Miracles and the Natural Order in Naḥmanides

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THE CENTRALITY of miracles in Naḥmanides' theology cannot escape the attention of even the most casual observer, and his doctrine of the hidden miracle exercised a particularly profound and abiding influence on subsequent Jewish thought. Nevertheless, his repeated emphasis on the miraculous—and particularly the unrestrained rhetoric of a few key passages—has served to obscure and distort his true position, which was far more moderate, nuanced and complex than both medieval and modern scholars have been led to believe.

I

To Naḥmanides, miracles serve as the ultimate validation of all three central dogmas of Judaism: creation *ex nihilo*, divine knowledge, and providence *(ḥiddush, yedi'ah, hashgaḥah)*.[1] In establishing the relationship between miracles and his first dogma, Naḥmanides applies a philosophical argument in a particularly striking way. "According to the believer in the eternity of the world," he writes, "if God wished to shorten the wing of a fly or lengthen the leg of an ant he would be unable to do so."[2] Hence, miracles demonstrate creation.

The reverse contention that creation demonstrates the possibility of miracles is an assertion which goes back to Philo.[3] In this case, however, Naḥmanides is applying to miracles an argument that Saadya had used

Some of the issues analyzed in this article were discussed in a more rudimentary form in chapters one, three, and four of my master's essay, "Naḥmanides' Attitude Toward Secular Learning and its Bearing upon his Stance in the Maimonidean Controversy" (Columbia University, 1965), which was directed by Prof. Gerson D. Cohen.

[1] *Torat HaShem Temimah* (henceforth *THT*), in *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. by Ch. Chavel, I (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 150. On Naḥmanides' dogmas and their connection with miracles, see S. Schechter, "Nachmanides," in *Studies in Judaism* I (Philadelphia, 1896), pp. 118-22, and Ch. Henoch, *HaRamban KeḤoqer VekhiMequbbal* (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 159-79.

[2] *THT*, p. 146. All translations from Naḥmanides' works are mine.

[3] H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1948) I, pp. 298-99, 354; II, pp. 199-200. Cf. also the references in Wolfson's *Religious Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961), p. 223.

about the fundamental hypothesis of creation from primeval matter. Such creation, the Gaon had contended, would have been impossible, since "God would not have [had] the power to create things out of" pre-existent matter; "it would not have accepted his command nor allowed itself to be affected according to his wish and shaped according to his design."[4] The direct source of Naḥmanides' imagery, however, is not Saadya but Maimonides. In discussing the Aristotelian version of the eternity of the universe, Maimonides remarked that if the world operates through necessity and not through will, "very disgraceful conclusions will follow....Namely, it would follow that the deity, whom everyone intelligent recognizes to be perfect in every kind of perfection, could, as far as all the beings are concerned, produce nothing new in any of them; if He wished to lengthen a fly's wing or shorten a worm's foot, He would not be able to do it."[5]

The glaring anomaly in Naḥmanides' borrowing of this vivid image is that Maimonides applied the argument not to any denial of *ex nihilo* creation but only to an Aristotelian universe governed by necessity; according to the "Platonic" version of eternity, miracles are possible.[6] Maimonides, in fact, practically begins his discussion of the question of creation by describing how the Platonic approach can maintain both the eternity of matter and divine control over it by appealing to an analogy with the potter's relationship to his clay. Here is a case in which control is manifestly not dependent upon creation or even chronological priority.[7]

Since Naḥmanides uses only the word *ḥiddush* (not creation *me'ayin*) in connection with this argument in his *Torat Ha-Shem Temimah* and since

[4]Translation from A. Altmann's selections in *Three Jewish Philosophers* (Cleveland, New York, and Philadelphia, 1960), p. 61 = *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, translated by S. Rosenblatt (New Haven, 1948), p. 48. Halevi (*Kuzari* I.91, and cf. V.14) also spoke of a connection between miracles and creation; he was, however, less dogmatic about the indispensability of the belief in creation *ex nihilo* since "a believer in the Torah" who accepted the reality of eternal hylic matter could nevertheless retain the conviction that "this world was renewed at a certain time and the beginning of humanity is Adam and Eve" (I.67; contrast, however, II.50). Apparently Halevi's characteristic skepticism about the decisive force of philosophical arguments—in this case the demonstration of a link between miracles and *ex nihilo* creation—ironically enables him to tolerate a radical philosophical position more readily than Saadya or Naḥmanides. (On the other hand, he may have been thinking of a specific refutation of this link, perhaps along the lines of the argument that we shall be examining shortly.)

[5]*Guide* II. 22 (Pines' translation).

[6]*Guide* II. 25.

[7]*Guide* II. 13.

Maimonides at one point uses the word *ḥiddush* about the Platonic view of eternity,[8] there is a fleeting temptation to suggest that Naḥmanides was not pressing this particular argument, at least to the discerning reader, beyond the point where Maimonides had taken it. This temptation, however, must almost certainly be resisted, for we find Naḥmanides using the same argument (though without the Maimonidean language) in his *Commentary to Exodus* explicitly about creation *ex nihilo*; miracles demonstrate *ḥiddush* by showing that everything is God's since he created it from nothing.[9] Naḥmanides nowhere addresses the "Platonic" analogy with the potter, and it must be said that, in the very same chapter of the *Guide* where he presents the analogy, Maimonides himself suggests that the Aristotelian and Platonic versions of creation do not differ significantly in the eyes of one who follows the Torah.[10] Hence, it may well be that Naḥmanides was disarmed by Maimonides' ambiguities and was not fully cognizant of the disparity between his use of the "fly's wing" image and the use of which it was put in his source.

In any event, we are left to speculate about Naḥmanides' response to the potter analogy. He may have felt that the potter's control over his clay is far too restricted to serve as a paradigm for God's power over the world. Perhaps more significantly, he might have argued that this analogy begs the question since the control of a potter over his clay is ultimately derived from God (Genesis 1:28; Psalms 8:7), but God's own power must be called into question if matter is primeval. Miracles are possible only, to use Shem Tov's play on a talmudic phrase, because "the mouth which prohibited is the one which permitted."[11]

However Naḥmanides may have dealt with this question, the most telling aspect of his presentation involves the sharpening of another, related point made by Saadya. To the Gaon, the denial of creation *ex nihilo* is motivated by the excessive empiricism of people who believe only what their eyes see and what their senses perceive,[12] and Naḥmanides

[8] *Guide* II. 25. The word appears in Al-Ḥarizi's translation (II. 26), which was the one Naḥmanides used, as well as in Ibn Tibbon's.

[9] To Exodus 13:16.

[10] *Guide* II. 13. Cf. also the end of n. 14 below. For some of the peculiarities in Maimonides' treatment of Platonic eternity, see H. Davidson, "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation," in I. Twersky, ed., *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1979), pp. 16-40.

[11] Commentary to *Guide* II. 25.

[12] For example, *Beliefs and Opinions* I, Rosenblatt's translation, pp. 38-39, 61-62, 71, 76.

twice refers to Aristotle as a man who believed only what he could sense.[13] In light of this perception, the argument from miracles can be sharpened into a remarkably effective polemical weapon: since miracles are an empirical datum, and they establish creation *ex nihilo* through a straightforward philosophical demonstration, the affirmation of eternity is a rejection of empiricism. "Hence you see the stubbornness of the leader of the philosophers, may his name be erased, for he denies a number of things that many have seen, whose truth we ourselves have witnessed, and which have become famous in the world."[14] The arch-empiricist is revealed as a pseudo-empiricist.

In an important way, this argument exemplifies Naḥmanides' fundamental philosophical stance. Because revelation—and hence the content of the revelation—is an empirical datum, there is hardly much point in wasting energy and ingenuity in demonstrating such things as God's existence or unity, and Naḥmanides never bothers with such philosophical exercises. At the same time, the use of reason to understand God, creation, and other key theological issues is essential. Those who spurn an investigation into theodicy on the grounds that it will inevitably remain a mystery are "fools who despise wisdom. For we shall benefit ourselves in the above-mentioned study by becoming wise men who know God in the manner in which he acts and in his deeds; furthermore, we shall become believers endowed with a stronger faith in him than others."[15]

[13]*THT*, p. 147; *Comm. to Lev.* 16:18.

[14]*THT*, p. 147. Saadya's attack against the empiricism of believers in eternity usually took the form of arguing that they too end by believing in things that they have never experienced (cf. the references in n. 12). He does appeal to miracles as well (e.g. Rosenblatt's translation, pp. 40, 58, 73), but on at least one of those occasions (and probably the others too) he seems to have in mind the less direct argument that miracles validate Scripture, which in turn teaches the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. In any case, he never formulates the argument found in Naḥmanides as clearly, sharply, or effectively.

In Maimonides' "fly's wing" passage, the argument was based not on the fact that God had demonstrated his control of the world but on the assertion that lack of such control would be a philosophically inadmissible imperfection in the deity. In the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, however (ed. by. J. Finkel [New York, 1939], p. 32, #46), which was directed to a more popular audience, Maimonides did argue that miracles demonstrate *ḥiddush* "as we have explained in the *Guide*." Most readers were not likely to realize that this *ḥiddush* can include Platonic eternity.

[15]*Sha'ar HaGemul*, in *Kitvei Ramban* II, p. 281. The phrase "fools who despise wisdom" (הכסילים מואסי החכמה, though based, as Chavel remarks, on Proverbs 1:22 (וכסילים ישנאו דעת), is borrowed from a similar discussion in Saadya: "Many people have erred and despised wisdom (מאסו בחכמה), some because they did not know the

In our case, the reality of miracles is taken for granted, and the connection with creation *ex nihilo* is made by a philosophical argument. Without denigrating the use of reason, Naḥmanides has eliminated the boundary between revelation and reason by incorporating revealed information, openly and unselfconsciously, into what might be described as the data base for philosophical analysis. It is this approach which accounts for his discussing theological issues primarily in the context of a commentary to the revelation,[16] and it is this, I think, which attracted him to kabbalah. Naḥmanides' mysticism, after all, is essentially a revealed philosophical system, and the function of kabbalah as a harmonizing force subsuming both reason and revelation may well precede and transcend Naḥmanides to account for the attractiveness of medieval Jewish mysticism in precisely the time and place where it first became a major force. It is no accident that late twelfth-century Provençal Jewry was the locus of both the rise of kabbalah and a confrontation with philosophy by a Jewish community without a philosophical tradition. Jewish mysticism provided an ideal solution for a mind captivated by the philosophic quest but committed only to authentic, revealed sources. The Talmud, it is true, spoke of the danger that esoteric investigation could lead to heresy; nonetheless, the perils posed by the study of esoteric doctrines revealed by God pale in comparison with the heresies awaiting a student of ultimate questions whose only guides are reason and Aristotle.[17] Within the kabbalistic system, the boundary between revelation and philosophy was completely erased, so that Naḥmanides and like-minded contemporaries could satisfy their yearning for what might best be termed not a religious philosophy but a philosophical religion.

way to it, while some knew and entered the path but did not complete it....Therefore, let not the contemptuous fool (הכסיל הקץ) blame God for his sin." My translation from Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew. See *Sefer HaEmunot VehaDe'ot* (Józewów, 1878) I, p. 41 = Rosenblatt's translation, p. 13. On the reading הקץ הכסיל (not הכסיל אוהקץ), see M. Ventura, *La Philosophie de Saadia Gaon* (Paris, 1934), p. 311.

[16]Cf. Chavel, *Ramban: His Life and Teachings* (New York, 1960), pp. 67-68.

[17]Though he is referring to a later period, A. S. Halkin's remarks can be applied to the twelfth century as well: "Its [kabbalah's] concern with fundamental problems and its incorporation of philosophical concepts into a system which vaunted a purely Jewish ancestry and claimed that it represented the deepest understanding of the revealed books, qualified it both to satisfy the curiosity of those who sought answers to theological and cosmological questions and to challenge Aristotelianism and its Jewish exponents as alien plants within Jewry." "Yedaiah Bedersi's Apology," in A. Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967), p. 183.

This commitment to kabbalah raises a crucial final question concerning the sincerity of the argument that we have been examining. Naḥmanides demonstrates creation *ex nihilo* through an appeal to miracles—but did he really believe in creation *ex nihilo*? Scholem has shown that the mystical school in Gerona, of which Naḥmanides was the most prominent representative, turned the naive understanding of the term on its head and understood *ayin (= nihil)* as a word for the hidden recesses of the Godhead itself; creation is a process of emanation from the divine Nothing, not the sudden appearance of matter from ordinary nothingness.[18] Although there may be a certain disingenuousness in the kabbalist's use of this term to an uninitiated audience, Naḥmanides' argument remains relatively unaffected and must almost certainly be regarded as sincere. The kabbalistic doctrine continues to assert—indeed, to insist—that the process of creation precludes the primeval existence of matter independent of God; even from a mystical perspective, then, the argument from miracles can be mobilized to deny the existence of such independent matter, and that is essentially what Naḥmanides has done. Whether the alternative is creation from nothing or from Nothing depends on the reader's kabbalistic sophistication, but Naḥmanides' appeal to miracles in support of his first dogma remains both ingenious and ingenuous.[19]

[18]Scholem's most elaborate discussion is in *HaQabbalah BeGerona*, pp. 212-40.

[19]For the possibility that Naḥmanides may have attempted somehow to salvage the straightforward understanding of creation *ex nihilo* within a mystical framework, see *HaQabbalah BeGerona*, pp. 255-65, esp. 261-65. On the subject of straightforward versus esoteric biblical exegesis (*peshat* vs. *sod*), A. Funkenstein has recently written that "*peshat* and *sod* correspond [or 'overlap'—*ḥofefim*] in only one place [in Naḥmanides' exegesis]: kabbalah is the central dimension in understanding the reason for sacrifices (*Comm. to Lev.* 1:9). Everywhere else *peshat* and *sod* are different, and in Genesis 1:1 this reaches the point of syntactical contradiction: according to 'the way of genuine truth,' the word 'God' is not the subject of the verse but rather its object" ("Parshanuto HaTippologit shel HaRamban," *Zion* 45 [1980]:46-47). Cf. also H. H. Ben Sasson, "Rabbi Moshe ben Naḥman: Ish BeSivkhei Tequfato," *Molad*, n.s. 1 (1967):360, 362-63.

In fact, however, Naḥmanides displays a pronounced tendency to equate *peshat* and *sod* by finding that the plain meaning of Scripture can be explained satisfactorily—or most satisfactorily—only by resorting to kabbalistic doctrine. Thus, only the esoteric interpretation pointing to metempsychosis really "fits the verses" of Elihu's critical speech in Job (*Comm. to Job* 32:3), only according to the kabbalistic interpretation is the sin of Moses and Aaron "mentioned explicitly in the biblical text" (*Comm. to Numbers* 20:1), only a midrash requiring kabbalistic elaboration "fits the language of the verse best" in Genesis 6:4, only after understanding a

II

Naḥmanides goes on to assert that miracles—or more precisely, manifest miracles—validate the remaining two dogmas of divine knowledge and providence.[20] The connection here is so obvious as to be scarcely interesting, but it is in this discussion of the nature of providence that Naḥmanides cites his central, seminal doctrine of the hidden miracle—and that doctrine is exceptionally interesting. Although similar views had been expressed earlier by Baḥya, Halevi, and even Maimonides,[21] no previous Jewish thinker had laid equivalent emphasis on such a conception, applied it as widely, or made it as central to his world view. The hidden miracle, then, justly came to be regarded as a Naḥmanidean doctrine *par excellence*, and the intellectual image of Naḥmanides has often been drawn in significant measure with this doctrine in mind. Thus, to the extent that we have misunderstood the hidden miracle, we have misunderstood Naḥmanides.

In at least two formulations of his position, Naḥmanides permitted himself some rhetorical excesses that have inevitably fostered such misunderstanding. "A person has no portion in the Torah of Moses," he writes, "without believing that all things that happen to us are miracles; they have nothing to do with 'nature' or 'the customary order of the

mystical secret in connection with the second commandment will "the entire verse become clear in accordance with its simple, straightforward meaning" (*Comm. to Exodus* 20:3), and Exodus 6:2-3 will reveal its "simple, straightforward meaning" (*Comm.* ad loc.) "with nothing missing or superfluous" (*Sermon on Qohelet, Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 192) only through kabbalistic exegesis. Cf. also Scholem's remark about the *Commentary to Job, HaQabbalah BeGerona*, p. 75, specifically with respect to Job 28 (cf. too p. 230). It is particularly significant that although Naḥmanides endorses the content of the kabbalistic doctrine read into that chapter by his source (R. Ezra's commentary to the Song of Songs), he expresses reservations (not noted by Scholem) about the validity of the exegesis (*Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 90). In a sense, this underlines the point; if Naḥmanides were prepared to find *sod* through forced interpretation, he would have accepted such exegesis without resistance. On the importance of *peshat* to Naḥmanides, see also J. Perles, "Ueber den Geist des Commentars des R. Moses ben Nachman zum Pentateuch und über sein Verhältniss zum Pentateuch-Commentar Raschi's," *MGWJ* 7 (1858):119-20, esp. n. 2.

[20]*THT*, pp. 150, 155.

[21]See *HaQabbalah BeGerona*, pp. 305, 309. Naḥmanides himself (*THT*, p. 154) noted that Maimonides' *Treatise on the Resurrection* contains a passage supporting his view; the passage he had in mind, which certainly influenced him, was without question the one pointed out by Scholem (Finkel's ed., pp. 33-36, #48-50), not the ones noted by Chavel in his edition of *THT* ad loc.

world'."[22] More succinctly, "One who believes in the Torah may not believe in the existence of nature at all."[23] The analysis underlying these remarks appears almost as a refrain throughout Naḥmanides' works: since the Torah promises rewards and punishments ranging from famine to plague to constant good health, and since there is nothing "natural" about the link between human behavior and such phenomena, providence must be realized through a series of hidden miracles disguised as part of an apparent natural order.[24]

It is hardly surprising, then, that students of Naḥmanides have perceived him as a thinker who denied, or virtually denied, the existence of natural law. Solomon Schechter, for example, argues that "We may...maintain that in Nachmanides' system there is hardly room left for such a thing as nature or 'the order of the world'....Miracles are raised to a place in the regular scheme of things, and the difficulty regarding the possibility of God's interference with nature disappears by their very multiplication. [There is] an unbroken chain of miracles."[25]

To Gershom Scholem, Naḥmanides tends

> to turn what we call the laws of nature into a sort of optical illusion, since we regard what is really a continuum of miracles as a manifestation of natural law....These hidden miracles, which are the foundation of the entire Torah, are miracles which do not appear miraculous to us....The world and the behavior of nature and their relationship to man are not at all in the category of what we call nature; they are, rather, a constant and constantly renewed miracle, a continuous chain of miracles....[26]

Naḥmanides' position, Scholem says, is very close to occasionalism, a later philosophical school which denied natural law entirely, though there is one very significant exception: Naḥmanides was a virtual occasionalist only with respect to Israel; other nations live in a world of nature.[27]

In his recent book on Naḥmanides, Chayim Henoch makes the same comparison between the "constant miraculous renewal" in Naḥmanides' thought and both occasionalists and *mutakallimun*, while pointing out,

[22]*Comm. to Exodus* 13:16; *THT*, p. 153.
[23]*Sermon on Qohelet, Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 192.
[24]See *Comm. to Gen.* 17:1, 46:15; *Exod.* 6:2; *Lev.* 18:29, 26:11.
[25]"Nachmanides," pp. 119-20.
[26]*HaQabbalah BeGerona*, pp. 306-07.
[27]Ibid., pp. 309-10.

like Scholem, that this applies only to Israel.[28] Yitzhak Baer's classic *History* presents Naḥmanides as an anti-rationalist who denied the natural order, Haim Hillel Ben Sasson's characterization is even more extreme and explicit, and a recent study by Amos Funkenstein refers somewhat more cautiously to "Naḥmanides' tendency to blur the boundaries between the natural and the miraculous."[29]

There can be no question that Naḥmanides perceives the operation of providence as a phenomenon consisting of repeated miracles. Indeed, he has forced himself into a position where he denies that God enters the causal chain in any but the most direct way.

> If we will stubbornly insist that the [non-priest] who eats of the heave-offering will not die through a change in nature, but that God will cause him to eat food that causes sickness or that he will go to war and die, the fact would remain that the astrological configuration of his constellation would have changed for ill through his sin or for good through his merit so that nature would in any event not prevail. Thus, if the alternative is that God would change this person's mind as a result of his sin so that he would eat harmful foods that he would not have eaten otherwise, it is easier to change the nature of the good food so that it will do him harm.[30]

Since there is no conceptual difference to Naḥmanides between indirect, "natural" providence and miraculous divine intervention, the work-

[28]*HaRamban KeḤoqer VekhiMequbbal*, p. 178. Henoch goes on to emphasize the kabbalistic character of Naḥmanides' position, which we shall touch on briefly a bit later. In a much earlier footnote (p. 54, n. 162), he had proposed, as we shall see, a crucial additional qualification, but there is no echo of that note in his later discussion.

[29]See Baer's *History of the Jews in Christian Spain* I (Philadelphia, 1971), p. 245; *Toledot HaYehudim BiSefarad HaNoẓrit* (Tel Aviv, 1959), p. 145; Ben Sasson in *Molad*, n.s. 1 (1967):360-61; Funkenstein in *Zion* 45 (1980):45. Ben Sasson's discussion clearly implies that Naḥmanides did not recognize a natural realm even in areas that do not impinge on human affairs; thus, it is not only "all things that happen *to us*" that are miracles. According to Naḥmanides, we are prohibited from mixing species because this would constitute unwarranted interference with creation; a sort of *hybris* reflecting the conviction that we can improve on the divine handiwork. To Ben Sasson, the motivation for this interpretation stems from Naḥmanides' conviction that even such a "natural" phenomenon as the maintenance of species in their present form is an ongoing miraculous process; hence, human intervention would involve an unseemly attempt to compete not merely with God's creative acts in the distant past but with miracles that He is performing at this very moment.

[30]Introduction to Job, *Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 19.

ings of providence are best understood as direct hidden miracles unmediated by natural forces. There is therefore hardly any point in asking why Naḥmanides does not formally list the hidden miracle as one of his dogmas. He does list it—under the name "providence."[31]

Nevertheless, Naḥmanides was forced by the Bible, the halakhah, and intuitions influenced by philosophy or common sense or both, to recognize that natural law often does operate—even for Jews and probably even for the Jewish collective. Consequently, a careful examination of the totality of Naḥmanides' comments on this issue reveals nature in operation ninety-nine percent of the time, and it is perforce nature without providence, since "natural," indirect providence is a contradiction in terms.[32] Naḥmanides' world is therefore exceptionally—extraordinarily—naturalistic precisely because of his insistence on the miraculous nature of providence.

This is, to say the least, an unexpected conclusion, and we must now take a careful look at the texts which make it inescapable.

> God's knowledge, which is his providence in the lower world, is to guard species, and even individual human beings are left to accidents until their time of reckoning comes. With respect to people of special piety *(ḥasidav)*, however, God turns his attention to such a person to know him as an individual and to see to it that divine

[31]In *THT*, p. 155, Naḥmanides comes very close to saying this explicitly: כבר נתברר כי הנסים המפורסמים מורים על החידוש ועל הידיעה שיש לו להקב"ה בפרטי העולם ועל ההשגחה והנסים הנסתרים. לדעת כל מאמין בענש העבירות ובשכר המצוות, ולדעת כל מתפלל וכל נשא עיניו לשמים, כלם מודים על החידוש ועל הידיעה וההשגחה הזאת אמיתית, אלא שהיא נסתרת, והם שלש מוסדות התורה.

Henoch (p. 171) cites this passage, but I don't think he takes it (as I do) as a virtual equation of hidden miracles and providence in particular. The references to *hashgaḥah* and *nissim nistarim* really merge into one another, and, despite the syntactical awkwardness which I must ascribe to Naḥmanides, the phrase *ella shehi nisteret* seems to me to modify *hashgaḥah* (not *hoda'ah*) and to mean that providence takes the form of hidden miracles. (Henoch's subsequent citation of the phrase "all the fundamentals of the Torah come through hidden miracles" from *Comm. to Gen.* 46:15 as another assertion of the connection between miracles and dogmas is probably not germane; in that context, "fundamentals of the Torah" does not mean creation, knowledge and providence but reiterates Naḥmanides' standard assertion that all the Torah's promises of reward and punishment [= "the fundamentals of the Torah"] come through hidden miracles.) Manifest miracles are not listed among the dogmas for the reason Henoch suggests: they are not a dogma in themselves but an expression of divine power and a means by which the fundamental dogmas are validated.

[32]Contrast Maimonides, *Guide* II. 48.

> protection cleaves to him always; knowledge and remembrance are never separated from him at all. This is the meaning of "He withdraws not his eyes from the righteous" (Job 36:4); indeed, many verses refer to this principle, as it is written, "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him" (Psalms 33:18), and others besides.[33]

Since he is commenting on a verse which says that God "knew" Abraham, Naḥmanides here understands the term knowledge in a strong sense as the equivalent of providence, but there is no reason to think that this passage limits divine knowledge in the ordinary sense of the word.[34] The limitation on providence itself, however, is significant enough; not many people are designated *ḥasidim* in Naḥmanides' terminology, and the attribution of constant providence to precious few individuals is made even clearer by the phrase he uses in a later passage.

> Know that miracles are performed for good or ill only for the absolutely righteous *(ẓaddiqim gemurim)* or the absolutely wicked. Those in the middle have good or ill occur to them according to the customary order of the world "in accordance with their way and their actions" (Ezekiel 36:17).[35]

The assertion that miracles are performed only for the absolutely righteous or wicked is couched in general terms and appears to include every variety of miracles. Hence, ordinary people are excluded from the regular operation of hidden miracles and are left, as in the *Commentary to Genesis*, to the customary, natural order. The last phrase from Ezekiel, however, remains troublesome. It could mean that such people are left to some sort of indirect providence weaker than the one which works by hidden miracles, but this would directly contradict the introduction to the *Commentary to Job*, which virtually denies the existence of such providence, it would contradict the assertion in the *Commentary to Genesis* that non-*ḥasidim* are left to "accidents," and it would introduce a category or providence found nowhere else in Naḥmanides. The most likely meaning, then, is that people left to accidents will be subjected to good or

[33] *Comm. to Gen.* 18:19.

[34] Cf. the passage from Baḥya cited by Chavel ad loc., and contrast L. Stein's assertion cited in n. 37 below. Note too that, if we would not assume constant divine knowledge in the weak sense, we would need to resort to complex and obscure triggering mechanisms to account for the "time of reckoning" and perhaps even for God's recognition that so-and-so has become the sort of pious man deserving of constant divine protection. See the related discussion at nn. 38-42 below.

[35] *Comm. to Deut.* 11:13.

evil according to "their way and their actions" in a purely naturalistic sense; those who are careful will be safer than those who are not. Just such a position, in fact, emerges from a passage in the *Commentary to Job* that we shall examine in a moment where Naḥmanides maintains that people left to accidents are likely to stumble unless they are particularly cautious.

Reinforcing this conception that God may well decide to leave people to accidents is Naḥmanides' celebrated discussion of medicine, where he maintains that in an ideal Jewish society even individuals would be dealt with miraculously so that medical treatment would be either unnecessary or futile. Regrettably, people began to consult doctors, and so God left them "to natural accidents."[36] In this case, the halakhic permissibility of consulting physicians, which Naḥmanides goes on to cite, undoubtedly played a role in moderating his skepticism about his own profession; the Torah, he says, does not rest its laws on miracles. This halakhic principle is not especially congenial to an occasionalist, and, as we shall see, this is not the only instance in which it worked to mitigate Naḥmanides' emphasis on the miraculous.

These passages leave no alternative to a thorough rethinking of the standard image of Naḥmanides. Chayim Henoch, who studied Naḥmanides' *oeuvre* with painstaking care, does confront them in a footnote, and he suggests that the passages about miraculous providence may refer to the Jewish collective and not to all Jewish individuals. Nevertheless, since we have seen that he later describes Naḥmanides as maintaining a view close to that of the occasionalists and the *mutakallimun*, the enormity of this concession has apparently failed to make a sufficient impression.[37] Finally, even the sharply shrunken position which applies Naḥmanides' denial of the natural order only to the Jewish collective (in addition to a handful of extraordinarily righteous and wicked individuals) must be shaken by a particularly striking passage in the *Commentary to Job.*

> *He withdraws not his eyes from the righteous* (Job 36:7): This verse explains a great principle with respect to providence concerning which there are in fact many verses. For people of Torah and perfect faith believe in providence, i.e., that God watches over and

[36] *Comm. to Lev.* 26:11.

[37] See above, n. 28. One nineteenth-century scholar noticed the passage in *Comm. to Gen.* 18:19 and allowed it to make too great an impression, asserting in a brief passage that Naḥmanides' view of both divine knowledge and providence is virtually identical with that of Gersonides. See L. Stein, *Die Willensfreiheit und ihr Verhältniss zur göttlichen Präscienz und Providenz bei den Jüdischen Philosophen des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1882), pp. 126-27. See above, n. 34.

protects the members of the human species....It is not said in the Torah or prophets that God watches over and protects the individuals of other groups of creatures that do not speak; rather, he guards only the species....The reason for this is clearly known, for since man recognizes his God, God in turn watches over him and protects him; this is not true of the other creatures, which do not speak and do not know their creator.

This, then, is why he protects the righteous, for just as their heart and eyes are always with him, so are the eyes of God on them from the beginning of the year until the end, to the point where the absolutely pious man *(ḥasid)* who cleaves to his God always and who never separates himself from him in his thoughts by paying attention to mundane matters will be guarded always from all accidents, even those that take place in the natural course of events; such a person will be protected from these accidents through a miracle occurring to him constantly, as if he were considered one of the supernal beings who are not subject to generation and corruption by accidents. To the extent that this individual comes close to God by cleaving to him, he will be guarded especially well, while one who is far from God in his thought and deeds, even if he does not deserve death because of his sin, will be forsaken and left to accidents.

Many verses make this point. David [*sic*] said, "He will guard the feet of his holy ones, but the wicked shall be put to silence in darkness" (I Samuel 2:9). He means by this that those who are close to God are under absolute protection, while those who are far from him are subject to accidents and have no one to protect them from harm, just as one who walks in the darkness is likely to fall unless he is cautious and walks slowly. David also said that "it is not with sword and spear that the Lord saves" (I Samuel 17:47), and it is written, "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who wait for his mercy" (Psalms 33:18); i.e., God's eyes are on them when they wait for him constantly and their souls cleave to him.

Since most of the world belongs to this intermediate group, the Torah commanded that warriors be mobilized, and that the priest anointed for war send back the fearful so that they will not sap the courage of the others. It is for this reason too that we find the preparation of the order of battle in the Torah and the prophets, for example, "And David inquired of the Lord, and the Lord said, 'Do not go up; circle around behind them...' (II Samuel 5:23), and 'Go and draw toward Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men" (Judges 4:6). Had they been meritorious, they would have gone out with a few people and achieved victory without

> arms, and had they deserved defeat, no multitude would have helped them. In this case, however, they deserved to be treated in the manner of nature and accident. This is a matter which was explained well by Maimonides in the *Guide of the Perplexed.*

As Naḥmanides hints in his last sentence, much of this passage (until the final paragraph) is a paraphrase of Maimonides' discussion in *Guide* III. 18, and it is so striking in its naturalism and limitation of providence that we shall first have to devote some time to demonstrating that Naḥmanides has not changed into a Maimonides in disguise. The truth is that he has introduced some subtle but crucial—and characteristic—changes into his paraphrase of the *Guide*, so that his final sentence, implying an identity of views with Maimonides, is profoundly misleading. First, despite Maimonides' use of the term pious (*ḥasidim* in both Ibn Tibbon and Al-Ḥarizi) to describe people who attain the benefits of providence, the *Guide* repeatedly emphasizes the intellectual dimension as well; to put it moderately, providence is connected not only with righteousness but also with intellectual achievement. In Naḥmanides, this central point of the *Guide* vanishes entirely; though even he could hardly have perceived his *ḥasid* as a pious fool, the emphasis on intellect is completely absent.

A second and for our purposes even more important divergence comes through Naḥmanides' introduction of an apparently innocuous phrase into the final sentence of the second paragraph. Maimonides had asserted that pious intellectuals are close to God and hence attain providence while those who are far from him are likely to stumble because they remain unprotected. The absolutely wicked, who constitute an extreme example of the second category, are thus likely to fall because of an absence of protection; consequently, the citation of the verse "The wicked shall be put to silence in darkness" interpreted as blind, unguided groping in the dark is especially appropriate. Naḥmanides, however, as we have seen in his commentary to Deuteronomy 11:13, believed that the absolutely wicked are punished by miraculous divine intervention, and so he slipped his crucial phrase into the Maimonidean discussion: "One who is far from God in his thoughts and deeds, *even if he does not deserve death for his sins*, will be forsaken and left to accidents." When Naḥmanides then continues to paraphrase the *Guide* by citing "the wicked shall be put to silence in darkness" understood merely as absence of protection, the reference becomes forced and inappropriate. All of a sudden, "wicked" excludes the truly wicked and refers only to an intermediate category that plays no role in the Maimonidean passage. It is only because of this tampering with the analysis in the *Guide* that Naḥmanides' final paragraph, which is not derived from Maimonides, can begin with a reference to "this intermediate group."

The introduction of the person who deserves death for his sins also undermines the essentially naturalistic character of Maimonides' analysis. To Maimonides, a person who reached the requisite level attained providence "by necessity" through his link with the divine overflow, and Naḥmanides' discussion of his *ḥasid*'s achieving providence through cleaving to God *(devequt)* could also be read in a relatively naturalistic, though mystical sense.[38] Later kabbalists, in fact, were uncomfortable with the entire concept of the hidden miracle because of their conviction that the process by which human actions affect both nature and the individual's fate is one of clearcut cause and effect involving the esoteric relationship between upper and lower worlds.[39]

Nevertheless, it would almost certainly be a mistake to understand Naḥmanides' miracles as entirely "naturalistic" mystical events. It is, first of all, overwhelmingly likely that Naḥmanides understood sefirotic action as involving specific divine volition,[40] and so the providence attained by the *ḥasid* who cleaves to God does not have to be understood as coming "by necessity."[41] Moreover, the miraculous punishment of the person deserving to die for his sins certainly does not come through any cleaving to God (just as it could not come through linkage to a Maimonidean overflow), and, while an alternative kabbalistic mechanism of a naturalistic sort is theoretically feasible, Naḥmanides does not provide one. In particular, the search for a "naturalistic" mystical triggering mechanism to account for the "time of reckoning" of intermediate individuals who are normally ignored would be especially difficult.[42] In

[38]On the process of *devequt*, in which the *sefirah* of *tif'eret* plays a special role, cf. Henoch, pp. 248-51. On the *ḥasid* who cleaves to God, cf. also *Comm. to Deut.* 5:23, 11:22; *Comm. to Lev.* 18:4; *Sermon on Qohelet, Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 192.

[39]Meir ibn Gabbai, *'Avodat HaQodesh* (Warsaw, 1894), II. 17, p. 36b (brought to my attention by Prof. Bernard Septimus); Isaiah Horowitz, *Shnei Luḥot HaBerit* (Józewów, 1878), pp. 9b-10a, discussed by Chavel, *Ramban*, pp. 85-86, and Henoch, p. 56, n. 171. Prof. Septimus' *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England, 1982), which appeared after the completion of this article, contains a discussion of the argument in *'Avodat HaQodesh* (pp. 110-11); the book also called my attention to a two-sentence passage in E. Gottlieb's *Meḥqarim BeSifrut HaQabbalah* (Tel Aviv, 1976), p. 266, which comments on the central theme of this essay with real insight (Septimus, pp. 110, 170 n. 54).

[40]See Henoch, p. 18, n. 21.

[41]Note that Naḥmanides' remark that the *ḥasid* "will be protected from accidents through a miracle occurring to him constantly" is another elaboration on his Maimonidean source.

[42]The systems of the later kabbalists did not generally assume the existence of a group of Jews usually left to accidents.

short, for all its limitation of providence, this passage in the *Commentary to Job* does not lead to naturalism of a Maimonidean or even mystical variety.

The fact remains, however, that it not only provides a vigorous reassertion of the largely accidental life of ordinary individuals, it calls into question the exclusively miraculous fate of even the Jewish collective. The final paragraph of this passage, which is Naḥmanides' own, asserts unambiguously that miraculous providence did not always protect the Jewish people in its biblical wars. Ironically, Naḥmanides is once again forced into a naturalistic posture precisely by his miraculous conception of providence. The verses that he cites include direct advice given to the Jewish army by God himself; for someone who believed that providence normally operates through nature, these battles would constitute classic examples of divine protection of Israel. Instead, Naḥmanides explicitly cites them to show that when Jews are in the intermediate category, they are abandoned to accidents, with a clear analogy to the individual who is allowed to stumble in the darkness. We are apparently left to assume that in an age without prophecy, when no divine advice is proffered, such an army would have been left to accidents pure and simple. But if a Jewish army fighting under the judges of Israel is not the Jewish collective, it is hard to imagine what is. Hence, although Naḥmanides could never consider the possibility that God would allow the Jewish people to be utterly destroyed through the accidents of nature, it seems clear that even the Jewish collective is not always governed by an unbroken chain of hidden miracles.[43]

[43]Needless to say, miraculous providence often does govern the wars of Israel; see the references in Henoch, pp. 60-61. On the suspension of such providence from the Jewish collective, cf. Rashba's responsum (I. 19) cited by Henoch, p. 57, n. 171, which asserts that, although Jews are generally excluded from astrological control, their sins can lower them to a position ehere this is no longer the case. Though Henoch apparently considers this inconsistent with Naḥmanides' view, the passage from the *Comm. to Job* may suggest otherwise, since nature and the astrological order are pretty much synonymous. For Naḥmanides' frequent denials that the Jewish people or the land of Israel are subject to the constellations, see *Sermon on Qohelet, Kitvei Ramban* I, pp. 200-01; *Sermon on Rosh HaShanah, Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 250; *Comm. to Gen.* 15:18; *Comm. to Lev.* 18:25; *Comm. to Deut.* 29:25; *THT*, p. 150. It was presumably the repeated assertions in these passages that Gentiles are subject to the constellations which persuaded Scholem and Henoch that Naḥmanides' supposed denial of a natural order applied only to Jews. The belief that nature prevails in the absence of special merit was used by Solomon ibn Verga as a clever transition from religious to naturalistic explanation of Jewish exile and suffering (*Shevet Yehudah*, ed. A. Schochet [Jerusalem, 1947], p. 127).

Finally, a responsum by Naḥmanides on astrology raises questions about the constancy of miraculous providence even for the remaining handful of extraordinarily righteous individuals. From a talmudic discussion, he says,

> it follows that it is permissible to listen to [astrologers] and to believe them. This is clear from Abraham, who said, "I looked at astrological calculations," and from R. Akiba, who worried deeply about his daughter [who had been the subject of a dire astrological prediction] and concluded after she was saved that charity had rescued her literally from death....However, God *sometimes* [my emphasis] performs a miracle for those who fear him by nullifying the decree of the stars for them, and these are among the hidden miracles which occur in the ordinary manner of the world and upon which the entire Torah depends. Consequently, one should not consult astrologers but should rather go forth in simple faith, as it is written, "You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your God" (Deut. 18-13). If someone does see something undesirable through astrology, he should perform good deeds and pray a great deal; at the same time, if he saw through astrology that a particular day is not auspicious for his work, he should avoid it and not depend on a miracle. It is my view that it is prohibited to go counter to the constellations while depending on a miracle.[44]

A legal responsum requires a particularly strong measure of caution and responsibility, and it may therefore be dangerous to draw conclusions about Naḥmanides' more general theological inclinations from this sort of source; even occasionalists do not walk off cliffs, and occasionalist halakhists do not advise others to do so. Nevertheless, the plain meaning of the passage appears to be that even "those who fear" God are not favored with continuous miracles, and methodological reservations cannot entirely neutralize the impact of such a remark. Thus, Naḥmanides' denial of nature may not apply in undiluted form even to that final category of the absolutely righteous.[45]

[44]*Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 379. The talmudic discussion that Naḥmanides cites is in *B. Shabbat* 156a-b.

[45]It may be relevant to note Maimonides' sudden insight in *Guide* III. 51, where he explains that even the pious intellectual is likely to stop concentrating on the divine for a while, and during that time he remains unprotected. Even within a less naturalistic framework than that of Maimonides, a parallel analysis is not impossible. Cf. also the somewhat enigmatic passage in *Sermon on Qohelet, Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 192, which apparently speaks of occasional accident with respect to the righteous.

Moreover, even though Naḥmanides complains that Maimonides "limits miracles and increases nature,"[46] his own exegesis is by no means free of such a tendency. The plain meaning of the biblical text indicates that the rainbow was first created after the flood, but Naḥmanides is prepared to resort to reinterpretation under the pressure of scientific evidence. "Against our will, we must believe the words of the Greeks that the rainbow comes about as a result of the sun's burning in the moist air, for the rainbow appears in a vessel of water placed in the sun."[47] Thus, the Bible means only that the rainbow, which had appeared from the beginning of creation, would henceforth be invested with symbolic significance. Similarly, he reinterprets a Rabbinic statement that the land of Israel was not inundated by the waters of the flood, arguing that there was no fence around it to prevent the water from entering; all the Rabbis meant was that the rain did not actually fall in Israel nor were its subterranean waters let loose, but the water that originated elsewhere covered Israel as well.[48]

With respect to the age of the antediluvians, there is a well-known dispute in which Naḥmanides takes Maimonides to task for ascribing extreme longevity only to the figures explicitly mentioned in the Bible. There is an almost instinctive tendency to ascribe Maimonides' position to his desire to restrict miracles[49] and Naḥmanides' to his tendency to multiply them. In fact, however, Naḥmanides attacks Maimonides for precisely the opposite offense. The argument in the *Guide*, he reports, is that a few people lived such long lives either because of the way they took care of themselves or as a result of a miracle. But it is hardly plausible that people could quadruple their life span by following a particular regimen; as for miracles, "why should such a miracle be performed for them when they are neither prophets nor especially righteous men?" The real reason for this longevity was the superior air before the time of the flood combined with the excellent constitution with which their recent ancestor

[46]*THT*, p. 154.

[47]*Comm. to Gen.* 9:12, and cf. *THT*, p. 174.

[48]*Comm. to Gen.* 8:11. As M. D. Eisenstadt pointed out in his comment ad loc. (*Perush HaRamban 'al HaTorah* [New York, 1958]), Naḥmanides' exegesis ignores a Rabbinic statement that the inhabitants of the land of Israel died only from the vapors.

[49]Maimonides wanted to leave the natural order intact, said Judah Alfakar at the height of the Maimonidean controversy, but what does it matter if someone tells you that he saw one camel or three flying in the air? See *Qovez Teshuvot HaRambam* (Leipzig, 1859), III, p. 2a.

Adam had been created, and these reasons, of course, apply to all antediluvians equally.[50]

It is a matter of special interest that Ritba's defense of Maimonides on this point already reflects what was to become the standard misreading of Naḥmanides' position on hidden miracles. Maimonides, Ritba argues, believed in the constancy of natural phenomena over the generations, and so Naḥmanides' naturalistic explanation about superior air could not appeal to him. As for the objection that miracles would not be performed for ordinary people, this is a peculiar argument coming from Naḥmanides. He himself, after all, "has taught us that there is a great difference between a miracle like longevity that comes to a certain extent in a natural way and a miracle that comes entirely outside the natural order."[51] In other words, manifest miracles would happen only to the specially righteous, but hidden miracles happen to everyone. Whether Naḥmanides would have considered the Maimonidean version of antediluvian longevity a hidden or manifest miracle is debatable,[52] but the main point is that Ritba has misread his view of the ubiquity of the hidden miracle: such miracles too happen regularly only to "prophets or especially righteous men."

One place where Naḥmanides introduces a miracle which is not in any of his sources is in the account of the flood, where he suggests that the ark miraculously contained more than its dimensions would normally allow. The problem here, however, is so acute, and the alternative solutions so implausible, that it is difficult to regard this as evidence of eagerness to multiply miracles, particularly since he makes a point of saying that the ark was made relatively large "for the purpose of minimizing the miracle."[53]

[50]*Comm. to Gen.* 5:4.

[51]*Sefer HaZikkaron*, ed. K. Kahana (Jerusalem, 1956), pp. 37-39.

[52]As Kahana notes, Ritba was probably thinking of Naḥmanides' assertion (*Comm. to Gen.* 46:15) that Jochebed's giving birth at the age of 130 is a hidden miracle. It is worth noting, however, that even though hidden and manifest miracles are performed through different divine names (e.g., *Comm. to Exodus* 6:2), the boundary line between them is not always hard and fast, if only because the constant repetition of certain hidden miracles can make them manifest (*Comm. to Lev.* 26:11).

[53]*Comm. to Gen.* 6:19. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that unless Naḥmanides had in mind the miniaturization of the animals in the ark (and he does not say this), the miracle he is suggesting appears to involve the sort of logical contradiction that Jewish rationalists refrained from accepting even in miracles and which they ascribed only to their Christian adversaries. See D. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1977), passim, and

Naḥmanides, then, was no occasionalist or near occasionalist. Except in the rarest of instances, the natural order governs the lives of non-Jews, both individually and collectively, as well as the overwhelming majority of Jews. The Jewish collective is often (usually?) guided by miraculous providence, but it too can find itself forsaken and left to accidents; and though the absolutely righteous and absolutely wicked also enjoy (or suffer) a chain of hidden miracles, the chain is apparently not unbroken. Moreover, Naḥmanides' uncompromising insistence that providence is exclusively miraculous means that, although God is constantly aware of everyone, he does not exercise providence when nature prevails; since nature almost always prevails, the routine functioning of Naḥmanides' world is, as we have already noted, extraordinarily naturalistic.

What, then, is the meaning of Naḥmanides' assertions that "a person has no portion in the Torah of Moses without believing that all things that happen to us are miracles; they have nothing to do with 'nature' or 'the customary order of the world' " and that "one who believes in the Torah may not believe in the existence of nature at all"?[54]

To resolve this question, we must look again at his standard argument for hidden miracles and the terms in which it is usually couched. As we have already seen, the essence of this argument is invariably the fact that the Torah promises rewards and punishments which cannot come naturally; hence, they are all miracles. This is true, he says, "of all the promises *(ye'udim)* in the Torah."[55] "The promises of the Torah *(ye'udei haTorah)* are all miracles."[56] Hidden miracles were performed for the patriarchs in the manner of "all the promises *(ye'udim)* of the Torah, for no good comes to a person as the reward of a good deed and no evil befalls him as a result of sin except through a miraculous act....The reward and punishment for the entire Torah in this world comes through miracles that are hidden."[57] "All the promises *(ye'udim)* in the Torah, favorable or unfavorable, are all miraculous and take the form of hidden miracles."[58] "All the blessings [in the Torah] are miracles."[59]

esp. pp. 25-43, and cf. my *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 351-52, esp. n. 11, for a possible affirmation of this rationalist position by Naḥmanides himself.

[54]See notes 22-23.

[55]*Comm. to Gen.* 17:1.

[56]*Comm. to Gen.* 46:15.

[57]*Comm. to Exod.* 6:2.

[58]*Comm. to Lev.* 18:29.

[59]*Comm. to Lev.* 26:11.

In all of these passages, Naḥmanides' affirmation of miracles refers specifically to the realm of reward and punishment promised by the Torah. Similarly, when he makes the extreme assertion in his commentary that "all things that happen to us are miracles," he immediately continues, "If a person observes the commandments his reward will make him successful, and if he violates them his punishment will destroy him."[60] In his sermon *Torat HaShem Temimah*, where he repeats his strong statement about miracles, the evidence again comes from the "promises of the Torah" *(ye'udei haTorah).*[61] Naḥmanides' intention is that "all things that happen to us" *in the context of reward and punishment* "are miracles."

The passage in his sermon does appear to be arguing for a somewhat broader conclusion, but that conclusion is not the non-existence of nature. Naḥmanides is concerned by Maimonides' tendency to limit miracles wherever possible, a tendency exemplified most disturbingly in his allegorical interpretation of Isaiah's prophecy that the nature of wild animals will be transformed at the end of days. Since Maimonides himself once demonstrated an understanding of ongoing miraculous providence, his apparent inclination to resist every extra miracle through the mobilization of all his considerable ingenuity appears pointless, inexplicable, and unwarranted.[62] The religiously unavoidable belief in such providence must logically lead to a relaxation of inhibitions against the recognition of miracles. There is nothing achieved by the tendency of Maimonides and Ibn Ezra to approach every miracle stated or implied in Scripture with the hope that it can be made to disappear through some naturalistic explanation; we will still be left with a world punctuated by the regular appearance of miraculous providential acts. No denial of the natural order is either explicit or implicit in this argument. Aside from the fact that such a denial would contradict a number of Naḥmanides' explicit statements, it would be an extravagant inference from the evidence of *ye'udei haTorah*. The Torah's promises of reward and punishment do not

[60]*Comm. to Exod.* 13:16.

[61]*THT*, p. 153.

[62]*THT*, p. 154 (cf. n. 21). The argument in *Comm. to Gen.* 46:15 is virtually the same, except that here the target is Ibn Ezra's refusal to recognize Jochebed's advanced age when she gave birth. Here too this unreasonable resistance stems from a failure to appreciate the fact that the Torah is replete with hidden miracles. Naḥmanides' statement that the punishment of a woman suspected of infidelity is the only permanent miracle established by the Torah (*Comm. to Numbers* 5:20) refers, of course, only to manifest miracles (cf. Henoch, p. 55, n. 169).

demonstrate the non-existence of nature, and Naḥmanides never meant to say that they do.[63]

The Naḥmanides that emerges from this discussion is a complex, multi-dimensional figure whose world view is shaped by an almost bewildering variety of intellectual forces. He must grapple with the pressures of profound religious faith, philosophical argument, halakhic doctrine, mystical belief, astrological science, and Scriptural teaching to forge a concept of the miraculous that will do justice to them all. On the one hand, his God retains the unrestricted right of intervention in the natural order; even ordinary individuals have their time of reckoning, not only the absolutely righteous or the absolutely wicked die from eating the heave-offering, non-Jewish collectives can surely be punished for sin[64]—and Naḥmanides' logic requires that all these divine acts be understood as miraculous. At the same time, such interventions remain very much the exception in a world which otherwise functions in an entirely naturalistic way. Naḥmanides' position allows for untrammeled miracles within a fundamentally natural order and is a striking example of his effort to integrate an uncompromising religious position into a world view that recognizes the validity of much of the philosophical achievement of the medieval world.

[63]The remark in the *Sermon on Qohelet* that "one who believes in the Torah may not believe in the existence of nature at all" (*Kitvei Ramban* I, p. 192) appears in an elliptical context with many of the same features as the other discussions of hidden miracles, and I am confident that it too refers to the realm of reward and punishment. See also the end of n. 45 above.

[64]*Comm. to Gen.* 1:1.

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I

RABBI MOSES NAḤMANIDES (RAMBAN): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity

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Distributed by
Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England
1983