Review Essay

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Fascination Unabated: The Intellectual Love of Maimonides

JAY M. HARRIS (ED.)
Maimonides After 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence
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A question posed by Jay Harris in the preface to this latest volume devoted to the study of Maimonides—gathered (with two exceptions) from a 2004 conference at Harvard marking the octocentenary of his death—is why the continuing fascination, even obsession, in the academy with Maimonides above all other figures from Jewish history. In fact, the fascination is twofold, for Maimonides exerts a very different hold on the hearts and minds of the inhabitants of the academy on the one hand and those of the Beit Midrash on the other. While it was on account of the philosophical content of the *Guide of the Perplexed*[1] that Maimonides "came to symbolize the possibility and desirability of acculturation to generations of Jews" (ix), simultaneously the halakhic *tour de force* that was the *Mishneh Torah* was, as Allan Nadler notes in his piece, immediately accepted as the "foundational text of Jewish jurisprudence" (231). And yet at a time when the *Mishneh Torah* is no longer the first port of call for practical *halakhah*, despite its centrality to the Beit

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Midrash, and in an age devoid of card-carrying Aristotelians, our fascination with Maimonides continues unabated. Clearly the "remarkably protean nature of the portrayals" (viii) of Maimonides that allow for almost universal appropriation ultimately trace back to the "remarkably protean" texts that lend themselves to interpretive malleability and personal projection. The resulting richness of Maimonidean scholarship is certainly well represented in the essays in this collection.

Rather than summarize each essay, it is my intention in what follows to first offer some impressionistic observations that emerge implicitly from some of the pieces in the volume in response to the "Why Maimonides?" question with which Harris begins. Subsequently I will briefly outline some of the most significant discussions regarding the *Mishneh Torah* before turning to a number of questions dealt with in particular essays relating to his philosophical work. Those pieces that are not covered here are by no means any less valuable as contributions to Maimonidean scholarship. Indeed, if opening with the exclamation "Yet another book on Maimonides!" (vii) betrays a fear of—and is supposed to forestall—an edge of academe-weary cynicism as the ever more voluminous literature on Maimonides continues to stack up, this volume, containing papers of a uniformly high standard by a stellar line-up of scholars, certainly wears its justification on—or rather within—its sleeves. But as a philosopher by training and inclination, the value of my observations on the more historical offerings is limited. With regard to philosophical issues and Maimonidean thought in general, I can offer rather more, without necessarily presuming any greater authority. And of course, as nobody can claim immunity from the sort of projection mentioned above, what follows will inevitably reveal as much about my own interpretive prejudices as it will about the volume.

I

Menahem ben-Sasson's opening essay addresses the self-conscious formation of a Maimonidean dynasty, starting with Maimonides and passing to his son Abraham, and then from father to son for more than two centuries. Ben-Sasson's account immediately sheds light on some of the tensions inherent in the Maimonidean legacy from the very beginning and the interpretive trends they shaped. In addressing the question of why Maimonides bestrides the Jewish world like a colossus, it is those very tensions that he struggled to bring together into a single stream, and the interpretive trends that would split them into separate tribu-

taries, that one might suggest places Maimonides into the unique position that is reflected in our singular fascination with him.

The central point of Ben-Sasson's piece is that the Maimonidean dynasty reflects at once both a form of conservatism and a form of radicalism in its approach to Maimonides himself. In the course of arguing for his thesis, Ben-Sasson also establishes the immediate recognition by his family of the role his writings had to play in cementing this reputation and that of the future of the dynasty. And the duality of conservatism and revolution is reflected in the immediate divide in the manner in which those writings are treated. Thus, though Maimonides' son Abraham was the only one of his descendants to compose his own original works in both philosophy *and* Halakhah, Ben-Sasson notes that with the exception of Abraham "no member of the family attempted to offer an innovative halakhic work" (9). Instead, "Maimonides' great *halakhic* treatises are not a model to be imitated by his descendants, but rather the infrastructure for his family's study and authority" (9, emphasis added). It appears, then, as if Maimonides' halakhic work was immediately treated with an air of authority. Indeed, remaining in the realm of practice, Ben-Sasson points out how even Abraham explicitly referred mystical *practices* back to his father in order to counter rationalist opposition to the ever more mystically inclined dynasty. Yet, as the preceding sentence indicates, philosophically speaking Maimonides' descendants take a far more mystical line than Maimonides himself, as has been well documented.[2] Thus the conservatism that underpins the need to ground specific *practices* in Maimonides' authority is clearly there from very early on. The need to ground particular *theories*, however, is just as clearly lacking. Far less deference is paid to Maimonides in relation to substantive philosophical content—which takes a radically mystical turn—than in relation to halakhic practice.[3] The family dynasty therefore established certain parameters that reflect a more pervasive distinction in the attitudes taken towards the halakhic as opposed to the philosophic, or "aggadic," more generally. And it is precisely this tension between continuity and revolution that is at the heart of the development of the Maimonidean dynasty in general according to Ben-Sasson.[4] Moreover, it is the very same tension that we find in the interpretive stances taken towards Maimonides by his later intellectual descendants. Indeed, it appears to be his authority as a halakhist that was being implicitly invoked by those that followed him in order to allow them to develop any philosophical or more generally speculative system, even when their substantive philosophical views differed from those of Maimonides himself.

Take, for instance, Carlos Fraenkel's piece on Samuel Ibn Tibbon—the subject of two articles in this volume reflecting the increasing focus upon him in the academy. Ibn Tibbon emerges as a key figure in mediating our own use of Maimonides' work inasmuch as, according to Fraenkel, he presents Maimonides as a "cultural hero", but does so in order to disseminate (and justify) his *own* philosophical interpretation of Judaism for a new cultural setting. Rather than being Maimonides' first radical interpreter, as scholars such as Aviezer Ravitzky have thought, Fraenkel's Ibn Tibbon is in fact forging his *own* philosophical views, often in opposition to those of Maimonides. What is significant, however, is the disciple's need to portray his views as continuous with those of Maimonides—a major factor in leading previous scholars to the conclusion that he is merely therefore an interpreter of Maimonides, albeit a radical one. Fraenkel's argument seems to me convincing, and also seems particularly germane to the question of "Why Maimonides?" Maimonides' halakhic authority once again makes an appearance here when Fraenkel notes how "in Ibn Tibbon's view Maimonides, *who had attained great respect as a halakhic authority throughout the Jewish world*, was well-suited to provide the conceptual framework required for transforming Judaism into a philosophical religion" (34).

Maimonides' scholarly reputation had very quickly extended throughout world Jewry, from North Africa to Southern France. Thus, while Ibn Tibbon disagrees with Maimonides on a "wide range of important issues, both philosophical and religious" (36), he nonetheless presents himself as a faithful disciple of Maimonides in a way that belies these significant divergences, and thus he "free-rides" on Maimonides' authority, in particular his halakhic authority, to justify engaging in such philosophical endeavors at all. In the particular case of Ibn Tibbon this led (with a few exceptions) to his formulating his criticisms indirectly under cover of biblical exegesis; thus philosophical dissent is disguised as exegetical disagreement—if one does not have the halakhic stature or authority to deviate from Maimonides philosophically, one's criticism can only be indirect. All of which leads us to the thought that in order to go down the philosophical road at all, there was a felt need to attach oneself to a halakhic authority who could act as a precedent for so dabbling. And at this point, even within the speculative framework one cannot dissent from Maimonides' views with impunity, at least, it seems, if the dissent is to take the form of a more radical rationalism rather than the more "acceptable" mysticism of his own family. As Fraenkel puts it, "The doctrine of Judaism's unchanging core of wisdom and the presentation

of Maimonides as a link in the chain of Jewish sages who transmit it rule out the possibility of criticizing him openly" (62).

It also seems possible to me that Ibn Tibbon's use of the literary form of commentary as the vehicle for his views might have been an attempt at popularizing philosophical approaches to Judaism. Indeed, in the second piece on Ibn Tibbon, James Robinson argues that it was Ibn Tibbon's exegetical program of philosophical biblical commentaries that initiated a distinctive tradition of exegesis along Maimonidean lines, effectively developing commentaries built around "what Maimonides would have said" out of material from the *Guide of the Perplexed*.[5] Eric Lawee's piece, which also focuses on biblical commentary, presents the use of Maimonides as the symbol of rationalism in biblical commentaries by eastern Mediterranean exegetes that critiqued Rashi's midrashic approach. One might speculate therefore that Ibn Tibbon and the eastern Mediterranean exegetes were bearers of the philosophical torch for the masses in the form of biblical commentaries centered on Maimonides.[6] And it was precisely because of Maimonides' halakhic success that they could propagate what turned out, at least at the popular level, to be their philosophical failure—as Lawee notes, these commentators "ultimately fought a losing battle" (206). One cannot imagine, for example, finding in pseudo-Rabad's *Sefer Hassagot* that Rashi was "devoid of all wisdom save for [facility in] navigating the [talmudic] periscope alone" (195), without some authority upon whom to depend.

As time goes on, the craving for such halakhic legitimacy clearly wanes. By the late eighteenth century the *maskilim* no longer felt the need to appeal to any halakhic authority in order to engage with philosophy. Nonetheless, as Allen Nadler points out in his essay on the revival of interest in the *Guide*,[7] the position that Maimonides had established in the Jewish world made him the perfect "model for the rational and worldly Jews they wished to cultivate among the European masses" (236). With the assigning of Aristotelian thought to the history of philosophy, Maimonides is now admired "more biographically—as a virtuous symbol of the ideal Jew/philosopher—than philosophically" (238), and it is as a philosopher rather than as a halakhist that he is thus admired. But as the latter half of Nadler's article shows, the Haskalah's appropriation of the *Guide* motivated in turn highly questionable reappropriations in traditionalist circles, in an attempt to "save" Maimonides from their hands. One particularly amusing example unearthed by Nadler tells us how R. Phinehas of Koretz was alleged to have studied the *Guide* constantly and to have refused to allow it out of his possession

"since he believed that having the Moreh Nevukhim in the house was a magical protection that preserved one's fear of heaven" (256).[8] Indeed, the Hasidic re-reading of Maimonides as a kabbalist clothed in rationalist garb is nicely documented by Nadler, as is the *anti*-Hasidic use of the *Guide* by Mitnagdim such as Pinehas of Plotsk, who for that matter also uses Maimonides' interpretation of the "fall of man" in order to inveigh against the rationalist project of *ta'amei ha-mizṿot* (!).[9]

We find, in sum, that while as noted previously the halakhic work itself is no longer considered normative, there is a clear sense in which it was the anchor that originally licensed the attempts to ground a Jewish philosophical tradition at all, albeit one that need not bear much resemblance to Maimonides' own particular brand of Aristotelianism. As time progresses, and the need for halakhic anchorage is no longer necessary, the legend has already been established and in consequence the author of the central work in Jewish philosophy is claimed by the *maskilim* as the perfect representative of Jewish rationalism, before being reclaimed by traditionalists who cannot allow the author of the *Mishneh Torah* to be divested of his rabbinic identity.

While Nadler writes that Maimonides was admired by the *maskilim* "more biographically . . . than philosophically" (238), one might say that he is admired more bibliographically than biographically. Ben-Sasson notes that it became clear to Maimonides' immediate descendants, most notably to Abraham's son David and those who followed him in the dynasty, that "its power was tied to Maimonides' books" (11)—though not because of any "sacral" powers, but rather by dint of the intellectual prowess they exhibited. Interpretive "ownership" of the books thus remains an issue to this day. And yet the very fact that he was the author of, at the time, if not to this day, *both* the most comprehensive and accomplished code of Jewish Law *and* the most sophisticated philosophical interpretation of Judaism, means that he has bequeathed to us the most powerful literary representation of what remains a troubled paradigm—the halakhically committed Jewish philosopher. While his halakhic influence made it very difficult, nigh impossible, to impugn the philosopher—as Aviezer Ravitzky has pointed out elsewhere "the author of the *Mishneh Torah* protected the author of the *Guide* and conferred him with legitimacy"[10]—the battle over his legacy remains ultimately a battle over the very question at the heart of the Jewish philosophical enterprise. The lingering concern as to whether Strauss was correct when he asserted in relation to the *Guide* "that being a Jew and being a philosopher are two incompatible things"[11] remains, perhaps, the reason for our continuing fascination with Maimonides.

II

We have seen how the halakhic deference that originated with Maimonides' own family members would go on to establish Maimonides' halakhic authority as the dynasty gradually entrenched itself. And yet ironically, one of the most interesting themes to surface from this collection is the originality of the *Mishneh Torah*, which emerges as a focal point for an intriguing question surrounding the extent to which Maimonides *himself* consciously cultivated what one might call a "cult of originality" around his own work whilst simultaneously issuing disclaimers that he was doing any such thing.

Regarding substantive halakhic originality, Robert Brody in the second essay of the collection focuses on the distinct *lack* of influence of Sa'adyah's halakhic (and, in fairness, philosophic) work on Maimonides, instead noting the "numerous and far-reaching differences" (25), with relatively isolated "possible" instances of influence (29).[12] Notable is "the very limited extent to which Maimonides exploited the models developed by . . . the *geonim*" (31). This lack of Geonic influence in general, and the lack of the deference that one might usually expect towards earlier authorities, with no felt need to justify departures from them, characterizes Maimonides' halakhic work. Indeed, other than following Sa'adyah's structural innovation—with a topical rather than talmudic organizational frame—Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* remains the most innovative legal work in terms of scope, and (non) citation of sources. Saying that, Daniel Lasker finds precedent for all of his criticisms of Christianity and Islam, halakhic or otherwise. What is new in Maimonides according to Lasker is "his comprehensive outlook towards these two religions," and with his insight that "a fuller understanding of their place in the world was required . . . Maimonides used old elements to fashion a new creation" (182).

That Maimonides somehow systematized Jewish law and philosophy—whether or not from pre-existing material—seems certain. But, Moshe Halbertal argues, the nature of that systematization in the *Mishneh Torah* is less clear. We know that Maimonides' intention was to make the law in its entirety clear and accessible to all. Yet Halbertal makes a case, based on its introduction, for two very different readings of what the *Mishneh Torah* is in fact supposed to be. Throughout the introduction Maimonides stresses the comparison between his work and the Mishnah. Both are portrayed as "literary transgressions" necessitated by a time of crisis to preserve the law from being forgotten, with the *Mishneh Torah* necessitated by the geopolitical crisis that followed

the editing of the Talmud by Rav Ashi and Ravina. Thus, much as we argued in the previous section that Maimonides acted as a halakhically authoritative precedent for the philosophical endeavors of his successors, it appears that Maimonides is similarly keen to use the Mishnah as a precedent for his own halakhic activities.[13] And yet the dependence on the authority of the Mishnah also serves to enable the very *independence* from the authority of the Geonim that is the focus of Brody's article. On Maimonides' account, their authority is limited not because of their deficiencies, but because of the geopolitical situation that limited their sphere of authority (though this certainly did not reflect their self-image). The great dispersion that followed the completion of the Talmud, combined with the perilous state of many Jewish communities of the time, made it difficult for Geonic authority to get universal geographical purchase. Maimonides thus connects halakhic authority to history—more specifically to geopolitical circumstance—rather than to some inherent spirituality (or lack thereof). And by setting up a link between historical crises and changes in the mode of transmission of halakhah from oral to written, Maimonides can attribute his lack of deference to the Geonim to this historical misfortune.

Besides explaining Brody's observations, Halbertal's naturalistic account of the lack of Geonic "stature" (that is, his account in terms of historical circumstances) here sits well with Maimonides' philosophical views more generally. Maimonides' explanation of Lamentations 2:9: "Yea, her [Israel's] prophets find no vision from the Lord," also takes the form of an appeal to geopolitical circumstance:

> You know that every bodily faculty sometimes grows tired, is weakened, and is troubled, and at other times is in a healthy state. Now the imaginative faculty is indubitably a bodily faculty. Accordingly you will find that the prophecy of the prophets ceases when they are sad or angry, or in a mood similar to these two. . . . This is indubitably the essential and proximate cause of the fact that prophecy was taken away during the time of the Exile. For what languor or sadness can befall a man in any state that would be stronger than that due to his being a thrall slave in bondage to the ignorant . . . (*Guide* II:36:372-73; see also II:32:362; *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 7:4).

Here the inability to prophesy, which Maimonides earlier tells us "was the case because they were in Exile" (*Guide* II:32:362), is ultimately given an explanation that depends on the geopolitical situation in which they found themselves, one in which it was simply not possible to gain the sort of perfection necessary for prophecy. Similarly, Maimonides is

able to assign the "deficiency" in the authority of the Geonim to their being victims of historical circumstance, and not inherent inferiority.[14]

Halbertal's central question however, regards whether Maimonides saw the *Mishneh Torah* as a *representation* of Halakhah—a moderate reading according to which it is to be taken into account in future halakhic decision making, thus working as a weak precedent that is non-binding—or as Halakhah *itself*—a "radical reading" which renders it binding and absolute such that a later judge who rules differently has erred in a matter of law. While we might expect to find adherents of both readings amongst Maimonides' followers, Halbertal presents the ambiguous expressions of Maimonides' own view of the work before concluding that ultimately Maimonides took the radical view but concealed it from the masses. And indeed Maimonides could not simply assert the radical view if we accept Halbertal's further claim that for Maimonides the status of a work as Halakhah is anyway dependent on its future universal acceptance. What would render the radical reading justified, therefore, would be the work's universal acceptance, just as occurred with the Talmud according to Maimonides' introduction. The Talmud was authoritative because it spread and was accepted by all Israel, something that was not the case with the Geonim, but that he hopes will be repeated in the case of the *Mishneh Torah* (as he writes to his student Joseph). Thus, Halbertal argues, when Maimonides speaks of his code ultimately replacing all else and being accepted by all Israel, this is in fact the prospective basis of it as authoritative Halakhah. Maimonides is often cited as one who "naturalizes" the halakhic process inasmuch as he is not willing to defer to prophetic authority, but rather follows pure legal process when it comes to halakhic decision-making. Here we find Halbertal presenting us with a Maimonides who not only "naturalizes" the process but also the manner in which its authoritative standing as Halakhah is conferred upon it by the community—an interesting and controversial claim if read maximally.

The further question that Halbertal raises relates to the infamous claim that "a person who first reads the Written Law and then this compilation will know from it the whole of the Oral law, without having occasion to consult any other book between them." Was the *Mishneh Torah* intended to summarize the prior halakhic literature for the masses, licensing those with the requisite ability to continue to study the original sources—the Talmud and its commentaries—or was it genuinely intended as a replacement? On the latter view, the Talmud becomes what Halbertal terms "the normative canon"—the statement

of Halakhah in its final form—but it is no longer part of "the formative canon" that "generates the community's collective memory and makes it possible to speak and write in a manner that presumes unmediated familiarity with a collection of texts . . . [that] establishes the terms in which people understand themselves and one another" (101). What is notable here is that if we understand the Talmud as a normative canon, then the talmudic give and take is of no inherent value. It is a law book, and what we require is the bottom line. Since that is now to be found in the *Mishneh Torah,* not only do the masses have a practical guide, but also, Halbertal argues, the elite are left able to attend to "matters more worthy of constant contemplation" (107), which would presumably be the philosophical contents of the *Guide.*[15] So the upshot of Halbertal's radical reading of the *Mishneh Torah* is that not only is it original and radical on its own halakhic terms, but in its intention to "alter the cultural agenda of the studious elite" (111), it is of a piece with the *Guide*'s intellectualistic conception of human perfection, which places philosophy at the center of the curriculum.

The philosophical import of the *Mishneh Torah* is explicitly taken up by Bernard Septimus, who argues that we can glean certain substantive philosophical views from the local structure of particular units of the work. Maimonides, Septimus argues, usually opens a unit by announcing the commandment that he is about to discuss. However, at times, there is a preamble that discusses a principle before presenting it in the form of a commandment. The very opening of the *Mishneh Torah* is brought as a case in point, where Maimonides presents an abbreviated argument to establish the existence of God together with further philosophical discussion before finally presenting the positive commandment to know God in the sixth halakhah. What this literary device indicates for Septimus is the rational nature of the commandment that is being discussed. The significance of this structural analysis comes out when applied to *Hilkhot De'ot*, for here we find the same structure: he opens with a general discussion of the virtues before introducing the commandment to "walk in His ways" at the end of the fifth halakhah. For Septimus, this indicates that there is a sense in which Maimonides asserts "the autonomous, rational nature" of ethical knowledge.

There is a sense in which I happen to agree with the substantive conclusion that Septimus reaches here regarding the rational nature of ethical knowledge, but with one important nuance.

Maimonides does not, in my opinion, recognize a realm of ethical knowledge *per se*. This remains mired in the realm of "generally accepted opinions" as he makes clear in numerous places in the *Guide*. Thus,

according to Maimonides such ethical systems would be identified with *nomoi* "the whole end of which and the whole purpose of the chief thereof, who determined the actions required by it, are directed exclusively toward the ordering of the city and of its circumstances and the abolition in it of injustice and oppression . . . [and] not at all directed toward speculative matters" (*Guide* II:40:383-84). *Miẓvot*, on the other hand aim at "the soundness of the circumstances pertaining to the body *and also to the soundness of belief*—a Law that takes pains to inculcate correct opinions with regard to God" (ibid., emphasis added). But given that many *miẓvot* simply restate straightforward ethical duties, this means that as Howard Kreisel has noted, for Maimonides, "in changing the ultimate *telos* of the prohibitions of conventional morality and directing them to the attainment of intellectual perfection, the Divine Law changes the nature of these prohibitions."[16]

As I have argued in detail elsewhere,[17] I would contend, therefore, that for Maimonides, we have merely conventional ethical opinions when we link ethical propositions to exclusively practical ends. We raise these to the status of autonomous rational knowledge when we regard them as *miẓvot*, i.e. when we relate them to their final contemplative end. Only then can we speak of "knowledge" as opposed to "generally accepted opinion." But that means that rather than asserting the autonomous rational nature of *ethical* knowledge, what Maimonides asserts is the rational autonomous nature of *miẓvot*—which is not the same thing, even if we would commonly regard many *miẓvot* as "ethical" in nature. Ultimately, this might nonetheless sit well with Septimus's argument, since it still allows that the structure of preamble followed by commandment indicates the possibility of a rational understanding of this realm of (ethical) *miẓvot*. The problem however would be that given Maimonides' discussions in the *Guide* of *ta'amei miẓvot*, one might expect rather more of the preambles than we actually find, for if *all* commandments have some rational basis, then in principle Maimonides should be able to say rather more by way of "preamble" to all manner of commandments. Given the nuances in Maimonides' discussion of *ta'amei ha-miẓvot*, there is certainly room to argue this one either way—one might, for example, attempt to somehow distinguish an exercise of "pure reason" such as we find with the argument for the existence of God from the use of reason involved in demonstrating the rationality of *miẓvot* that require appeal to historical information, a notorious difficulty in Maimonides' work. Nonetheless, one might reserve judgment on Septimus's central point about the lessons to be learned from the structure of the *Mishneh Torah* until more of the project is complete.

Septimus also uses the literary structure to answer the much-discussed question of the apparent discrepancies between Maimonides' and Aristotle's respective presentations of the doctrine of the mean. Thus while the more ascetic practices of the *ḥasid* that veer away from the mean are presented in the commentary to the Mishnah as non-ideal therapeutic measures on the road to becoming a *ḥakham*, the *Mishneh Torah* does not make any such explicit claim. For Septimus, however, the same structure of preamble, including discussion of the *ḥasid*, followed by commandment—in this case to "walk in His (God's) ways"—implies the "rational" nature of the commandment. Thus the *ḥasid* is following a *rational* path—and still therefore only deviating from the mean, which remains his ideal, as a form of therapy. Regarding anger and pride, where Maimonides famously forbids us from taking the path of the mean and rather counsels extreme humility and an imperturbability that never succumbs to anger, again Septimus sees these as such "pernicious" emotions, that there is a universal need to take precautionary measures, but precautionary measures they are, again only as a form of therapy to protect the mean. Septimus supports his claim again via the structural "split" between the opening discussion of the virtues which is focused on the "rational" and virtually devoid of scriptural or rabbinic references, and the latter part of the discussion which is devoted to talmudic discussions of the same, at which point we find the extreme formulations regarding anger and pride. Again, the structure indicates for Septimus the rational nature of these commands, with apparent deviations explained simply as talmudic "fences" to protect the rational ideal. The problem with taking this view is that derogation of the *ḥasid* requires us to associate the term "*lifnim mi-shurat ha-din,*" which is attached to the *hasid*, with an inferior (therapeutic) form of behavior and thus in a manner inconsistent with its usual positive connotations.[18] Discovering whether Septimus's argument for this is convincing—that in this case "*lifnim mi-shurat ha-din*" refers to going beyond the "law of reason"—will have to await the publication of a forthcoming article of his to which he refers us. Further discussion of Maimonides' ethics is included in Lenn Goodman's wide-ranging essay on Maimonides' view of the soul.

Haym Soloveitchik also chooses to focus on the *Mishneh Torah*, answering questions that arise in connection with the structure of *Hilkhot Shabbat* by reference to specific Karaite challenges. The larger issue this raises for him, however, is why the *Mishneh Torah* was never "Ashkenized" as was the *Shulḥan Arukh*, or at least was only "Ashkenized" the once as a result of R. Meir of Rothenburg's instructions to R. Meir Ha-Cohen to write the *Haggahot Maimuniyot*, a gloss that would

act as a "*mappah*" equivalent, if I may be allowed the anachronism. Soloveitchik further notes how the *Shulḥan Arukh* yielded commentators who moved "away" from the text itself to treat of new cases relating to the issue at hand. With Maimonides, on the other hand, the commentators were all concerned with elucidating Maimonides' own words rather than with their wider application. Soloveitchik's explanation of this is that the *Mishneh Torah*, unlike the *Shulḥan Arukh*, is a work of art that "creates its own imaginative universe" (335). A work of art draws you into its orbit on its own terms which you can accept or reject wholesale, but acceptance must be on its own terms. It is an end in itself, a work to luxuriate in, rather than a means to an end, and does not readily lend itself to manipulation for "external" practical purposes that would require violating its artistic unity.

That Maimonides is a stylist is undoubted, and the idea of the *Mishneh Torah* as a work of art seems to me clearly appropriate. Moreover, Soloveitchik's question regarding the subsequent treatment of the *Mishneh Torah* is good one and his point about its "layers of meaning"—in contrast to the *Shulḥan Arukh*—is well-taken, explaining precisely why Maimonides is a canvas for our self-projection in a way that R. Joseph Caro is not. I was not, however, initially convinced that the artistic classification alone was able to do all of the explanatory work here. Indeed, one might think that the artistic nature of a work allows for *greater* interpretive latitude, far more than would a less stylized work. People can and have, for example "mysticized" the *Guide*, however far-fetched such readings might be. Yet, one might argue that this is precisely Soloveitchik's point: we can—and do—*interpret* works of art as we have *interpreted* Maimonides' work. What we do *not* do, he would claim, is utilize it as "a springboard for things beyond itself" (335). Having said that, however, one might still object that the manipulation of art in propaganda might be an instance of just such a use, and for that matter analogous to "Ashkenizing" the *Mishneh Torah*. Moreover, I suspect that the great controversies that the work aroused in Ashkenazic territories, controversies the likes of which to my knowledge did not surround any other legal code, would play, at the very least, a supporting role in the hesitation to adopt it as a "universal" code of law, despite the implicit support of an authority such as Maharam.

In truth, Ashkenazic restraint with respect to the *Mishneh Torah* seems rather over-determined. Jeffrey Woolf, for example, mentions a number of possible reasons, including its "claim to universal, unilateral authority [which] violated the democratic, decentralized nature of rabbinic authority and mode of study in Ashkenaz,"[19] as well as its presen-

tation as an "authoritative, often apodictic code,"[20] all of which rather recalls Halbertal's radical reading discussed earlier. None of this necessarily contradicts Soloveitchik's suggestive argument, but it does leave me questioning the extent of its explanatory power when it comes to answering the question as to why the *Mishneh Torah* has not been adapted for use in the manner of the *Shulḥan Arukh*.

III

Having briefly raised some of the points pertaining to the *Mishneh Torah* in the volume, we are left to consider the *Guide* itself and some of the substantive contributions to its study made by a number of the contributors here to debates old and new.

One of the most fascinating pieces treats the vexed question of Maimonidean esotericism. As is well known, the *Guide* was constructed in such a way as to maintain the rabbinic prohibition (*Mishnah Ḥagigah* 2:1) on the public teaching of *Ma'aseh Bereshit* (the Account of the Beginning) and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (the Account of the Chariot), which according to Maimonides were in fact none other than the disciplines of natural science and divine science (or metaphysics) respectively. Via an entire battery of literary devices, Maimonides writes the *Guide* in a manner that will continue to conceal the esoteric message of these subjects—notoriously including a form of contradiction in the work and dispersing discussions of a single topic throughout the book. Lawrence Kaplan argues, however, that we ought to distinguish between *Ma'aseh Bereshit* (henceforth MB) and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (henceforth MM) regarding levels of esotericism. For when Maimonides writes that one ought not ask for anything other than the "chapter headings" and that even these will be "scattered and entangled with other subjects" (*Guide* 6), Kaplan convincingly shows that he is only referring to MM. The striking thing about Kaplan's piece is that once he has pointed this out, it seems so obviously correct that one wonders why it seems to have gone unnoticed.

Kaplan argues that, so as not to subvert the rabbinic prohibition entirely, Maimonides' intention in the *Guide* is to "monotonically decrease" the esotericism of these disciplines i.e., to further our understanding of each by just one increment, but in different ways depending on the subject matter. Thus, while according to Maimonides there is plenty of rabbinic material on MB, it is presented by the rabbis in haphazard fashion. Maimonides therefore decides to "mention them in a certain order" (*Guide* II:30:355) thereby systematizing the discussion and allow-

ing us to further our understanding by a single step. But regarding MM, where Maimonides believes there to be very little rabbinic material to start with—merely "slight indications and pointers" (*Guide* I:71:176)—Maimonides has to present the very material itself, but this time he can only present scattered chapter headings in order not to further our understanding by any more than one step. Systematization presumably remains down to the reader who presumably must be one who, as the Mishnah states will "understand through his own knowledge."[21]

Kaplan's distinction is clearly significant for the future study of Maimonides, inasmuch as one must now be rather more careful to distinguish those elements that belong to each of the disciplines before engaging in the literary gymnastics that bedevil Maimonidean scholarship. Thus the question that Kaplan's piece raises is precisely how we individuate the two, what exactly constitutes *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and what *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. Kaplan himself makes this very point and notes that for Maimonides it is in fact only the "first principles" of the natural sciences that are esoteric, and this due to their close links to the thoroughly esoteric divine sciences. MM—divine science—is esoteric and must be presented by Maimonides, though only in "haphazard" fashion. MB—the first principles of natural science that are closely linked to the divine science—is similarly esoteric though Maimonides undertakes its systematization up to a point. But if we are to know just how far we need to dig beneath the surface of the text, we need to know what falls under the heading of divine science, what falls under the heading of natural science, and which are the first principles that require the more esoteric reading, something that could well keep scholars busy in continuing discussions surrounding Maimonidean esotericism. Indeed, to give just one indication of how difficult this might be, we need simply look at Maimonides' discussion of creation itself. While Kaplan believes this discussion to form part of MM, he notes that Sara Klein-Braslavy believes it to be part of MB. Few topics have been subject to quite such divergent interpretations in the scholarship, and yet, if this is part of MB rather than MM, this would presumably affect how we are to approach the discussion, for the levels of concealment that he has built into his presentation will vary.[22] If the matter is part of MM, we need to piece together scattered chapter headings in a way that would not be the case if it were a part of MB. Thus, the question of these "boundary issues" takes on greater significance once Kaplan has awoken us to his important distinction and work remains to be done if we are to put it to full use.[23]

Continuing the theme of esotericism, Alfred Ivry's discussion of the image of Moses in the *Guide* raises a question of esoteric moment in rela-

tion to prophecy.[24] Ivry notes how Maimonides' portrayal of Moses seeks "not to divinize Moses" (130), a position to which his father Maimun ben Joseph comes close in presenting him as one "not dead but [who] stands and serves (God) in heaven" (123). In Maimonides' so presenting Moses as the most perfect *man*, Moses gains knowledge, or actualizes his intellect, in the same manner as any other human being, albeit without the mediation by the imaginative faculty necessary for other prophets. Most significantly, this claim leads Ivry to assert that Moses' greatness lay in his ability to translate non-verbal emanations from the Agent Intellect "into descriptive terms that approximated the truth as much as was possible" (133). On this model, however, Moses turns out to be "the author, not the scribe, of the Torah" (ibid.). Howard Kreisel likewise notes that the Torah "does not result from God directly creating audible words conveying specific commandments to Moses' hearing . . . nor does it result from the impressing of specific laws on Moses' mind . . . [but] is the immediate product of Moses' intellectual perfection . . . [and] ability to frame perfect law on the basis of his theoretical understanding" (156).

There is no question that God's role in prophecy is mediated by the Agent Intellect and that the emanation from the Agent Intellect is not emanated as speech. As Maimonides tells us explicitly, the terms "saying" and "speaking" "never signify that He, may He be exalted, spoke using the sounds of letters and a voice" (*Guide* I:65:159). So in classifying the revelation at Sinai as one of the mysteries of the Torah, and thus a part of MM requiring us to piece together a picture from the various relevant discussions scattered throughout the *Guide*, one is led to something like the picture that Ivry and Kreisel paint[25]—even though Mosaic prophecy is distinguished by Maimonides from all other prophecy in not being mediated by the imagination and thus in being somehow "direct," one is certainly led to query the extent to which God communicates the Torah as "divine dictation" to Moses. Yet the rhetoric of Ivry might be modified somewhat, since ultimately for Maimonides, God remains the author and Moses the scribe—though a scribe who "reads off" the revelation from God's non-verbal emanation in a manner that admittedly requires a rather more detailed account than Maimonides gives us.[26] There is a definite sense in which God does therefore emanate the Torah, which is received by Moses. Nonetheless, the human role in prophecy being what it is for Maimonides, we cannot claim that Moses received a straightforward verbal presentation.

Again here, however, much rides on the extent of Maimonidean esotericism, and Charles Manekin's essay counters some of the more

radical readings, arguing that there is an intellectual shift between the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide*, with the latter in fact being more theologically *conservative*: it is only in the *Guide* that creation *ex nihilo*, for example, makes an appearance, and only in the *Guide* that his view of prophecy moves away from the pure naturalism of the *Mishneh Torah*—where prophecy is simply the consequence of achieving human perfection—to a view that includes a power of divine veto through an act of divine will over those who would otherwise have become prophets were nature left to its own devices. Manekin's argument is that in the *Guide* Maimonides recognized that the distinction between "a God who wills the world into existence after non-existence and a God from whom the world proceeds necessarily was a crucial one and that the adherents of a religious law must accept the former and not the latter" (214). Thus for Manekin, Maimonides becomes more critical of Aristotelian naturalism with age. Manekin points to the *Treatise on Resurrection,* which argues for a literal understanding of bodily resurrection—contrary to claims based on Maimonides' own *Mishneh Torah* that it ought not be understood thus—as shedding light on this change. Given the particular polemical purpose of that piece, however, whether one takes it at face value returns us ultimately to the general image one forms of Maimonides from all the evidence, and I have to admit to some reservations in reading the *Treatise* in the manner than Manekin does. Even in the *Treatise* itself, we find Maimonides cautioning us against those who

> like nothing better, and, in their silliness, enjoy nothing more, than to set the Law and reason at opposite ends, and to move everything far from the explicable. So they claim it to be a miracle, and they shrink from identifying it as a natural incident . . . . But I try to reconcile the Law and reason, and wherever possible consider all things as of the natural order. Only when something is explicitly identified as a miracle, and reinterpretation of it cannot be accommodated, only then I feel forced to grant that this is a miracle.[27]

It is not clear to me therefore, that when he speaks, for example, of the role of divine will in withholding prophecy as "like all the miracles [that] takes the same course as they" (*Guide* II:32:361), that this is necessarily making a case for a robust notion of divine will rather than appealing to the statement three chapters prior that "miracles too are something that is, in a certain respect, nature" (*Guide* II:29:345), or reflecting the general stance on miracles quoted above from the *Treatise* itself, especially given that in the case of prophecy itself reinterpretation

can be accommodated and, I would argue, is in fact given by Maimonides himself. As noted earlier, the lack of prophecy in exile, which is presented as an example of God preventing prophecy through an act of will, is given a far more naturalistic sheen a few chapters later, where he writes that since the imaginative faculty that is necessary for prophecy is a bodily faculty, and bodily faculties are weakened at times of stress, "you will find that the prophecy of the prophets ceases when they are sad or angry," and that "this is indubitably the essential and proximate cause of the fact that prophecy was taken away during the time of the Exile" (*Guide* II:36:372-73; see also II:32:362). The divine will at work here seems to be that to which he refers at *Guide* II:48 where "everything that is produced in time" is part of a causal chain that ultimately traces back to "the First Cause of all things, I mean God's *will and free choice*" (*Guide* II:48:409-10). On the strength of this we can indeed attribute the prevention of prophecy to God's will, though not, it seems to me, in the robust manner that Manekin's thesis requires.[28]

Manekin is wary of radical esotericists who would see Maimonides as one who "deliberately conceals his unorthodox opinions on foundations of the Law and misleads the reader about them" (211n17). In the above example of prophecy, however, one need not attribute any outright falsehoods to Maimonides. One merely needs do precisely what he (and Kaplan) would have us do with those topics that relate to MM—piece together the chapter headings that are scattered throughout the work. Moreover, every reader must draw his line in the sand somewhere. Even Manekin himself writes the following of the *Mishneh Torah*: "If Maimonides did not really accept the premise of the perpetual rotation of the sphere at the time of writing his legal works, why did he base his proofs on it?" (209). Yet in the *Guide* Maimonides explicitly tells us that his basing his proofs on the eternity of the world there was "not that I believe in the eternity of the world" (*Guide* I:71:182). Presumably, therefore, Manekin would have to read certain elements of the *Guide* as misleading. Nonetheless, Manekin's article, as a perceptive and well articulated presentation of the more conservative reading of Maimonides (that probably consigns me to the school of "moderate radicals") certainly highlights the difficulties that attend Maimonidean scholarship on these issues—and incidentally highlights an increasing tendency to see the philosophical views contained within the *Mishneh Torah* as more radical than those contained in the *Guide*.[29]

IV

In his opening article, one of the things noted by Ben-Sasson is how the esteem in which Maimonides was held meant that he was sought out for all sorts of public activity, down to the minutiae of communal budgets and bureaucracy. Scholars have long been concerned with how one reconciles such levels of communal activity with "Total devotion to [God] and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him," especially given that "every excellent man stays frequently in solitude and does not meet anyone unless it is necessary" (*Guide* III:51:621). It is worth briefly concluding, therefore, with the skeleton of Aviezer Ravitzky's solution to this problem as presented in this volume (without pretending to have done justice to the full richness of his presentation).

To approach the issue obliquely to begin with, Howard Kreisel's piece addresses the question of whether, given Maimonides' use of the term *dat ha-emet* in his discussion of the messianic age (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:1), he believed that the whole world will convert to Judaism at that time, the reasonable assumption being that Judaism is clearly "the true religion" for Maimonides. Given the general "enlightenment" of messianic times, at which time the knowledge of God will be the world's sole concern (ibid., 12:4), surely all will simply acknowledge the true religion of Judaism voluntarily. Yet, according to Kreisel, Maimonides' esoteric view would in fact have it that at this time others will become "fellow travelers" rather than formal converts, for since the *Guide* presents the Torah as a means to the ultimate human perfection, which is seen as primarily intellectual (III:27:54), it appears that an alternative means that would achieve that end would suffice. Political considerations here dictate, however, says Kreisel, that Maimonides cannot possibly reveal this, for in the eyes of the masses this would undermine Judaism—after all, if other routes will suffice, the determination to stand up for one's religion might well be eroded, especially in the face of persecution by other religions (and at the time of course, this possibility was not merely academic). Maimonides thus has to walk a tightrope between maintaining the centrality of philosophic knowledge and not undermining Judaism as the path to salvation for his co-religionists. Interestingly therefore, Kreisel seems to "split the difference" between Chaim Rapoport and Menachem Kellner, who recently debated the meaning of *dat ha-emet* and its implications for Maimonides' understanding of the messianic era.[30] Kreisel, it appears, would agree with Kellner that *dat ha-emet* is supposed to be under-

stood as Judaism by the readers of the *Mishneh Torah* for the political reasons cited above (though the fact that one could also understand it to mean the Noahide laws would suit Maimonides—and Kreisel). In truth, however, Kreisel's Maimonides believes that in the messianic era, it will not necessarily be the case that everyone will convert to Judaism —which is Rapoport's view.[31]

In relation to this, it is worth noting that elsewhere Kellner argues that while in principle Maimonides cannot rule out the possibility of attaining the ultimate perfection via a purely philosophical route, in practice Maimonides believes it is not possible to reach this goal without *miẓvot*, which are necessary in real terms for the moral perfection that is the prerequisite for the ultimate perfection.[32] Thus, Judaism can remain the superior path to salvation for Maimonides in reality, even if we accept that others are possible in principle. Such nuances being beyond the average reader, however, for Kreisel the use here of the term *dat ha-emet* to mean Judaism is a perfect example of Maimonides' sensitivity to his role as a leader in the Jewish community. And it is a leadership role that Ravitzky argues has a deep philosophical basis in Maimonides' writings.

In his description of the most perfect individuals such as Moses or Abraham, Maimonides famously tells us that such an individual "talks with people and is occupied with his bodily necessities while his intellect is wholly turned toward Him, may He be exalted, while outwardly he is with people . . ." (*Guide* III:51:623). Such an individual must therefore operate simultaneously on two levels, though it appears that his mind is not really "on" the communal job. In his attempt to square the circle, Ravitzky distinguishes between those on the path to perfection and those at the summit. The individual's ascent to perfection requires a gradual weaning off the need for society and its political and social "goods." Only in this way can one attain intellectual perfection. However, once one has achieved such knowledge, one can go on to become the ideal leader since 1) intellectual perfection involves an overcoming of egocentricity and thus one is naturally disposed to the pursuit of the general good; and 2) one overcomes social conventions and generally accepted opinions and can thus present the genuine divine alternative. Consequently, though all can aim at individual perfection, the upshot of that achievement for the few who can attain it is a lack of egocentricity and a corresponding commitment to the more "disinterested" general good, leading to precisely the dual consciousness that Maimonides presents, whereby one's physical (and psycho-physical) faculties are engaged in political activity while the intellect is simultane-

ously transcending such activity.[33] There is no contradiction, therefore, between Maimonides' pronouncements on both the individual and the communal, but the expression of a real duality in the consciousness of the perfect individual.

The difficulty of maintaining this duality should not be underestimated. Ironically given some of the rather more outré Hasidic interpretations of the *Guide* noted earlier, Ravitzky argues that, albeit through the mediation of Nahmanidean terminology, Maimonides' model appears to be the original foundation for the idea of the Hasidic *ẓaddik*. Even more ironically, they appear closer to this ideal than rationalists who could not see their way to any such combination of the intellectual and the social, a combination that, as Ravitzky notes, Maimonides' own disciple Ibn Tibbon opted out of in his exclusive pursuit of the intellectual ideal so as not to suffer the fate of his hero and mentor as famously laid out in Maimonides' letter to him.[34] That Maimonides was nonetheless committed to struggling to attain this ideal in his own life seems clear.

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Toward the end of his article, Ravitzky tells us to be wary of "anachronistic efforts to draw inter-temporal and inter-contextual conclusions" (287) in discussing Maimonides, but it is in the nature of religious observers to pin their flag to authoritative figures from the past. Whether anyone will heed the warning, therefore, is open to question. What this outstanding collection makes clear is precisely why it is that Maimonides more than any other figure suffers this fate. Maimonides' work and image was *sui generis* from the very beginning, which, to return to our starting point, rather increases our respect for the ability of Maimonides' descendants to so entrench him in Jewish "tradition," rendering him part of *our* "formative canon," albeit one that can be made to fit so many different agendas.

Notes

In the course of writing this, I have enjoyed a number of conversations, some virtual, some real, some very brief, some more lengthy, all of which were helpful in various ways. I am grateful to all of the following, and claim sole responsibility for the use I have made of our exchanges: David Berger, Mordechai Cohen, Lawrence Kaplan, Menachem Kellner and especially David Shatz.

1. All references to the *Guide* in the text and notes will be to the *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago, 1963) (henceforth *Guide*), and will be cited by part, chapter, and page number.
2. Notably in Paul Fenton's work. See Paul Fenton, "The Literary Legacy of Maimonides' Descendants," in *Moses Maimonides: His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts*, ed. Gorge K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse (Wurzburg, 2004), 95-112. Fenton similarly notes that Abraham "refrains from halakhic discussions and for such things is content to refer the reader back to [Maimonides'] *Code*" (ibid., 101), while we find a "pivotal difference" in Abraham's "extreme form of Sufi-like asceticism" (ibid, 102). See also Fenton's work on Maimonides' grandson. See Obadyah Maimonides, *Treatise of the Pool*, trans. Paul Fenton (London, 1981).
3. While Fenton argues that the difference between Maimonides and his son "is not so much one of theory than one of practice," (Fenton "The Literary Legacy of Maimonides' Descendants,"102), the practice to which he is referring is the Sufi asceticism that was informed by Abraham's general mystical stance that I am here categorizing as a difference of theory. I do not think that Fenton would deny that on halakhic matters, Abraham followed his father and that "practical" differences were a result of Abraham's mystical philosophy infusing this practice with Sufi-like mysticism. As Fenton notes, Abraham "is more interested in the spirit rather than the letter of the law and . . . this spirit is imbued with pietistic ideals" (ibid., 101).
4. Indeed, one of the tensions to which Ben-Sasson points here is that between the straightforward dynastic continuity itself and Maimonides' own negative statements regarding familial inheritance of positions of spiritual leadership. It is worth noting in relation to this that Ben Sasson believes that "Maimonides did not—beyond the apprenticeship customary between fathers and sons—officially involve his son in his day-to-day activities, nor . . . appoint him to an office in the Jewish administration," and thus that he "did not consciously found a dynasty" (7). Joel Kraemer on the other hand seems to read the situation differently in writing that he "groomed his son for leadership by having him observe as he carried out communal supervision." See Joel Kraemer, "Moses Maimonides: An Intellectual Portrait," in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, ed. Kenneth Seeskin (Cambridge, 2005), 30.
5. A tradition that continues to have echoes in modern scholarship, the best example being Sarah Klein-Braslavy's books: *Perush ha-Rambam le-Sippur Beri'at ha-Olam* (Jerusalem, 1978), and *Perush ha-Rambam la-Sippurim al Adam be-Parashat Bereshit: Perakim be-Torat ha-Adam shel ha-Rambam* (Jerusalem, 1986).
6. Though it is not necessarily true of all biblical commentary, the form does

seem to have a more populist intent than would a philosophical treatise. Moreover, it seems clear that Rashi's commentary was written with a general audience in mind and thus it is not unreasonable to speculate that at least the eastern Mediterranean counter-commentaries would have a similar intent.

7. Nadler reveals that while the *Mishneh Torah* was always at the forefront of study, and indeed practice, until the appearance of the *Shulḥan Arukh*, the *Guide* was ignored and suppressed until we see this revival amongst the *maskilim*. As Nadler notes, while the *Guide* was never reissued between 1553-1742, six different Hebrew editions with new commentaries appeared in the century following 1791 (234).
8. The irony of using the *Guide* in such a manner is compounded when one recalls Maimonides' comments regarding the mezuzah at *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Tefillin u-Mezuzah ve-Sefer Torah* 5:4: "Those who write inside [a *mezuzah*] the names of angels, or holy names, or a biblical verse, or inscriptions usual on seals, are among those who do not have a portion in the world to come. For these are fools who not only nullify the *miẓvah*, but furthermore, they make from a great *miẓvah* that expresses the unity of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, the love of Him, and the service of Him, a talisman for their own benefit, as if, in their foolish minds, they think that this will help them regarding the vanities of the world." The translation is adapted from *Mishneh Torah*, *The Book of Adoration*, trans. Moses Hyamson (Jerusalem, 1965).
9. Less radical but no less misleading misappropriations remain common in popular literature and there is a danger of not countering such misuse and of not defending interpretations that show greater fidelity to the text (and the man). Accomplished presentations of clearly false views often attain popularity way out of proportion to their merits. To take but one example, Maimonides' well-known use at *Guide* II:17 of a parable where a father explains the origins of human life to his son has been used by one writer as follows: "The Rambam quotes this phenomenon to illustrate a firm root for our faith that there is a transition from this world to the next" (Akiva Tatz, *Living Inspired* [Southfield, MI, 1993], 34). The parable is of course actually used in the service of an argument against the Aristotelian theory of the eternity of the world. Where the link to life in the next world comes into this discussion I genuinely cannot fathom. Even the esotericist readings of this passage at least link its use to the *topic* of creation versus eternity.
10. Aviezer Ravitzky, "Maimonides: Esotericism and Educational Philosophy," in Seeskin ed., *Cambridge Companion*, 301. In a populist adult education course that I used to give entitled "Sanitizing the Sages (or how to be a heretic and get away with it)" I used to begin in answer to the subtitle that the trick was to write one's halakhic work first. As time and scholarship progresses, what began as a facetious joke appears to be garnering some academic respectability.
11. Leo Strauss, "How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in *Guide*, xi-lvi. The quotation is from xiv.
12. Regarding possible philosophical influence, it is worth noting Yair Lorberbaum's argument that in the *Guide*, Maimonides follows the Geonic tradition of skepticism towards *Aggadah* and even employs specific Geonic formulations in order to make his point. This marked a change from his earlier position where he was explicitly critical of this Geonic tradition and

believed almost all Aggadic material to be a repository of philosophical truth. See Yair Lorberbaum, "Temurot be-Yaḥasso shel ha-Rambam le-Midrashot Ḥazal," *Tarbiẓ*, 78,1 (2009):81-122.

13. As Halbertal notes, this need for analogy to the Mishnah reveals an interesting motive for Maimonides' view that the Mishnah was always a written document (contra Rashi, amongst others). It also explains why he would need to portray it as exhaustive and decisive in all matters of Halakhah, neither of which is beyond dispute, to say the least.
14. Indeed, according to Isadore Twersky this naturalistic approach, according to which political conditions are linked to the potential for intellectual attainment, is "a basic thought pattern of Maimonides' historiosophical apparatus." See Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven and London, 1980), 67.
15. Menachem Kellner previously argued for this conclusion in detail in Menachem Kellner, "Mishneh Torah—Maddua?" in *Masorah le-Yosef* (Netanya, 2005), 316-329.
16. Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought* (Albany, NY, 1999), 83.
17. D. Rynhold, "Good and Evil, Truth and Falsity: Maimonides and Moral Cognitivism," *Trumah* 12 (2002):163-82.
18. See David Shatz, "Maimonides' Moral Theory," in Seeskin ed., *Cambridge Companion*, 181.
19. Jeffrey R. Woolf, "Admiration and Apathy: Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* in High and Late Medieval Ashkenaz," in *B'eerot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, ed. Jay M. Harris (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 427-53. The quotation is from 432. Woolf also mentions how "in the wake of the Maimonidean controversy . . . objection to the work was intensified by rejection of its philosophic tenor and content."
20. Woolf, "Admiration and Apathy," 433.
21. There is a sense in which James Robinson's essay, mentioned earlier, sets out precisely how Ibn Tibbon takes up this challenge on behalf of such individuals by applying Maimonides' fragmentary teachings on these matters to form systematic commentaries on both biblical and rabbinic literature.
22. Incidentally, it does seem to me that Kaplan's view is all the more convincing given the inclusion of creation at *Guide* I:35 amongst those things that "ought not to be spoken of except *in chapter headings* . . . and only with an individual such as has been described" (*Guide* I:35:81). This passage, which Kaplan cites, seems clearly to indicate that it is part of MM.
23. Having said all of that, Maimonides does write in the part of his introduction designated "Instruction with Respect to this Treatise" that when reading the *Guide*, one "must connect its chapters one with another; and when reading a given chapter, your intention must be not only to understand the totality of the subject of that chapter, but also to grasp each word that occurs in it in the course of the speech, even if that word does not belong to the intention of that chapter" (*Guide*, Introduction to the First Part, p. 15). This description applies to the book in general and not just to MM, raising the question of whether the scattering of topics in fact applies to both MB and MM, reducing the difference between them (and how we interpret them) to the need to interpret the chapter headings with the latter but not the former—for both, however, the discussions would be equally 'scattered'. Despite this, I remain inclined to think that there remains a more far-reaching differ-

ence between the presentations of MB and MM– as does Kaplan in brief correspondence on this matter for which I am grateful—and that there is a distinction between the general need for “connecting its chapters” on the one hand, and the more extensive “scattering and entangling” that only applies to MM on the other. What precisely that difference is would require some more detailed work.

24, Incidentally this is a further bone of contention between Kaplan and Klein-Braslavy as regards classification.

25. Maimonides does write that while the children of Israel heard a voice at Sinai rather than articulated speech, Moses was “the one who heard words and reported them to them” (*Guide* II:33:364). As is so often the case with Maimonides in the *Guide* however, one has to interpret this in consonance with everything else in the work, and it seems to me that it is far more difficult to maintain that God literally spoke in words given everything else that Maimonides writes, than it is to hold firm to his general philosophical views and read this passage in light of them. While obviously much more could be said here, in this general vein, his “hearing words” would not then imply that God articulated words, but rather that this was the mode in which Moses’ intellect “received” or understood the divine emanation.

26. It is also not clear to me why Ivry insists that “The revelation at Sinai is such a depiction, an imaginative construct of Mosaic origin.” Maimonides explicitly tells us that the notions that the prophets teach “are not . . . mere products of their thought” (*Guide* I:65:158).

27. Moses Maimonides, “The Essay on Resurrection”, trans. Abraham Halkin, in Abraham Halkin and David Hartman, *Crisis and Leadership* (Philadelphia, 1985), 223.

28. For further discussion of this interpretation, see my *An Introduction to Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (London, 2009), chap. 4. Manekin does mention this more radical interpretation of Maimonides and asserts elsewhere that the statement that “miracles too are something that is, in a certain respect, nature” (*Guide* II:29:345), is quoted in *contrast* to Maimonides’ own view. Clearly I read that paragraph differently. See Charles Manekin, “Divine Will in Maimonides’ Later Writings” in *Maimonidean Studies* ed. Arthur Hyman (Jersey City, NJ, 2008), 189-221. See especially 200.

29. Shlomo Pines has argued similarly in “The Philosophical Purport of Maimonides’ Halachic Works and the Purport of the *Guide of the Perplexed*,” in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. Shlomo Pines and Yirmiyahu Yovel (Dordrecht, 1986), 1-14. This is a further modern tendency with medieval antecedents. See Aviezer Ravitzky, “The Secrets of the *Guide to the Perplexed*: Between the Thirteenth and the Twentieth Centuries,” in *Studies in Maimonides* ed. Isadore. Twersky (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 159-207. See especially 197-204.

30. The debate between Rapoport and Kellner can be found in the online journal *Meorot* 7,1 (September 2008), http://www.yctorah.org/content/view/436/10/.

31. In opposition to Kellner’s view that in the messianic era there will be no distinction between Jew and Gentile who will all follow the same (Jewish) path to God.

32. See Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides on Human Perfection* (Atlanta, 1990), 27-30 . Kreisel also appears to allude to this sort of idea at 163 n. 45.

33. David Hartman has previously made the same ascent-descent distinction to

similarly define the prophet as a "political leader who does not view political activity as a means to gratify egocentric needs." See David Hartman, *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest* (Philadelphia, 1976), 198. He goes on to note that "Moses' attachment to the community is inseparable from his intellectual love for . . . God" (ibid., 199).

Given the debates regarding the Platonic vs. Aristotelian influences on Maimonides on these issues, it is interesting to find a very similar account of how intellectual perfection leads to a loss of egocentricity and a corresponding disinterested "political" commitment to the general good as a possible reading of the conclusion to Plato's parable of the cave. See Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford, 1981), 268. Ravitzky himself points out the Platonic imagery of Maimonides' account of Jacob's dream.

34. Two versions of the letter in Hebrew translation can be found in Alexander Marx, "Texts by and about Maimonides," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 25 (1934-35), 371-428. The relevant passage in the letter to Ibn Tibbon is on 376-77.