the names be in any way used commonly?

98Ibid., pp. 204-205; cf. supra, pp. 37-38.


100Maimonides, Guide, I. 205: cf. supra, pp. 36-37.
He has, in fact, half of the principle of analogy stated: that "no name can be used univocally of God and man." The other half, that these terms are not purely equivocal, either, he sometimes seems to be groping after; the first half necessitates some new method of applying concepts to God, since if all terms are equivocal when applied to God and man, it becomes impossible to say anything at all about God. The use of any term must be either univocal, equivocal or analogous; Maimonides was certainly acquainted with analogical terms, but he chose instead the way of "negative attribution" in speaking of God, missing the point that a term is equivocal, in a certain sense its "negation must be equivocal also.

In practice, in the understanding of Maimonides' philosophy, I believe that we can frequently, without perverting his meaning, read him as saying that "no terms can be used univocally of God and man," but ignore the dictum that all terms are used equivocally, since in such a case, "no terms at all could be used of God."103

101 Loc. cit., and cf. n. 37 for St. Thomas' comments.

102 Cf. Maimonides, Makala, p. 64: "Nous avons un autre genre raisonnablement encore que nous appello's l'analogie. Il consiste à ceci: lorsque l'un de deux objets qui se ressemblent par un certain trait, possède un attribut quelconque, inaperçu dans l'autre, nous affirmons de ce dernier le même attribut."

103 I may be guilty here of the same fault of which I accuse Pearson; that of reading into a philosopher something which
Thus, as I pointed out earlier,\textsuperscript{104} the teaching on the anthropomorphisms and attributes is important for two reasons: first, because it sets forth the basic premise that no terms can be used univocally of God and man; second, because it sets forth some of the basic notes which must be included in Maimonides' concept of God.

God is, first of all, One, and this is the basis of all

he neither said nor thought. Maimonides may, indeed, have meant precisely what he said, which comes, eventually, to the statement that "nothing can be said about God or "nothing can be known about God. If so, as I have pointed out, all his writing on the subject becomes meaningless.

I prefer to hold the opinion I have outlines above, both because it is more intelligible and because it is evident from his writings that Maimonides was both wise and learned, a man who cannot easily be conceived of as holding such a theory.

This is a purely personal interpretation, yet I submit that it differs from Pearson's method of interpretation; he begins with the general principle that he will "omit all matter which has no direct bearing on Spinoza's Ethica... and endeavour to make allowance for the age and the theologico-philosophical language in which Maimonides wrote."

This interpretation, on the other hand, is based on Maimonides' own writings, in context with their time and the terminology used; it is "not a principle decided upon before examination of the writings, but a conviction arrived at after examination. Thus, though unprovable, neither is it necessarily invalid, so far as the method by which it was formed is concerned.

\textsuperscript{104}Cf. supra, pp. 45-48.
the other "notes: His existence is not different from His essence. He is incorporeal. He is immutable, He has no accidents, His essence, as such, is unknowable and not philosophically definable, there being no parts. He is the completely simple, uncaused, necessary being. Thus much we can learn from the teaching on anthropomorphism; let us now examine more particularly His unity.

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105 Cf. supra, p. 41; Maimonides, Guide, I, 212: "a Being that is free from substance." Maimonides may here mean by substance, corporeality; cf. Maimonides, Makala, p. 83: "D'autre part, de meme que l'attribut corps organique qui s'applique a l'animal et au vegetal est un genre; de meme celui de corps inorganique qui s'applique au ciel, aux etoiles, aux elements et aux mineraux constitue aussi un autre genre. Mais lorsque nous disons le corps dans le sens absolu du mot, nous e" nonco" s u'e notion qui embrasse tout. Nul genre n'a plus d'extension qu'elle. On l'appelle aussi la substance et constitue un genre superieur ou un genre generalissime."

106 Cf. Maimonides, Makala, trans. introduction, p. 21: "Maimonide, qui consacrera dans le Guide une place considerable a l'interpretation des termes bibliques ayant trait a l'anthropomorphisme, avait presenti de bonne heure toute l'importance de ce probleme lexicologique. Deja les premiers traducteurs juifs de la Bible, les auteurs des Targumim, et plus tard, les theologiens du moyen-age, tels que Saadia, Bahia et Juda Halevi, choques par certains anthropomorphismes bibliques, avaient essaye de les interpreter metaphoriquement; mais c'etait par des procedes purement empiriques. Maimonide fut le premier a fournir des bases scientifiques a cette branche de la Theologie." (This is perhaps a little too high praise on this point; Saadia, op. cit., pp. 75-92, presents a scientific, though "not as exhaustive treatment.

Cf. also Singer, op. cit., pp. 267-268: "St. Thomas adopted the doctrine of Maimonides that Human Reason can attain to the recognition of the Existence of God, but neither to a Knowledge of His Nature, nor to a recognition of the identity of His Nature with His Existence. St. Thomas also agrees with Maimonides that the attributes of God cannot be regarded as something added to His Nature, since that would suggest that Accidents distinct from His Nature could be added thereto, and such a conception would impart plurality to His single Nature."
CHAPTER V

THE UNITY OF GOD

We have already mentioned that Maimonides holds the unity of God; he has, indeed, offered proofs of this unity bound in with the very proofs of God's existence.1 We shall here consider the unity of God specifically, rather than as a consequence or corollary of other problems; we shall further consider the incorporeality and eternity of God, as necessitated by His unity.

The belief in the unity of God is enjoined on all Jews in the second Basic Principle of the Jewish faith2 and in the second Positive Commandment.3 Indeed, for Maimonides, this is one of the most important points in the Jewish faith; the final demolishing blow against any theory or opinion is "this is a contradiction of the unity of God."

Certainly the Jews were the great defenders of monothelism in ancient times; Maimonides devotes the whole of the fourth treatise of the Mishna Torah4 to a survey of star-worship,

\[1\text{Cfr. supra, pp. 24-25.} \]
\[2\text{Cfr. infra, Appendix I.} \]
\[3\text{Cfr. infra, Appendix II.} \]
\[4\text{Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, Tractate Four, pp. 283 sqq.} \]

"Concerning the Worshippers of Stars and their Practices."
as illustrative of ancient idolatry and polytheism, and also considers them in the Guide. Always the emphasis is on the fact that these idolaters worshipped many gods, while the true God is one.

The tone of his exposition of God's unity is set by this excerpt, early in the Mishnah Torah:

Whosoever supposes that there is another god besides This One, violates a prohibitive commandment... and is an atheist, deny ing the great principle upon which everything depends. A touch of acerbity is more than evident.

Maimonides more than once holds that one who does not believe in God's unity does not believe in God, as when he says that one who believes God to be an essence with many properties believes in a God Who cannot exist. He classifies such a one as second in his list of atheists:

There are five categories of atheists; (1) he who says that there is no God and no omnipotence; (2) he who says that there is an omnipotence but that there are two or more such; (3) he who says that there is one Lord but that He is corporeal and has a form; (4) Likewise one who says that He alone is not the First Cause and Creator of all; (5) likewise he who worships a star, or planet, or any other as a mediator between him and the Lord of the universe; every one of these five is an atheist.

5Ibid., p. 268; here Maimonides presents Abraham as a philosopher reasoning himself out of idolatry and into the worship of the one true God.

6Maimonides, Guide, III, 134-147. 7Mishnah, p. 121.
It is evident, then, that Maimonides not only considers the unity of God a fundamental part of Judaism; he also holds that no man can really believe in God without believing in His unity, that is, that one who denies God's unity denies, in the same breath, His existence.

Let us first examine what Maimonides means by unity:

This God is One God; He is neither two nor more than two, but One to whose Unity there is no comparison among the individual units in the universe; not like the unit of a genus which embraces many individual units, or like the unit of a body which is divisible into parts and particles, but a Unit to Whose Unity no other unit in the universe is like.¹⁰

There are, then, several ideas embraced in this concept of unity: first, that God is not more than one being; second, that this one being is not composite in any sense, whether of individual units, parts or concepts.¹¹

Maimonides has already stated that God's existence includes no composition;¹² this is the meaning the term 'unity' has here. God's unity is completely without parts within itself and there is but one God.

Further, we now must consider whether he means essential unity, that is, the unity which is identical with God's essence, or accidental unity, which is a property of things in the same way as

¹⁰Ibid., p. 121.

¹¹The concept excludes plurality and composition, whether numerical, physical, metaphysical or logical.

It is obvious from all that we have already said concerning Maimonides' concept of God that no accidental unity will be predicated of Him. As Maimonides says, in speaking of the essence of God:

Consequently God exists without possessing the attribute of existence. Similarly, He lives, without possessing the attribute of life; knows, without possessing the attribute of knowledge; is omnipotent without possessing the attribute of omnipotence; is wise, without possessing the attribute of wisdom; all this reduces itself to one and the same entity; there is no plurality in Him, as will be shown. It is further necessary to consider that unity and plurality are accidents supervening to an object according as it consists of many elements or one. This is fully explained in the book called Metaphysics.13 In the same way as number is not the substance of the things numbered, so is unity not the substance of the thing which has the attribute of unity, for unity and plurality are accidents belonging to the category of discrete quantity, and supervening to such objects as are capable of receiving them.

To that being, however, which has truly simple, absolute existence, and in which composition is inconceivable, the accident of unity is as inadmissible as the accident of plurality; that is to say, God's unity is not an element super-added, but He is One without possessing the attribute of unity.14

This unity, then, is not distinct, added to or an attribute of His existence; it is a unity like no other. It is neither the unity of a group, nor the unity of a composite unit. It is identical with His existence and His essence, which is simple and absolute.

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13 The reference is to Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 6 (1015b16-1017a7).

We may note here the basis for his statement in the Ig-
ghereth ha-Schemad, the Letter on Apostasy, that Islam is not
idolatry. The leading sect in Islam, the Puritains or Almohades
(Unitarians), were strict believers in the absolute unity of God,
taking that unity in the same sense and, sometimes, in almost the
same words as Maimonides himself. Accordingly, he could hold
that the form of words by which the Jews who were apostate had
sworn their belief in Islam was no denial of belief in the God
of Israel.

On what basis does Maimonides hold the unity of God? We
have already seen that he holds any composition, whether within

15 For an analysis of this work and commentary, cf. Maim-
onides, Guide, I, trans. introduction, pp. xxxiii-xl. The trans-
lator, Friedlander, does not believe this work authenticated as
that of Maimonides; Yellin, op. cit., pp. 221-222, n. 13, says its
authenticity is not certain, but that it is probably the work of
Maimonides; Levy, op. cit., pp. 10-12, holds that Maimonides wrote
the letter, but notes, ibid., p. 274, "Authenticite contestee."

16 Cf. Yellin, op. cit., pp. 20-22, for text of the Con-
fession of Faith of Abdallah ibn Tumart, founder of the Almohades,
cited from trans. by L. M. Simmons, Jewish quarterly Review, III,
360, which calls God "one but incomprehensible," "all-powerful. . .
without attributes. . . .Time does not contain him. Space does not
hold him. . . .However our imagination may conceive God, he the
Exalted is different from our conception of him."

17 They had sworn this oath in order to escape death,
with which the Almohades threatened all unbelievers.

18 Since in swearing this oath the Jews would not deny
any of the basic truths of the Jewish religion, Maimonides held
that, to escape death, they were allowed to go through the for-
malities of entering the Mohammedan religion.
the essence of God or between His essence and accidental attributes to be equivalent with atheistic opinions and a denial of the very nature of God. We have also seen that, in the very proof of God's existence, he proves that God must be One.19

In addition to these proofs, he offers two further proofs for God's unity. The first of these arguments is sufficiently concise to be quoted in full:

If there were two Gods, they would necessarily have one element in common by virtue of which they were Gods, and another element by which they were distinguished from each other and existed as two Gods;

the distinguishing element would either be in both different from the property common to both ---

in that case both of them would consist of different elements, and neither of them would be the First Cause, or have absolutely independent existence; but their existence would depend on certain causes ---

or the distinguishing element would only in one of them be different from the element common to both: then this being could not have absolute independence.21

To put the argument even more briefly, a plurality of Gods requires distinction between the various individuals, distinction requires composition and composition requires a prior cause of composition. God, therefore, must be one and simple.

The second argument22 is more lengthy; it is based on

19cf. supra, pp. 22-25; first, third and fourth proofs.

20Based on Proposition 19; cf. supra, p. 22.

21Maimonides, Guide, II, 22; one paragraph in original.

22Ibid., p. 22-23.
the organic unity of the world, which makes it impossible that one deity "be engaged in forming one part, and another deity in forming another part of that organic body of which all parts are closely connected together." 23

It follows then that the activity of a duality can only be explained in two ways: either one is active at one time, the other at another, or the two act simultaneously. Taking the first case, if the two could act at the same time, there is no reason why they should not do so; if they cannot act at the same time, there would be required some cause or agent external to both, which would bring each in turn from potentiality to actuality.

If, on the other hand, the two always act simultaneously, neither one will be the cause of the activity, but rather their union. The action of the absolute, however, cannot be due to an external cause. 24 If this union is the cause of activity, it must be brought about by some force or combination of forces; the cause of the existence of the universe, then, must eventually be some one simple being. 25

23 Ibid., p. 22.

24 Based on Proposition 20; cf. supra, p. 22.

25 Since the "combination of forces" would also require an external cause for union, the series must be traced back to a simple cause, which requires no external force in order to act.
In summation, to use the words of Maimonides:

The Holy one, blessed is He! recognizes His Own Truth and knows it as it really is; and He does not know with an intelligence which is apart from Himself, as we know, for we and our intelligence are not one, but the Creator, may He be blessed! and His Intelligence and His Life are One from every lateral, angle and manner of Unity. Since but for this, He would live a life and understand with an intelligence apart from Himself, then there would be many gods, He, His life and His Intelligence; and it is not so, for He is One from every lateral, angle and manner of Unity. Consequently you must say that, what He knows, and that by which He is known, and the Intelligence itself are all One. But this matter the mouth has no power to express, nor the ear to perceive, neither is it within the heart of man to see it clearly... the Creator and His life are not two, as are the lives of living bodies, or as the lives of angels. Therefore, He does not recognize the creatures nor knows them because they are creatures as we know them, but by reason of knowing His Own Self does He know them. Therefore, because He knows His Own Self, He knows all; for, all depend upon Him in being.26

We have noted that the proofs of God's existence include proofs of His unity; proofs of His incorporeality are also included in these arguments.27 God's unity, according to Maimonides, excludes all possibility of composition, including the composition of matter and form which corporeality requires; God, therefore, is necessarily incorporeal.

Supposing that there are many deities is equivalent to an admission that they are corporeal, because like individual beings do not differ save in chance traits characteristic of bodies and material things only. Thus supposing the Creator to be corporeal and material would force a conclusion that He is finite, for, it is impossible to imagine a body which does not end in dissolution; but our God, blessed is His

26Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, pp. 150-131.
27Cf. supra, pp. 22-25; first and fourth arguments.
Name! beholding that His power is infinite and uninterrupted, for lo, the universal sphere continuous sic to revolve forever. His power is positively not a physical power. And, because He is Incorporeal, none of the chance traits, characteristic of bodies, so as to be divisible or an offshoot of another being, can be attributed to Him. . . .

It is clearly indicated in the Torah and in the Prophets that the Holy One, blessed is He! is Incorporeal. 28

The incorporeality follows necessarily from the unity, therefore; yet Maimonides considers it sufficiently important in itself to list it as the third Basic Principle of the Jewish faith 29 and to list "he who says that there is One Lord but that He is corporeal and has a form" as one of the five categories of atheists. 30

Indeed, he proves the incorporeality of God in a distinct proof from the arguments for the existence and the unity of God, though one based upon them. As we have noted, every corporeal object is composed of matter and form, 31 and required an agent to effect their composition. Further, such an object is evidently divisible and subject to accidents. But the Absolute has been proved to admit of no dualism. 32

28 Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, pp. 121-122.
29 Cf. infra, Appendix I.
30 Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, p. 398. Cf. criticism by RABD (Rabbi Abraham ben David), loc. cit.: "Why does he call such one an atheist? Many greater and better than he followed this opinion, according to what they saw in phrases, and more particularly in the texts of the Agadot which misdirect opinions."
31 Cf. supra, Proposition 22, p. 22
The proof of the incorporeality of God follows naturally from the proof of His unity; the only necessity for stating it separately lies in the fact that there were some theologians who, as we have noted, held both the unity and the corporeality of God, basing this contradictory interpretation on literal reading of the Torah.

As we have noted, it is on the Incorporeality of God that Maimonides bases, in the Mishnah, his argument against many of the attributes predicated of God:

Since it is clear that He is Incorporeal, it clearly follows that none of the corporeal changes happen to Him. All such and other similar expressions in the Torah and in the words of the Prophets are merely proverbial and figurative.

We may mention here the difference in format between the two major works of Maimonides, the Guide and the Mishnah Torah. In the former, he devotes the first section to the interpretation and explanation of the attributes and names predicated of God, then takes up the proof of His existence, His unity and His incorporeality as following from the previous arguments.

In the Mishnah, on the other hand, he first postulates God's existence, from this His necessary unity and incorporeality and finally the explanation of the anthropomorphisms, based upon

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33Cf. supra, p. 30.

34Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, pp. 124-125.
this foundation.

The difference in order is explained by the difference in purpose of the two works, the Guide being intended for the philosophically minded and learned among the Jews and, therefore, first showing that there is no contradiction between the philosopher's idea of God and the God of the Torah. The Mishnah, on the other hand, is intended to be a clear summary on the subject of that which is forbidden or permitted, defiled or clean along with the other laws of the Torah, the whole scope in pure language and concise style, so that the Oral Torah be entirely methodical in the mouth of everybody, without query and without repartee, without the contentions thus of one and such of another, but clear text, cohesive, correct, in harmony with the law which is defined out of all these existing compilations and commentaries from the days of our Holy Master Judah ben Simeon till now, so that all laws be open to young and old, whether they be laws concerning each and every commandment or whether they be laws concerning matters instituted by scholars and prophets....when one studies Holy Writ first and thereafter reads this work, he obtains herefrom a complete knowledge of the Oral Torah, having no need to read any other book in between them.35

The Guide, therefore, is the philosophic argument on the nature of God and man's responsibilities; the Mishna is the theological codification of Judaism.36

35Maimonides, Mishna Torah, pp. 17-18.

36Leo Strauss, "The Literary Character of the Guide for the Perplexed," Essays on Maimonides, ed. Salo W. Baron (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), pp. 37-91, argues that the Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas should be compared to the Mishnah rather than to the Guide, on the basis that the Mishnah was written for the general Hebrew congregation, the Guide for the more understanding in the group. This appraisal underestimates the philosophic content of the Summa considerably.
The incorporeality of God is, therefore, proved both on philosophic grounds, since the very nature of a First Cause will require that it be incorporeal, and on theological grounds, since the teaching of the Torah, though it may apparently support the argument that God is a body, yet actually also demands that He be without any of the changes which follow the predication of a composite nature.

In the Guide, Maimonides gives no special proof of the eternity of God. Perhaps he felt that no proof is needed, having stated as a postulate that what is indivisible cannot move, and that time has relation only to the movable. From this it follows that in God, Who is simple, there is no possibility of time.

He says in the Mishnah that "neither is His being dependent on time to attribute to Him either a beginning, or an end, or number of years," and, in the fourth Basic Principle, requires belief in God's priority: "whatever is found in existence besides Him is subsequent in relation to Him." He holds, then, not merely that God is outside time and immeasurable by time, but also that all other beings are measured by time. This second aspect of eternity is more properly considered in the examination of the doctrine of creation ex nihilo.

37Cf. supra, p. 21, Prop. 7. 38Loc. cit., Prop. 15. 39Maimonides, Mishnah, p. 124 40Cf. infra, Appendix I. 41Perhaps this could be used as the basis of an argu-
ment that, if two eternal beings existed, some time could be pre-
dicated in regard to the relation between them; if a being is out-
side time, it will have no measurable duration and, hence, no
other being can exist in respect to which it can be measured. Thus
one might also prove the Unity of God from His Eternity.
CHAPTER VI

THE NATURE OF GOD

In Maimonides' classification of attributes applicable to God, as we have noted, all predications are either applied to His actions or they are negations of some imperfection. Since the main purpose of this thesis is to determine His nature, according to Maimonides, we shall consider only briefly, in the following chapter, His activities, i.e., His relations with man and the universe.

The previous chapters have attempted the explication and amplification of those "attributes" which can properly be predicated of God, Himself, remembering always that, for Maimonides, there is no distinction in God between any of these characteristics, be they real or logical. Like any terms applied to God, they are based on the way our mind understands Him and cannot be a strict statement of the way in which He exists.

The most basic statement we can make of God is "He exists"; indeed, strictly speaking, this is all we can say of Him, for His essence is incomprehensible. All we can know is His existence, yet even the words "He exists" are not quite accurate, for in God there is no distinction or composition between essence.
and existence, such as might be implied by making God as subject distinct from the verb to exist.

If, then, we say that God exists or God has existence, we must keep in mind that we are not saying that He and His existence are disparate, for, if they were, some prior cause would be required for their union. There is no composition in God; His existence is not different from His essence. He is Absolute Existence.

To make this concept of Absolute Existence more clear to human minds, we say that God is One; not merely in the monotheist sense that there is no other Being like to Him, but also in the sense that He is simple, that there is no composition whatever in Him. From this simplicity follows the necessity that He be incorporeal, since any corporeal being is composite, and eternal, since if He were measurable by time, it would mean the presence of change and potentiality in Him.

Thus, all possible statements concerning God's nature are reducible to Absolute Existence, existence without composition. Accordingly, Maimonides says, God's essence is incomprehensible to us; we can know only that He exists, not what He is. For all other beings known by man are composite, compounds of essence and existence. "Are they?" and "What are they?" are two different questions, except when asked of God. It must, then, be impossible for man to understand fully any Being Whose existence and essence are the same.
We might, as we noted previously, interpret this to mean the Maimonides was tending towards the notion that God's essence is existence; indeed, the statement that His existence is not different from His essence is the obverse side of that same coin. It is doubtful, however, that he actually reached such a conclusion, since many of the difficulties he encountered could have been either explained or made clearer through the application of this principle.

Further, there is the very fact that Maimonides always refers to God's essence and existence in negative terms; that is, every statement is to the effect that His existence is not different from His essence, that His existence and His essence are not a composite. Never does he say that the essence is existence, merely that God's existence is simple; we can know He exists and exists simply, but His essence remains a mystery.

There must, of course, be some point in any monotheist philosophy at which the philosopher says, "I can go no further," since, otherwise, he equates his knowledge with God's and cancels the whole of his philosophy. This, indeed, might be considered a further proof that Maimonides did not even approach pantheism, since, if man is a part of God, there is no contradiction in his being omniscient.

The point at which Maimonides stopped is the knowledge

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1Cf. supra, pp. 56-58.
of God's essence in itself; we can know His existence and that it is absolute, we can know what He is not, but we cannot know truly what He is.

Moses desired to know the truth of the existence of the Holy One, blessed is He! with a thorough knowledge within his heart. ... until he would know the truth of His existence as it is. And He, blessed is He! answered him, that it is not within the intellectual power of the living man, who is a composite being of body and soul, to reach the pure truth of this matter; but He, blessed is He! imparted to him that which no man before him did nor no man after him shall know for, he fathomed the subject of the true existence of the Holy One, blessed is He! even so that He became separated in his mind's vision from other beings.²

The pure truth of God's existence, i.e., the nature of His essence cannot be known by man, for the very reason that he is composite.³

Yet something of God may be known through His actions, for man's guidance:

How may one discover the way to love and fear Him? When man will reflect concerning His works, and His great and wonderful creatures, and will behold through them His wonderful, matchless and infinite wisdom, he will spontaneously be filled with love, praise and exaltation and become possessed of a great longing to know the Great Name. ... and when he will think of all these matters, he will be taken aback in a moment and stricken with awe, and realize that he is an infinitesimal creature, humble and dark, standing with an in-


³Solomon Goldman, The Jew and the Universe (New York: Harper & Bros., 1936) holds throughout that Maimonides gave or attempted to give a complete rational explanation of the Torah. He even makes a comparison between this supposed completeness and St. Thomas' failure to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. Goldman apparently does not notice that Maimonides refuses to attempt a statement of God's essence.
significant and slight knowledge in the presence of the All Wise. . . I elucidate great, general principles of the works of the Lord of the universe, so that they might serve as an opening for one who understands by which to love the Name. 4

Thus, through His creation we can know something of God; through this knowledge we most properly love Him.

This, then, is our idea of God: an absolute, uncaused existence, one in number and indivisible in any way; simple, with no type of composition, even of essence and existence; incorporeal and immutable; outside of time and immeasurable by it. He is incomprehensible by any save Himself, since He alone is without composition and, therefore, He alone can know the true meaning of "to be without composition."

Concerning Him, it can be known that He exists, but what He is cannot be truly known, although we can know something of Him through His activities and it is to this knowledge that we are commanded when we are told to love God. 5

We will now turn from the discussion of God's nature to the discussion of His activities and Maimonides' opinion and explanation of them.


5Cf. infra, Appendix II, Third Positive Commandment.
CHAPTER VII

THE CREATION EX NIHILO

Since Maimonides' God is, after all, a Creator and a Goal, not a God Who has no activity in relation to this universe, it is only proper that any discussion of Him must also include some discussion of this activity. We shall, therefore, discuss briefly Maimonides' concept of God in regard, first, to the origin of the universe, then in regard to the problem of evil, the problem of prophecy and, finally, man's relationship to Him.

That God is the First Cause of all existing things is shown by the very philosophic proofs of His existence;¹ it would seem, then, that His being Creator is merely a restatement of this. However, the Aristotelian principles from which both Aristotel and Maimonides prove the existence of the First Cause include as a proposition the eternity of the universe.²

Here is one of the major contradictions between the philosophy of Aristotle and any religion which holds the Torah, and particularly the Book of Genesis to be the revealed word of God.

¹Cf. supra, pp. 22-25.

This tenet of the universe's eternity is not merely an appendage of Aristotle's system, which could be removed without affecting the rest of his thought, but is apparently an integral part.

Here, then, is a point on which not merely the unlearned and literal-minded interpreters of the Torah saw a conflict between the faith and this new science, but even the philosophically minded, who held the anthropomorphic content of scriptures to be metaphorical, could see no possibility of harmonization.

In order to better understand Maimonides' solution of the problem, let us briefly consider the earlier arguments of Saadia concerning Creation. As we noted previously, he was to some degree acquainted with the work of Aristotle, but being more properly an apologeticist, he made more use in his philosophy of the principles of the Kalam. Indeed, we find that his four arguments for the Creation ex nihilo are all taken from the Kalam; three of them are among the seven which Maimonides quotes and refutes.

Saadia first states the nature of the problem:

It is quite certain that the origin of things is a matter concerning which no human being was ever able to give evidence as an eye-witness. Should, therefore, our inquiry lead us to the conclusion that all things were created ex

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3Cf. supra, p. 9.


5A detailed summary of Saadia's arguments are presented as an aid to understanding the background and difficulties involved.
nihilo -- a thing the like of which was never experienced by sense perception -- we have no right to reject it out of hand on the ground that we never experienced the like of it." 6

Indeed, he says, whoever forms a cosmological theory must do it some other way than on the basis of sense-perception:

All those who discuss this problem and seek a solution are agreed on this point. Those, for instance, who believe in the eternity of the world seek to prove the existence of something which has neither beginning nor end. Surely, they never came across a thing which they perceived with their senses to be without beginning or end, but they seek to establish their theory by means of postulates of Reason... In a similar way, those who believe in an eternal Matter 7 regard it as a Hyle 8 i.e. something in which there is originally no quality of hot or cold, moist or dry, but which becomes transformed by a certain force and thus produces those four qualities. Surely their senses never perceived a thing which is lacking in all those four qualities, nor did they ever perceive a process of transformation and the generation of the four qualities such as is suggested.... It is clear that all have agreed to accept some view concerning the origin of the world which has no basis in sense perception.9

However, says Saadia, these three facts will meet the reader in every part of this book, namely, (1) that our arguments are stronger than theirs; (2) that we are able to disprove the arguments of our opponents; and (3) that we have in the bargain the testimony of the miracles narrated in Scripture.10

He begins the argument proper by saying that God, Himself, has informed us of the creation ex nihilo, in the words "In

6Saadia, op. cit., p. 49.
7Arabic tina, Hebrew homer (clay).
8Arabic hayula, Hebrew hayyule.
9Saadia, op. cit., pp. 50-51. 10Ibid., p. 51.
The beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1, 1); our object here is to discover if this can be verified by speculation.  

Saadia's four proofs are, briefly, these: first, since the universe is finite in magnitude, the force residing in it is also finite and, since "the force which preserved heaven and earth is finite, it necessarily follows that the world has a beginning and an end"; second, he says, "I saw that bodies consist of combined parts and segments fitted together. This clearly indicated to me that they are the skilful work of a skilful artisan and creator."  

Third, no bodies can be found devoid of all accidents and anything which has accidents coeval with it must be created like the accidents, since "the accident enters into its definition e.g., the motion and colour of the celestial bodies; fourth, "since I find myself existent, I know that the process of generation has traversed time until it has reached us, and that if time were not finite, the process of generation would not have traversed it." Thus, our present existence proves time finite and, therefore, the creation of the universe.

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11 The verb bara, used here, is used only in reference to God; both Saadia and Maimonides hold it to mean creation ex nihilo. Cf. Saadia, op. cit., p. 51, trans. note.
12Saadia, op. cit., pp. 51-52  
13Ibid., pp. 52-54.  
14Ibid., pp. 54-55.  
15Ibid., pp. 55-56  
16Ibid., pp. 56-57 and n., p. 56.
Having shown that all things in the universe have a beginning, Saadia next takes up the question of their origin, i.e., did they create themselves or were they created by someone external to them? The second alternative must be true, since the first is absurd, for three reasons: first, if a body can produce itself out of non-existence, it should be even more powerful once it is existing; if it is more powerful, it should be more capable of producing its like. Bodies are unable to create now, when existing, so they could not have brought about their own existence.

His second argument is that the time of this creation presents an insuperable difficulty. For if we say that the thing created itself before it came into being, then we assume that it was non-existent at the time when it created itself, and obviously something non-existent cannot create a thing. If, on the other hand, we say that it created itself after it had come into being, the obvious comment is that after a thing has come into existence there is no need for it to create itself. There is no third instant between 'before' and 'after' except the present which, however, has no duration in which an action can take place. 17

Thirdly, if a body is able to create itself, it must also be able to abstain from creating itself; 18 and

Under this assumption we shall find that the body is both existent and non-existent at the same time. For in speaking of the body as capable, we take it to be existent, but in going on to speak of it as being capable of abstaining from the act of self-creation, we assume it to be non-existent. 19

17 Ibid., pp. 58-59. The parallel with Parmenides is apparent.
18 Cf. supra, pp. 21-22, Propositions 13, 20.
19 Saadia, op. cit., p. 50.
Thus having proved the universe created in time and not by itself, Saadia last considers whether the Creator made it "from something [prima materia] or from nothing [ex nihilo] as revealed in the Scriptures." If we say that God made the universe from something, we would imply that this substance was co-eternal with God, in which case He would not be Creator nor would He have power over this co-eternal matter. Further, the maker must necessarily be prior to the thing made by him. Should we, however, believe the substance to be eternal, the maker would not be prior to the thing created by him, and neither of the two could claim priority so as to be the cause of the other's existence, which is completely absurd.

Saadia offers two more arguments in reference to the doctrine of creation; first, he points out, the opinion that everything comes from something is based on sense-perception. If we accept this as axiomatic in regard to the origin of things, on what grounds can we deny the other sense-relationships to this 'eternal substance'? In other words, if we allow this one sense-perception eternal validity, must we not also say that this eternal substance eternally "existed in time, space, form, quantity, position, relation, etc. . . .and nothing would remain to be created."

20Loc. cit. 21Ibid., pp. 59-61. 22Ibid., p. 61; Saadia here differs from Maimonides in that he holds priority in time essential to a cause. 23Ibid., pp. 61-62.
The second of these arguments repeats, in a new form, one of the previous proofs for the creation of the universe in time, the argument that

if we fail to admit the existence of something which has nothing prior to it, it is impossible for us to accept the fact that there exists anything at all. ... since an infinite series cannot be completed. ... But, behold, we are in existence, and unless the things which preceded us were finite [in number], they could not have been completed so as to reach us.25

The validity of these arguments is not our concern here; we are interested rather in their relation to Maimonides' discussion of the problem of creation.26

First, then, let us note the difference in order between Saadia's presentation and that of Maimonides. As we noted, the latter, in the Guide, considers first the attributes of God, then the proofs of His existence, His unity and His incorporeality. These proofs, he says, are valid on Aristotelian principles whether we believe the universe eternal or created ex nihilo.27

Saadia, however, proceeds from proving the universe to

24Cf. supra, p. 82, fourth argument.


be created to a proof that it is created by a being external to it and that it is created \textit{ex nihilo}. Only then does he take up the discussion of God’s nature and attributes.\textsuperscript{28}

To understand this difference in order, let us consider Saadia’s proofs for creation \textit{ex nihilo}, since the Aristotelian belief in eternal matter is Maimonides’ point of attack.

The first argument, that God’s making bodies from ‘something’ would mean that He is not creating, is little more than an explication of the term \textit{creation}. If creation is making something from nothing, then making the universe from matter is not creation. As an argument, it has relevance only to the statement in Genesis, which Saadia holds to refer to the creation \textit{ex nihilo} of heaven and earth. Maimonides is presenting a philosophic argument; he cannot, therefore, use revelation as evidence.

The next two arguments depend on the necessity that a cause be prior in time to its effect; the Aristotelian theories which Maimonides considers hold the cause prior in nature to the effect, but not necessarily prior in time.

Saadia’s arguments on sense-perception neither prove creation nor disprove eternal matter; rather, they show that any argument from sense-perception is invalid in reference to this problem.

\textsuperscript{28}Saadia, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 49-92.
The final argument, that based on the impossibility of an infinite series, is then the only one which will have any force for Maimonides, since it is the only positive philosophic argument which is not immediately cancelled by the basic Aristotelian theories. The argument from the meaning of bara is not a philosophic argument; the priority in time of cause to effect is not necessary in the Aristotelian system; the invalidity of sense perception as evidence proves nothing for either faction.

In reference to this Kalam argument on the infinite series, let us quote Maimonides' opinion on its validity:

Those who boast that they have proved the eternity of the Universe say that time is infinite; an assertion which is not necessarily erroneous; for only when one atom has ceased to exist, the other follows. Nor is it absolutely wrong, when they assert, that the accidents of the substance succeed each other in an infinite series, for these accidents do not co-exist, but come in succession one after another, and the impossibility of the infinite in that case has not been proved. The Mutakallemim, however, make no difference between the existence of an infinite body and the divisibility of a body or of time ad infinitum, between the co-existence of an infinite number of things, and the infinite number of beings successively existing. If it were undoubtedly wrong to assume that an infinite number of things can exist in succession, although that link of the series which exists at present is finite, the inadmissibility of the eternity of the Universe would be equally self-evident, and would not require for its proof any other proposition.

Thus we can see that none of Saadia's arguments are necessarily valid for Maimonides.

29 The reference is to the atomic theory of time.

Maimonides, like Saadia, holds the creation as an article of faith, yet, in a philosophic argument, he must prove his theses by reason. The eternal universe is certainly one of the major points on which Aristotelian theory contradicts the Torah; Saadia, therefore, holding the impossibility of an infinite series makes his first attack on this point. Maimonides, however, does not consider the creation so easily proved. Accordingly, he shows first that no principle of Aristotle's science contradicts the Jewish belief and doctrine concerning the existence and transcendence of God, leaving the eternity of the universe in abeyance until these more important questions have been settled.

Maimonides begins his examination of the origin of the universe by a statement of the three opinions on the matter which have been held by those who believe in the existence of God:

Those who follow the Law of Moses, our Teacher, hold that the whole Universe, i.e., everything except God, has been brought by Him into existence out of non-existence. Every time itself is among the things created. [This] is undoubtedly a fundamental principle of the Law of our Teacher Moses; it is next in importance to the principle of God's unity. Do not follow any other theory. Abraham, our father, was the first that taught it, after he had established it by philosophical research.

30Cf. Maimonides, Mishnah, pp. 129-130: "All beings, save only the Creator, from the First Form to the smallest moth which might be. . . came into being by the power of His truth."

31Having proven the existence of God, Maimonides does not consider it necessary to discuss atheistic theories.

The theory of all philosophers whose opinions and works are known to us is this: It is impossible to assume that God produced anything from nothing or that He reduces anything to nothing. . . . The philosophers thus believe that it is no defect in the Supreme Being that He does not produce impossibilities, for the nature of that which is impossible is constant -- it does not depend on an agent, and for this reason it cannot be changed. . . . They therefore assume that a certain substance has co-existed with God from eternity in such a manner that neither God existed without that substance nor the latter without God. But they do not hold that the existence of that substance equals in rank that of God; for God is the cause of that existence, and the substance is in the same relation to God as the clay is to the potter. . . .

Plato holds the same opinion. . . .only superficial and careless persons wrongly assume that Plato has the same belief as we have.33

Aristotle maintains, like the adherents of the second theory, that a corporeal object cannot be produced without a corporeal substance. He goes, however, farther, and contends that the heavens are indestructible. . . . he considers it impossible for God to change His will or conceive a new desire; that God produced this Universe in its totality by His will, but not from nothing. . . . the Universe has always been the same in the past, and will be the same eternally.34

All those who believe in God, then, explain the origin of the universe either as a creation from nothing by Him or as a creation from co-eternal matter; of the latter group, some hold the universe as it is destructible or changeable, others that it is indestructible and permanent.

It is with the latter group that Maimonides concerns himself. "No notice," he says, "will be taken of the opinion of any philosopher but that of Aristotle; his opinions alone deserve

33Ibid., pp. 63-65.
34Ibid., pp. 65-66.
to be criticized." He proceeds, therefore, to consider the arguments by which the Aristotelians demonstrate the eternity of the universe.

These arguments can be divided into two general groups, which we will here summarize, stating them in their basic form. The first group is based on the nature of the universe.

Motion is eternal, since transition from potentiality to actuality implies motion, and the beginning of motion implies a previous motion.

If the First Substance had a beginning it would have come from some other substance and be a composite of that prior substance and form. But the First Substance is formless, therefore had no beginning.

Since the spheres move in circular motion, there can be no opposite elements in them. They are, then, indestructible from this lack of opposition.

Before the universe exists, it is either possible, necessary or impossible. If impossible, it cannot exist; if necessary, it cannot not-exist; if possible, what is the substratum of its possibility?

These, Maimonides says, are the "principal methods, based on the properties of the Universe, by which Aristotle proves the Eternity of the Universe."

The remaining methods are based on the Aristotelian notion of God:

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35Ibid., p. 68. 36Ibid., pp. 67-75. 37Ibid., p. 68. 38Loc. cit. This seems somewhat of a petitio principii. 39Ibid., pp. 68-69. 40Ibid., pp. 69-70. 41Ibid., p.70.
If God produced the world from nothing, He must have been a potential agent before He became an actual agent. He must, therefore, have passed from potency to act, which requires a prior external agent. 42

If an agent is active at one time, inactive at another, it must be due to favorable and unfavorable circumstances. But these are accidental to the agent. Since God cannot have accidents, He cannot be active at one time, inactive at another. 43

God's actions are perfect, being the acts of a perfect Being. Therefore, the Universe must be perfect, and, therefore, permanent. 44

The common opinion of mankind is that the universe is eternal. 45

These eight arguments, says Maimonides, state all the arguments in favor of the universe's eternity; all other arguments can be reduced to these. 46

The problem, then, is this: did God make the universe from nothing or from some co-eternal substance, or, to state it more briefly, is anything eternal besides God? The Aristotelian arguments have been presented; now let us consider the other view.

Maimonides' first point is that Aristotle, himself, was well aware that he had not proved the Eternity of the Universe. He was not mistaken in this respect. He knew that he could not prove his theory, and that his arguments and proofs were only apparent and plausible... Later philosophers, disciples of Aristotle, assume that he has proved the

42 Loc. cit.
43 Ibid., pp. 70-71.
44 Ibid., p. 71. Maimonides here includes an interesting objection to creation, the question, "What did God do before creating the universe?"
46 Ibid., p. 71.
Eternity of the Universe, and most of those who believe they are philosophers blindly follow him in this point, and accept all his arguments as conclusive and absolute proofs. They consider it wrong to differ from Aristotle, or to think that he was ignorant or mistaken in anything. For this reason, taking their standpoint, I show that Aristotle himself did not claim to have proved the Eternity of the Universe.

In order to show that Aristotle did not consider the point proved, Maimonides remarks three facts about the theory as Aristotle expounds it: he gives opinions in favor of the theory and refutations of his opponents, thus, obviously, not holding the theory demonstratively proved; he, himself, always refers to the theory as an opinion.

My conviction is, that what Aristotle says on the Eternity of the Universe, the cause of the variety in the motion of the spheres, and the order of the Intelligences, cannot be proved, and that Aristotle never intended to prove these things. We have mentioned these things only because we know that the majority of those who consider themselves wise, although they know nothing of science, accept the theory of the Eternity of the Universe on the authority of famous scholars. They reject the words of the prophets, because the latter do not employ any scientific method by which only a few persons would be instructed who are intellectually well prepared, but simply communicate the truth as received by Divine inspiration.

Thus having stated that Aristotle, himself, held the universe's eternity merely as the best theory available to him

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47 Italics not in original. Note scorn of this opinion.
48 Italics not in original.
50 Ibid., p. 73.
51 Ibid., pp. 73-74.
52 Ibid., p. 74; cf. S.Th., I, 46, 1.
53 Ibid., p. 75.
(and having dropped a few satiric remarks in regard to those who make a god of Science), he states precisely what he intends to show in regard to the origin of the world.

I intend to show that the theory of the Creation, as taught in Scripture, contains nothing that is impossible; and that all these philosophical arguments which seem to disprove our view contain weak points which make them inconclusive, and render the attacks on our view untenable...[I] consider either of the two theories... as admissible, I accept the latter on the authority of Prophecy... I will, by philosophical reasoning, show that our theory of the Creation is more acceptable than that of the Eternity of the Universe. 54

Note particularly that Maimonides never says that the Aristotelian view is inadmissible, or the Jewish view provable on the basis of pure philosophic reasoning.

Maimonides now takes up the two groups of arguments for the eternity of the universe and disposes of them, on the basis of two general arguments. The first group, those based on the properties of the universe, are dismissed with the statement that you cannot argue from the present properties of a thing to the way in which it was produced. 55

The Aristotelians... found their objections on the properties which the things in the Universe possess when in actual existence and fully developed. We admit the existence of these properties, but hold that they are by no means the same as those which the things possessed in the moment of their production; and we hold that these properties themselves have come into existence from absolute non-existence. 56

54 Ibid., pp. 76-77. 55 Ibid., pp. 77-81. 56 Ibid., p. 79.
His answer to the second group of arguments is, basically, that you cannot make rules univocally for created agents and God; i.e., the change from inactivity to activity is not necessarily one from potentiality to actuality,\(^{57}\) nor is it dependent necessarily on external circumstances, when we are referring to an incorporeal agent.\(^{58}\)

In the same way he answers the argument on the perfection of God's wisdom manifested in the universe:

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\text{We cannot understand why His wisdom at a certain time caused the Universe to exist, whilst a short time before it had not been in existence. All things owe their existence to His eternal and constant wisdom, but we are utterly ignorant of the ways and methods of that wisdom, since, according to our opinion, His will is identical with His wisdom, and all His attributes are one and the same thing, namely, His Essence or Wisdom.}^{59}
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Thus, says Maimonides, he has "proved that our theory is admissible, and not impossible."\(^{60}\) Indeed, he has demonstrated that the Aristotelian theory is a matter of opinion rather than a proven fact; what evidence, however, has he that the Creation \textit{ex nihilo} is a better explanation of the origin of the universe?

His answer is based on the presence of design in the universe. The Aristotelian theory is based on the belief that everything in the universe works according to unchanging laws. Nonsense! says Maimonides. One has only to examine the heavens.
to see that Aristotle has failed to answer the problem; the best proof for design in the universe is the different motions of the spheres and the fixed position of the stars in these spheres.\footnote{Ibid., p. 96; pp. 87-98 \textit{passim}.}

Who has determined the variety in the spheres and the stars, if not the Will of God? \footnote{Ibid., p. 97.} Since the substance of all things is the same \footnote{Loc. cit.} \textit{[in the Aristotelian theory]}, what made the nature of one portion different from another?\footnote{Ibid., p. 98.}

This examination of the spheres and the Aristotelian theory of their motion brings Maimonides to examine two questions:

1. Is it necessary to assume that the variety of things in the Universe is the result of Design, and not of the fixed laws of Nature, or is it not necessary?  
2. Assuming that all this is the result of Design, does it follow that it has been created after not having existed, or does \textit{Creatio ex nihilo} not follow, and has the Being which has determined all this done always so?\footnote{Ibid., p. 99.}$^63$

Aristotle certainly denies that any of the products of nature are due to chance;\footnote{Loc. cit.} "things in real existence are not accidental,"\footnote{Ibid. , p. 100.} but his rejection does not imply the admission of design,\footnote{Ibid. , p. 100.} since "design and determination applies only to things not yet in existence, when there is still the possibility of their being in accordance with the design or not."\footnote{Ibid. , p. 100.} When Aristotle refers to the universe, then, as a necessary result of God, he is not talking of a priority in time or in existence, but merely a
causal relation, a result which cannot possibly be absent when God is present.

The inadequacy of the Aristotelian theory as an explanation of the origin of the world is shown by the number and importance of the questions which it leaves unanswered. Maimonides lists four basic axioms which, according to Aristotelian theory, should apply to all existing things:

1. A simple element produces a simple thing; a compound can only produce as many things as it contains simple elements;

2. Things are not produced by others at random; the laws of cause and effect are always in operation;

3. An agent acting by design, not merely by natural laws, can produce different objects;

4. The essentially compound (composite unit) is simpler than the numerically compound (group of units).

Using these axioms as bases, Maimonides asks the pure Aristotelians these questions: How can compound things come from the simple First Intellect? How can material beings come from immaterial beings? How can one Intelligence produce both the sphere and the stars in that sphere, (i.e., a compound of two elements producing two compounds)?

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68 Ibid., p. 103. 69 Ibid., pp. 101-103.
Since these questions cannot be answered on the basis of the Aristotelian theory, it must follow that the production of the spheres is not purely a result of the laws of Nature; nor can the differing motions of the spheres be explained purely on the basis of these laws.\(^{73}\)

Further, if all these spheres have the same substance, why do their forms never interchange,\(^{74}\) and if, on the other hand, they all have different forms of existence, why do they all move with a circular motion and why do all the stars have the same relative positions in the various spheres?\(^{75}\)

One of the troubles with the Aristotelian theory is, says Maimonides, that Aristotle holds God to be perfect and omnipotent, yet unable to change anything in the universe; "if He wished to make the wing of a fly longer, or to reduce the number of the legs of a worm by one, He could not accomplish it. . .\(^{76}\) If He could, it would not increase His perfection; it might, on the contrary, from some point of view, diminish it."

In sublunary theory, he concludes, Aristotle is "undoubtedly correct";\(^{77}\)

But what Aristotle says concerning things above the sphere of the moon is, with few exceptions, mere imagination and opinion; to a still greater extent this applies to his system of

\(^{73}\)Ibid., p. 106. \(^{74}\)Ibid., p. 106. \(^{75}\)Ibid., p. 107. \(^{76}\)Loc. cit. \(^{77}\)Loc. cit.
Intelligences, and to some of his metaphysical views; they include great improbabilities, ideas which all nations consider as evidently corrupt, and cause views to spread which cannot be proved.78

It is obvious that Maimonides has neither proved creation nor disproved the eternity of the universe; what he has done is show that the eternity of the universe is not proved and that creation and design are not only possible but answer some questions that an eternal universe and an immutable law of Nature cannot.

This is, of course, no less than he promised;79 but he considers further his own method of argument. Am I, he says, trying to overthrow Aristotle's theory or establish my own merely on a basis of doubts? No; I am treating Aristotle as his followers tell me to do, since they believe his theories less open to doubt than any others.

Being convinced that the question whether the heavens are eternal or not cannot be decided by proof, neither in the affirmative nor in the negative, we have enumerated the objections raised to either view, and shown how the theory of the Eternity of the Universe is subject to stronger objections, and is more apt to corrupt the notions concerning God.80

Only demonstrative proof should be able to make you abandon the theory of the Creator; but such a proof does not exist in Nature. . . . In this regard we may justly quote the saying: 'Should not our perfect Law be as good as their gossip.'81

78Ibid., p. 108. 79cf. supra, p. 93.
81Ibid., p. 110; Saying is from Babylonian Talmud, Baba-bathra, 115b.
There are, then, two reasons for holding the creation ex nihilo: first, it has been revealed by God; second, the opposing argument for the eternity of the universe is not only unproved but leaves unanswered objections which creation and design can answer.

A final, important note on Maimonides' treatment of this problem gives us his rule for all Biblical interpretation.

We do not reject the Eternity of the Universe because certain passages in Scripture confirm the Creation; for such passages are not more numerous than those in which God is represented as a corporeal being; nor is it impossible or difficult to find for them a suitable interpretation. We might have explained them in the same manner as we did in respect to the Incorporeality of God.

In other words, God's incorporeality has been proved, the eternity of the universe has not and "a mere argument in favour of a certain theory is not sufficient reason for rejecting the literal meaning of a Biblical text."

The theory of the eternity of the universe makes all miracles impossible, if we follow the Aristotelian argument; the Platonic theory of the origin of the world does not make miracles impossible, but "there is no necessity for this expedient, so long

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82 Cf. supra, pp. 28-60.
83 Maimonides, Guide, II, 118.
84 Loc. cit. Italics not in original.
To sum up, 86

Owing to the absence of all proof, we reject the theory of the Eternity of the Universe; and it is for this very reason that the noblest minds spent and will spend their days in research. For if the Creation had been demonstrated by proof, even if only according to the Platonic hypothesis, all arguments of the philosophers against us would be of no avail. If, on the other hand, Aristotle had a proof for his theory, the whole teaching of Scripture would be rejected, and we should be forced to other opinions. I have thus shown that all depends on this question. Note it. 87

85 Ibid., p. 119. Concerning miracles, cf. Maimonides, Shemonah Perakim, pp. 90-91: "We...believe that the Divine Will ordained everything at creation, and that all things, at all times, are regulated by the laws of nature, and run their natural course... This occasioned the sages to say that all miracles which deviate from the natural course of events, whether they have already occurred, or, according to promise, are to take place in the future, were fore-ordained by the Divine Will during the six days of creation, nature being then so constituted that those miracles which were to happen really did afterwards take place."

Cf. also loc. cit., n.: "Exodus Rabbah, XXI, 6: When God created the world He made an agreement that the sea should divide, the fire not hurt, the lions not harm, the fish not swallow persons singled out by God for certain times, and thus the whole order of things changes whenever He finds it necessary."

Cf. Roth, op. cit., pp. 95-98, on miracles and on what is impossible for God.

86 The philosophic arguments for and against creation are presented by Maimonides only in the Guide; in his other works, he presents the doctrine of creation as an article of faith, with no more argument than the fact that it is part of the Law. For this reason, discussion of the creation has been confined to the texts from the Guide.

A discussion of Maimonides' influence on St. Thomas' solution of this problem will be found in the general discussion of Maimonides' influence, cf. infra, Chap. X.

87 Maimonides, Guide, II, 120.
CHAPTER VIII

EVIL AND PROPHECY

As corollaries to our consideration of the nature of God, we shall now examine Maimonides' answer to the problem of evil, i.e., if God is perfectly good, how can there be evil in the universe He created? and the problem of prophecy, the problem of how men can prophesy future acts of God.

Maimonides' answer to the problem of evil is not, in any great measure, an unusual one; he answers it as would most philosophers who follow the Aristotelian system:

Evils are evils only in relation to a certain thing, and that which is evil in reference to a certain existing thing, either includes the non-existence of that thing or the non-existence of some of its good conditions. The proposition has therefore been laid down in the most general terms, "All evils are negations." Thus for man death is evil; death is his non-existence. Illness, poverty, and ignorance are evils for man; all those are privations of properties.1

After these propositions, it must be admitted as a fact that it cannot be said of God that He directly creates evil, or He has the direct intention to produce evil; this is impossible. His works are all perfectly good. He only produces existence, and all existence is good; whilst evils are of a negative character, and cannot be acted upon. . . . He creates evil only in so far as He produces the corporeal element such as it actually is; it is always connected with negatives and on that account the source of all destruction and evil.

1Maimonides, Guide, III, p. 34.
... Even the existence of this corporeal element, low as it in reality is, because it is the source of death and all evils, is likewise good for the permanence of the Universe and the continuation of the order of things, so that one thing departs and the other succeeds.2

The solution, then, is that whatever is is good; a thing is evil only irsofar as it is non-being.

What of the evils "which men cause to each other because of certain intentions, desires, opinions, or religious principles"? These are likewise "due to non-existence, because they originate in ignorance, which is absence of wisdom."3

At this point, Maimonides considers the types of evil with which man is burdened, and shows that most of them are his own fault.

Very often the throngs of the unreasonable will, in their hearts, put forth the claim that there is more evil than good in this world, so that in a great number of proverbs and poems of most peoples, it appears as though finding good anywhere were almost a miracle, and as though evil prevailed and endured. This error is not confined to the unreasonable, but is common even among those who consider themselves wise. Thus Al-Razi, in his famous book, which he called On Metaphysics, collected many of his absurd and foolish ideas, and among them a concept he made up for himself, namely, that more evil exists than good.4

2Ibid., p. 35
3Ibid., p. 36.
4Maimonides, "Design in the Universe", In Time and Eternity, ed. Nahum E. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), p.25. This translation of the Guide, III, 12 is used in preference to Friedlander's because of its greater literary value, which gives a better idea of Maimonides' style than the latter's somewhat pedantic version. For comparison, I quote Friedlander's version of this paragraph, italicizing special differences in emphasis; p. 37: "Men frequently think that the evils in the world are
The cause of this error is that... every fool thinks that life is there for his sake alone, and as though nothing existed but he. And so, when anything happens that opposes his wishes, he concludes that the whole universe is evil. But if man would regard the whole universe itself and realize what an infinitesimal part he plays in it, the truth would be clear and apparent to him. He would see that men have formulated the stupid generality of the prevalence of evil in this world (which they have thought up for themselves) not with regard to the Divine Messengers, or to the spheres and stars, or to the elements and whatever is composed of them, or to stones and plants, or to the species of other living things, but with regard to some particular instance in mankind.

It is our opinion that the universe exists only for the sake of the Creator [not for man]. Yet man is the most important of all the creatures in this lower world... and so his life is a great treasure and a grace of God by which He has distinguished man.

What is really to blame for these many evils we seem to find in the world?

Most of the evil that befalls individuals comes from the imperfections within themselves. Out of these imperfections of ours we cry out demands. The evil we inflict upon our-

more numerous than the good things; many sayings and songs of the rations dwell upon this idea. They say that a good thing is found only exceptionally, whilst evil things are numerous and lasting. Not only common people make this mistake, but even many who believe that they are wise. Al-Razi wrote a well-known book "On Metaphysics." Among other mad and foolish things, it contains also the idea, discovered by him, that there exists more evil than good.

Cf. Maimonides, Guide, III, 37-38: "an ignorant man believes that the whole universe only exists for him; as if nothing else required any consideration. If, therefore, anything happens to him contrary to his expectations, he at once concludes that the whole universe is evil."


selves, of our own volition, and which pains us, we ascribe to God. How very remote from Him it is! As it is clearly expressed in His Book:8 "Is corruption His? No; His children's is the blemish; a generation crooked and perverse."9

These evils can be classified in three groups: the first "consists of the evils that befall men from the very nature of being born and dying";10

he who is made of flesh and bone and yet does not wish to be subject to that to which all matter is subject, is trying to reconcile two contrasts without realizing it: he wants to be subject and not subject to change.11

These evils are rare, and occur infrequently. "Thousands of persons are born in the best of health, and the birth of an ailing child is a rare event and a special case."12

The second category consists of the evils that men inflict upon one another, in that they use violence against one another. This evil is more frequently encountered than the evils in the first category, and the reasons are well known; they too lie within ourselves, yet no amount of wisdom can obviate them. ... It is rare, and we find it only where a man schemes against another, to murder him or to steal his money by right. It is true that in great wars this category of evils affects many people; but this too does not occur in the major part of the inhabited earth.13

The third class is that which affects a man as the result of his own actions, and "this category is the one found most

8Deut. 32, 5.
frequently."¹⁴ It "affects all men, so that they cry aloud, and this is because there is none who has not sinned against himself."¹⁵

The wise, however, can see the wisdom in the universe; they set up as their goal understanding, and seek only what is necessary. What seems difficult to you in this connection, too difficult and too burdensome for us, is only because of the superfluous. For if you seek after what is not necessary, it will become difficult to find even what is necessary, and the more men desire what is superfluous, the more difficult this thing becomes. Not only are strength and possessions corroded by what is unnecessary, but even what is necessary is lacking!¹⁶

All necessary things are fully and cheaply provided by God; air is most plentifully supplied, water, which is more necessary to life than food, is abundant, and even the more important foods are abundant and cheap. "Musk and ambergris, rubies and emeralds -- I do not think that anyone with perfect understanding could believe that these are necessary to man."¹⁷

Further, no animal is extraordinarily endowed or extraordinarily lacking in its needs. God "has given us life, that is the great and perfect good, as we have demonstrated."¹⁸

¹⁷Ibid., p. 29; cf. Guide, III, 43-44.
These evils of which man complains, then, appear to him as evils only because he makes himself the center of the universe or else they are the result of his own actions. For either he bewails the fact that he is subject to change, ignoring the fact that this is a necessary part of a material nature, or he brings evil upon himself and blames God for it. He wants the whole universe run merely to give him pleasure.

To return to our first statement, evil is called evil only in relation to some existing thing, and is called evil only insofar as it refers to the non-existence of that thing or of some good connected with it. Evil, then, is the lack of good, the lack of being.

This seems an obvious and clear explication of the problem of evil as it must follow from the concept of God as good and absolutely existing and from "God saw everything He had made, and behold, it was very good."19 Necessarily, Maimonides must explain evil in the world as due to something besides the action of the Creator and, since all that exists is due to His action, evil must in some way be non-existence.

However, even so simple a solution in existential philosophy can be misinterpreted:

With the attributes goes the problem of evil. Just as there is no absolute good, so there is no absolute evil. . . . Many

things are evil to man, but man has no right to set himself up as the ultimate standard.20

This borders almost on the sophistic interpretation of Maimonides. As has been demonstrated, the Maimonidean view is not that "there is no absolute good" but that there is no good distinct from God, in the absolute sense; that the Good cannot be considered as an attribute, but must be part of His simple, absolute existence. "All existence is good," he says;21 the absolute existence is therefore the absolute good, but the two are one in Him. This interpretation, we might say, is not a case of mis-reading Maimonides but of not-reading Maimonides.

Further, the statement that "man has no right to set himself up as the ultimate standard" of good and evil is certainly true. Many of the things which man considers evils are so only if he makes himself the center of all creation, as an individual; but only by judging good and evil on this very basis can one say that "there is no absolute good or evil."

Such a statement means really that because man can err concerning good and evil, there is no such thing as good or evil. This is, to use the words of the Rabbi, a foolish and absurd notion, since the only way in which the statement that man can err concerning good and evil can be intelligible is on the basis that there is some standard of good and evil independent of man. If

man is the measure, if things are good and evil only because man thinks they are, then, obviously, we cannot say man is wrong in his judgment.

This same commentator makes an even more specific misapplication of Maimonides on evil:

We have the curious paradox that both Maimonides and Spinoza, who alike, and with the most uncompromising frankness, deny categorically the absolute validity of moral values, yet devote all their energies to the investigation of what is good for man.22

If this were true, it would indeed be a "curious paradox"; it would, in fact, be pure idiocy. As to what Spinoza actually says, we will not concern ourselves here, but we will investigate those portions of Maimonides' writings on which the conclusion is based.

The first reference is to the discussion in the Guide of the fall of Adam;23 indeed, this is the only reference of any importance. This section of the Guide concerns itself with the statement that, after Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he 'knew good and evil.' From this, presumably, one should infer Maimonides held that there was no absolute scale of moral values and that morality was invented by God as a punishment for Adam's disobedience.24

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22Roth, op. cit., p. 108.


24Perhaps a frivolous way of stating the argument, but it does not deserve much better.
Let us, however, examine what Maimonides says:  

When Adam was yet in a state of innocence, and was guided solely by reflection and reason. . . , he was not at all able to follow or to understand those principles of apparent truths; the most manifest impropriety, viz., to appear in a state of nudity, was nothing unbecoming according to his idea: he could not comprehend why it should be so. After man's disobedience, however, when he began to give way to desires which had their source in his imagination and in the gratification of his bodily appetites. . . , he was punished by the loss of part of this intellectual faculty. He therefore transgressed a command with which he had been charged on the score of reason; and having obtained a knowledge of the apparent truths, he was wholly absorbed in the study of the beautiful and its opposite. . . . Further observe the passage, "And the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked." (Gen. iii. 7): it is not said, "And the eyes of both were opened, and they saw"; for what the man had seen previously and what he saw after this circumstance was precisely the same; there had been no blindness which was now removed, but he received a new faculty whereby he found things wrong which previously he had not regarded as wrong.  

Maimonides, then, is not denying the validity of moral values; he is rather distinguishing between the truths of reason and "apparent truths," such as the "manifest impropriety" of nudity. Here the Rabbi provides us with a clear example of his meaning.  

To Adam, in a state of innocence and guided solely by reason, there was nothing wrong in nudity; when he began to give way to desires which had their "source in his imagination and in the gratification of his bodily appetites," he found it wrong. In other words, to the pure reason, judging between true and false, there is nothing contradictory in man's being naked; but to the
fallen man, who is ruled rather by his bodily desires than by truth, this nakedness can lead to sin.

There are two ways in which things and actions can be considered: the reason considers them as true or false, the will as right or wrong. Before Adam's sin, there was no need for the second classification, since his reason was never in conflict with his will. The reason told him whether an action was true or false and the will was never drawn towards the false in any way. Only when man began to seek his own "bodily gratifications" rather than the truth was there any necessity for a classification of actions which were contrary to reason.

As contributory evidence, let us consider a text from another of Maimonides' works:

Les assertions exemptes de démonstration sont de quatre especes:
   10) les données de sens. . . .
   20) Les axiomes ou les données immediates de la raison.
   . . .
   30) Les opinions repandues. Ex. La nudité des parties honteuses est blamable; recompenser généreusement un bien-faiteur, c'est convenable.
   40) Les assertions traditionelles dues au témoignage d'une ou de plusieurs personnages dignes de foi. Car, nous soumettons a l'épreuve l'intégrité de la personne qui transmet le témoignage, plutôt que de demontrer chacune de ses assertions. Aussi, nous appuyons-nous exclusivement sur la borre foi du rapporteur dont l'integrite est reconnue par ailleurs. 28

The third class of unprovable "assertions" is the same as the class of "apparent truths" in the Guide; the fourth includes those

28 Maimonides, Makala, p. 67.
laws of the faith for which he can find no basis in reason or in
man's fallen nature.

It is on the third group, however, that the assertion
that Maimonides denies "categorically the absolute validity of
moral values" is based. It is clear that Maimonides does not
dery the validity of moral values; what he is doing rather is
pointing out that many of our moral standards are necessary be-
cause man no longer acts according to reason alone.

Certainly, Maimonides denies the absolute validity of
some standards of conduct, e.g., the tabu on nudity, if "derying
validity" is defined as "saying that the intellect cannot dis-
cover purely intellectual reasons for them." If nudity were
wrong per se, Maimonides would have difficulty explaining how, as
in some of his medical treatises, he advises weekly bathing.

This would, however, be a very special definition of
"derying validity," and one certainly not explicit in the criti-
cism quoted. The statement that, after the Fall, Adam found some
things wrong "which he had not previously regarded as wrong" is
not a statement that there are no moral values.

One further criticism of Maimonides' moral theory, as
expressed in the Guide, should be considered here; that found in
the Errores Philosophorum of Giles of Rome:

11. Ulterius erravit circa humanos actus, ponens sim-
plicem fornicationem nullo modo esse peccatum in iure natu-
sitting down, his rising up and his speech shall be facing this goal. . .29

On this basis we can summarize the argument. God is the Absolute Existent; He is Good and, therefore, whatever exists is good insofar as it exists. Evil is the negation of some existence or of some perfection of existence. Moral evil or wrong results from man's making himself the standard and the goal of his actions; moral good consists in turning from self towards God and seeking to know Him. The standard of moral values and of good is absolute, but it is not man; it is the Absolute, Himself.

The second problem to be considered in this chapter, that of prophecy, takes up a large section of the Guide30 besides frequent mentions in the Mishnah and the Shemonah Perakim. Here we shall attempt no more than a brief statement of Maimonides' theory on the subject.

First, let us quote another of Giles of Rome's criticisms:

7. Ulterius erravit circa prophetiam, credens hominem se posse sufficienter disponere ad gratiam prophetiae, et quod Deus non elegit in prophetando quemcumque hominem singularem, sed illum qui se adaptat ad talia.31

Indeed, Maimonides dismisses the opinion that "God selects any person He pleases. . .whether that person be wise or

29Maimonides, Mishnah, p. 194.
31Giles of Rome, op. cit., p. 62, ll. 7-9.
stupid, old or young; provided he be, to some extent, morally good," but he also says that "even if one has the capacity for prophecy, and has duly prepared himself, it may yet happen that he does not actually prophesy. It is in that case the will of God." "It depends chiefly on the will of God who shall prophesy, and at what time, and... He only selects the best and the wisest. We hold that fools and ignorant people are unfit for this distinction." Know, then, that no prophet received the gift of prophecy, unless he possessed all the mental virtues and a great majority of the most important moral ones. ... It is not, however, an indispensable requirement that a prophet should possess all the moral virtues, and be entirely free from every defect. ... Thou must not be surprised to learn, however, that a few moral imperfections lessen the degree of prophetic inspiration.

It is apparent that Giles is, to a certain degree, correct in his appraisal; Maimonides does hold that God does not choose just anyone for prophecy, yet he also holds that the final decision rests entirely with God, and that no amount of preparation on man's part is in itself sufficient for prophecy.

It is not our intention here to investigate the validity of Maimonides' opinion, though it seems he holds rather that God would not honor an unfit man with the faculty of prophecy than

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33 Ibid., p. 162.  
34 Ibid., p. 164.
that he cannot. For this opinion, no proof is offered.

The briefest statement of the way in which prophecy occurs is the following:

It is a fundamental part of religion to acknowledge that God bestows prophecy upon the sons of men. But prophecy does not descend save upon a wise man, eminent in wisdom, of sterling character, never subdued by worldly passion, but conquering it by an ever-present will-power, broad-minded and settled to the highest degree. A man, endowed with all these moral principles, of sound physique, when he enters the Vineyard, and is carried away with the current of these great and remote subjects, and possessed of a mind ready to understand and attain, he continuing to gain in saintliness, separated from the general public which follows the dark paths of the times, continuing to take care of himself, training his soul to heed no thought in idle affairs nor in the vanities and phantasies of the time, but his mind be constantly ready and directed Upward, connected to the Throne Beneath, to understand the Holy and Pure Intellegences and to penetrate the scope of the Wisdom of the Holy One, blessed is He! from the First Intelligence even unto the summit of the earth to know from them His greatness -- immediately the Holy Spirit will rest upon him.

And, when the Spirit will rest upon him, his soul will be mingling with the Angels of the degree of the Sphere called Men, and will be transformed into another being, and will understand his own intelligence, that he is not as he was, but that he is elevated above the degree of other wise sons of man, as it is said of Saul: "And thou shalt prophesy among them and thou shalt be turned into another man." (I Sam. 10. 6)36

As we noted in considering the problem of evil, the fall of Adam consisted in his turning from his state of innocence, in which he was guided by reason alone, to a condition in which he was guided by his desire for self-gratification. We see here that the preparation for prophecy consists in an attempt to re-

36Maimonides, Mishnah, pp. 158-159.
turn to that original state of innocence, so far as possible; the 
would-be prophet separates himself from the "general public," 
from the "dark paths of the times" and directs his mind Upward, 
"to penetrate the scope of wisdom of the Holy One."

After a man has gone through this process of raising 
himself by self-control and self-denial and by reflecting on the 
nature of God and the universe, the "Holy Spirit" rests upon him, 
he becomes united with the Intelligence of the lowest Sphere, and 
receives the gift of prophecy. The process, then, is one of 
union with the active intellect which unites God and man through 
the system of Intelligences emanating from Him.

It is after this discussion that Maimonides begins to 
make apparent the reason that "only the best and wisest" are se-
lected for prophecy by God, for, he says,

not every one who delivers a token or performs a miracle 
should be believed to be a prophet; for only such man whom 
we knew heretofore to be worthy of prophecy, both by his 
wisdom and by his conduct. . . . if, thereafter, he came and 
delivered a token and performed a miracle and said that he 
is a messenger of God, it is a mandatory commandment to hear-
ken unto him.37

Tokens and miracles, then, are not sufficient proof of 
a prophet, since these may possibly be the result of witchcraft.38

Why is it so necessary that there be some other standar 
by which to tell a true prophet than tokens and miracles?

37 Ibid., pp. 163-164. 38 Ibid., pp. 164-165.
If a prophet arose and performed great tokens and miracles and thereby seeks to deny the prophecy of Moses our Master, we must not hearken to him, for we know clearly that those tokens are of enchantment and witchcraft, because the prophecy of Moses our Master is not based upon the tokens so as to make a comparison between the tokens of this one and the tokens of that one; for with our own eyes we saw it, and with our own ears we heard it even as he himself heard. . . whereas we do not believe in a miracle save because of the commandments which Moses commanded us, how will we accept this token which is brought to deny the prophecy of Moses which we saw and heard?39

Here, then, is the reason for the preparatory requirements; they are intended to safeguard the Mosaic law against false prophets. The prophecy of Moses is certified, not by miracles and tokens, but by the very voice of God, Himself; "with our own eyes we saw, with our own ears we heard." Whosoever denies his prophecies or breaks his laws cannot be accounted a true prophet, regardless of tokens.

It is a clear and manifest principle concerning the Torah that as a Law it is permanently established forever and evermore; and that it is not subject to mutability [sic], nor to diminution, nor to amendment. . . . Therefore, should a man rise up, whether he be from among the Gentiles or whether from among Israel, and deliver a token and perform a miracle saying, that God hath sent him to add a commandment, or to diminish a commandment, or to interpret a certain commandment of among the commandments with such interpretation as we have not heard by tradition from Moses; or he said, that these commandments with which Israel was charged are not forever and throughout all generations, but that they were commandments in keeping with those times only, behold him, he is a false prophet, seeing that he came to deny the prophecy of Moses. . . . for He, blessed is He! commanded Moses, saying, that this enactment was "unto us and our children forever" (Deut. 29. 28): and, "God is not a man that He should lie" (Num. 23. 19).40

39Ibid., p. 166.  
40Ibid., pp. 169-170.
No prophet, then, no matter what evidence he offers, can be a true prophet if he seeks to change the Torah. Indeed, "even concerning thought which causes man to delete a principle of the fundamentals of the Torah are we charged not to offer it to our heart, not to concentrate our mind thereon and reason it out and be drawn after the swerving fancies of the heart." 41

Here also apply the first two categories of infidels:

(1) he who says that prophecy is altogether an invention, and that no knowledge reaches the heart of the sons of man from the Creator;
(2) he who denies the prophecy of Moses our Master; 42

and the third category of

Torah traducers... he who says that the Creator commuted this Duty for another duty and that the Torah had been nullified long ago though it really was God given. 43

The purpose behind Maimonides' doctrine of prophecy does not require much further explication; the various statements above give the basic argument. A true prophet must be a man of wisdom and virtue; he must have all the mental virtues. No ignorant man will be a true prophet.

Secondly, the law of Moses will be the standard by which a prophet may be judged. No matter what miracles he may perform, if he denies one word of the Torah, he is a false prophet, a traducer and an infidel.

41Ibid., p. 291.
42Ibid., p. 399.
43Ibid., p. 400.
Certainly, the defence of Judaism from Christianity is not the only purpose of this doctrine; Maimonides intends to preserve the law of Moses from all those who wish to make any change in it. Yet the miraculous beginnings of the Christian religion are, most probably, near the head of the list of false prophecies he has in mind.
CHAPTER IX

GOD AND MAN

We have already considered several aspects of God in relation to His universe: God as Creator, the problem of evil in His creation, His gift of prophecy to men. Here we shall present no more than a summary of some of the more important remaining points.

The position of Maimonides is that man's purpose on earth is to love and fear God, which is most properly done by an attempt to know Him through His creation, though it is impossible for the mind of man, while in the body, to arrive at a true conception of Him. The moral good for man is to follow the laws of the Torah, out of love of God.

Every man was endowed with a free will; if he desires to bend himself toward the good path and to be just, it is within the power of his hand to reach out for it, and if he desires to bend himself to a bad path and to be wicked, it is within the power of his hand to reach out for it. . . this species, man, stands alone in the world, and there is no other kind like him, as regards this subject of being able to his own accord, by his reason and thought, to know the good and the evil, and to do whatever his inclination dictates him with none to stay his hand from either doing good or evil.¹

But if God knows beforehand that a certain man will be

¹Maimonides, Mishnah, p. 410.
just, how can we say that this man is free to be just or not?

The Holy One, blessed is He! does not know of things with a knowledge which is outside of Himself. ... but He, may His Name be exalted! and His knowledge are One, and it is not within the power of the knowledge of man to attain this matter clearly, and even as it is not within the power of man to attain and find the truth of the Creator. ... This being so, it is not within our intellectual power to know in what manner the Holy One, blessed is He! knows all the creatures and their actions, but we do know without a doubt that man's behavior is in the hand of man.2

Man, then, most certainly has a free will; God, most certainly, is omniscient. How this apparent contradiction is resolved is beyond human understanding. Some commentators seem to find in this answer and explanation an "evasion" of the problem, yet it seems the only answer which reason can give. As Maimonides says, concerning those who raise the question, they are,

it is true, aware that the divine essence, as it is, is incomprehensible, yet they strive to comprehend God's knowledge, so that they may know it, but this is, of course, impossible. ... If we are asked, "What is the nature of God's knowledge?" we answer that we do not know any more than we know the nature of His true existence.3

Man has control over his actions; he is also under the influence of Divine Providence, in proportion to his endowment of intellect;4

I do not ascribe to God ignorance of anything or any kind of weakness; I hold that Divine Providence is related and closely connected with the intellect, because Providence can

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2Ibid., pp. 414-417.
3Maimonides, Shemonah, pp. 101-102; cf. supra, p. 44,n.83
only proceed from an intelligent being, from a being that is itself the most perfect Intellect. Those creatures, therefore, which receive part of that intellectual influence, will become subject to the action of Providence in the same proportion as they are acted upon by the Intellect.\(^5\)

Further, since the species as such exists only in the mind, this influence of Providence will descend to the individual intelligent creature, rather than to the species of mankind as a whole.\(^6\)

Such a conception of Providence is a logical outcome of Maimonides' theories. The form\(^7\) of man is his intellect:\(^8\)

The soul of all flesh is the form which God gave unto him, and the high intelligence which is found in the soul of man is the form of the man who is perfectly intelligent. Concerning this form it is said in the Torah: "Let us make man in our form after our image" (Gen. 1:26), as if saying that he should possess a form which knows and attains the Intelligences which have no body, as angels, which are forms without a body, thereby being like unto them.\(^9\)

From this it follows that man's love of God must be based upon his intellect and God's care for man be also based on the intellect, since it is through the intellect that man is like

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 78. \(^6\)Ibid., pp. 79-82.

\(^7\)Maimonides, Makalā, p. 80: "Notons reanmoins que la forme des choses naturelles ne consiste pas dans leur aspect extérieur ou dans leur configuration. La forme d'une chose naturelle est sa quiddité, ce qui caractérise l'espece et sans quoi individu n'appartiendrait pas à son espèce."

\(^8\)Ibid., pp. 80-81: "Considéron p. ex. l'être humain qui est une chose naturelle. Sa matière, c'est son organisme; sa forme, c'est la faculté de la raison; sa cause finale, c'est l'action d'acquérir les connaissances rationnelles; enfin, sa cause efficiente, c'est Celui qui a doué l'homme de sa forme, de sa faculté de raisonner; car nous entendons par cause efficiente l'Étre qui donne à la matière, la forme; c'est-à-dire Dieu."

\(^9\)Maimonides, Mishnah, p. 142.
God and is linked to Him. According to his intellectual capacity for the knowledge of God, therefore, and according to his actual knowledge of God, man is cared for by Divine Providence. Indeed, his protection by God is dependent on his reflection on God:

Providence watches over every rational being according to the amount of intellect which that being possesses. Those who are perfect in their perception of God, whose mind is never separated from Him, enjoy always the influence of Providence. But those who, perfect in their knowledge of God, turn their mind sometimes away from God, enjoy the presence of Divine Providence only when they meditate on God; when their thoughts are engaged in other matters divine Providence departs from them. . . because when a person perfect in his knowledge is busy with worldly matters, he has not knowledge in actuality, but only in near potentiality.10

Thus, the whole life of man centers around his reflection and meditation on God; upon his knowledge of God depends not only his love and his fear of God, but also God's care for him. Upon this knowledge, also, depends man's reward and punishment after death.

The reward of the just is, that they will acquire the sweetness thereof [the World to Come], to be in such goodness; and the punishment of the wicked is, that they will not share in such life, but will suffer excision and eternal death. And, whoever does not earn such life, is to be dead, without coming to life forever; for he is severed from life by his iniquity and goes to oblivion like cattle. . . ."That soul which was separated from the body in this world shares not in the life of the World to Come, for even from the World to Come is it cut off.

The World to Come harbors neither body nor aught of a concrete form, save only the souls of the righteous divested of body as are the ministering angels. . . .

The term soul employed on this subject refers not to the breath of life necessary for the body, but the form of the

soul which is the intelligence by which it attained knowledge of the Creator's Being according to its intellectual power, and by which it attained knowledge of the non-concrete intelligences and other works of God. . . . there is no death connected with it, seeing that death is only incidental to the happenings which befall a body, and . . . there exists no body. II

It is difficult to achieve a precise explanation of Maimonides' theory of reward and punishment, due to the difficulty of deciding the precise sense of terms, particularly those used in setting forth the theory of punishment, the "excision and eternal death."

At any rate, Maimonides considers the life after death to be one of the soul alone, the form or intelligence. Now, if the form is taken to mean the intelligence and the intelligence to mean "the knowledge of the Creator's Being" and "knowledge of the non-concrete intelligences and other works of God," it will follow that the man who knows absolutely nothing of God and His works will, in this strict sense of the term, lack a soul entirely.

This follows, of course, from Maimonides' version of the Aristotelian notion of the intellect:

Man, before comprehending a thing, comprehends it in potential; when, however, he comprehends a thing, e.g., the form of a certain tree which is pointed out to him, when he abstracts its form from its substance, and reproduces the abstract form, an act performed by the intellect, he comprehends in reality, and the intellect which he has acquired in actuality, is the abstract form of the tree in man's mind. For in such a case the intellect is not a thing distinct from

II Maimonides, Mishnah, pp. 430-433.
the thing comprehended. 12

What survives of the individual after death is this sum of knowledge which he has acquired during his life, "according to [his] intellectual power."

Does man remain an individual after death? Pearson, using the passage from the Mishnah as a basis, argues that since the soul, when dissociated from matter, knows only the intelligences, it loses all individuality. 13 This does not necessarily follow; if mere dissociation from matter makes individuality impossible, there would be no possibility of differentiation between the intelligences or angels themselves, 14 whom Maimonides classifies as incorporeal. 15

Maimonides, himself, distinguished between the angels in that they are not alike in their being, but each of them functions in a lesser degree than the other, and each one derives his being from the power of the one above him. . . lesser degree does not mean a degree in place. . . but as it is said of two scholars that one is greater than the other in learning who is of a degree higher than the other, and, as we speak of the cause as of a higher degree than the thing to which it gives being. 16

Here, it seems, is the basis on which we can posit in-


14 Pearson, of course, says, op. cit., p. 130: "we leave out of account the angels, to whom Maimonides, rather on doctrinal and theological than on philosophical grounds, assigned an anomalous position."

15 Maimonides, Mishnah, p. 127. 16 Ibid., p. 128.
divinduality after death: the difference in degree, not of cause and effect, but in amount of knowledge. Since Maimonides definitely and frequently speaks of the different capacity for knowledge appertaining to different men, there is no reason for holding that all will have the same capacity after death. Indeed, this would make much of his theory of reward pointless, since each 'survivor' would receive the same post-mortal knowledge, regardless of his merit in life.

If we consider this difference in degree of knowledge as a basis, eternal individuality becomes at least a possibility, since the infinite incomprehensibility of God allows for an infinite number of degrees of comprehension.

What, however, does this leave us as an explanation of the "excision and eternal death" of the wicked? Obviously, if the intellect alone survives death, the measure of what survives is the amount of truth the intellect has acquired in life. Falsity, in the intellectual order, is non-existence; that part of the intellect, therefore, which has devoted itself to falsity cannot survive its separation from the body. If there be no truth whatever in it, there will be nothing to enter into the life after death.

The vengeance, than which there is none greater, is that the soul will be cut off and will obtain no share in that life. . . . As for hell, it is what the prophets call figuratively by different names, such as, pit of destruction, burning flame, leech, and by every word which means decay
and destruction is it called, because it is an expression of terminating decay from which there is no regeneration and a loss which remains forever unreturned. 17

Maimonides allows, indeed, for repentance:

though he continued a life of sin but did repent on his dying day, and did die a penitent, all of his sins are forgiven; 18

but if a man die with no truth in his soul, that soul, which has had no true existence even in this life, will certainly not exist in the next. 19

If, as was noted, all that survives a man's death is his intellect, this would seem the only possible interpretation of Maimonides' theory. As to whether any man ever merits this extreme of punishment, it would be difficult to say, since it is not stated by Maimonides that any man has died or even can die without acquiring any truth whatsoever.

Indeed, it is also possible to interpret the whole doctrine as metaphorical and call the eternal separation from God the "death" of the soul. This is, however, not justifiable in a strict interpretation of Maimonides; his whole philosophy and theology is based on the notion that man's rationality is his likeness to God and his way to God. It is certainly not inconsistent to hold that his reward will be his eternal knowledge of truth, unhampered

17Ibid., p. 434. 18Ibid., p. 385.
by the body, when he makes his whole purpose in life, according to the Rabbi, the thorough understanding of Metaphysics.
CHAPTER X

MAIMONIDES AND ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Maimonides is, of course, the high point in the history of Jewish philosophy. There were, before him, Jews who philosophized; there were, after him, philosophers who were Jews; but the perfect composite of Judaism and philosophy was achieved in no other thinker.¹ He has always been an important factor in the religious thought of the Jews, since the appearance of his first writings; as late as the eighteenth century we find the orthodox Jews regarding him with the suspicion usually accorded only to an innovator yet alive:

The young scholars of the town [Posen] passed a resolution at their meeting to make up a salary for me, in return for which I was to deliver lectures to them on the celebrated and profound work of Maimonides, Moreh Nebukhim. But this proposal was never carried out, because the parents of these young people were anxious lest their children should be thus

¹Cf. Harry Wolfson, "Maimonides and Halevi," Jewish Quarterly Review (new series), II 1911-1912, p. 314: "Maimonides was not a rabbi employing Greek logic and categories of thought in order to interpret Jewish religion; he was rather a true medieval Aristotelian, using Jewish religion as an illustration of the Stagirite's metaphysical supremacy."

Neither this view nor the one it opposes is accurate; Maimonides was most properly a Jewish philosopher-theologian, of which three elements none can properly be omitted.

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led astray, and by their independent thinking or religion be made to waver in their faith. They acknowledged indeed that with all my fondness for speculation I was still a pious man and an orthodox rabbi. But they could not rely upon their children having sufficient judgment to be able to enter upon this course without passing from one extreme to the other, from superstition to unbelief; and perhaps they were right. 2

Even today, Maimonides' writing is a required study for the understanding of contemporary Jewish theology; for the Jews, he is still the "Eagle of the Synagogue," it is still true that "from Moses to Moses, there arose no one like to Moses."

Still more impressive is the record of his influence on later philosophers. Mention has already been made of the connection between him and Spinoza, which has given rise to so much misinterpretation of Maimonides' philosophy; among the other relatively modern Jewish philosophers under his influence are Moses Mendelssohn and Solomon Maimon. 3

Since a definitive statement of Maimonides' influence is beyond the scope of this thesis, the discussion will be confined to his relation to the Christian Scholastics and most particularly to St. Thomas Aquinas, as the main representative of the Christian Aristotelians.

Many of the Christians made use of Maimonides' Guide; William of Auvergne is probably the first and Alexander of Hales follows Maimonides in many details of biblical interpretation. 4

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Albertus Magnus was acquainted with the works of Isaac
Israeli, Ibn Gabirol, Maimonides; St. Thomas also cites these
three Jews in his works.\(^5\) Roger Bacon's pupil, the author\(^6\) of
the *Summa philosophiae* edited in the name of Robert Grosseteste,
was "so satisfied with [Maimonides'] teaching that he assures us
that this sheet-anchor of Jewish theology was converted to Christi-
nity and wrote a work against Judaism and in defence of the
Catholic faith!"\(^7\) Maimonides is quoted also by Siger of Brabant,\(^8\)
Duns Scotus\(^9\) and Nicholas of Cusa.\(^10\)

According to Singer, the thought of both the Dominican
and Franciscan orders

exhibits many elements of Jewish origin. The chief Jewish
thinkers available to them were Maimonides and Avicebron. On
the whole, Maimonides was more used by the Dominicans, Avi-
cebron by the Franciscans.\(^11\)

Obviously, a detailed survey of Maimonides' influence
on Christian thought is impossible here;\(^12\) indeed, even a detailed
survey of his influence on St. Thomas will be impracticable. What
we shall do is sift through the various opinions on the extent of
the Angelic Doctor's indebtedness and attempt to ascertain their
validity.

Our object here, then, is no more than an indication of their relationship. There are three main views on the matter: the extreme pro-Maimonidean view, which holds that the Summae are little more than rewritings of the Guide; the extreme defence of St. Thomas' honor as an originator, which holds that all he took from the Guide were a few quotations and that he could have done without those; a view somewhere between these two, which holds that St. Thomas used the Guide as a help and a model but added a great deal to its concepts.

It seems obvious that both of the extreme views must be inaccurate since, if either were true, it would be impossible for reasonable men to present evidence for the opposite opinion. If St. Thomas took nothing important from the Guide, it would be impossible to find so much similarity between his works and Maimonides'; if he added nothing to the Guide, it would be impossible to present him as an original philosopher.

As a working hypothesis, then, but only as a hypothesis, we may begin by saying that St. Thomas both used the Guide and added to it. Our problem is not whether the Guide influenced his writings but how much it influenced them.

The influence is certainly not one of style. As we have noted at several points, Maimonides' way of treating dissenters is somewhat acid; he will not only disprove their opinions but add a few editorial comments on their stupidity in holding such a
view. This acerbity with objectors is notably lacking in St. Thomas.

Further, the format is different. The Guide was actually written as a series of letters to a pupil, Joseph ibn Ak-rim, which together make up a coherent work; however, they are in the style of connected discourse rather than the almost mathematical arrangement of the Summa Theologiae, with its "Objections" and "Answers to Objections" and "On the Contrary." 14

Any appraisal of Maimonides' influence must, therefore, be based on content. Here we are faced with several difficulties. In a modern work, one can almost prove the extent of the influence of one writer on another by the number of quotations one makes from the other; in a medieval work, this would be a waste of time. St. Thomas does, indeed, quote frequently from 'Rabbi Moyses the Egyptian,' but he quotes just as frequently from dozens of others and much more frequently, for instance, from St. Augustine, who is, in philosophy, usually on the opposite (or Platonic) side of the fence from both St. Thomas and the Rabbi.

The medieval habit of making any philosophic work a compendium of opinions makes it impossible for us to perform the evaluation by the simple though arduous task of counting heads. 15


14All comparisons are to the Guide, since this was the only one of Maimonides' works available to St. Thomas.

15Cf. infra, Appendix VII.
Nor is it possible to evaluate the influence of Maimonides simply by checking the points on which he and St. Thomas agree. The Catholic religion defines itself as the fulfillment of Judaism; the Jewish Torah is the Catholic Old Testament. It would be more a matter of comment if Jewish and Catholic theologians did not agree on major points than if they did. Indeed, as Gilson points out,16 of the thirteen articles of faith, which Maimonides valued most of all his work, at least nine "are common to Judaism and Christianity."17

Any analysis of his influence on St. Thomas, then, will have to be dependent on such of Maimonides' work as was not the common tradition of both religions. Thus, if we are to show any influence it must be on the basis of some opinion which cannot be found in the Christian tradition or of some interpretation of this tradition which can be found prior to St. Thomas in the Guide alone.18

We are not here affirming or denying that Maimonides influenced St. Thomas on these matters of doctrine common to both religions; we are merely saying that, due to this common tradition, it is almost impossible to conclude with any degree of accuracy.

18This is, of course, strictly speaking a physical impossibility, if only from the number of lost works.
For example, concerning the problem of evil, St. Thomas' answer is a restatement of the solution of St. Augustine and of Maimonides. In such a case, since St. Thomas had read both solutions, one might say that he was influence either by the Saint or by the Rabbi or by both or by neither, since the solution is by no means unique with them.

Perhaps by comparing texts and counting words and by other such methods of the 'Bacon-wrote-Shakespeare/Shakespeare-wrote-Bacon' school, one could establish a balance of probabilities in such an instance, but it is doubtful one could prove anything.

Further, such a method could be obviated by a slight attention to the psychology of philosophers. A sincerely religious philosopher, though he is seeking the truth wherever it may be found, would most probably rather find it within his own faith's philosophical writing. St. Thomas, indeed, was more than ordinarily tolerant, for his time, towards the Jews; he was no fanatic and had no personal feeling against them; in fact, "he considered that the Jews should have freedom of worship, since their religion contains the gners of Christianity." Yet, though he might quote a Jewish rabbi as authority to show that a certain opinion was held regardless of religion, I believe that in any case where it is possible, his own statement will be based on Christian rather than Jewish sources.

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19Singer, op. cit., p. 265. 20Ibid., p. 266.
This preference for Christian sources would, of course, have reference to discussions which occurred after the Christians became a sect distinct from the Jews; any sources prior to this time are the common property of both religions.

We must determine, then, what factors in the Guide would be unique in their influence on St. Thomas. We have ruled out the interpretation of the Torah except in such cases as St. Thomas follows an interpretation peculiar to Maimonides; we must also rule out points which are a matter of dogma rather than of reason, e.g., Maimonides' denial and St. Thomas' affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The remaining factor, then, is Maimonides' criticism of Aristotelianism. Let us here quote at length from the analysis by Husik, who has one of the more balanced considerations of this inter-relationship:

The Church [upon the introduction of Aristotle in Latin translation in the thirteenth century] took alarm because the new Aristotle constituted a danger to accepted dogma. He taught the eternity of the world, the uniformity of natural law, the unity of human intellect.21

Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas undertook the study of Aristotle and the interpretation of his works with a view to harmonizing his teachings with the dogmas of Christianity. Albertus Magnus began the task, Thomas Aquinas, his greater disciple, the Maimonides of Christian philosophy,22 completed it. And in this undertaking, Maimonides was Thomas Aquinas' model.23

Judaism had to be formulated and defended with a view not so much to the dangers threatening from Christianity and Mohammedanism as to those endangering all religions alike, namely the opinions of science and philosophy, as taught especially by the Aristotelians. Hence, ... Thomas Aquinas the Christian had no scruple in making the Jewish philosopher's method his own when he undertook to defend the Catholic faith "contra Gentiles".24

It is no doubt an exaggeration to say that there would have been no Aquinas if Maimonides had not preceded him. For Aquinas had access to the works of Aristotle and his Arabian commentators, the former of whom he studied more diligently than Maimonides himself. But there is no doubt that the method of harmonizing Aristotelian doctrine with traditional teaching so far as the common elements of Judaism and Christianity were concerned was suggested to Aquinas by his Jewish predecessor.25

St. Thomas' peculiar problem, then, is the harmonization of Aristotle and the Church; Catholic doctrine in itself was in no difficulty, but it seemed to be in definite conflict with the new science, just now available after the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1207.

The problem is the same as that with which Maimonides had been faced:26 are religion and reason naturally contradictory? Can a man correlate revelation and science or must he choose between them? The Christian tradition, so far as philosophy was concerned, had been for the most part a Platonic and Neo-Platonic one; this, with its mystical overtones, fitted itself well to the

interpretation of the Scriptures. However, the Aristotelian phi-
losophy, with its factual, experimental attitude, so well pre-
pared for by the emphasis on the Organon in the preceding century, 
posed a problem. Whereas the Platonic and Neo-Platonic philo-
osophy had made a point of being detached, Aristotle was an extremely 
down-to-earth thinker; his premises could be checked against the 
facts of experience. So, it seemed, when his conclusions contra-
dicted revelations, one must either deny the validity of faith or 
of reason or relegate them to different strata entirely.

This problem had already been faced, and faced most 
thoroughly by Maimonides in the context of the Jewish faith; the 
Christian philosophers had considered it to some extent and some 
of the Thomistic doctrine concerning it can be traced to Albertus 
Magnus and other Christian thinkers. Here, however, we will con-
cern ourselves only with the direct influence of Maimonides.

In order to determine his influence on Thomas, we must 
consider the main problems with which Judaism and Christianity 
were presented by Aristotle. The first is, of course, the nature 
of God, the First Cause, Prime Mover, thought thinking itself, in 
relation to the God of the Bible. The second is the creation ex 
nihilo as opposed to the eternity of the universe and, as a sub-
division of the problem, the uniformity of natural law. The 
third is the unity of the human intellect as opposed to the doc-
trine of the individual responsibility and reward of men.
Maimonides' conception of God has already been considered; the absolute immutability and unity of the Aristotelian deity led him to deny all attributes, even to the point of saying that any term used in reference to both God and man is used equivocally. This is, obviously, the first reaction which would follow from trying to reconcile Aristotle and the Torah; it is not, as Wolfson puts it, reducing the idea of God "to a vanishing point,"27 but rather an attempt to remove all corporeal characteristics from the idea.

Here, it seems, can be found a definite effect on St. Thomas. Certainly, he disagrees with the Rabbi or the statement that all terms must be used equivocally or negatively concerning God28 and clarifies the discussion with the analogy of being, but would this theory have evolved to its advanced state without the Guide? Before Maimonides, both Jewish and Christian thinkers had already said that God was necessarily incorporeal, but the very all-inclusive nature of his consideration of the problem makes it a new solution.

That is to say, one can state and believe that God is not man all one's life and philosophers can point it out throughout the history of philosophy, from Heraclitus' scorn of anthropomorphism on; but until someone systematically attacks all the

attributes ascribed to Him, the problem is not properly set.

Maimonides performed the attack: he denied that any term could be properly applied to God. Immediately, the problem appears: How then can we say anything about Him? This is the question that St. Thomas' analogy answers and there seem good grounds for saying his development of the doctrine is determined to a great extent by the completeness of Maimonides' attack.

Maimonides had, that is, permanently destroyed the possibility of attributing any characteristic univocally to God and man; for him, this left only the possibility of equivocal and negative attribution. But equivocal attribution means we are actually saying nothing about God's nature and negative attribution means that we are saying only what God is not. Regardless of the ways in which this doctrine can be interpreted, taken literally it means that we can know absolutely nothing about God. This attitude is completely repugnant to the whole spirit of St. Thomas, as, indeed, it is also to that of Maimonides.

The problem, then, is: How can we know anything about God? There are only three possibilities: univocal knowledge, equivocal knowledge and analogous knowledge. The first is completely ruled out by Maimonides' arguments; the second is no knowledge at all, since it says merely that the terms applied to God are meaningless. Therefore, if we are to know Him, it must be analogously. The problem has been set and the only possible answer in-
dicated within the work of the Rabbi for, if Thomas says we can know God, he cannot ignore the Guide's restriction upon that knowledge. 29

Certainly, we would not deny that other and Christian sources influenced the development of the argument from analogy; it did not spring full-blown from the Guide through St. Thomas. What we do attempt to show here is not that Thomas conceived the whole notion from his reading of Maimonides but that he developed it more completely than he would have otherwise done, because the Rabbi had so effectively cleared away the disguising underbrush from the problem.

The proofs of God's existence according to the principle of Aristotle were, in all probability, mostly adaptations of those of Maimonides. "The first proof [from motion] recurs in its complete form in Albertus Magnus, who... borrows it, without doubt, from Maimonides." 30 Several more of Thomas' quinque viae 31 are also restatements of Maimonidean arguments. 32

29 Cf. supra, pp. 28-60, especially pp. 36-37 and n. 57.


31 Ibid., pp. 84-86.

32 Cf. supra, pp. 22-26; p. 25, n. 15.
Changing our order somewhat, let us take next the last of the three major problems of Aristotelianism common to both St. Thomas and Maimonides, that of the unity of the human intellect. Here, let us again quote Husik:

Thomas Aquinas, as a truer interpreter of Aristotle, goes so far as to maintain that the Active Intellect itself is also a part of the human soul, and not one of the angelic separate Intelligences. Neither Maimonides nor Hillel ben Samuel, nor any other Jewish philosopher was able to depart so widely from their Arabian masters or to undertake an independent study of Aristotle's text, as to come to a similar conclusion. Hence the Active Intellec in Jewish Philosophy is unanimously held to be the last of the Angelic substances, and the proximate inspirer of the prophet. 33

We have here no intention of determining the accuracy of this interpretation of Maimonides, i.e., whether he actually holds that there is no part of the Active Intellect in the individual soul; though it would seem from what we have noted previously34 that this is not precisely his position. If there is but one Active Intellect, in which all men participate, on what does Maimonides base his distinction between the varying 'capacities' of various men?

I think it would be more proper to interpret Maimonides as believing in two types of Active Intellects: the Intellect proper, comprising the sum total of knowledge concerning the lowest sphere, and the individual's intellect, comprising his capacity for that knowledge, a capacity definite and determined both before and after death.

33 Husik, History, p. 323. 34 See supra, pp. 113-123.
Be that as it may, the point to be considered here is the difference between his interpretation and St. Thomas'. "The Active Intellect is a part of the human soul, and not one of the separate intelligences": why?

Examining Maimonides' doctrine, we came to the conclusion that man could only retain his individuality after death if his knowledge remained limited after death as before; the distinction between incorporeal beings is one of degree and, if these incorporeal beings exist only as knowing God (an idea not too un-Christian), the only differentiation between them will be on the grounds of difference in knowledge.

Now, if there be no individual active intellect, obviously, there will be no individual after death; each portion of the whole Intelligence will rejoin the whole. To maintain man's individuality, then, it is necessary that there be individual intelligents. We hold that this can be deduced from Maimonides' own theory, but, whether or not he actually held such a theory, it is apparent from our explication of his doctrine on life after death that such an opinion on the intellect is necessary to make this life after death individual.

The second problem we listed and the third we shall consider here is that of the creation ex nihilo. This is, of course, one of the most important points in discussing the harmonization of Aristotle and Scriptures; Aristotle holds the eternity of the
universe, Scriptures say that God created all from nothing.

This is one of the standard points of reference when considering the relationship between Maimonides and St. Thomas:

The indebtedness of Aquinas to Maimonides in this matter of maintaining the insufficiency of reason to prove or disprove the eternity of matter has been much exaggerated, and it is undeniable that to the study of the venerated question of the origin of the universe St. Thomas makes an entirely original contribution. He showed that the philosophical teret of the eternity of matter was not, as Maimonides thought, in itself irreconcilable with the dogma of creation ex nihilo. Primary matter must, in any event, be a creation of God. 35

What actually is St. Thomas' statement? "Supposing an eternal world to exist, it exists to the extent that God wills it to exist, since the being of the world depends on the will of God as on its cause." 36

Again, there is no doubt that to solve the problem of creation our philosopher has availed himself of the results of his predecessors, notably of Albertus Magnus and Moses Maimonides. The position adopted by him is not, however, identical with that of any one of his predecessors. Maimonides admits the creation of the world only on the authority of Revelation; St. Thomas, on the contrary, bases it on demonstrative arguments. But both philosophers agree that it is impossible to prove the beginning of the world in time, and further that it is always possible to deny the eternal existence of the world. 37


36 St. Thomas, S. Theo., I, 46, a.1; cf. ibid., I, 44, a.2.

37 Gilson, Philosophy of St. Thomas, pp. 150-151.
Now, it is true that when Maimonides takes up the specific question of creation, he opposes it to the eternity of the universe as a necessary contradiction; this would necessarily follow, if one defines the doctrine of the eternity of the universe as the theory that the universe is co-existent with God, in the sense that, though God produced it, he "did not produce it from nothing."

Obviously, if the eternity of the universe is taken to mean that God did not produce it from nothing, it must be a contradiction of the creation ex nihilo.

On the other hand, what is this 'demonstrative argument' of St. Thomas? The statement that the existence of the world, whether it be eternal or not (which according to St. Thomas, also cannot be proved), is dependent on God's will.

For comparison, let us append here one more quotation from Maimonides:

It is therefore certain that there must be a being which has absolutely independent existence, and is the source of the existence of all things, whether transient or permanent, if, as Aristotle assumes, there be in existence such a thing, which is the effect of an eternal cause, and must therefore be itself eternal.39

It would seem that not St. Thomas' dependence on Maimonides in his answer to this question but his independence has "been

greatly exaggerated." The Saint's argument is more detailed and more complete than that of the Rabbi, but, basically, it is the same argument.

In general, we may agree with Gilson:

On a good many points the position of the "Rabbi Moses" prepares that adopted by Thomism and their respective interpretation of Aristotle is often analogous... their mental attitude, positive and full of common sense, is singularly akin.40

Certainly, we do not hold that St. Thomas could not have written without the aid of Maimonides, but the Guide was such not only to the perplexed of the Jewish faith but to the course of Christian Aristotelianism; indeed, it seems certain that many of St. Thomas' criticisms, answers and revisions of Aristotle are based directly on those of the Guide.

They are only infrequently paraphrases or restatements of Maimonides' arguments, but it is obvious that, in many of the most important problems, the Rabbi not only cleared the ground and established the precise question to be answered but often provided also the nucleus of St. Thomas' answer.

The discussion of the nature of God, the analogy of being, the human intellect and the creation ex nihilo all rest upon a firm foundation of Maimonidean study; they are in the Guide in a combination of act, potency and, in some cases, Maimonides' own favorite, 'negativity', but none the less the foundations of

40 The Philosophy of St. Thomas, p. 34, n. 33.
Thomism are, to a great extent, there.

At least so far as regards the common Aristotelian element, one may say with Emile Saisset:

L'aimonide est le précurseur de Saint Thomas d'Aquin, et let More Neboukhim annonce et prepare le Summa Theologiae.41


Cf. infra, Appendix V, for further commentaries concerning Maimonides' influence on Scholasticism.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. PRIMARY SOURCES

A. WORKS BY PHILOSOPHERS


B. MISCELLANEOUS SOURCES


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A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: BOOKS


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D. INFLUENCE OF MAIMONIDES

1. BOOKS


2. ARTICLES


APPENDIX I

THE THIRTEEN BASIC PRINCIPLES OF FAITH


Note: The first five principles are quoted in full, as having to do with the nature of God; the remaining eight are summarized. Footnotes given in the body of the quotation are those of the translator, in his numbering.

In his introduction to the Commentary on the tenth chapter of Tractate Sanhedrin -- chapter chelek\(^1\) -- Maimonides enumerates thirteen Basic Principles as constituting the very foundation of the Faith of Israel. These principles, which Maimonides substantiates on the basis of Scriptural authority and which deal in the main with (1) Belief in the Lord (Basic Principles I-IV), (2) Prophecy (Basic Principles VI-IX), and (3) Reward and Punishment (Basic Principles X-XIII), are as follows:\(^2\)

What is most of all essential to emphasize at this point... is that the fundamental principles of our faith and its Roots are embraced in thirteen basic principles.

BASIC PRINCIPLE I

(Concerning God's Existence)

Principle I is that (we are) to believe in the existence of the Creator, blessed be He, that is (we are to believe that) there is in Existence a Being Perfect in respect of all (possible) ways of existence, who is the (Supreme) Cause of all things in existence, through whom (alone) their existence is possible, and from whom (alone) their existence ensues. It is impossible to posit...\(^3\)

\(^1\)Cf also J. Abelson, "Maimonides on the Jewish Creed," Jewish Quarterly Review, XIX-73 (October 1906), 24-58.

\(^2\)Translator's introduction, p. 400.
the negation of His existence, since with the negation of His existence the existence of all other things becomes an impossibility—in that no object whatever could then conceivably continue in existence—while if we were to posit, (on the other hand) the negation of all things in existence besides Him, the existence of the Lord, blessed be He, would neither cause nor suffer diminution therefrom; indeed, absolute Unity and Lordship are His alone, blessed be His Name, for He is Self-containing in the nature of His existence, being sufficient unto Himself, and requiring nothing in existence besides Himself. But all things (in existence) beside Him—from the angels, and the Bodies of the Spheres, along with all that they contain as well as all that is below them—are ever dependent upon Him for (their existence). It is this, the FIRST PRINCIPLE, that is referred to in the commandment, I am the Lord thy God, etc.¹ (see Pos. Comm. I).

¹Ex. xx, 2.

BASIC PRINCIPLE II

(Concerning God's Unity)

Principle 2 is (that we are to believe in) the Unity of the Lord, blessed be He, that is, we are to believe that He who is the Cause of all things (in existence) is One: not that He is One in a numerical sense, or one in the sense of a species, or one in the sense of (representing) an Individual Person who is divisible into many parts, or one in the sense of constituting some one simple substance capable of infinite division—but the Lord, blessed be He, is One by virtue of a Unity which is unlike any other unity. It is this, the SECOND PRINCIPLE, that is referred to in His words, Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One. (see Pos. Comm. 2)

¹Deut. vi, 4.

BASIC PRINCIPLE III

(Concerning God's Incorporeality)

Principle 3 is that (we are to believe in the) negation of all (attributes of) corporeality (in our conception) of Him, that is, we are to believe that this One (Being) referred to is not a body or a power in a body, and is not subject to any accidents affecting (corporeal) objects—such as movement, rest, abiding place—either in respect of any event that might befall Him. It is for this reason that the Sages, of blessed memory, have negated in all references to Him (the attributes of) composition and decomposition, in the words, "In the world above there is neither sitting nor standing, etc."²—that is to say, neither decomposition nor composition are to be found there. It is thus that the prophet has said, To whom then will ye liken Me, that I should be equal? saith the
Holy One—since if He were a body He would be like other bodies. Now whatever representations are made in the Sacred Scriptures concerning Him as displaying bodily attributes, such as walking, standing, sitting, speaking—-as well as all other similar expressions—are intended in a figurative sense. The Sages, of blessed memory, have likewise said: "The Torah speaketh the language of man." It is this, the THIRD PRINCIPLE, that is referred to in His words, (Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves--) for ye saw no manner of form (on the day that the Lord spoke unto you, etc.) ; that is to say, you did not (then) perceive Him as possessed of any (manner of) form, because, as we have mentioned, He is neither a body nor a power in a body. (see Note to Pos. Comm. 2).

2Hag. 15a. 3Isa. xl, 25. 4Ber. 31b. 5Deut. iv, 15.

BASIC PRINCIPLE IV
(Concerning God's Eternity)

Principle 4 is (that we are to affirm His Eternity, namely, His) Priority (to all things in existence); that is, we are to believe that this One (Being) referred to is (Eternal—being) Primordial in an absolute sense—and that whatever is found in existence besides Him is subsequent in relation to Him. The proofs for this (principle) in the Sacred Scriptures are many. It is this, the FOURTH PRINCIPLE, that is referred to in Scripture's words, The Eternal God is a dwelling-place (see Pos. Comm. 1).

2Deut. xxxiii, 27.

BASIC PRINCIPLE V
(Against Intermediation in Worship)

Principle 5 is that (we are to believe that the Holy One), blessed be He, alone may rightly be worshipped and exalted; that it is (the Holy One, blessed be He, alone) whose Greatness we are to proclaim, and that it is His Commandments (alone) that we are to fulfill—and that we are to act in such manner only towards Him, blessed be His Name, and towards nothing whatever in existence below Him—whether it be the Angels, the Stars, the Spheres, or the Elements and their Compounds—inasmuch as all these are predetermined in their nature, possessing neither Judgment nor Free Will. Neither may any of them rightly be worshipped with a view to entreating them as intermediaries that might bring (our prayers) near to Him: to Him alone our thoughts are to be directed disregarding all things (in Existence) besides Him. It is this, the FIFTH PRINCIPLE, that is referred to in His admonition against the worship of idols (see Neg. Comm. 1-7), and that constitutes the basis of many other admonitions in the Torah (see Neg. Comms. 8-14, and 30-45).
SUMMARY OF REMAINING PRINCIPLES

BASIC PRINCIPLE VI
Believe that men are found possessed of qualities excellent in the extreme, their souls disposed to take on the "Form of Reason," the "human reason thereupon writing with the Active Intellect from which significant emanations proceed towards it--... such being the manner of Prophecy."

BASIC PRINCIPLE VII
Believe in the supremacy of Moses as a prophet, and in the supremacy of his prophecy.

BASIC PRINCIPLE VIII
Believe all of the Torah is received from Heaven, "all alike constituting the Law of the Lord." All is essential, all is abounding in wisdom.

BASIC PRINCIPLE IX
Believe the Torah is immutable, both written and oral; it will never be added to or taken from.

BASIC PRINCIPLE X
Believe God "has cognizance of all the deeds of man, and that His Watchfulness over all men is unceasing."

BASIC PRINCIPLE XI
Believe the Lord "rewards him who fulfills the commandments of the Torah, and punishes him that transgresses against them." "The greatest reward (is)... the World to Come,... the severest punishment (is) Extirpation... Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him I will blot out of My book" (Ex. xxxii, 32).

BASIC PRINCIPLE XII
Believe the Messiah will come, but "set no time for his arrival." "(He) will enjoy pre-eminence, excellence and glory to a degree surpassing all kings that were ever in existence."

BASIC PRINCIPLE XIII
Principio 13 is (that we are to believe in the coming of) the Resurrection of the Dead; this we have already explained. 

3Cf. trans. introduction, op. cit., p. 408: "In an earlier part of the Introduction. 'Resurrection is only for the righteous of mankind--... for how can the wicked ever attain Resurrection,
inasmuch as they are already "dead" when they are yet alive; even as the Sages have said, "The wicked are called 'dead' even in their lifetime, and the righteous are called 'living' even after their death" (Ber. 18b) -- notwithstanding that all men must die equally, their bodies becoming dissolved into their constituent matter."
APPENDIX II

THE POSITIVE ANDNEGATIVE COMMANDMENTS

Note: Maimonides, in the Sefer Ha-Mitzvot, lists two hundred and forty-eight Positive Precepts and three hundred and sixty-five Negative Precepts as comprising the whole of the Law. These Precepts are known as the Taryag commandments, the Hebraic word Taryag also standing for the number six hundred and thirteen, the total number of Precepts. Of these we quote here only the Positive Precepts 1-9 and Negative Precept 1 with some of Maimonides' comments upon them, since the remaining Precepts have no immediate bearing upon the topic of this thesis.


POSITIVE COMMANDMENTS

1. We are commanded to acknowledge the existence of the Deity, as it is said, I am the Lord thy God (who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage). (Ex. xx, 2)

2. We are commanded that we are to affirm His unity, as it is said, Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One. (Deut. vi. 4)

3. We are commanded that we are to love Him, as it is said, And thou shalt love the Lord thy God. (Ibid., 5)

4. We are commanded that we are to fear Him, as it is said, Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God. (Ibid., x, 20)

5. We are commanded that we are to pray unto Him, as it is

said, And ye shall serve the Lord your God (Ex. xxi, 25), that is to say, we are commanded to serve Him by praying unto Him.

6. We are commanded that we are to cleave unto Him, as it is said, And to Him shalt thou cleave. (Deut. x, 20)

7. We are commanded that we are to swear by His name, as it is said, And by His name shalt thou swear. (Loc. cit.)

8. We are commanded that we are to imitate Him in respect of His good and righteous attributes, as it is said, And thou shalt walk in His ways. (Ibid., xxviii, 9)

9. We are commanded that we are to sanctify His name, as it is said, But I will be hallowed among the children of Israel. (Lev. xxi, 32)

NEGATIVE COMMANDMENTS

1. We are commanded against entertaining the thought that there is in existence any deity besides the Lord, as it is said, Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. (Ex. xx, 3)

COMMENTARY AND NOTES

1. Note. This commandment-- the first of the Decalogue-- is of the very essence of Judaism. Indeed, without a firm belief in the existence of the Deity, or Lord of the Universe, and without a firm conviction and clear sense of His All-transcendent Reality-- such as were directly decreed by the Almighty Himself under the terms of this commandment-- an understanding of the Torah and the observance of its commandments become utter impossibilities. . . For any Israelite who denies the existence of the Deity is an out-and-out apostate, having neither merit nor portion with Israel.4

2. In most Midrashim you will find (the Sages) interpreting (this verse 'Hear, O Israel...') by representing the Lord therein as) laying down the condition that '(Israel) declare the Unity of My name', or as laying down the condition (that Israel declare)


3Paragraph numbers indicate Positive Precept to which referred.

'The Unity of Mine Essence', and (you will find there) other similar expressions.

Note. 'Hear, 0 Israel...': this commandment is thus declared to be binding primarily only upon Israel. While the admission of spiritual ruling powers subservient to the Supreme— and associated with Him— in the religious worship and ritual of non-Israelites is to be tolerated under the terms of this commandment, its very language presages the spirit of self-sacrifice that Israel was to evince throughout the ages, and the grim martyrdoms he was to suffer, in upholding his faith in the Unity of God. The great goal of Jewish history, according to Maimonides, is Israel's affirmation of the Unity of God.

The doctrine of the Incorporeality of God—namely, that God is Spirit and not matter—as promulgated in Jewish religious thought, finds its root and substantiation in the commandment which establishes His Divine Unity. '...Nothing corporeal can be a unity...' (Moreh Nebuchim, II, 1).

The Unity of God is further the logical basis for the humanitarian doctrine of the Unity of Mankind. Indeed, from the belief that there is One God, who is our common Father in Heaven, it is but a step to conclude that we are all equally His children... (Ref. Job, xxxi, 13-15).  

3. We are to dwell upon and contemplate His commandments, His words, and His (wondrous) deeds, so that we may obtain (in a measure a true) conception of Him, and in conceiving Him attain absolute joy, this procedure constituting the love of Him, and being obligatory. ... We have thus explained to you that through... contemplation you will attain a conception (of Him) and reach that stage of joy, (where) love will then follow of necessity... this commandment also embodies (the obligation) that we should call upon all mankind to serve Him, praised be He, and to have faith in Him....

Note. In the expression 'contemplate His deeds', Maimonides refers to the partial manifestation of God through nature. The attainment of the love of Him may thus be said to be dependent upon a study of the Torah and of Creation....

4. The doctrine of fear of the Lord is the basis of the doctrine of rewards and punishment, which is an 'integral part of the faith of Israel.'

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6Ibid., pp. 82-83.

7Ibid., p. 85.
5. Note. The chief thing in prayer is kawwanah, devotion—or more correctly, direction of the heart. Thus Maimonides writes: 'Prayer without devotion is no prayer at all. The man who has prayed without devotion is under obligation to recite his prayers again. . . . Now what is devotion? One must free his heart from all other thoughts and regard himself as standing in the presence of God. . .' 8

6. 'Cleave unto Him' is interpreted as 'to attach ourselves to the Sages and help and protect them in all ways possible'.

Note. The Sage...interpreting and exemplifying as he does the word of God, is consequently regarded in Jewish thought as being nearest to Him. To cleave unto the Sage is thus to cleave unto the Lord. 9

7. Note...in the case of every such transgression [a false oath], Israel as a whole without regard to culpability is held surety and subject to punishment. . . . According to the Talmud, all transgressions may be forgiven—all, except those involving a false oath. 10

8. He has commanded us that we are to make ourselves like unto Him, praised be He, as far as it is in our power to do so. This (principle) finds expression in His words, And thou shalt walk in His ways, (Deut. xxviii, 9) and has already been repeated in His words, (What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God,) to walk in all His ways. (Ibid., x, 12)

Now on this (latter verse) the Sages have commented as follows: 'Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is called Gracious, so shouldst thou be gracious; just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is called Merciful, so shouldst thou be merciful; just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is called Chasid (a quality bespeaking kindness, goodness, etc.), so shouldst thou be a chasid.' (Sotah, 14a)

This thought has already been repeated in another form, in His words, After the Lord your God shall ye walk. (Deut., xiii, 5) In explanation (of this verse the Sages have commented) that the reference is to our imitating (Him) in respect of His manifestations of Goodness, and in respect of His lofty Attributes, by which the Lord, praised be He, is described, all in a figurative way—He being immeasurably beyond such attributes. 11

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8Ibid., p. 88.
9Ibid., pp. 88-89.
10Ibid., p. 91.
11Ibid., pp. 91-92.
9. . . The purport of this commandment is that we are in duty bound to proclaim this (our) true faith in the world, and that (in doing so) we are to disregard all fear of injury from any source. Even where one uses force against us, seeking to constrain us (to a denial of Him), we are not to heed him, but we are rather to submit to death, and we are not so much as to mislead him into supposing that we have denied Him even while in our hearts we continue to affirm our faith in Him, praised be He. 12

Concluding Remarks 13

Among them [the Positive Commandments], there are commandments which are perforce obligatory at all times and at all places, and under all circumstances. . . . The commandments of this class are called Unconditional Commandments, because they are of necessity incumbent upon everyone of age in Israel at all times and at all places, and under all circumstances. . . . These sixty Unconditional Commandments are signified (by the verse), There are threescore queens (Song of Solomon, vi, 8). 14

12 Ibid., p. 93.

13 Ibid., p. 384.

14 Precepts 1-9 are included among these sixty Unconditional Positive Commandments.
APPENDIX III

SAINT THOMAS' REFERENCES TO MAIMONIDES

Note: We append here a representative list of references to Maimonides in the Summa Theologica and the Summa Contra Gentiles of St. Thomas Aquinas. This is by no means a complete or exhaustive listing; it is intended merely as an indication of the number and type of reference the latter makes.


SUMMA THEOLOGICA, I

That the names predicated of God affirmatively are intended to remove something from Him, rather than to posit something in Him. . . . . . . . . . . . Q. 13, 2

That names predicated of God and creatures are predicated equivocally. . . . . . . . . . . . Q. 13, 5

That among corporeal beings man alone, because of the nobility of his intellect, is subject to providence, while the other corruptible beings are subject to providence only according to the species. . . Q. 22, 2; ibid., ad 5

That the angels, in so far as they are called immaterial substances, are multiplied according to the number of movements or bodies in the heavens, as Aristotle held, but that in Scripture men, who act as divine messengers, are called angels, as are the powers of natural things which manifest the divine omnipotence. . . . . . . . . . . . . Q. 50, 3

That angels never assume bodies, and the angelic apparitions mentioned in Scriptures refer only to an imaginary vision. . . . . . . . . . . . . . Q. 51, 2
That (in Genesis i. 2) darkness signifies fire, because fire is not luminous in its own sphere. ... Q. 66, 1

That where Scriptures says God called, the equivocal use of a name is signified. ... Q. 68, 1, ad 1

Q. 69, 1, ad 5

That under earth Sacred Scriptures includes all the four elements. ... Q. 74, 3, ad 2

Three reasons why the expression and God saw that it was good is not used in the work of the second day. ... Ibid., ad 3

That the ceremonial precepts are those that exist without an evident reason. ... Q. 101, 1, obj. 4

That the Law prescribed many restrictions about external worship in order to diminish foreign worship. ... Q. 101, 4, ad 3

On the ceremonial precepts of the Old Law pertaining to sacrifices and sacred things. ... Q. 102, 3, ad 4, 6, 11:

Q. 102, 4 & ad 2, 5, 7

On the reason for the sacraments and the ceremonial observances of the Old Law. ... Q. 102, 5, obj. 10, ad 4:

Q. 102, 6, ad 1, 6, 8, 9

On the interpretation of the judicial precepts in Deut. xxxi. 1-4. ... Q. 105, 2, ad 12

Maimonides as historical source, chiefly on Aristotle, the Peripatetics and the Mutakallimun, S. Theo., I

Q. 22, 2;
Q. 25, 5;
Q. 46, 1 & obj. 1, 3, 5, 10;
Q. 46, 2;
obj. 6, 8;
Q. 57, 2;
Q. 110, 1,
ad 3;
Q. 116, 1,
obj. 5,

S. C. C.
III, 65, 69.
APPENDIX IV

THE CRITICISMS OF GILES OF ROME


Note: In Chap. 12, "De collectione errorum Rabbi Moyse," Errores Philosophorum, Giles praises Maimonides for holding, in contradiction of Aristotle, the creation of the world. However, he says, "in aliis multis deviavit a veritate firma et fide Catholica." We append here merely the eleven points on which Giles says he errs, omitting Giles' examples and references.

1. Posuit enim in Deo nonesse aliquam multitudinem.

2. Ulterius erravit circa divina attributa credens sapien-
tiam, bonitatem esse omnino aequivoce in Deo et in nobis. ... gun perfectiones nostrae derivatae sint a perfectionibus divinis.

3. Ulterius erravit circa tales perfectiones, non credens

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1Cf. op. cit., introduction, "The Sources of the Critique" p. liv: "Giles owes to Maimonides the decisive stimulus for his critique of Aristotle. Here he found the idea that the doctrine of the eternity of the world rests on definite methods of proof. This idea he took up, and for his part tried to show that all the errors of the Stagirite rest on one false principle."

2Ibid., p. 58, ll. 13-14.

3Cf. Husik, An Anonymous Medieval Christian Critic, pp. 172-190, for commentary on these criticisms.

4Op. cit., p. 58, l. 15; Maimonides denies the Trinity.

5Ibid., p. 58, ll. 21-22; p. 60, ll. 1-2.
eas in Deo vere existere. ait quod Deus est non in essentia, et vivit non in vita. 6

4. Ulterius erravit circa propria personarum, credens Verbum et Spiritum Dei in divinis dici essentialiter solum. 7

5. Ulterius erravit circa supercaelestia corpora, ponens ea esse animata et dicens ipsa esse animalia rationalia. 8

6. Ulterius erravit circa motum supercaelestium corporum et circa eorum innovatioem. Nam licet crediderit motum incepisse, credidit tamem ipsum nunquam desinere. 9

7. Ulterius erravit circa prophetiam, credens hominem se posse sufficienter disponere ad gratiam prophetiae, et quod Deus non elegit in prophetando, quemcumque hominem singularem, sed illum qui se adaptat ad talia. 10

8. Ulterius erravit circa divinam potentiam, dicens aliqua esse Deo possibilia, aliqua non; inter quae impossibilia narrat esse imposibile accidentes esse sine subjecto. 11

9. Ulterius erravit circa divinam providentiam. Credidit enim Deum habere providentiam hominum quantum ad speciem et quantum ad singularia; aliorum autem dixit Deum tantum habere providentiam secundum speciem et non secundam singularia. 12

10. Ulterius erravit circa humanam voluntatem et naturam, ponens quod licet talia a Deo immutabiles possint, nonquam tamen immutantur, quia tunc frustra esset auctoritas prophetarum; credens hominem per se ipsum absque speciali Dei auxilio posse omnia peccata vitare et omnes monitiones prophetarum implere. 13

11. Ulterius erravit circa humanos actus, ponens simplicem fornicationem nullo modo esse peccatum in iure naturali, sed solum est ibi peccatum ratione prohibitionis. 14

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6 Ibid., p. 60, ll. 4-6. 7 Ibid., p. 60, ll. 11-12.
8 Loc. cit., ll. 16-17. 9 Loc. cit., ll. 21-23.
12 Loc. cit., ll. 17-20. 13 Ibid., p. 64, ll. 3-7.
APPENDIX V

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAIMONIDES AND ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Note: We append here appraisals from various sources of the relationship between Maimonides and St. Thomas. These opinions have been omitted from the main body of the thesis in the interest of brevity, either because they duplicate some opinion expressed there or because they would entail too detailed a consideration for the relative importance of the subject to the whole thesis.

Source: Julius Guttmann, Das Verhaltniss des Thomas von Aquin zum Judenthum, 1891, pp. 31 sqq., quoted in Yellin, Maimonides, pp. 213-214:

As regards Thomas Aquinas, his dependence on Maimonides is not confined to philosophical details, but in a certain sense may be detected in the whole of his theological system.

Source: Louis-Germain Levy, Maimonide, pp. 265-267:

Chez Thomas d'Aquin, l'influence de Maimonide gagne encore en valeur. Créateur d'un système harmonique et clos de la théologie chrétienne, Thomas d'Aquin a reçu les doctrines du penseur juif non d'une façon extérieure, mais les a élaborées et incorporées à son œuvre. Thomas se demande pourquoi la révélation divine communiquée à l'homme non seulement les vérités que par sa seule raison il ne saurait saisir, mais aussi certaines vérités supérieures qui rentrant dans les connaissances naturellement accessibles à la raison; dans sa réponse, Thomas d'Aquin suit Maimonide de près. Il s'inspire également de l'argumentation de Maimonide sur la connaissance de l'existence et de l'essence divines, sur les attributs, l'omniscience, la providence, la toute-puissance, la création du monde, la distinction entre l'être à l'état achevé et l'être en voie de devenir, la prophétie. Il fait presque complètement sienne l'interprétation rationnelle du Pentateuque telle qu'elle est exposée par le docteur de la synagogue.
Loc. cit., references:

1Quaest. disput., De veritate, q. 14, art. 10 (Opera, Paris 1660):

"Perfectae autem cognitionis statim homo in suo principio non est, unde oportet, quod accipiat per viam credendi aliqua, per quae manuducator ad perverierdum in perfectam cognitionem... quaedam vero sunt, ad quae etiam in hoc vita perfecte cognoscenda possumus pervenire sicut illa, quae de Deo demonstrative probari possunt, quae tamen a principio necessae est credere propter quinque rationes, quas Rabbi Moyses ponit. Quorum prima est profunditas et subtillitas istorum cognoscibilium, etc."

Voir encore Contra Gentil., I, ch. 4; Somme, I, q. 1, a. 1; Comment. in Sent., III, dist. 24, q. 1, a. 3.

2Contra Gentil., I, ch. 22:

"Hanc autem sublimem veritatem Moyses a Domino est edoctus, qui cum quaereret a Domino, Exodii tertio dicens: "Si dixerint ad me filii Israel, quod est nomen ejus, quid dicam eis?" Dominus respondit: "Ego sum, qui sum," sic dices filiis Israel, "qui est" misit me ad vos, ostendens suum proprium nomen esse: "qui est." Quod libet nomen autem est institutum ad significandem naturam seu essentiam aliquujus rei, unde relinquitur, quod ipsum divinum esse est sua essentia vel natura."

Dans un passage similaire, Thomas nomme Maimonide: "Furaterea R. Moyses dicit, quod Deus est ens non in essentia et vivens non in vita et potens non in potentia et sapiens non in sapientia. Ergo in Deo non est aliud essentia quam esse." Quaest. disp., De potentia Dei, q. 7, a. 2.

3Quaest. disp., ib., a. 4: "Furaterea Rabbi Moyses dicit quod hujusmodi nomina non significant in Deo intentiones additas supra ejus essentiam. Omne enim accidens significat intentionem additam supra essentiam sui subjecti; ergo praedicta nomina non significant accidens in Deo."

Par ailleurs, Thomas d'Aquin combat Maimonide, Ibid., a. 5: "Respondeo dicendum, quod quidam posuerunt, quod ista nomina dicit de Deo non significant divinam substantiam. Quod maxime expresse dicit R. Moyses..."

Somme, I, q. 13, a. 2: "...Unde dicunt quod, cum dicimus Deum esse viventem, significamus, quod Deus non hoc modo est, ut res inanimatae, et similiter accipiendum est in aliiis, et hoc posuit R. Moyses."

...cit scientiam Dei esse aequivocam scientiae nostrae, unde per conditiones scientiae nostrae non possimus aliquid de scientia Dei arguere, etc."


5 Somme, I, q. 22, art. 2: "A corruptibilium etiam generalitate exceptit R. Moyses homines propter splendorem intellectus, quod participant"; cf. Comment. in Sent., I, dist. 39, q. 2, a. 2. Toujours le docteur angelique reproche à Maimonide de n’admettre la providence divine que pour les seuls individus humains dans ce bas monde, Somme, ibid.

6 Comp. Contra Gent., II, Ch. 25 avec Guide, I, ch. 75; II, ch. 13; III, ch. 15.


8 Quaest. disput., De veritate, q. 13, a. 1: "...quod non est eadem natura rerum est in fieri et dum est in perfecto esse, ut dicit Rabbi Moyses."

Comment. in Sent., II, dist. 1, q. 1, a. 5: "unde si quis ex conditionibus hominis nati et perfecti velt argumentari de conditionibus ejus, secundum quod imperfectus in utero matris existens, deciperetur, sicut narrat R. Moyses, de quodam puero..."; cf. Guide, II, p. 130 et suiv.

De potentia Dei, q. 5, a. 7: "Et R. Moyses dicit, quod motus coeli in universo est sicut motus cordis in animali, a quo dependet vita totius animalis; cf. Guide, I, p. 361.


Contre Maimonides, il estime que le monde a été créé en vue de l’homme: "Ad sextum dicendum, quod ratio illa est Rabbi Moyses, qui omnino nititur improbare mulum propter hominem esse factum," Comment. in Sent., IV, dist. 48, q. 2, a. 3; cf. Guide, II, p. 218 et suiv.

Thomas rejette également sa conception des anges; voir Contra Gent., II, ch. 92; Somme, I, q. 50, a.5; Comment. in Sent., II, dist. 3, q. 1, art. 5; De potentia Dei, q. 6, a. 7.


[Levy's references to the Guide are to the Guide des indecis, 1856-66, trans. by Salomon Munk.]


1. Dass die Welt aus Nichts geschaffen ist kann die Vernunft demonstrativ beweisen, so Thomas von Aquin; dies wissen nur aus der Offenbarung, behauptet Maimonides.

2. Dass die Welt einen Zeitlichen Anfang hat, wissen wir nur durch den Glauben und kann nicht demonstrativ beweisen werden. In dieser These kommen beide miteinander oberein, beide stehen auf dem rein kritischen Standpunkt. . . . Denn Thomas hat dest Schopfungsproblem unvierunglich tiefer, klarer und praziser behand­elt.

Source: Charles ard Dorothea W. Singer, "The Jewish Factor in Medi­eval Thought," The Legacy of Israel, pp. 267-271:

To Maimonides, St. Thomas' debt is very great. It is, in general, the same in kind, but greater in degree than that of Al­bert.

1) Relation of Reason to Revelation. Thomas here owes almost everything to Maimonides. Not merely details in the structure but the very bases of his system are to be found in the Jewish philo­sopher.

2) Divine Attributes. St. Thomas adopted the doctrine of Mai­
monides that Human Reason can attain to the recognition of the Existence of God, but neither to a knowledge of His Nature, nor to a recognition of the identity of His Nature with His Existence. St. Thomas also agrees with Maimonides that the Attributes of God cannot be regarded as something added to His Nature, since that would suggest that Accidents distinct from His Nature could be added thereto, and such a conception would impart plurality to His single Nature.

3) God's Knowledge. Maimonides says the knower contains the known, that God knows futures, that it is a mistake to compare God's knowledge to man's. God's knowledge is akin to the artist's knowledge of a work conceived, the "details are implicit in the conception, but have no separate part in the artist's thought. St. Thomas follows these lines, and especially elaborates the conception of the Supreme Artist."

4) Providence. Maimonides says, in contradiction to Aristotle, that Divine Providence extends to the sublunar sphere and to each inhabitant in proportion as he has cultivated his spirit and thus attained union with God. St. Thomas adopts the argument, but "stigmatized as heresy the limitation of God's Providence, ... which was not limited to those beings who had cultivated the spirit."

5) Omnipotence. "St. Thomas also adopted the argument of Maimonides that Logical absurdities are outside the range of God's omnipotence."

6) Creation. "In no matter did Maimonides show more power and originality than in his doctrine of Creation, which formed the greater part also of the teaching on the subject by St. Thomas. Maimonides regards the Doctrine of Creation in Time as matter rather for Faith than Reason. ... Exegesis on such absurd [sic] lines [as the work of the Seven Days and the explanation of why God did not say the second day's work was good] is adopted by St. Thomas direct from Maimonides."

7) Structure of Universe. St. Thomas follows Maimonides' analogy between the Prime Mover in the heavens and the heart in the animal body, but not in the souls of heavenly bodies nor the denial of Creation for man's sake. "He believed in the perfect renewal of creation and ever for the benefit of man."

8) Angels and prophecy. Maimonides limited angels and identified them with the separated Intelligences of the Spheres or divinely inspired men. These two concepts were not congenial to St. Thomas; however, he follows Maimonides' opinion that angels have a greater measure of Freewill and Reason than men have, also that prophetic revelation is accomplished by the agency of angels. He also adopted the Maimonidean classification of grades of prophecy and the unique character of the prophecy of Moses.

9) Biblical law. "The attempt of Maimonides to rationalize
biblical law by symbolic interpretation. . . particularly scandalized his Jewish contemporaries. By his Christian followers [sic], on the other hand, his doctrine on this subject commanded complete approval."

Source: David Yellin and Israel Abrahams, Maimonides, pp. 213-214.

If the Guide of the Jew and the Summa of the Christian bear this relation [in re quotations from Guttman, cf. supra, p. 169, and Seisset, cf. supra, p. 147], then Maimonides deserves a place among the fathers of the Church.

Note: Full bibliographical details have been given only for source not quoted in the body of the thesis. All quotations are literal, except those from the Singers' article. This has been quoted exactly except when the lengthiness of their discussion of a subject has forced condensation and summarization.
The thesis submitted by James H. Fleming has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

[Signature]

Date: June 1, 1949