GUIDE 2:1
THE PHILOSOPHIC PROOFS FOR
THE EXISTENCE, UNITY, AND INCORPOREALITY OF GOD

We saw at the end of Volume I that theology, specifically theology as it had come down to Maimonides through the agency of the Muslim Kalām theologians, had failed to convincingly demonstrate the truth of the four doctrines that he insisted all religious believers must convince themselves of—divine existence, unity, incorporeality and the creation of the world from nothing.

This crisis of theology required Maimonides' turn to philosophy, where he found up-to-date convincing proofs that there is a God, unique and incorporeal. Only with the last requirement, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, did philosophy part company with revelation. But given the overwhelming significance of committing believers to the first three doctrines of divine being, Maimonides could temporarily shelve the debate over creation. To that end, he would even briefly allow the Aristotelians' eternalism, since they assumed that their proofs depended upon eternal heavenly rotation, even though he would soon show why he rejected it.

In this chapter, Maimonides relates four philosophical proofs for the existence of God, and several additional arguments for divine unity and incorporeality. That skeletal outline, however, would not help the reader cast headlong into his sea of arguments, especially since those arguments are in truncated form. Maimonides feels that he has avoided some complexity by having listed, in the last chapter, the 26 Philosophical Propositions that he wields in this chapter. But he merely cites them here by *number*, not sparing a moment to remind us what each one meant. The reader should continue to refer to my explanations of the Propositions in the last chapter, which I will briefly repeat here. I will mostly avoid lengthy critique of his arguments, since I explained the main lines of that critique in the last chapter.

The four philosophic proofs for the *existence of God* will be:

I. The proof from the causes of *motion*, especially the "motion" of *change*, which is the *metaphysical* preparation of matter to meet its form in the *generation* of new beings.
II. The proof from the *composition* of the components of motion.
III. The proof from the nature of *existence* itself.
IV. The proof from the *dynamism* of the universe, whereby the qualities lurking as potentialities in our world come to be manifest as actualities.

Each of these is followed by corollaries establishing the *unity* and *incorporeality* of God that follow from the special form of that proof. I call these four proofs and their corollaries "philosophic" to register that they had come a long way by the 12th century from their roots in Aristotle's *Physics*. Maimonides reshapes the ancient structures of these proofs, especially the first proof, by raising them from billiard ball mechanics to the sublime transcendence of divine intervention.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to the massive Hebrew commentary of Rabbi Dr. Yehuda Even-Shmuel on this chapter, outstanding among all commentaries, ancient and modern, since he found those sublime notes, especially in the First Proof. Previous commentators tended to minimize these proofs, failing to appreciate Maimonides' great achievement in this chapter.

In this analysis, I will address four questions regarding each of Maimonides' Four Philosophic Proofs:
1) *What are its presuppositions*? 2) *How does the proof work*? 3) *What are its corollaries*? and 4) W*hat are the problems with the proof*?

I. The First Philosophic Proof of the Existence of God: From the Causes of Motion and Generation.

What Are the Presuppositions of the First Philosophic Proof?

The Meaning of "Generation." R. Even-Shmuel had complained that the modern commentators, Munk, Friedlander and Weiss, reduced Maimonides' First Argument to a mechanical account of motion: *i.e.*, that nothing moves without a mover. R. Even-Shmuel's subtitle alerts us, however, that the proof is really about what he called "The Motion of the *Preparation* of Matter to Meet its Form." (P. 45, *ad loc*., and p. 46 note 1. All translations from R. Even-Shmuel are mine.).

This should catch our attention, because it takes the word "motion" far beyond its usual physical meaning as the *translocation of a physical object from one place to another*.

This "matter" which is *prepared* to meet its "form" was not a physical object, but an object of contemplation and speculation. That is because matter and form are not physical things that can be grasped by our hands. There is no matter without form, for matter does not exist until it is in-formed in a physical substance. We must not confuse *physical substance* with conceptual "matter," nor *shape* with "form."

This conceptual matter and conceptual form occupy no *place*, for "place" was defined as *the innermost limit of the surrounded body*. Neither form nor matter are *bodies* surrounded in place. They could not "move" from *place* to *place* since they have no *place*. But they are subject to *change.*

Maimonides grasped the metaphysical link between physical motion and metaphysical *change*. He distilled this ancient tradition in his Aristotelian Proposition V: "*Every motion is change, and is the transition from potentiality to actuality.*" The "preparation of matter to meet its form" is just such a change. It is the cause of the physical *generation* of all things, which is the change implied by "the transition from potentiality to actuality." Both motion and change are such transitions.

The point is that the heart of this First Proof is a metaphysical and even theological appreciation of the inner meaning of *motion* as the transition of matter to meet a new form in the generation of new things. We must not reduce this to a mere physical reaction (as most commentators did).

We see this by focusing on just a few words in Maimonides' lengthy account of the proof (two and half closely printed pages in the Judeo-Arabic original). When we first read the proof it looks like it really is only about physical processes, and that Munk, Friedlander, and Weiss were not wrong to read it that way. But as we focus on these terms that Maimonides subtly introduces, it is clear that he has gone far beyond a mechanical account.

Thus, in addition to movers and the moved Maimonides talks about "forces," including the forces of life and intelligence which emanate from the cosmic sphere. These forces "prepare" matter to meet form. They are unleashed by intellectual activity at every level of the universe.

Even the basic physical rotation of the cosmos must have a nonphysical cause. Otherwise, we would always have to look behind each mover and moved body for the prior physical cause, going on to infinity. But since an infinite causal chain is impossible (Proposition III), we must find the initial metaphysical cause for the physical motion of the heavenly sphere.

Maimonides' Introduction to the First Argument. Maimonides begins by recalling Proposition XXV: Every physical thing is a composite of matter and form, but matter cannot *move itself* to join this composition. There must be an external mover (Proposition XVII). That mover is the *change-agent* of Proposition XVIII: "Everything that passes from potentiality to actuality must have a separate external change-agent." This is the agent that prepares matter to accept its unique form. We learn this from his first line, "According to Proposition XXV, a moving agent must exist which moved this *generable and corruptible matter* (*khomer shel zei hahovei-hanifsad*), enabling it to receive *form*," (my trans, however, unless specified, all other translations from the Guide are Friedlander's).

To cement this understanding, he makes the following point, "The cause of the motion of that agent is found in the existence of another motor of the same or of a different class, the term *motion*, in a general sense, being common to *four categories* (citing Prop. IV)." He refers here to the *four types of change* of Prop. IV, *i.e.*, not only the change in *quantity*, *quality* and *location* that we usually call "motion," but also *substantial* change, which is the creation and destruction of new substances.

He meant that when we use the term "motion" in a general sense we include this *substantial* change. This succession of changes is not infinite (Proposition III), for it only continues…

> "… till the motion of the Fifth Element is arrived at and then it ends. The motion of the Fifth Element is the source of every *force* that moves and *prepares* any substance on earth for its combination with a certain form, and is connected with that force by a chain of intermediate motions. The celestial sphere performs the act of locomotion, which is *the first of several kinds of motion* [citing Proposition XIV]." (Emphases in all quoted material is supplied.)

This Proposition XIV that he cites regarding the "several kinds of motion" was about the *priority of motions*, from the lowliest physical motions to this preparatory "motion" emanating from the rotation of the sphere's unique "fifth element." [On this outmoded cosmology, see Proposition V. I suggested there that "if readers wish to substitute for the nonexistent spheres a general universal motion, they are encouraged to do so."].

Maimonides immediately provides an example to show that all motion connects to heavenly motion, including the motion of human thought. His illustration is of how a person stops a hole in a wall to keep out the draft. First, we notice the motion of a stone pushed by a stick into a hole in the wall. The stick was *moved* by human muscular action, *fueled* by our "natural heat" (an obsolete Galenian mechanistic theory which still prevailed in the 12th Century), *impelled* by our will, *inspired* by an uncomfortable draft, *caused* by the motion of the element of the air, which *flowed* from the rotation of the heavenly spheres, which *pushed* the elements out of their natural resting places, creating the draft.

Maimonides reminds us that the motion of the sphere causes *essential* changes, not just mechanical changes:

> "From the motion [of the sphere] there is a branching out and procession of all the motions which *prepare* [matter] in the whole lower world," (my trans.) *m'tenua zot mistaef u'mishtashel kol menia u'mekhin b'olam ha-shafel kulo* (Shwartz Heb., and see his note 6).

I emphasized the word "prepares," *mekhin*, for Maimonides wants us to meditate on the preparation of matter that commences the process of generation. Every mover in this chain, at its level, is the *proximate mover*, *i.e.*, the last mover before the next moved object in that chain. Each compound of matter and form requires such a *proximate mover* to prepare that potential combination (Prop. XXV).

The Souls of the Spheres and The Souls of Men. We still have not reached the cause of the motion of the sphere. The mover of the sphere could not be the sphere itself. Some mind must activate that motion, since, according to Maimonides, the eternal rotation of the sphere is the motion of an intelligent being.

The "motion" of these minds and souls cascades through the noetic levels. R. Even-Shmuel concludes: "All *motion* that we find in the world is, at its inception – caused by the motion of the sphere: but every *soul* that is present in an ensouled being in this world commences with the soul of the sphere."

The homeowner's soul or mind was aroused to take action to seal the wall to stop the draft from coming in, since his experience was that the draft could damage his health. His arm's motion comes from his reaction to this experience (Even-Shmuel). Maimonides explained that a "… counsel, plan or idea, which is some thought or will, enables the individual to act purposively," thereby causing those muscular actions.

Maimonides' concern with the mind's role in the physical process is an important expansion on Aristotle's original example, which stated:

> "The stick moves the stone and is moved by the hand, which is moved by the human being, while this [the human being] no longer moves by being moved by something else…. And if this is moved, but no other thing is moving it, it must move itself." (*Physics* 8:5:256, 5-8; Joe Sachs trans., 199-200)

Maimonides' language is broader and deeper than Aristotle's. R. Even-Shmuel, quoting Aristotle's language, criticizes the "modern commentators" (Munk, Friedlander and Weiss), who took Maimonides' example to be merely a restatement of the words of Aristotle. They failed to notice that Aristotle discussed only physical movements, while, by contrast, Maimonides showed that even our intellectual activities are connected to universal motion. (Even-Shmuel footnote 4, p.49, v. 3).

How Does the First Philosophic Proof Work?

Maimonides First Argument Proper. The foregoing was by way of introduction. We have now established that the ultimate cause of all the actions in the universe, including our thoughts and our choices, goes back to the conscious motion of the celestial sphere. Still, *every motion must have a mover* (Proposition XVII). But where is the sphere's mover?

Maimonides presents a "*disjunctive*" division of all the possible causes that could exist for the motion of the spheres. This is a type of logical demonstration that Maimonides frequently used. (*Treatise on Logic*, ch. 7, Israel Efros trans., p. 45, "hypothetical disjunctive syllogism" *ha-hekashim ha-tnaii ha-nekhalek*). In this disjunctive division, there are four and only four possibilities. The eternal mover of the sphere is either:

A) An *external physical* body, *i.e.*, some other physical body external to the sphere itself,
B) An *external incorporeal* mover,
C) An *internal physical* force distributed through the sphere and divisible with it, or
D) An *indivisible* undistributed *incorporeal* force existing *in* or *with* the sphere.

He proceeds to reject three of these. Only Division B will be left standing, so he skips that one for now.

The problem with *Division A* is that it suggests a vicious regress of physical bodies in violation of the *Infinity Propositions*, for if the sphere's fifth element matter were moved by some more potent physical element, what could that element be? If the mover was another sphere made up of some higher "sixth" element, the

latter could only be moved by a "seventh" element, then an "eighth" element, and so on to infinity, which is absurd. <u>*Conclusion*</u>: The sphere is not moved by an *external physical body*.

Skipping *Division B*, Maimonides turns to *Division C*, that the sphere's eternal rotation is due to an internal physical force, like Galen's "natural heat." Still, the sphere is finite, as are all physical bodies, since *the existence of an infinite magnitude is impossible* (Proposition I). But the *Finitude Axiom*, Proposition XII, taught that *every force distributed through the body is finite because the body is finite*. It follows that no infinite physical force can exist in a finite physical body. <u>*Conclusion*</u>: An *internal physical force* would not have the infinite power required to not rotate the sphere forever.

Division D suggested that the mover of the sphere could be an incorporeal force *in* or *closely tied in with* the sphere, like the human soul is to the individual person. ("A nexus of *in*existence," Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, 607 – 608). But even such a "soul of the sphere," no matter how powerful it is, moves in *accidental* motion and therefore could not be eternal. For example, when a man walks, his soul is carried along in accidental motion, *and must stop when he stops* (Proposition VI). *Anything moving accidentally must come to rest: since this motion is not due to itself, it cannot go on moving forever* (Proposition VIII). <u>*Conclusion*</u>: The action of *soul of the sphere* must come to a halt, and, therefore, cannot be the cause of eternal rotation.

Having rejected the other three alternatives, we are left with *Division B*, that the sphere's mover is external and incorporeal:

> "Consequently, the motion of that supposed first motor must be due to some cause *which does not form part* of the things composed of two elements, that is, a moving agent and the object moved [*i.e.*, it is external to the soul and the body of the sphere]….It may thus be considered as proved that the efficient cause of the motion of the sphere, if that motion be eternal…it must be indivisible and unchangeable [citing Propositions VII and V, that *no incorporeal entity is divisible* or *subject to change*]. This prime mover of the sphere is God, praised be His name."

In short, the only possible eternal mover of the sphere must be an *external incorporeal force*, *i.e.*, a spiritual being. Since such a being is not physical, it has no *place*. Since it has no place to move from, it cannot be subject to motion. It follows that this incorporeal being is an *unmoved mover*.

This unmoved mover has *no potentiality* to be anything else. While "every *motion* is *change* and is the *transition* from *potentiality* to actuality," where there is no motion, no transition and no potentiality, there is no change. Only the incorporeal is unchanging. We also see that this being is indivisible, as Proposition VII taught, "… *anything immovable or incorporeal is indivisible*."

We now have a being which is incorporeal, indivisible, immobile and unchangeable. Those descriptions are all *negative attributes* (Guide 1:51 – 60). Maimonides taught that when we meditate on God, we should systematically negate divine corporeality, divisibility, mobility, and changeability. No being on earth answers to such a description. Thus, using only the tools of philosophy, we reach this most sublime conception of God. "This prime mover of the spheres is God, praised be His name!"

What are the Corollaries of the First Philosophic Proof?

<u>*Divine Unity and Timelessness*</u>. Maimonides concludes with two corollaries regarding number and time:

> "The hypothesis that there exist two Gods is inadmissible, because absolutely incorporeal beings *cannot be counted* (citing Proposition XVI), except as cause and effect; the relation of *time is not applicable* to God (citing Proposition XV), because motion cannot be predicated of Him."

God could only be the One, a *non-numerical unity*, since only physical bodies can be numbered (Proposition XVI). Incorporeals are, in principle, *uncountable* unless those entities are connected to physical bodies. (See my discussion under Prop. XVI in the last chapter). The mover of the sphere must also be *atemporal* specifically because it is unmoved, since, as Proposition XV states, "Time is an accident attached to motion and one is never found without the other…. Therefore, things which do not move have no relation to time."

What are the Problems with the First Philosophic Proof?

Two sorts of problems have been advanced against this proof. The first is a series of objections to the paradigm on which this proof is based raised by the philosopher Averroes (1126-1198). Averroes rejected Neoplatonic emanation on the ground that it implied a succession *in time*, whereby the soul of one sphere emanated another soul and sphere, *one after the other*. Since we have just seen that incorporeal beings were atemporal, the proof's emanatory scheme should crumble.

A second critique came from R. Falaquera (1225 – *c*. 1290), a Guide commentator. He objected, on principle, that all logical proofs are constructed from definable propositions, but no proposition could be constructed based upon an entity as unique and undefinable as God. This was not just an objection to Maimonides' proof, but to *logical proof* in general, insofar as it made God a term in a proof.

R. Even-Shmuel suggests that these difficulties were the reason why Maimonides felt he needed a Second Philosophic Proof, one that did not rely on any cosmological paradigm, or on any definition of God. But neither objection is pertinent. Since the First Philosophical Proof is as much about the *metaphysical* generation of new entities as it is about the *mechanics* of motion, no particular cosmology need be implicated. All it says, boiled down, is that, irrespective of emanation or of any other cosmology, there must exist an unmoved incorporeal force apart from the motion of the heavens and apart from the universe of motion. No temporal succession need be posited.

The objection about whether God could be a term in a proof also misses its mark. God is not a "term" in Maimonides' fourfold disjunctive proof of the possible causes of the motion of the heavens. All that the disjunction shows is that our universe of change could only be explained by the existence of an unmoved mover. This might not be God, if, as Averroes contended, there was an unmoved mover for each sphere, each existing as an "absolute" unconditioned being. The proof that there could only be one ultimate cause, God, is entirely separate, and comes near the end of this section, where Maimonides says:

> "The hypothesis that there exists two gods is inadmissible, because absolutely incorporeal beings cannot be counted (citing Proposition XVI) except as cause and effect…"

Two such absolute unmoved movers could not be numerable except as cause and effect. But if that is the case, then the first *cause* could be none other than God, while the second entity would only be the *effect*, and, therefore, could not be God. (Proposition XVI. See Shem Tov, 13b; Friedlander, note 2, p. 16).

II. The Second Philosophic Proof of the Existence of God: From the Composition of Motion.

What Are the Presuppositions of the Second Philosophic Proof?

This proof has two parts.

The *first* is that if one component element can exist independently from its composite whole, then the other component can also exist independently apart from it.

The *second* part frames this as an insight about the components of motion. It urges that we can grasp any motion as a composite of mover and moved. But in any chain of motion, *since the last moved thing is no longer moving, the first mover must also be unmoved*, e.g., if there is a last domino, there must be a first.

In Maimonides' example, the man moved his muscle, which moved the stick, which moved the stone. But once the stone is in its place, it does not move. Therefore, to avoid infinite regress, the chain of motion must commence with an unmoved mover. Both the stone and the prime mover are independent of the causal chain which connects them. Since the stone exists unmoving, the prime mover must be unmoved. Since the last moved object is *not a mover*, there must be a prime mover that *is not moved*: this mover is God.

Of the four philosophic arguments for divine existence, this is the shortest. Here is Maimonides' statement:

> "The philosophers employ besides another argument, based on the following proposition of Aristotle. If there be a thing composed of two elements, and the one of them is known to exist also by itself, apart from that thing, then the other element is likewise found in existence by itself separate from that compound. For if the nature of the two elements were such that they could only exist together—as, e.g., matter and form—then neither of them could in any way exist separate from the other. The fact that the one component is found also in a separate existence proves that the two elements are not indissolubly connected [*i.e.*, there is no *necessary reciprocal connection*], and that the same must therefore be the case with the other component. Thus, we infer from the existence of honey-vinegar and of honey by itself, that there exists also vinegar by itself. After having explained this proposition Aristotle continues thus: We notice many objects consisting of [both] a motor and a *motum* [*m'mnia v'na.* The "*motum*" is the thing moved], *i.e.*, objects which *set other things in motion*, and whilst doing so *are themselves set in motion* by other things; such is clearly the case as regards all the middle members of a series of things in motion. We also see a thing that is moved, but does not itself move anything, viz., the last member of the series: consequently, a motor must exist without being at the same time a *motum* [*sh'ayno na*, lit.: *that is not in motion*], and that is the Prime Motor, which not being subject to motion, is indivisible, incorporeal, and independent of time, as has been shown in the preceding argument."

We will sort this into its parts for the benefit of the reader. But first, we note that Harry Wolfson called it "a postulate of logical symmetry." This is too reductionist. Here is his summary of the proof: "From the fact that there are things which are moved but do not move, and there are things which both move and are moved, he [Maimonides] infers that there must be something which moves but is not moved" (*Hist. of Phil. and Rel.*, p. 573). But if it were merely a consequence of symmetry, it would only be a rhetorical argument, not the philosophic deduction that it is.

How Does the Second Philosophic Proof Work?

Let us take this demonstration step-by-step, which neither Maimonides nor Wolfson does. There are seven steps:

1) If two component elements exist in combination as a *composite* thing, and do not have a *necessary connection*, but one can exist independently of the other, the second component must also be able to exist independently of this composite.

(In Maimonides' example, "oxymel" is a mixture of honey and vinegar, used as an elixir or a salad dressing. Since the honey and the vinegar can be separated, and the honey can exist independently, so can the vinegar. That is because the components have no *necessary reciprocal connection*. In the combination of matter and form, by contrast, you cannot remove form and still have matter, because they have a necessary connection.)

2) The mover and the moved are in contact in most movements that we see. These movers are themselves moved. (Proposition IX: "Any body that moves another body must already be in motion").

3) This contact between mover and moved can be conceived of as a *composite*. In other words, "motion" is a composite of the mover and the moved.

4) That composite actually has three components: a) the first mover, b) the intermediate instrumental movers, and c) the last moved thing. The intermediate instrumental movers display a *necessary reciprocal connection* between mover and moved, which cannot be disentangled. That is because the intermediate mover is "moved while it moves" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072a 24-25). But the prime mover and the last moved thing are not instrumentalities of motion. They have no necessary reciprocal connection.

(As an example of the necessary relation of the intermediate movers, think of the executive toy known as the Newton's Cradle. Five steel balls hang suspended, each touching the other. Pull back ball 1 so that it hits ball 2. Balls 2, 3, and 4 remain unmoved, but ball 5 swings out. Since this is a pendulum, it will swing back, hit ball 4, and repeat the action in the other direction. The three intermediate balls are intermediate instrumental movers that maintain a necessary reciprocal connection.)

5) Since the last object moved can remain unmoving and independent, existing separately from the composite chain of intermediate movers, like the rock lodged in the wall to block the draft, then, …

6)… It follows, according to 1) above, that the other non-instrumental component in the composite chain would also exist apart from the composite of mover and moved. We know that this must be the *first* mover because *no causal chain could be infinite* (Prop. II).

7) Since the last thing moved is now unmoved, and exists outside the composite of motion, the first must be unmoved, though it can inspire the motion of other things. It is the prime unmoved mover, God.

Since I accept Proposition 1) above as being a *logical* and not a *rhetorical* statement, I do not see this as merely a matter of symmetry.

What Are the Problems with the Second Philosophic Proof?

If I were to identify a weakness in the proof, I prefer to focus on 3). To swallow the idea that motion is a composite, you would have to agree that just as vinegar and honey are a composite when mixed together to form oxymel, so mover and moved are the components that make up the "composite" of any motion. Oxymel clearly represents a physical mixture. Motion is only a metaphorical "mixture," for it is not evident that a mover and a moved form a "composite" of anything.

The commentators were also troubled by examples of composites where the components cannot be isolated, e.g., matter/form, substance/accident, or man as the "discoursing animal" (*khai medaber/zoon logikon*). In other words, in man, our "discoursing" is not readily severable from our "animal" nature. (See, generally, Friedlander, note 3, v. II, p. 16, and Even-Shmuel note 13, p. 59.). Maimonides already forestalled this type of objection by including a distinction between things that are *necessarily reciprocally connected* and those that are not:

> "For if the nature of the two elements were such that they could only exist together—as, e.g., matter and form—then neither of them could in any way exist separate from the other. The fact that the one component is found also in a separate existence proves that the two elements are not indissolubly connected, and that the same must therefore be the case with the other component."

Thus, in Maimonides' previous example, where the stick moved the stone, it could not do so without having been moved. Every mover that we experience in our world is an instrumentality of motion that must be moved while it is moving by its mover. But the final member of the causal chain (*ha-mitnoeia ha-aharon*), the rock wedged in the wall, is not an intermediate instrumentality. It does not *now* cause anything to move. It was subject to motion but is not now a mover. *It exists outside of the composition*. It no longer has a necessary and reciprocal connection to motion.

Since there is this final moved object that can be separated so that it is no longer a component, it follows that the first mover would also not be a component. Both exist outside of the composition because neither is an instrument of motion. As the rock is now only an object that had been moved, the other is, by contrast, *only a mover* (*i.e.*, it is entirely and eternally active). Moreover, the rock has no internal motor or volition by which it could move itself. Corresponding to this inanimate object that has no *power* to move, there must exist, at the beginning of the chain of motion, an entity that has no *capacity* to be moved. This is God.

> "…That is the Prime Motor [Prime Unmoved-Mover], which not being subject to motion, is indivisible, incorporeal, and independent of time, as has been shown in the preceding argument."

When Maimonides says, "in the preceding argument," he refers to the First Philosophical Proof. At the end of his discussion of that argument, he developed its corollaries that since God is incorporeal, He is therefore beyond number and atemporal. He adopts those corollaries here.

The Second Philosophical Proof comes from Aristotle (*Physics* 256 B 13-24; 200-201 in Joseph Sachs; 368-369 in McKeon), except that Maimonides contributed the argument from composition, step 3) above. The idea of the role of the intermediate instrumentalities, 4) above, comes from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (12:7:1072a 24-25).

III. The Third Philosophic Proof of the Existence of God: From the Nature of Existence Itself.

Introduction: Maimonides' Third Philosophical Proof moves us further in the direction of purely philosophical proof, away from physical proofs for the existence of God. This proof seeks to establish and develop the consequences of the *absolute existence* of God. The proof has three parts, followed by a short section establishing its three corollaries: divine causelessness, non-plurality and incorporeality.

It begins with the recognition that I must exist. I also sense that there are other beings that exist *as I* exist. Like me, they come to be and pass away. However, if everything were to pass away (*i.e.*, if everything were subject to destruction) the world would have been destroyed long ago. We are forced to conclude that there must be something *eternal* that guarantees the continued evolution of our own transient existence.

But even if there were a number of such eternal beings, like the heavens and the intellects, there must still be an *absolute existence* which determines the existence of everything in our universe, including even those apparently timeless entities. Their existence is *contingent* upon the will of the absolute existence. The absolute grants the existence of the contingent beings, but may also make them nonexistent.

There could not be two such absolute beings. If there were two, they would both belong to the same "species." But there must be some additional component by which the individual members of that species could be differentiated. A composition consisting of that component and their shared species quality could not be the absolute being.

I have divided the proof into three parts. The first part is about the distinction between generated and eternal beings. The second moves to the metaphysical distinction of contingent and absolute existences. The third explains why there could only be one absolute existence.

How Does the Third Philosophic Proof Work?

The First Part of the Proof: Maimonides begins this proof with the following introductory statement:

> "This is taken from the words of Aristotle, though he gives it in a different form. It runs as follows: There is *no doubt* (*ain sofek*) that many things actually exist, as, e.g., things perceived with the senses."

The first point that Maimonides makes is that we should not *doubt* the existence of most things that we see. Before Descartes speculated that he could be deceived even as to his own existence by an evil genie, Avicenna (c. 980-1037) had introduced the world of philosophy to such categorical doubt with his "Falling Man" proof. Imagine that a person is suspended in air, touching nothing and having no sensation whatsoever of the medium that suspends him. He also hears and sees nothing. Avicenna writes:

> "Then contemplate the following: Can he be assured of the existence of himself? He does not have any doubt in that his self exists, without thereby asserting that he has any exterior limbs, nor any internal organs, neither heart nor brain, nor any one of the exterior things at all; but rather *he can affirm the existence of himself*, without thereby asserting that this self has any extension in space." (Trans.: Nader El-Bizri, *The Phenomenological Quest between Avicenna and Heidegger*, Binghamton, N.Y.: Global Publications SUNY, 2000, my emph.)

Having accepted the existence of both himself and of the normal things we perceive, Maimonides makes another disjunctive division as he had in the First Philosophical Proof. The things in our world are either:

1) *All* ungenerated and uncorrupted (*lo haviim v'lo nfsadim*), or
2) *All* generated and corrupted, or
3) *Some* are generated and some are not.

This simple statement of the division summarizes an ancient pre-Platonic debate:

Alternative 1) is that everything exists eternally. Corruption is a figment of our imagination. Nothing changes. This first alternative is associated with Parmenides (late sixth or early fifth century BCE), who argued that this existence was not created and will never perish. The universe is a whole: it is one, complete, and unalterable.

Alternative 2) is that nothing exists forever. The notion that there are eternal things is a figment of our imagination. Everything changes. This alternative is associated with Heraclitus (c. 535 – c. 475 BCE), who argued that there was nothing but change, and, therefore, you could not enter the same river twice.

Maimonides quickly rejects the *first alternative* by reminding us that we are aware of many things that come to be and pass away, and that we need not doubt the general evidence of our senses. His rejection of the *second alternative* is more complicated. Assume, for the moment, with Aristotle, that the universe has been in existence forever. If, as 2) suggested, everything is subject to the *possibility* of corruption, at some point in eternal time that possibility must be realized. As Aristotle said, "Among the everlasting things, to *be possible* and *to be* do not differ in any way" (*Physics* 4:3:203b30, Sachs trans., page 83). In other words, with respect to eternity, *possibility becomes necessity*. All that may be must be.

If all possibilities must eventually be realized (Proposition XXIII), the possibility of universal destruction should have occurred in the eternal past. Since no one would be left after such destruction, there would be no one to carry on the cycle of procreation.

Maimonides expresses the outcome: "All things must therefore come to an end, and then nothing would ever be in existence, for there would not exist any being to produce anything.… But…*we see* things existing, and find ourselves in existence…," and so, therefore, the *second alternative*, that *everything* has a possibility of destruction, is absurd.

Having excluded the first two alternatives, only 3) remains. Some things come to be and pass away, while some do not.

> "Hence it follows necessarily, according to this speculation, that if there are, as we perceive, existents subject to generation and corruption [*haviim nfsadim*], there must be a certain existent that is not subject to generation and corruption. Now in this existent that is not subject to generation and corruption, *there is no possibility of corruption at all; rather, its existence is necessary, not possible*" (Pines trans. 247). *Ain bo efsharut hefsed klal, ele hu mkhuyav hamitziut, lo efshari ha-mitziut.*

Our senses reveal a world of natural things that are born and later die, including ourselves. The very existence of those contingent beings demands that there must be an *absolute* being that is the *sufficient reason* for their existence. That is why the Second Part of the Third Philosophical Proof will show that the proof was not really about whether substances are *eternal* or *generated*, but whether their existence is *absolute or contingent*.

The Second Part of the Proof: If we were to say that eternal beings exist, for example, like God or the spheres and their souls, there is another logically disjunctive division. Maimonides writes:

> "It has been further argued that the existence of this being is necessary, either 1) on account of *itself* alone, or 2) on account of some *external force*." (Enumeration supplied in all quotations.)

The disjunction is this:

> *1)* There is a necessary existence *with respect to itself* which has no prior cause;
> *2)* There are existences that are necessary *with respect to us*, but not *with respect to themselves.*

Maimonides thus divides existences into *1)* God, and *2)* those *contingent* things that exist because of some external causal force. The conclusion is that:

> "In the latter case [*2)* above], its existence and non-existence would be equally *possible*, because of its own properties, but its existence would be *necessary* on account of the external force. That force would then be the being that possesses *Absolute Existence* (citing Proposition XIX)."

Proposition XIX and Proposition XX introduced the Avicennan doctrine of absolute and contingent existences. The Third Philosophic Proof applies that distinction to the classification of eternal entities. First, however, we must clarify, since is it not obvious in the translations, the distinction between entities that have *1) absolute* existence, and *2)* those that have *necessary* existence. Absolute existence is unconditioned and causeless. Beings that have necessary existence, by contrast, appear to be eternal, but depend upon the will of the absolute existent. The usual formula that Maimonides and others use to make this distinction is that the necessary existences are contingent *with-respect-to-themselves*, but necessary *with-respect-to-us.*

Even if no contingent beings remained in existence, eternal absolute being would remain the foundation for future existence. *They* depend on *It*, and not the other way around. This is the *sine qua non* principle, most famously expressed by Maimonides in the beginning of his Mishneh Torah:

> "It is the most basic of basic principles and the pillar of wisdom to know that there is an existent [namely God] that existed before anything else did and that He created everything that there is. *Everything in the skies, on the ground and in between exists only because Truth of His existence* [absolute existence]. If it were supposed that the Creator did not exist then *nothing else would*, for nothing can exist independently of the Creator."

The Nature of Eternal Entities. There are several kinds of eternal entities. According to the ancient cosmology, the cosmos is a nested complex of eternally rotating spheres. These spheres are moved by their souls or by what were known as "separate intellects" (*nivdalim*). The spheres, the souls, and the separate intellects were all considered eternal beings. The "active intellect" of man was also considered an eternal separate intellect. What they all have in common, is that they exist "…on account of some external force…," because with respect to each of them "…existence and non-existence would be equally *possible*…."

This means that all contingent existences ultimately depend for their existence on God's absolute existence, and gesture towards it. This is Avicenna's version of the "Cosmological Proof" for God, which became Leibniz' (1714) Principle of Sufficient Reason: "Why is there something rather than nothing? The sufficient reason is found in a substance which is a necessary being, *bearing the reason for its existence in itself*."

What did Leibniz' "bearing the reason for its existence in itself" mean? The "reason" for any being is its *logos*, or essence. The essence of every individual thing would be its Platonic form or its Aristotelian universal. But those eternal essences need not be realized in any particular being. As Maimonides said, "…Their existence and non-existence would be equally possible…" Only in the absolute is essence *identical* to existence. The absolute bears the reason or essence of its existence in itself, since it itself is the reason for its own existence. Everything else is a composite of essence and existence, dependent for its existence upon its composer.

Just because the absolute is the identity of essence and existence, it has the power to join the essence and existence of the contingent beings. It is their direct or indirect composer. Since the absolute is not subject to the division of essence and existence, it is subject to no limitation, condition, or prior cause.

Looking back at the disjunctive framework of the First Part of the Proof, we can now see that it was not merely meant to be a disjunctive division that all things are 1) non-transient, 2) transient, or 3) that some are transient or some are not. The real disjunction which unites the First and the Second Part is that all things are either 1) *absolute* existences, 2) *contingent* existences, or 3) include both *absolute* and *contingent* existences.

There must *be at least* one absolute existence which is the sufficient reason for all contingent beings, *irrespective* of whether they are transient or non-transient. In other words, the Third Philosophical Proof was not about whether beings are mortal, but whether those beings, *as well as* eternal beings, exist *contingently*.

Maimonides has not yet determined whether there is only one or more than one absolute existence. That required the *Third Part* of the Third Philosophic Proof for the existence of God.

The Third Part of the Proof: Maimonides now writes, rejecting the existence of numerous absolute beings:

> "It can besides be shown in many ways that independent [absolute] existence cannot be reconciled with the principle of dualism (*ha-shniut*) by any means. It would make no difference, whether we imagine two beings of similar or of different properties."

If we were to speculate that there were *two beings* that were both absolute existences, what would distinguish each one's divine existence from the other? Maimonides writes:

> "It can easily be proved that *absolutely independent existence* cannot be attributed to two beings. For, if that were the case, [the *species* of] *absolutely independent existence* (*min khiuv ha-mtziut*) would be a property added to the substance of both; neither of them would be *absolutely independent on account of their essence*, but only through a certain property, viz., that of this…[*necessary*] existence, which is common to both."

Thus, in response to the question of *how many* absolute beings there could be, he suggests that we first ask whether there could be a *species* (*min* / מין) of them. Anything numerous can be classified into species.

Thus, if there are several absolute existents they would, presumably, be members of the species of necessary beings. Such beings would be identifiable by their shared *marker*: eternal existence. But individual members of a species must also be differentiable. Thus, in the human species, I should be able to distinguish Isaac from Jacob, either because of their different appearance or their different personalities.

It follows that if there were two absolutely existent beings, e.g., two gods, both of whom were members of the species "*necessary existence*" (*khiuv ha-mtziut*), I should also be able to identify some marker that would differentiate them. Perhaps only one acts during the day and the other at night, or, perhaps, one is the god of matter, and while the other is the god of form. However, any such Manichaean difference between the two would make each entity a *composite* definable by its species and its difference.

But if a god is a composite it could not be God, since it would require a *composer* (Proposition XXI with XXV). That composer would be the real *absolute* existence, not these contingent demigods. God is the only being whose existence and essence are identical and requires no composer:

> "The reason for all this is to be sought in the absolute simplicity and in the utmost perfection of the essence of this being, which is the *only member* of its species, and does not depend on any cause whatever, – this being has therefore *nothing in common* with other beings."

It is absolute simplicity (*ha-pashtut ha-mukhletet*), while being simply perfect (*ha-pashtut ha-shlemut*). It has "nothing in common" with other beings because it has no species. To emphasize this paradoxically, he says that "it is the *only member* of its "species." It is paradoxical because God is so unique that He could never be considered a member of any species.

This proof does not occur in this form in Aristotle, but emerges from Themistius (317 CE-*c*. 390 CE), Alfarabi (*c*. 872-951) and Avicenna. Maimonides cast the proof in its final form.

What Are the Corollaries of the Third Philosophic Proof?

Maimonides now states the corollaries of the Third Proof: divine existence, unity, and incorporeality:

> "We further say that the existence of anything that has independent existence [absolute existence] is not *due to any cause* (citing Prop. XX), and that such a being does not include any *plurality* whatever (citing Prop. XXI); consequently, it cannot be a *body*, nor a *force* residing in a body (Prop. XXII).… this being is God."

- Proposition XX stated that "A thing which has in itself necessity of existence cannot have for its existence any cause whatever," and, thus, is not "*due to any cause*." It is the absolute existent.
- Proposition XXI made clear that since the absolute could not be subject to composition it would also not be subject to the *numerability* of its components. As the simply perfect being, God could not be subject to "*plurality*."
- Proposition XXII implied that God is not subject to matter or form. The proposition says that "Material objects are always composed of at least two elements…matter and form," but since God is not a material object He could not "be a *body* (matter) nor a *force* residing in a body (form)." Maimonides concludes:

> "It is now clear that there must be a being with *absolutely independent existence*, a being whose existence cannot be attributed to any *external cause*, and which does not include *different elements*; it cannot therefore be *corporeal*, or a force residing in a corporeal object; this being is God."

At the end, he makes a broad statement endorsing this Third Philosophic Argument. "This is a proof the correctness of which is not doubted, disputed, or rejected, except by those who have no knowledge of the method of proof," since it is completely independent of one's belief in either creation or eternalism. It could work for both Jerusalem and Athens.

IV. The 4th Philosophic Proof of the Existence of God: From Dynamism.

What Are the Presuppositions of the Fourth Philosophic Proof?

Maimonides' 4th Philosophic Proof for the existence of God is based on the *dynamic* nature of change and generation in our world. This dynamism brings forth the potential qualities of all things.

Everything that we see evolves. This evolution is the expression of the potential for change. That potentiality (Gr. *dunamis*), dynamism or power, when actualized, becomes the engine of change. This transition to actualization is a "motion" from one state to another, which is why "Every *motion is change*, and is the transition from potentiality to actuality" (Proposition V).

Proposition XVIII taught us the need for a *Change-Agent* to make this change. "Everything that passes from potentiality to actuality has a *separate external change-agent*.…" We need this agent because nothing actualizes itself. The *cause* of the actualization is the change-agent.

The key to this proof is that it does not focus on the *object* of the change-agent's action, but on the *change-agent* itself.

What we want to know is why this change-agent is not always changing everything. For if it were, nothing would remain potential. Everything would *already having been realized*. But if everything were realized there would be no change since there would be no need for further change. We do, however, recognize the existence of ongoing change. The only way to explain this is to concede that individual change-agents must sometimes be dormant and inactive. What brought the change-agent from dormancy to activity?

How Does the Fourth Philosophic Proof Work?

<u>*Change in the Change-Agent*</u>. This emphasis on the transformation of the change-agent is the basic idea of the 4th Philosophic Proof:

> "Fourth Argument.–This is likewise a well-known philosophical argument. We constantly see things passing from a state of potentiality to that of actuality, but in every such case there is for that transition of a thing an agent separate from it (Proposition XVIII). *It is likewise clear that the agent has also passed from potentiality to actuality*."

This agent always has the ability to act, but for some reason does not act. What stands between the agent's *ability* to actualize the potential qualities of its object, and its *actual* realization of those qualities?

First, there must be a "separate external change-agent" before the original agent can act. Second, even if there is a separate external change-agent, why can't it always make the potential agent into an actual agent? The answer is that the potential agent is not always *prepared* to accept the action of the separate external change-agent due to some *obstacle* (*mei'akev*).

Focusing on those obstacles, Maimonides explains that the obstacle either 1) exists *within* the agent itself, or 2) reflects the absence of a necessary *relation* between the agent and its object. The job of the external change-agent is to remove the obstacle within the agent or to provide the missing relationship. He says:

> "It [the agent] has at first been potential, because it could not be actual, owing to 1) some *obstacle* contained in itself, or on account of 2) the absence of a certain *relation* between itself and the object of its action: it became an actual agent as soon as that relation was present."

As an example, the teacher is the change-agent that causes the student to become a scholar. But the teacher does not always teach. Sometimes the teacher is himself the problem, if he is lazy or neglectful. Sometimes there is something lacking in the relationship between the teacher and the pupil, such as the possession of a necessary textbook. When the school principal prods the teacher into action, or provides the textbook, the principal becomes the teacher's external change-agent. Maimonides writes:

> "Whichever cause be assumed, an agent is again necessary to remove the obstacle or to create the relation. The same can be argued respecting this last-mentioned agent that creates the relation or removes the obstacle."

This is a restatement of what he said in Proposition XVIII: "The agent that removed the obstacle would, of course, be the cause of the actualization of that potential…"

This series of agents could not go on *ad infinitum*.

> "This does not go on infinitely, but must ultimately arrive to some agent for this procession from potentiality to actuality. This agent always remains in *one state* (*b'matzav ekhad*) and is not at all subject to potentiality." (My trans.)

In order to avoid infinite regress, we conclude that there must be a *prime agent* at the commencement of all such processions. This prime agent does not require a separate external change-agent to explain its action because it is never dormant, it is never in a state of potentiality. Since it has no potentiality it has no dynamism. It never changes because it is always in "one state," the state of *actuality*. It constantly acts.

This dynamic universe can only proceed because the prime agent is *not* dynamic. The Prime Mover "remains in one state." That is why this Primary Agent is the sufficient reason for the direct or indirect removal of the obstacles to the action of all the subsidiary change-agents. It is why God must exist.

What Are the Corollaries of the Fourth Philosophic Proof?

<u>*Divine Incorporeality and Unity*</u>. Maimonides now draws conclusions about this ungenerated constantly acting agent:

> "In the essence of this cause nothing exists potentially, for if its essence included any *possibility* of existence it *would not exist at all* (citing Prop. XXIII.); it cannot be corporeal, but it must be spiritual (citing Prop. XXIV.); and the immaterial being that *includes no possibility whatever*, but exists actually by its own essence, is God. Since He is incorporeal, as has been demonstrated, it follows that He is *One* (citing Prop. XVI)."

Since the nature of universal dynamism requires the existence of a prime agent, we recognize that this agent could not itself be subject to the potentiality, corporeality, or multiplicity inherent in dynamism. That is why this agent is God. Maimonides demonstrated this by citing three Aristotelian Propositions from the last chapter:

- Proposition XXIII stated that "*Anything that exists potentially, and has any possibility attached to it, may, at some time, not exist as an actuality*." That proposition portrayed the subtle distinction between potentiality and possibility. Potentialities are real though as yet unrealized qualities in things. Possibilities, by contrast, do not exist until they are realized, and would, at some point, not exist at all. But if God were subject to the possibility of nonexistence, there would be no one to keep

the world going. Since we see that life continues, we conclude that the Prime Agent could not be subject to the possibility of nonexistence, or to any potentiality.

- From this recognition it is easy to show that this Agent must be incorporeal. Proposition XXIV said that "*matter is always subject to possibility*," but since God's absolute existence is not subject to possibility or contingency, He could not be a material being.
- We have not yet proven that there is only one prime mover. For there could be other necessary and incorporeal actors, such as the souls of the spheres, the active intellect, and the angels. Proposition XVI supplies the answer: "*No incorporeal things can conceivably be numerable, except when they are causes or effects*…." In other words, incorporeals are numerable only when they are reciprocally connected to one another as cause and effect in a causal chain. Alone among the incorporeal beings, *only God is a cause without being an effect*. It follows that numerosity cannot attach to His absolute incorporeal unity.

Maimonides' final point about the power of the Four Philosophical Proofs is that even eternalist philosophers must concede the existence of God:

> "Even if we were to admit the Eternity of the Universe, we could by *any of these methods* prove the *existence* of God; that He is *one* and *incorporeal*, and that He does not reside as a force in a corporeal object."

In other words, since the philosophers must provide an account for the generation of new things (1st Proof), for the composition of motion (2nd Proof), for the nature of existence itself (3rd Proof), and for universal dynamism (4th Proof), they must acknowledge the truth of the first three doctrines of religion: divine existence, incorporeality, and unity.

V. Two Additional Proofs of Divine Unity: Simplicity and Organicism.

Maimonides follows his exposition of the four philosophic proofs for the existence of God with two proofs of divine unity. The first is derived from the *simplicity* of God, while the second is a consequence of the *organic* interconnectedness of everything in our universe. Maimonides begins his exposition by calling these "… *A correct method* to prove the *incorporeality* and *unity* of God…" He meant that the proofs are *explicitly* directed toward divine unity, while divine incorporeality is their *implied* consequence.

He reveals these two proofs now because they presume divine existence, which he had only just demonstrated with his four prior proofs. Otherwise, these two additional proofs would not work.

Alone among the major commentators, Friedlander translates the introductory language to read "a correct method" (vol. 2, p. 22, note 1). He meant to suggest that these two proofs are *merely* a correct method. They are not "philosophic" methods since they are not *logically deductive* methods, and since they include elements from the Kalām arguments for divine unity that he had criticized (Guide 1:75).

They are not logically deductive methods because they studiously ignore the possibility that a dualistic Manichaean universe could contain two mutually exclusive worlds governed by two completely independent deities. Such a universe might not function as an organic whole. In it divine dualism could be necessary.

On the other hand, if you accept the worldview of the philosophers that we live in a world governed by laws, where everything is organically interconnected, including even the upper and lower domains of the universe,

then you could perhaps call these arguments from simplicity and from organicism "philosophic and sound," even though they were *rhetorical* and not *deductive* in nature (for this distinction see my chapter essay on Guide 1:74 under "Rhetoric and Sophistry"). That is why Maimonides says that this is "a *philosophic and sound argument* for those who are able to examine it, and obtain clear insight into its premises" (1:75).

1. *The Argument for Divine Unity from Simplicity.*

This argument appears in various places in this chapter, but Maimonides treats it independently here.

If there were two gods, one or both must be composite. But God cannot be composite.

They would be composite because they *share* an element, such as divinity or eternality, which marks them as "gods." But just because there are two, there must be a *differentiating* element. That element is the reason why they could be numbered as "two" gods.

Maimonides does not offer examples, but the commentators suggest that one could be the god of form and light, while the other would be the source of matter and darkness, as in the religion of the ancient Persians. They would *share* divinity but be *differentiated* by their respective spheres of influence.

Maimonides writes, introducing the argument from simplicity:

> "The following is likewise a *correct method* to prove the Incorporeality and the Unity of God: If there were two Gods, they would necessarily have one element *in common* by virtue of which they were Gods, and another element by which they were *distinguished* from each other and existed as two Gods; the distinguishing element would either be in both different from the property common to both—in that case both of them would *consist of different elements*,…"

Since the two gods "consist of different elements" each one must be a composite. But any composite requires a composer (Prop. XXI) and must be contingent (Prop. XIX: *anything subject to causes is contingent*). Contingent beings are subject to a possibility of nonexistence (Prop. XXIII). But it would be absurd to say that a god would not exist. Such a composite deity could not be a prime cause of the universe, since it must always look back to some *absolute* composer that was responsible for its contingent existence. It follows that since no composite being has absolute existence, it could not be God. As Maimonides put it,

> "…neither of them [the two demigods] would be the First Cause, or be necessary existences with respect to themselves [*i.e.*, absolute existences]; but each would be *subject to causes* (*baal sibot*), as we explained in Proposition XIX…" (My trans.)

In this case, *both* gods were composite, contingent, and therefore subject to causes. But now Maimonides considers what would happen if only *one* of them was composite:

> "—or the distinguishing element would only in one of them be different from the element common to both: then that being [the one with the distinguishing element] could not have absolute independence."

Clearly, since one of them is composite, it could not be God. If the other was simple in its structure it would not be composite. It would not be a complex of matter and form, and, therefore, it must be incorporeal (this is the *implied* corollary that I referred to at the beginning of this section). This simple being must then be the *prime cause* of all things, including the other composite "deity," or there would be infinite regress. That non-composite being must be God.

Maimonides' terse statement of this proof matches his even more compact statement in Guide 1:75 when he made it the Second Kalām Argument for Divine Unity, the argument of "specific difference":

> "If there were two gods, there would necessarily be some *element common to both*, whilst some element present in the one would be absent in the other, and constitute the *specific difference* between them." (Guide 1:75)

That was his entire statement of the argument. Friedlander completed the thought: "The conclusion can easily be supplied, namely, that neither of the two gods could be the Primal Cause, because each of them is a combination of several forces or properties and thus requires again a cause for that combination" (footnote 3, vol. 1, p. 357). Such a composite cannot be God.

The significance of the terms "elements common to both" and the "specific difference" is that these are the required terms in any definition. According to Aristotelian logic (explained by Maimonides in his *Treatise on Logic*, chapter 10), definitions require a genus and a difference. The definition is the *essential form* of a thing, while the parts (the genus and specific difference) are its *formal* causes.

The critical idea is that we can define anything except God: He belongs to no genus from which anything else could be differentiated. Precisely because the Dualist's deities are definable, they could not be God. The very duality of Dualism, therefore, seems to imply corporeality, just because such definable entities are always composite. The power of the argument from simplicity is its grasp of the essentially complex nature of such putative gods.

The only difference between Maimonides' two statements of the proof in these two chapters is that in our chapter Maimonides also considered a case in which only one of the two deities was composite. But he came to the same conclusion, that since only the non-composite entity could be God, there could only be one God.

In Guide 1:75, Maimonides had condemned the Kalām's hypocritical reliance upon the Specific Difference argument. Since the (Asharite) Kalām believed in the real existence of divine essential attributes, like wisdom and power, their Allah would be composed of those attributes and therefore not be God.

The Specific Difference argument was not a *deductive* argument, but only a *rhetorical* argument, because, if we take the Dualist position seriously, we will have to admit that two completely separate universes could conceivably exist. In Maimonides' statement of the argument, he had said that "If there were two gods there would necessarily be some element *common* to both…" But in a perfectly bifurcated universe *there would be no common element*. The upper god would share no definitional element with the lower god. Between them the meaning of the term "divinity" could only be *homonymous*, sharing nothing but its pronunciation.

Consequently, the argument for divine unity from *simplicity* must fail unless you accept the worldview of the philosophers that we live in a world where everything is *organically* interconnected. Then you perhaps could call this argument "philosophical and sound" though it was merely rhetorical. Thinking about that organic worldview leads us to Maimonides' next argument, the argument for divine unity from *organicism*.

2. *The Argument for Divine Unity from the Organic Interconnectedness of the Universe.*

> "Another proof of the Unity of God.—It has been *demonstrated by proof* [Kafiḥ, note 51: "affirmed by demonstration"] that the whole existing world is one *organic* body, all parts of which are connected together; also, that the influences of the spheres above *pervade* the earthly substance and prepare it for its forms. Hence it is impossible to assume that one deity (*ha-eloa ha-ekhad*) be

> engaged in forming one part, and another deity (*v'ha-eloa ha-sheni*) in forming another part of that organic body of which all parts are closely connected together."

This is his basic statement of the argument for *organicism*. When he says "it has been demonstrated by proof," he refers to Guide 1:72, where he canvassed all the best rhetorical arguments for the claim that we could describe the universe as a single organism, the macrocosm of our human microcosm. In this model the parts of the universe are connected, the lower world in the higher and the higher in the lower, like the organs of a body. The intelligent forces of the sphere "pervade" matter and prepare its instantiation in form, just as our thoughts determine our actions. The medieval commentator R. Shem Tov articulates this beautifully:

> "The meaning is that the world of mind (*olam hasekhel*) is connected to the world of the spheres (*olam ha-gilgul*), and the forces of the spheres are connected with this world (*b'ze ha-olam*) and prepare it. Thus, the *nivdal* actualizes the form, and the sphere prepares it [for this actualization]." (16a. Translations from R. Shem Tov are mine.)

I intentionally left the word *nivdal* untranslated. The *nivdal*, in this context, is the separate soul of the spheres, which is either itself God or directly subject to God. Its thought organizes the world.

To develop his case that two gods could not both act in this organically interconnected universe, Maimonides identifies another disjunctive division. Either 1) both hypothetical deities act *independently* of each other in their own different *jurisdictions*, or 2) they act at their own different *times*, or 3) they both act *simultaneously*.

He rejects the idea that the two deities are independently powerful in their own jurisdictions (1 above), because of the organic unity of this universe. That is because their opposed actions would be mutually nullifying. He wrote:

> "Hence it is impossible to assume that one deity be engaged in forming one part, and another deity in forming another part of that organic body of which all parts are closely connected together."

His reason for saying this was that the simultaneous commands of the two deities would cancel each other (Guide 1:75). For example, if one demigod commands that something shall be *hot*, while the other that it shall be *cold*, their commands would result in *mutual hindering* or *mutual cancellation*, and nothing would happen, which is not what we see. Since there is no existential rupture or paralysis in our world of constant activity, the suggestion that they could act independently is absurd.

But if there were a *temporal* division of labor between the gods (2 above), such that each god would have its allotted *time* of action, they could conceivably exist as separate powers. He considers and rejects the hypothesis that "… at one time the one deity is active, the other at another time…" for the following reasons.

If there were two gods, one for night and one for day, could time be their differentiating factor? It could not because "…Time is without change, and … remains one and the same organic whole." In other words, since time is unitary and undifferentiated, "day" is the daytime only for us, and "night" just for us, but not with respect to time itself (Even-Shmuel). There could be no essential difference between these demigods based on time alone.

Yet, even if we were to accept such a temporal division, who or what would determine the moment when one god acts while the other rests? Only a prior cause would determine that one could lawfully act at one time while the other must not. That prior cause would be God, not these two subservient actors.

Plato gave a better example of what would happen in a temporally divided universe in his dialogue *The Statesman*. In that dialogue, the Eleatic Stranger narrates a myth (268e – 274e) in which the Demiurge assigns Kronos to rule the world half the time, while the other half of the time Zeus rules the world. This strange recurring divide between two eras occurs because the Demiurge, who formed the world and maintains control, needed this division to discharge the instability caused by the collision of *unchanging* forms with *unstable* matter. But even in this "reversing world," Plato understood that there had to be a "third man" above those two deities, *i.e.*, the Demiurge. Neither Zeus nor Kronos had absolute existence as God. The Demiurge determines that one acts while the other does not, since there is no differentiation in time itself.

Maimonides rapidly makes three more truncated arguments against the notion that there could be a temporal division between two gods:

> "Besides, if two deities existed in this way, *A)* both would be subject to the relations of *time*, since their actions would depend on time; *B)* they would also in the moment of acting pass from *potentiality to actuality*, and require an agent for such transition: *C)* their essence would besides include *possibility*."

Taking up these three arguments: *A)* If the two gods were "subject to the relations of time" and "depend upon time," neither could be God, since they *would not exist outside of time* as eternal beings. *B)* Similarly, since those deities would, in the moment of their action, pass from potentiality to actuality, a change-agent must cause that change (Proposition XVIII) and that change-agent would be their God. And *C)* "their essence would besides include possibility," meaning the possibility of nonexistence (Proposition XXIII). But God's nonexistence would be absurd.

Having eliminated the possibility that the gods would act at different times, we are left with Maimonides' final alternative (3 above), the suggestion that "… Both [gods] act simultaneously, nothing being done except by both together." He continues:

> "It is equally absurd to assume that *both together* produce everything in existence, and that neither of them does anything alone; for when a number of forces must be united for a certain result, none of these forces acts of its own accord, and none is by itself the immediate cause of that result, *but their union is the immediate cause*."

The Dualist's only escape would be to conceive, for example, that a *partnership* between the two demigods ran the world. In that case, neither could act independently, but only through the combination of their forces. Neither would be the first cause of any particular action. Only their joint action would be its first cause. R. Shem Tov provides a homely example: if two men were required to bear a heavy load, neither could carry it alone since "…their union is the immediate cause" (16b). But what is the origin of their union? Who incorporated their corporation? Maimonides writes:

> "The union is also an act which presupposes a cause effecting that union, and if that cause be *one*, it is undoubtedly God: but if it also consists of a *number* of separate forces, a cause is required for the combination of these forces, as in the first case."

In other words, the union must have a cause, which could either be single, in which case it is God, or multiple, but then you would have to find what united those multiple causes. You come, in either case, to the same conclusion, that the cause at the apex of the causal chain must be God:

> "Finally, one simple being must be arrived at that is the cause of the existence of the Universe, which is one whole."

And now, having arrived at the conclusion of divine unity, using premises acceptable to both pagan philosophers and religious believers, to Athens and Jerusalem, he highlights this achievement:

> "Thus, there can be no doubt about ultimately reaching One who is the cause of the existence of this existent, which is one, whatever the manner of this may have been: 1) whether through *creating* it …after it had been *nonexistent*, or 2) because it *proceeds necessarily* (*o al derekh ha-khiuv*) from this One." (Pines trans, 251)

The first alternative is God's creation of the world *ex nihilo*, as taught in the Torah. The second alternative was Maimonides' understanding of the *eternalism* of the philosophers, whereby the universe continually *emanates* necessarily from God, just as the sun necessarily sheds its rays on earth (see Kafiḥ, n. 61). This was the consensus understanding of medieval neo-Platonized Aristotelianism (even if it may not have been that of Aristotle himself).

> "It has thus become clear, also according to this method, that the fact that all that exists is one shows that He who caused it to exist is One." (Pines trans.) *ki hiot ha-mtzui kulo ekhad horeinu al sh'm'mtziu ekhad.*

The organic unity of existence testifies to the unity of the One who brought about this existence. R. Shem Tov eloquently restated the point:

> "Where Maimonides says, 'That all that exists is one, shows that He who caused it to exist is One,' [he means] the existing *order* implies the existence of the One who provides *order*, and since the world is one, the Provider of *order* is one. This is the Aristotelian teaching on unity, that we know the actualizer from the action, and, therefore, from this [one] world we know that there is one God."

VI. A Final Proof of Divine Incorporeality.

In the last section, Maimonides showed why two hypothetical deities could not both be God. Building on those insights, he turns from the notion of multiple gods to the question of whether there could be multiplicity *within* God. From this speculation he shows again why God must be incorporeal. This problem of intradeical complexity was the same problem he resolved in the Attributes section of the Guide, where he rejected the notion of real divine essential attributes, like divine wisdom, power, justice, or mercy existing as eternal entities *with* God (Guide 1:51-60).

Maimonides now looks at this problem using the apparatus of his Aristotelian Propositions, to show why there could be no multiplicity within God, and, therefore, no corporeality. He writes:

> "Another method of refuting the belief in the corporeality [of God]. As has been mentioned in the twenty-second premise [Proposition XXII], *every body is a compound* (*kol guf murkhav*). Now there can be no doubt that every compound requires an agent, which is the cause of the subsistence of its form in its matter." (Pines trans.)

Proposition XXII affirmed that substances are compounds of matter, form, and their attendant accidents, including their accidental "… quantity, shape, and position."

This proof for divine incorporeality works backwards from such physical bodies. In the language of R. Even-Shmuel, all physical bodies are subject to noetic multiplicity (*ribui noeti*) and real multiplicity (*ribui reali*).

The "noetic" multiplicity of physical bodies follows from our *recognition* that they are composites of matter and form. This recognition is based solely on speculation, since matter and form exist only as conceptual entities, *i.e.,* you can never grasp either matter-in-itself or form-in-itself in your hands. Thus, even though the object that you actually hold, like a coffee cup, appears as one real physical thing, we recognize that it is a noetic composite of the two elements that underlie universal change: matter and form. Proposition XXII articulates this *conceptual* duality of all physical things.

On the other hand, the "real" multiplicity of physical things is the multiplicity of their accidents (*ribui shel mikrim*). These "accidents" are the characteristics of that particular physical object, like the solidity and size of your coffee cup. These seem more "real" to us, but are no more real than matter and form.

Not everyone agreed that physical bodies were noetic dualisms of matter and form. These included the theologians, like the Kalām, who rejected the conceptual dualism of form and matter (see my note on Proposition II, last chapter), but also, among the philosophers, Averroes (1126-1198) denied that the celestial beings, including the cosmic spheres and their souls, were composites. Perhaps because of those controversies, Maimonides strengthened his argument for universal physical multiplicity. He did this by showing that the multiplicity of physical bodies was not only noetic, but also a real multiplicity:

> "Besides, it is evident that a body is *divisible* and has *dimensions*: a body is thus undoubtedly subject to accidents."

A body is "divisible" because every physical body can be *divided* infinitely. The was one of the exceptions to the general rule against infinite magnitudes. (The "potential infinite": see my discussion of Kalām Prop. XI in Guide 1:73, and Kalām Prop. II, in 1:74). Moreover, every physical body must occupy a *place*, limited by its *dimensions* and subject to dimensionality. Divisibility and dimensionality are manifestations of the *accident* of quantity, *i.e.*, the specific quantification of length, breadth, and depth.

That is why Maimonides says that "a body is thus undoubtedly subject to accidents." At the most basic level, all physical bodies are subject to the *size* of their dimensions and the *quantity* of their divisible components. This is the reality of the "real multiplicity" of the accidents of every physical body, irrespective of whatever concept of *noetic* multiplicity you may be prepared to accept. That is the first step of this proof.

Numerosity and Composition. Taking this thought to the next level, Maimonides emphasizes that these qualifications make it possible to *identify* any physical body:

> "Consequently, nothing corporeal can be a unity, either because everything corporeal is divisible or because it is a compound; that is to say, it can logically be analyzed into two elements; because a body can only be said to be a *certain body* when the *distinguishing element* is added to the corporeal *substratum*, and must therefore include two elements…"

It is "*a certain body*." In other words, it is not just any *body*, since one physical body is a house, another is a stone, another is an animal and so on (Shwartz). Whatever distinguishing element makes it possible for you to pick that one body out of a crowd is the second "element" added to it. (Thus, even Averroes, who claimed the simplicity of heavenly bodies, still must explain how one differs from another).

The result is that every physical body is composite (*kol guf murkhav*) of multiple elements, real and noetic,…

> "… But it has been proved that the Absolute admits of no dualism [composition] whatever," *kvar hukhakh ki m'khuyav ha-mitziot ayn harkhava bo b'shum panim.*

That is because any composite is subject to causes (*baal sibot*). But "Whatever *necessarily* exists with respect to itself has *no cause* for its existence in any way or under any condition" (Proposition XX). In other words, God, in His necessary and absolute existence, is subject to no further explanation. He has no agent. Precisely because of His pure simplicity, there is nothing for an agent to assemble. R. Shem Tov wrote insightfully that "Since God has no actualizer He has no matter," *i.e.*, since God is subject to no material potentialities, He requires no actualizer. His simplicity means that He has none of the potentialities to which all matter is subject.

God's very lack of multiplicity is the proof of His incorporeality, since multiplicity and corporeality are equivalents (Propositions XVI and XXII).

Maimonides thus fulfils here the promise he made at the beginning of the first chapter of the Guide: "The incorporeality of the Divine Being, and His unity, in the true sense of the word—for there is no real unity without incorporeality—will be fully proved in the course of the present treatise," referring specifically to this chapter, and to this section of it (Friedlander, Kafiḥ).

Even if we speculated that perhaps God could have had an agent or actualizer, we would have to search for that agent's actualizer, and so on, an absurd infinite regress. That is why God is the *sufficient reason* for all other existents. They could not exist without His necessary existence.

Conclusion

Maimonides now suggests his program for the next series of Guide chapters:

> "Now that we have discussed these proofs, we will expound our own method in accordance with our promise."

In this chapter Maimonides used his 26 Aristotelian Propositions to prove God's existence, unity, and incorporeality, the first three doctrines of religion. But Maimonides recognized the dangerous pitfall of the Aristotelians' ideology, which was their rejection of the Torah's doctrine of creation from nothing.

The Aristotelians thought that their Propositions presupposed eternity. Maimonides used the Aristotelian structure, with its presupposition of eternalism, to confirm God's existence, but would, in upcoming chapters, reveal the superiority of creationism. The problem for Judaism was that the doctrine of eternalism subjects God to the world, thereby destroying divine transcendence. The medieval Hebrew phrase for eternalism, *kadmut ha-olam*, literally means the "priority of the universe," *i.e.*, that it is prior and therefore superior to God, a notion that is anathema to the Torah.

We note that Maimonides called Aristotle here "our adversary," *yariveinu* / Jud. Ar.: כ'צמנא. This alone should rubbish any misguided attempt by contemporary academics to discover a concealed Maimonidean adherence to Aristotelian eternalism. His God was not the "god of the philosophers," a "god" subject to the cosmos, but the transcendental and providential God of Moses.

Maimonides will contend against his Aristotelian adversary's core eternalism in Volume II (especially Guide 2:17), undermining Aristotelianism, just as he had undermined the basic structures of Kalām theology. Having weakened the foundations of both those tottering structures, he promises to expound his own method of proving the four necessary doctrines of religion.

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