

GUIDE 1:76
THE THREE KALĀM ARGUMENTS AGAINST DIVINE CORPOREALITY

INTRODUCTION:
INCORPOREALITY AS THE THEME OF THE FIRST VOLUME OF THE GUIDE

The rejection of divine corporeality is the central doctrine of the first book of the Guide of the Perplexed.

In this chapter, Maimonides assaults the arguments that the Kalām (the Muslim theologians) leveled against those who believed in divine corporeality. He agreed with the Kalām that God has no physical body, but thought that their “proofs” were dangerously ineffective.

To show this he plays devil’s advocate again, as he did in the last chapter. This forces him to argue for the corporealists, a job he abhors. But he saw that the Kalām had failed to prove that God is incorporeal. This was especially disastrous because the Kalām arguments were theology’s best arguments. Maimonides must resort to philosophy to resolve the crisis in theology.

Maimonides’ Corporealist is sophisticated. This invented Corporealist is a committed monotheist whose god has a finite body, even though this body is invisible, unique, incomparably subtle, and indivisible.

Why must we dispose of this peculiar conception of God? A Jew must be able to contend against this strongest version of corporealism, because divine incorporeality is a pillar of Judaism.

We may not minimize the importance of establishing God’s incorporeality. According to Maimonides, corporealists are heretics: “Five classes are termed heretics (*minim*);...(including) he who says there is one ruler, but that He is a body and has form” (Mishneh Torah, *Teshuva* 3:15). Corporealism leads to idolatry for “the thought of the heretic turns toward idolatry” (*u’makhshavat min l’avoda zara*; *ibid*, *Avoda Zara* 2:5).

He uses the term “thought” here, meaning the “thought” that emerges from the heretic’s imagination. Maimonides’ equation of imagination with idolatry is a constant theme of the Guide.

He had always stressed the priority of intellect over imagination, precisely because the imagination only registers corporeality. To put it another way, the imagination reifies everything, making even the incorporeal a physical thing.

The argument against divine corporeality and religious anthropomorphism dominates the first book of the Guide. It is the reason for the first forty-five mostly lexical chapters of biblical terms susceptible of anthropomorphic misinterpretation. It is Maimonides’ real purpose for his chapters against the existence of numerous essential divine attributes (Guide 1:51-1:60), inasmuch as numerosity is the marker for the corporeal, as we will show. His chapters on the names of God (1:61-64) oppose vulgar “Masters of the Holy Name” who are like corporealists: by using the divine name as a magical tool, they made God a thing (*baalei Shem*: 1:61, my notes on “Amulets”).

WHO WAS MAIMONIDES’ CORPOREALIST?

To act as devil’s advocate Maimonides must stand in for the best partisan for divine corporeality.

It is not clear who are the models for his Corporealist. They are not the Manichaean Dualists, whom I wrote about in the last chapter, since he makes it clear that his Corporealist is a strict Monotheist. Instead, it looks

like Maimonides combined certain features of Aristotle's god with Kalām conceptions. By allying his Corporealist with Aristotle, he eludes the force of the Kalām's atomistic physics. By employing Muslim attributist conceptions of God, he embarrasses the Kalām, which embraced the idea that Allah possesses multiple real eternal attributes like wisdom and power.

His Corporealist is not a Christian, although Maimonides did think that Christians were corporealists. His Corporealist's deity differs from Jesus in several respects. The usual concept of Jesus, i.e. Luke 24:39, has his material substance like that of other humans. By contrast, the Corporealist's deity is not like any other thing, as we will see. (Christians as corporealists or polytheists in Maimonides: *Mishneh Torah, Avoda Zara 9:4: notzrim ovdei avoda zara hen*; *ibid., Ma'akhalot Asurot 11:7*; Commentary on the Mishnah, *Avoda Zara 1:3*; Guide 1:50).

Maimonides' Corporealist is a monotheist who believes that his god exists within our universe. It is corporeal but unique, yet its body resembles ours in some vague analogical way. His god exists eternally and necessarily, but has a specific shape.

Let's take a look at this constructed deity and why it would pose such a threat to the theologians.

In and Of The Universe. Maimonides' Corporealist's deity is part and parcel of an eternal universe, just like the philosophical god of Aristotle or Spinoza. Aristotle's philosophical deity differs from Maimonides' religious conception of God in several ways, the principle difference being that Aristotle's incorporeal god is *in* the universe, while the God of Abraham is *outside* and *other* than the universe.

The Corporealist's god could not have created the universe from nothing without simultaneously creating itself, which would seem to be absurd. The point is that their god neither transcends the universe nor creates it *ex nihilo*.

A Sixth Element? Maimonides' Corporealist adopts Aristotle's notion that there are radically different kinds of matter. The matter of the world, with its four elements of fire, air, water and earth, is different from the Fifth Element matter of the celestial spheres. This quintessent matter is dimensional but invisible. Thus, gazing at the night sky, we could not have seen the enveloping Aristotelian spheres, but only the planets suspended on them. Nonetheless, the spheres have a definite shape.

The ethereal matter of the spheres is wholly different from terrestrial matter, i.e., it is more subtle, it rotates infinitely, etc. The Corporealist asserts that there is divine matter which is more sublime than even Fifth Element matter (*v'lo guf ha-shekhina o amud ha-anan ha-nivra hu guf ha-eloa ytalei l'daato*). Though Aristotle never conceived of it, Maimonides' Corporealist's deity is made of such subtle stuff, perhaps a Sixth Element. Still, no matter how different its matter, this god is corporeal, as we are.

Possession of Attributes. The Kalām were vulnerable on the related issue of divine attributes. They maintained that the so-called "essential" attributes (life, will, wisdom, power, knowledge) were real eternal elements with or in Allah. That implies composition, which implies physicality.

"Composition" means that different elements combined to make up an entity or substance. All physical bodies are subject to composition. Composition also entails *number*, and, therefore, only physical things are numerable. But God is perfect unity, not subject to composition. It would have been hypocritical for the Kalām attributists to reject the corporealism of Maimonides' Corporealist on the grounds of composition or

numerability, since they agreed with the Corporealists that God possesses numerous real attributes. Maimonides, therefore, disqualified the Kalām from raising the argument of composition against his Corporealist.

Absolute Existence. This Corporealist's god is physical, but nonetheless *necessary*; that is, its bodily existence is absolute, not contingent.

Recall Avicenna's distinction between necessary and contingent being: contingent beings only exist because the one necessary existent, God, willed their existence. The *necessary* existence of God means that you cannot ask who could have created Him, or who "preponderated" His chances of existence over His chances of non-existence.

Similarly, Maimonides' Corporealist maintained that his god's body was necessary. It was the commencement of all causal chains. Yet its absolute existence would not contradict its existence as a physical body.

(See my note under the Kalām Third Argument, "Particularization and Preponderation," below; Guide 1:47, Arguments Five and Six; compare Mishneh Torah, *Ysodai ha-Torah* 1:1)

Finite Shape. Maimonides' Corporealist does not deny his divinity shape, size, or figure.

The Corporealist's god is *dimensional* (*m'madim* / אלאבצעאר). Maimonides notes that dimensionality alone does not define matter (*ain etzem ha-m'madim he ha-guf*). Others thought that dimensionality was part of the definition of matter: e.g., Averroes, Alfarabi, Rabbis Yosef ibn Akin, Avraham ibn Daud, Yosef Ibn Tzadik, and especially R. Hasdai Crescas, whose statement on this may have led to the Spinoza's identification of God with dimensional extension. (See Harry Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, Harvard, 1929, pp. 123, 201, 261, 579-590, 594; Efros, Israel, *Space in Jewish Medieval Philosophy*, 36-46, AMS Press, New York, 1966; and my note on "Dimensionality," below)

In sum, Maimonides' Corporealist's deity is necessary, eternal, one, unique, invisible, unchanging and powerful. This divinity is also dimensional, corporeal, possessed of attributes and of a definite permanent figure.

THE FIRST ARGUMENT: ATOMISM

Maimonides' Corporealist contends that his god has a physical body. The Kalām replies with their first argument for divine incorporeality, in the form of a dilemma, as follows. They allege that all bodies are atomic in structure. They are composed of discrete, indivisible atoms (*a-tom* means uncuttable in Greek). If God is a body, He must *exist* (*meitzav, ykayem*) in either one atom of the body or in all atoms of the body. Both alternatives are impossible, according to the Kalām, for the following reasons.

1) If God were in *one* atom, the other atoms of the body would be superfluous (*ma toelet yeter otam ha-khalakim, v'ain inyan l'mtziut kol ha-guf ha-zeh*). But they cannot be superfluous because you need at least two Kalām atoms to constitute a body (Proposition I, Guide 1:73). Since bodies require at least two atoms, God's atom would have to unite with another atom to exist, which is absurd. Therefore, God could not have a physical body.

2) If divinity manifested in *all* the atoms of the body, and each atom is independent, then it would manifest independently in each and every atom of the body (*kol etzem yakhid m'hem*). This would be true even if there were the minimum of only two atoms in the body. Since bodily features exist independently in each

atom (Proposition V, *ibid.*), then each atom would manifest a different god. However, both sides had agreed to the premise of one God. Therefore, God could not have a physical body.

This is clever but moot since Maimonides' Corporealists does not believe in atomism. His god has a physical body that is coherent, continuous (*m'khubar, ratzuf, m'duvak*), indivisible and, therefore, not made up of atoms.

The reason that the Kalām assert the atomic divisibility of heavenly bodies is that they only know divisible terrestrial bodies. But invisible non-terrestrial bodies, like the cosmic spheres, the angelic hosts, and the Corporealists' god are not to be *imagined* as being like visible terrestrial bodies. Maimonides criticizes the Kalām imagination for projecting what they know on what they do not, so that they even “tear and cut up heaven” (*m'dama sh'guf ha-shamaim sovel hikria v'hivkia*).

The Unified Field Theory of the Theologians. Others, besides the Kalām, also sought to unify the physics of heaven and earth. R. Saadia Gaon agreed with the Kalām that the heavens were not made of a different “fifth” element. He argued for the uniformity of terrestrial and celestial matter. In this respect, he foreshadowed R. Hasdai Crescas' drive to eliminate this disruptive division between the cosmic fifth element and the four earthbound elements that was introduced by Aristotle. R. Saadia, however, was no atomist. He contended that the heavens were made of the terrestrial element of fire. (*Book of Opinions and Beliefs*, I:3, 8th theory, page 70 – 72)

On this point, the modern Hebrew commentator, Yehuda Even-Shmuel, writing on our chapter of the Guide, says that “the existence of a continuous body was already a stone of contention” between philosophy and theology, since theology “portrayed the cosmos as a divisible body, like any other body” (my trans.). So that you could, in the Kalām's unified field theory, “tear and cut up heaven” into its constituent but indivisible atoms.

By contrast, the philosophers thought that the cosmos was an eternal whirling mass of continuous matter, which could not be divided into indivisible atoms. They argued that the theologians were led astray by their imagination's projection of what they thought they knew from the earth upon the unknowable heavens. Maimonides says that they “assumed a similarity and an analogy between the visible i.e., the bodies which exist among us, and the invisible” (*v'ha filosof omer ki zeh pa'ulat ha'dimion m'tokh hashavvah min ha-nokhakh—hem ha-gufim ha-mitzuyam etzenu—al ha-neelam*).

Who was right? On the one hand, we long ago abandoned the five-element theory in physics, which will not be resurrected. But the atomic theory, as revived in the science of the Age of Enlightenment, looks threadbare in our day. Now we split the atom into innumerable parts. Quantum theory, and its recent cousin, string theory, seem to work better with a theory of universal matter and form than with the indivisible atoms of the pre-Socratic Greeks and the Kalām (as I argued in Guide 1:73).

So, whatever the world is made from, Maimonides' point holds, that the Kalām could hardly expect any serious corporealist to accept their sophistry that God's body would, absurdly, have to exist in either one or many atoms, if it were to exist at all.

Crescas Destroys Atomism. R. Crescas, commenting on this paragraph in the Guide, cuts to the nerve of the Kalām First Argument. They had argued the dilemma that if God were corporeal, his divinity would manifest either in one of the atoms of that body or in all of them. But how could divine corporeality manifest itself in any atom, since an atom is indivisible, and therefore not a corporeal body? Crescas' argument flows from the fact that individual Kalām atoms do not possess *extension*, which is the capacity to fill space. If

they were extended, they could be divided, but then they would not be indivisible Kalām atoms. Kalām atoms only become extended bodies when two of them clump together (Propositions I and II, 1:73).

Here is the real dilemma for the Kalām. The atoms are either extended or not extended. If not extended they cannot combine to form a body, for Aristotle had already shown that a magnitude cannot arise from a combination of non-magnitudinous points (*Generation and Corruption*, I:2, 316a, 29-31). On the other hand, if extended, they would then be divisible bodies, not indivisible atoms. It follows that atomism is impossible, and can form no proof for God's incorporeality.

THE SECOND ARGUMENT: IMPOSSIBILITY OF COMPARISON

The second Kalām argument builds on the premise of God's uniqueness: that we cannot compare God to His creatures. The Corporealist responds that his god is also unique inasmuch as it is "a body *unlike* other bodies."

The Kalām answers this challenge with their Second Argument for divine incorporeality. If God were physically embodied He would have to be *like* other bodies in respect of corporeality. The Corporealist's deity would then not be unique, and would therefore not be God.

Maimonides' Corporealist makes three excellent (though not particularly consistent) responses:

1. Who says God must be unique? It is only books of revelation, like the Qur'an, that claim we cannot compare God to His creatures (Qur'an 42:9, 112:4; cf. Isaiah 40:25). Thus, the Kalām drew their premise of incomparability from tradition and not from demonstration (*mkubelet lo muskelet*), but they meant this to be a *demonstrative proof* against corporeality. In other words, their argument was a rhetorical argument, not a demonstrative argument. A rhetorical argument contains a premise based on received opinion rather than on fact. There is nothing particularly bad about rhetorical arguments. They are superior to sophistical arguments, i.e., those in which one of the premises is false. Maimonides uses rhetorical arguments himself, but only when forced to admit that a proposition has no demonstrative proof, as when he argues the case for creation *ex nihilo*. Since the Kalām had framed this as a demonstrative proof but *falsely concealed* its rhetorical reality, they in fact committed sophistry. (On the three types of arguments: Maimonides, *Book of Logic*, ch. 8).

2. Who says God must be *totally* unique? Even though the Corporealist accepts the premise of uniqueness, he replies that "uniqueness" is an *equivocal* term. His corporeal god is unique, but still resembles corporeal creatures *analogically*, that is, it is unlike them in *most* respects. For, as Maimonides says: "He who admits the corporeality of God does not deny the existence of properties in the divine Being." He meant that the Corporealist, like the Asharite Kalām, had no problem believing in the existence of real divine attributes, like wisdom or power. Uniqueness did not have to mean complete incomparability. Here Maimonides deployed Kalām arguments against the Kalām: they themselves used this argument of analogy to explain away anthropomorphic elements in the Qur'an and in support of their claim that God has real attributes. In other words, when the Kalām said that God is "wise in virtue of wisdom" they meant that in some respects man and God share in the attribute of wisdom. But if God has real attributes which are only analogically distinct from those attributes of humans, then even the Mutakallimūn must admit that God is comparable to His creatures in some way. By attacking the Corporealist for the sin of comparison, they revealed their own hypocrisy.

3. Who says that a material body could not be unique? Maimonides' Corporealists could use the term "body" *homonymously*. Thus, the word "body" sounds the same for his god's "body" and his creatures' "body," but would mean something completely different. Maimonides mentions that there were some "bodies unlike other bodies," including, the "created light" (*or hanivra*), Moses' pillar of cloud, and the *Shekhina*. These were made of some kind of matter, more sublime than terrestrial matter or even Fifth Element celestial matter, but completely different from both. His Corporealist could argue that his god was made of finer stuff unlike even those sublime entities. Kalām physics, however, had insisted that all matter was uniformly made of identical atoms. Maimonides' Corporealist rejected this.

In defense of his claim that there are different kinds of matter, the Corporealist argued that it would be absurd to say that "the substance of dung" and the invisible celestial spheres are made of the same kind of matter. Completely different kinds of matter exist above and below, sharing nothing but the sound of the word "matter." His god's matter is completely unlike Earth's matter.

A god in the World and of the World. These last arguments are hard for us to take, since they again contrast *passé* Kalām atomism with the antique Fifth Element. Nonetheless, the point remains that the Corporealist's deity could be a body unlike other bodies. In what would this unlikeness consist? It is unlike other bodies because it is invisible, eternal, necessary, and, therefore, not similar to any other being.

My first thought would be that the Corporealist is just giving incorporeality the *name* of "body." But the Corporealist is serious that his god is a real body and not a body in name only, because this deity is *in the world*. He can even quote Scripture for support.

Take Isaiah 45:7, "I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I am the Lord that doeth all these things." The Corporealist would say that no deity could create matter and evil without being material or evil (so to speak) itself. A mutual relation between creator and created generally exists, as Maimonides noted (Guide 1:16), "The properties contained in the quarry should be found again in those things which are formed and hewn out of it." (He was referring to Isaiah 51:3: "...Look unto the rock from which ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged; look unto Abraham your father and unto Sarah that bore you...")

Being corporeal, this deity could create the world *from itself* without having to create it *ex nihilo*. This avoids the old theological scandal of *ex nihilo nihil fit*, that nothing can come from nothing. The creator, according to our philosophical Corporealist, must be material to create the material world. Since the Kalām failed to grasp the significance of this point, they failed to engage the Corporealist's claim that god must have a body. Perhaps they could have asked how grossly physical bodies could possibly have come from such a subtle divine body, but this would be easier for a Neoplatonist corporealist to explain than that God creates from absolute nothingness. All of this helps to explain why, despite the onslaught from the Kalām, the Corporealist refuses to abandon his position.

The uniqueness argument is the best Kalām argument against corporeality. The Corporealist's responses are his most serious rejoinders, since they challenge the very notion of divine transcendence. The Kalām's atomism was its overreaction to this challenge. In its quest to emphasize absolute divine transcendence, by making each moment a miraculous re-creation, the Kalām end up destroying divine transcendence. Their deity must involve itself in the momentary granular existence of all things. Maimonides jokes (Guide 1:73, Proposition VII) that since people have discovered 2000-year-old teeth in the dirt, God must continually re-create the death of each their tooth-atoms in every moment of that eon.

The corporealist's explanation, that he is deity creates the material world out of its own unique matter, has a precedent in the history of philosophical discourse. Neoplatonic creationist philosophers had argued that being comes from *potentiality*, not from absolute nothingness. In philosophic terminology, this is called creation *de novo* as opposed to creation *ex nihilo*.

By contrast, one of Maimonides' responses to the Corporealist's philosophical challenge to divine transcendence will be the completely *miraculous* (and hence inexplicable) nature of *ex nihilo* creation.

(Miraculous creation: Guide 2:25 and *Treatise on Resurrection*, 8:42, p. 44-45, Fred Rosner trans., Jason Aronson Inc., 1997. *De novo* creation: *Maimonides on the Origin of the World*, 54-56, Kenneth Seeskin, Cambridge, 2005.)

Analogy vs. Homonymy. The Qur'an contributes to Maimonides' Corporealist's idea of god. It recounts Allah's possession of physical features and movements. Allah stands and sits (Qur'an 10:3).

The earliest Kalām discussions of this issue borrowed a Muslim legal concept, *analogy*, to explain such anthropomorphisms. Analogies differ from homonyms in that analogies compare things that are *not completely unlike*. Thus, Allah's physical features are analogous to ours, and, therefore, not completely unlike ours. It is never explained how this is manifested (Wolfson, *Kalām*, 14-15). Analogy leaves the door open for corporeality.

Maimonides, by contrast, held that we must interpret the attributes of God *homonymously*, so that these terms have a *completely* different meaning for us and for God. In Guide 1:47 he even admits that we could say that God has a physical body, if we were to speak of "physical body" in a homonymous sense. We must *not* do so, only because:

"The prophetic books have never applied to God even metaphorically anything that is considered by ordinary people as an *imperfection* or that is conceived by one as being incompatible with God, though such a term is not different from those other terms which are used in those books as descriptions of God.... we do not meet with the expressions, 'And God tasted,' 'And God touched.' According to our opinion, the reason for this is to be found in the idea, which has a firm hold in the minds of all men, that God does not come into *contact* with a body in the same manner as one body comes into contact with another, since He is not even seen by the eye."
(My emph. See also Guide 1:26; but see Guide 1:18 and my discussion of two possible exceptions that Maimonides himself raised.)

Judaism would never use such anthropomorphisms because they always suggest physical contact. Even if we were to interpret "tasted" or "touched" to mean something completely different from physical contact, we would not use them that way since they were "considered by ordinary people as an imperfection." Elsewhere, Maimonides said that touch is a "disgrace" for us (Guide 2:36), and, therefore, could never be attributed to God, no matter how homonymously we choose to interpret it.

Muslim analogists, by contrast, would defend the literal meaning of the Qur'an, even with regard to such disgraceful "imperfections." Some Muslims, including, surprisingly, the fundamentalist Hanbalites, could even accept a homonymous interpretation. Harry Wolfson explained:

"Then, as in Christianity, there arose in orthodox Islam a difference of opinion, perhaps a difference of opinion which is only verbal, as to whether God can be described as being corporeal or even as having a body. There were those among the Orthodox who assumed that on the mere basis of the

Koranic injunction against likening God to created beings (42:9; 112:4), that it is *permissible* to conceive of God as corporeal or even as having a body, provided His corporeality or His body is taken to be *unlike* that of anything else. Thus Averroes, speaking of ‘many Muslims,’ such as ‘the Hanbalites and their many followers,’ says that they believed that ‘God is a body which is unlike other bodies.’ Ibn Haldūn, referring to certain Muslims, whom he describes as ‘corporealists’ (*mujassimah*), says that ‘they affirm the corporeality [of God], but not like [that of] bodies,’ and Ibn Hazm, who himself believed in the incorporeality of God, argues that ‘if a Koranic text was shown to us in which God was called a body, it would be our duty to profess this belief, but then to qualify it by saying that He is a body not like other bodies.’ Reference to this view in Islam is to be found also in the works of Jewish philosophers writing in Arabic. Joseph al-Basir (early 11th c.), referring to some Mutakallimūn, says: ‘Their statement that God is a body not like all other bodies is unsustainable,’ and Maimonides refers to this view in quoting some other Mutakallimūn, who were opposed to it, as arguing: ‘If you say that God is a body not like other bodies, you are self-contradictory.’”

(Quoting from our chapter: *im ne'emar guf lo k'gufim, k'var sateret et atzmekha*. Wolfson, *Studies in the Hist. of Phil. and Rel.*, p. 445. Hanbalites: from Ahmad bin Hanbal, 780 – 855 CE. Compare the Raavad, 1125 – 1198, whose *Hasagot* criticized Mishneh Torah, *Teshuva* 3:7, where Maimonides ruled that a monotheist corporealist is a heretic. The Raavad famously objected: “Why did he call him a heretic? Several greater and better than he [i.e., better than Maimonides!] followed this way.”)

It turns out that Maimonides’ Corporealist had good Orthodox company when he claimed, “God is a body unlike other bodies.” This would be very embarrassing for the Kalām, as well as for theology generally.

An Important Tangent: Dimensionality. Maimonides, in voicing one of the Corporealist’s responses, said that things were embodied in different ways and with different types of matter. The doctrine asserts that the celestial spheres and the terrestrial elements are made of different kinds of matter. But what, precisely, is this “matter” that they allegedly share?

Here is Maimonides’ short statement: “Although there is no doubt that the spheres have, like the things below, three dimensions, they are corporeal because they consist of matter and form, not because they have dimensions,” *v'af al fi sh'ha-galgel bli sofek baal m'madim, ain etzem ha-m'madim hu ha-guf, ele ha-davar ha-murkav m'khomer v'tzura*.

The commentariat spilled much ink over this line, because what Maimonides obliquely referred to was a debate over Aristotle’s claims about the nature of material substance. In the purely Aristotelian view, substances are dynamic composites of matter and form, and this would be true even of the celestial spheres. But if the spheres were eternal and unchangeable, how could they be like material substances that were all subject to generation and corruption?

Averroës’ (Ibn Rushd, 1126 – 1196) revolutionary answer was to remove *matter* from the spheres entirely. He reminded the Aristotelians that their eternal spheres could not be subject to the law of generation and corruption. There would then be no reason why we should assume that they are composed of matter and form. He replaced the matter of the spheres with dimensionality. Matter as dimensionality, and its more abstract sense as extension, or extensity, has a long subsequent history coming down to Descartes and Spinoza.

R. Hasdai Crescas (1340 – 1411), famously expanded on Averroës’ dimensionality of the spheres. Why stop at the spheres? Crescas argued that all things, celestial or terrestrial, were a composite of dimensionality, on the one hand, and their natural form or shape, on the other. Even while agreeing with Maimonides that all

corporeal substance “consists of matter and form,” he redefined the notion of “matter” so that it was no longer a mere potentiality but was always actual, just as dimensions are always actual.

Here is Crescas’ remarkable statement, commenting directly on Maimonides’ sentence:

“Maimonides meant that dimensions existing in actuality (*b’poel*) are, indeed, accidents of the substance of the composite entity, since the length and width are in the category of quantity. But we call *dimensionality* the form of all matter because all matter is capable of *receiving* dimensions, not that those quantified dimensions will define matter that actually has dimensions.” (My translation.)

This conception turns the mysterious hylic matter of Plato from the vagaries of “potentiality” and of the “unlimited” to the real dimensionality embodied in existing things. Crescas differentiated this substantial dimensionality from the accidental dimensions themselves. He thereby sought to remove the Aristotelians’ objection that the actual dimensions were merely accidental quantities attaching to substance.

Taking this a step further toward a unified field theory in physics and cosmology, Crescas, in his masterpiece, *Or Adonai*, completely removed matter from the equation. He replaced it with his new definition of “corporeal form” as dimensionality.

“As a result of this (new) view, it would follow that even without its specific form, matter would be in place and would have actual existence. Behold, my witness is in heaven, for the heavenly sphere, which [according to Averroës], is body without any matter, has actual existence. This theory would remove many a difficulty, strong and perplexing, which exists with regard to the nature of matter as it is generally understood.... The corporeal form, which we now propose as the substratum, always has actual existence...” (H. A. Wolfson’s translation, page 263, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle*.)

In other words, the dimensions and dimensionality constitute the “material” substance of all things. The dimensions are real, actual, and not just potentialities. They are the same in heaven and on earth.

The Aristotelians responded to this challenge by re-asserting that dimensions were a *quantity*, not a *substance*. They always classified quantity as one of the nine categories of accidents attaching to a substance. Matter is such a substance. A substance is that which exists through itself and not through another. By contrast, accidents always subsist in or upon substances. Accidents do not define substances. It follows that while matter is always extended, dimensional extensity is not the essence of matter, but only an accident attaching to substantial matter. This was the view of Maimonides, as well as R. Saadia Gaon, Abravanel, Efodi, and Shem Tov.

What we are witnessing is the historic clash between the purely Aristotelian view that space is just the finite contiguous place of a body, and the new paradigm that saw space in itself as infinite dimensionality or extensity. This new concept of endless void broke through the artificial wall of the Aristotelian outer sphere.

For Maimonides and the Aristotelians, substantial matter could never be defined by its extension or by its dimensions, for these only attached to things as a finite quantity, and, therefore, as accident, and are only attachable insofar as they are quantifiable. Crescas had not solved the problem of the split between the Fifth Element and the other Four by changing “dimensions” to “dimensionality,” that is, from a quantity to a quality. The reason that this failed to resolve the problem was that quality, exactly like quantity, was also one of the nine categories of accidents in the Aristotelian system. In that system there is no way to make extension substantial. “Extension” included nothing more than an object’s place.

For Maimonides it was incontestable that while actual matter is always extended, extensity could not be the essence of matter. Space was just the finite measurable area surrounding physical bodies in a tightly packed universe. He could not conceive space as infinite void.

THE THIRD ARGUMENT: PARTICULARIZATION

The argument of particularization derives from the Christian “Kalām” of Gregory of Nazianzus, Archbishop of Constantinople (325-389 CE, see Wolfson, *Kalām*, p. 50).

The Kalām argued that if God were corporeal then He must have a shape, and since that shape could possibly have been different, someone must have *particularized* the actual shape. That particularizer (*myakhed*) would have to be a second god, but that contradicts the stipulated premise of one God. Therefore, God is incorporeal.

This familiar argument (1:74, Argument Five) fails because the Corporealist insists that his god has absolute eternal existence in its manifest shape. This means that his god needs no particularizer, because it could not possibly have a different shape.

Particularization and Preponderation. Maimonides pushes the Kalām position further. He reminds us that the argument of particularization is of the same *type* as their argument of preponderation (1:74, the Kalām's Sixth Argument for creation and against eternalism).

The preponderation argument turns on the presumed contrast between God’s necessary existence as against the possible existence of everything else. According to that argument, there must be One who preponderates (*makhria*) the existence of all creatures over their *possible imagined* non-existence. They might exist or they might not. It is only God who can make that choice, by preponderating their chances of existence over their chances of nonexistence, when both alternatives are equally possible. This was Avicenna’s argument for the existence of God, which the Kalām adopted (Ibn Sina, 980-1037).

Maimonides’ Corporealist flips this preponderation claim back on the Kalām, to gut their particularization proof. Why not apply preponderation to God Himself? Thus, God exists, but were His prior non-existence a possibility, there would have to have been a second deity who preponderated His existence over His chances of non-existence. The Kalām would retort that this would result in an absurd infinite regress of preponderators, unless we presume God’s *absolute* existence at the start of the causal chain. But that is precisely what Maimonides’ Corporealist will maintain: his god’s absolute existence, including its absolute bodily existence in its permanent eternal shape prior to all causal chains.

The parallel that Maimonides identified between particularization and preponderation arguments is that in the former the particular possible shape of a body requires a particularizer, while in the latter, its very existence as a contingently existing being requires a preponderator. The flaw in these types of claims is that the Kalām exalted their imagination of what things could admissibly be over what they actually are.

Admissibility. Maimonides’ point was that particularization/preponderation arguments produce absurd results whether used by the Kalām or against them. They produce absurd results because they depend on Proposition X of Kalām physics (1:73), the proposition of *admissibility* (*hitakhnut*), which is that anything imaginable could exist. He retorted that “Imagination yields...no test for the reality of a thing.” The imagination projects its fancies on existent things irrespective of whether their actual natures would allow for them (*b’yakhas l’shaar ha-nmtzaot im ntaaram sh’lo k’fi tevaam*). Thus snakes could conceivably have feet.

If that is a grievous fault with normal things like snakes, it is far worse when those dubious imaginations are projected upon God, such as the notion that God might not have existed (*asher kvar be'ernu shi'ur ma sh'yesh ba min ha-sfekot...kol sh'khen b'yakhas l'eloa*). The Kalām's imaginative projections nullified the nature of existence by changing the natural characteristics of the heavens and the earth (*sh'hem batlu teva ha-mtziot, v'shanu ha-t'khuna ha-teviot*).

Nature Does Nothing in Vain. The problem with admissibility, i.e., the notion that a thing could have been different or that it might not have been at all, is that natural things really could not have been different. Aristotle wrote that nature does nothing in vain (*natura nihil agit frustra / Φύση δεν κάνει τίποτα μάταια*). To the contrary, things must be as they are. A thing cannot be different from its nature because its nature is its essence. "Nature does nothing in vain, but with a view to that which is better." "For snakes, the cause of why they are footless is that nature does nothing in vain, but always, from among the possibilities, does what is best for each thing." Nature "gives to everything that which it is capable of receiving, and preserves its particular essence and characteristic property." In sum, "nature always makes the best of possible things." Maimonides accepts the doctrine that things cannot be different from their nature, *im ntaaram sh'lo kfi tevaam*. (Aristotle quotations: *De Incessu Animalium*, 12.711a 17-19, 8.708a 9-12. Also see *Metaphysics*, 6.4.1030a 3, 6-7; *De Caelo* 2.5.288a 2-3.)

The Kalām tried to ape Avicenna's famous preponderation argument while (purposefully) neglecting that on this precise point Avicenna agreed with Aristotle. Things do not possess the possibility of nonexistence nor of existing differently. The very *existence* of natural things, including their particular shapes, partakes of natural permanency. The truth is that the existence of things is only contingent with respect to God, but their existence is necessary with respect to themselves. The existence of things, as experienced by us and as manifested in the world, is natural. They are what they are and they will remain as they are until natural entropy dissipates them, or until countervailing natural forces destroy them. God's creations are contingent only with respect to His absolute existence; they are not contingent with respect to themselves.

(See my more developed argument on this point in Guide 1:74, Sixth Method, including discussion of Avicennian preponderation, which is really an argument for the existence of God, not an argument against the existence of nature. Miracles, which disrupt natural order, are a special case, see my discussions at Guide 1:46 "God of Miracles"; 1:66 "Science of Miracles"; and 1:73, "Maimonides' Influence on Leibniz: The Possibility of Miracles").

Theologians Defeated! So, when the Kalām replied that a particularizer must determine the shape of the Corporealist's god, the Corporealist could reply that its shape is not contingent, but necessary, since it is divine. Its permanent shape is included in the necessity of its existence. There need be neither particularizer nor preponderator.

The disastrous result is that the Corporealist won all three arguments against the Kalām! 1) His god's bodily structure is not *atomic*; 2) its matter is *incomparable*, i.e., unlike any other; and 3) its existence and shape are *absolute*, requiring no particularizer/preponderator. Theology had no good argument against divine corporeality, just as, in the last chapter, it failed to defeat the Dualists.

Maimonides' Own Use of Particularization. In Guide 1:73, Maimonides used the particularization argument in certain restricted circumstances (he never used the preponderation argument). He used it only as a rhetorical support for creationism, not a demonstrative proof. In this form, it resembles the Argument for Creation from Design, i.e., that God must have designed the splendid structures of the heavens.

Opposing the philosophers who held that strict eternal necessity held sway not only in sub-lunar nature but also in the constellations of the super-lunar cosmos, Maimonides replied:

“This is exactly the difference between us; that which actually exists, has, according to my view, been produced by the will of the Creator, not by necessity; just as it has been created with that special property, *it might have been* created with any other property, unless the impossibility which you postulate be proved by a logical demonstration.” (My emph.)

By “that special property,” he referred to the curious patterns seen among the stars, such as the Big and Little Dipper. What he meant was that when you apply particularization to those super-lunar existents, it works as an argument for the *existence* of a creator. Those patterns do not seem to follow any rational purpose. Since they appear to be purposeless, it is *admissible* that they could have been arranged in a different pattern. The decision to particularize them in their particular pattern required a particularizer, and that particularizer is God (Guide 2:19). This only works because we cannot know, as we could know of all sub-lunar patterns, what their *natural* role is. Thus, it was not merely imaginative to conceive that a Designer particularized these stellar patterns.

MAIMONIDES’ ARGUMENT AGAINST CORPOREALITY

Maimonides’ own proof of divine incorporeality was the argument against *composition*. This is an argument the Corporealist cannot elude. Maimonides finds it ridiculous that the Kalām could ever invoke the argument against composition, since they believed that God possessed real essential attributes. He therefore refused to include it in his list of the Kalām arguments:

“Those who maintain that God is incorporeal because a corporeal object consists of substance and form—a combination (*harkava*: composition) known to be impossible in the Divine Being, are not in my opinion Mutakallimūn (*ain ze l’daati ‘mutakallem’*), and such an argument is not founded on the propositions of the Kalām...”

He only briefly sketches the composition argument here. He will not say more because this chapter is about the Kalām arguments, not his arguments. He gives his argument in Chapter 2:1 of the Guide, as follows. All bodies are *composed* of two things, matter and form. God, however, is simple unity, and therefore cannot be subject to composition. It follows that God is not a body. This argument disposes of the Corporealist’s embodied deity, which, like all bodies, is composed of two things, matter and form.

Why must bodies be composed of at least two things? R. Hasdai Crescas succinctly explained:

“Among the ancients there were some who held that body has no composition in any sense whatsoever, but that it is one in essence and in definition [he refers to the atomists’ conception of the indivisible body of the atom]...Aristotle...knocked this view on the head (*haku al kadkod*) by demonstrating conclusively that every body must inevitably consist of two essential parts, matter and form. For we observe that all mundane bodies (*geshamim sh’bkhan*) are subject to generation and corruption; and, as that which no longer is cannot be the recipient of that which is coming to be, it is necessary to posit the existence of a substratum. That substratum is matter, the so-called hyle. That matter must be essential to that which comes to be, is self-evident, inasmuch as it is its substratum. But still the recipient (*mkabel*) must be something distinct from that which is received (*mkubel*). It follows, therefore, that in every body there must be two principles.” (Crescas’ *Critique of Aristotle*, H.A. Wolfson’s translation of *Or Adonai*, 257-259, with facing Hebrew, Harvard, 1929, and my bracketed comments)

Maimonides said that his composition argument against divine corporeality is a philosophic argument (*v'zo shita filosofit*). It is essentially the same argument he made in Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah* 1:7:

“7) This God is One. He is not two nor more than two, but One; so that none of the things existing in the universe to which the term *one* is applied is like unto His Unity; neither such a unit as a species which comprises many units, nor such a unit as a physical body which consists of parts and dimensions. His Unity is such that there is no other Unity like it in the world. If there were plural deities, these would be physical bodies; because entities that can be *enumerated* and are equal in their essence, are only distinguishable from each other by the accidents that happen to physical bodies.”

Here is the explanation he gave at the end of Guide 2:1:

“Another argument concerning the Incorporeality of God.—Every corporeal object is composed of matter and form; every compound of these two elements requires an agent for effecting their combination. Besides, it is evident that a body is divisible and has dimensions: a body is thus undoubtedly subject to accidents. 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 analysed 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: but it has been proved that the Absolute admits of no dualism whatever.”

*** REFLECTIONS ON THE GUIDE'S KALĀM CHAPTERS ***
WHY DID MAIMONIDES DEVOTE A SECTION OF THE GUIDE TO THE KALĀM?

Apart from the fact that his student asked him to discuss the Kalām, and the fact that it was so influential in his time, there is a deeper reason why Maimonides devotes all this ink to the Kalām.

Maimonides had ruled that any monotheistic religion worthy of the name had to secure the four necessary doctrines of religion: God's existence, oneness, incorporeality, and creation of the world *ex nihilo*. All religious people, particularly Jews, must acknowledge the four necessary doctrines of religion. If possible, each must do so based on his own true understanding of these concepts.

The problem was that Judaism lacked the native resources to secure these doctrines by proof. This was because the knowledge of their proofs had been lost. In Guide 1:71, he wrote:

“Know that many branches of science relating to the correct solution of these problems, were once cultivated by our forefathers, but were in the course of time neglected, especially in consequence of the tyranny which barbarous nations exercised over us....our nation lost the knowledge of those important disciplines. Nothing but a few remarks and allusions are to be found in the Talmud and the *Midrashim*, like a few kernels enveloped in such a quantity of husk, that the reader is generally occupied with the husk, and forgets that it encloses a kernel. In addition you will find that in the few works composed by the *Geonim* and the Karaites on the unity of God and on such matter as is connected with this doctrine, they followed the lead of the Mohammedan Mutakallimūn, and what they wrote is insignificant in comparison with the kindred works of the Mohammedans.”

The point is that when Maimonides went looking for *theological* works on the subject of the four necessary doctrines, he found the Jewish library lacking except to the extent they followed the Kalām lead. He does not name names, but is probably thinking of the initial chapters of the great works of Rabbis Saadia Gaon

and Bahya Ibn Pakuda. There was also no point in pursuing Christian theological works because the Kalām absorbed their teachings (Guide 1:71).

Since, according to the Kalām, for a variety of reasons, the world must have been created, then it obviously followed that it had to have a Creator, *Q.E.D.* All of their works sought to prove the existence of the Creator from the disputed premise of creation. That is why the Kalām failed to make convincing arguments. They strove to prove creation, at all costs, irrespective of the fact that no such proof exists. That was a fault of theology as a whole:

“We merely maintain that the earlier theologians, both of the Greek Christians and of the Mohammedans, when they laid down their propositions, did not investigate *the real properties of things*: first of all they considered what must be the properties of the things which should yield proof for or against a certain creed; and when this was found they asserted that the thing must be endowed with those properties; then they employed the same assertion as a proof for the identical arguments which had led to the assertion, and by which they either supported or refuted a certain opinion.” (Guide 1:71)

In other words, the theologians argued in favor of their preconceived notions. Of them, Themistius scoffed: “the properties of things do not adapt themselves to our opinions, but our opinions must be adapted to the existing properties.” Instead, by making “the properties of things” reflect their dogmas, theology had cut itself off from reality. This was precisely what the Kalām had done, and why it had left the four necessary doctrines of religion unsupported. (Themistius, 317-387 CE, see Guide 1:71 and my discussion there).

Yehuda Even-Shmuel makes the same point in a slightly different way. The reason the Kalām, and theology generally, failed to prove the incorporeality of God, was their desire to establish God as Creator (*kdei l'hishair makom l'borei*, in order to leave room for the Creator). Their insistence was prior to what we might actually learn about creation, and, if necessary, in spite of that evidence. But their proofs could not succeed, since all proof presumes a lawfully ordered world, in which the human intellect is competent (*s'mukhot*) to draw conclusions from the evidence of the senses. Besides, had they proceeded in a scientific manner, they would have found that it was really rather easy (*n'kala*) to make this proof, i.e., the proof that since God could not be composite He could not be corporeal. (Even-Shmuel's Hebrew commentary to the Guide, p. 515).

These last three chapters revealed the impotence of the theologians. In our own chapter, Maimonides shockingly let his Corporealist beat the theologians, shattering the strongest “proofs” that they had against divine corporeality.

Most of Maimonides' proofs, by contrast, came from the philosophers. Unlike the theologians, the philosophers rejected preconceived notions and received opinion. By disputing everything, they left only the individual pursuit of truth.

Can religion turn to philosophy to secure its own foundational doctrines?

THE HALACHIC AUTHORIZATION OF PHILOSOPHY

Maimonides' argument for the incorporeality of God quoted above is a philosophic argument. Its source is clearly Aristotelian. That raises the question of whether the Guide is a book of philosophy.

Leo Strauss, in his introductory essay to the Pines translation, said that the Guide was a Jewish book, not a philosophic book. His statement was, perhaps, intentionally paradoxical, since Strauss certainly regarded it either as a work of political philosophy or as secretly Aristotelian. (For the former, see Strauss' *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Chicago, 1988, page 91; for the latter, see my note at the end of the chapter essay on Guide 1:71, "Was Maimonides a Theologian?")

I prefer the formulation in Strauss' early work, *Philosophie und Gesetz (Philosophy and Law*, SUNY, 1995, Ch. 2, esp. 89-92), where he had Maimonides making the case that Jewish law authorized philosophy, just because of this need for solid arguments against corporealism and dualism. Since we must make those arguments, the Guide is undeniably philosophical, even if not primarily philosophical (as I have emphasized in these essays). Strauss wrote, "Philosophy is commanded by the law, philosophy is authorized by the law."

But is philosophy antithetical to religion? Is it dangerous? Its portal bears this admonition:

"If you wish to go in search of truth, cast aside your passions (*hitravravut* = vanities, conceits; Judeo-Ar.: אלהוי), your tradition, and your fondness of things you have been accustomed to cherish, if you wish to guard yourself against error..." (Guide 1:76)

His sentence concludes with a warning not to follow the path of the Kalām, but the point is that you must cast aside passion and even *tradition* if you want to find the true case against divine corporeality. This is so important that one must dare to enter the realm of philosophy. If you conceive a prejudice against doing so and take up the Kalām type of argument instead, you could end up as a corporealist heretic, since you would be unable to counter the Corporealist's argument.

Rabbi Shem Tov's explanation of the problem of tradition is worth reviewing at length:

"*OBSERVE, you seekers after truth*, how Maimonides destroyed the arguments of the Kalām whereby they sought to prove creation *ex nihilo*, and their arguments that there must perforce be a Creator, one, and incorporeal. Observe, also, that people are accustomed from childhood to believe in creation. That is why Kalām thinking is so popular, since they would always start from the 'proof' of creation and only then use that to 'prove' the other three requirements of all religion: divine existence, unity, and incorporeality. Therefore, Maimonides demanded that you turn away from the tents of these evildoers, for any man who considers himself a seeker should withdraw from dwelling in their company, rather should you seek truth, abandoning passionate desires, especially desires for those things you considered great while you were growing up. For there is nothing so injurious as that to which we have become accustomed. The seeker should not turn to received opinion, for it is easy to accept, requiring no thought. You should have no inclination but to know truth *qua* truth, inclining neither to passion nor to opinions merely accepted from childhood. Do not cause your soul to err by following these theologians, for they 'leapt from the frying pan into the fire.' By this remark, Maimonides referred to their inveterate but failed attempts to establish creation *ex nihilo*, which only ended when they destroyed the [natural] basis for the real proofs for divine existence, unity and incorporeality. For the Kalām rejected the actual natures of existent beings. They altered the creation of heaven and earth with their propositions, which they meant to prove creation, but which never succeeded. Creation cannot be established by proof. But, by contrast, the proofs of divine existence, unity and incorporeality all follow from the natures of existing things, known and apprehensible by sense and intellect." (My trans., from his commentary on our Guide chapter, *ad loc*, 133a-133b.)

A TALMUDIC AUTHORIZATION FOR PHILOSOPHY?

The law may authorize the pursuit of philosophy to secure the necessary doctrines of religion. There is precedent in the Talmud, *Shabbat 75A*. Accurate calendrical calculation is so important that it might be illegal for a judge to ignore or put aside his Hellenic astronomical knowledge, reason of its pagan origin. Maimonides wrote a *Responsa* (no. 61) explaining the breadth of this doctrine:

“Question: Where the Talmud says, ‘Someone who knows how to compute cosmic cycles and planetary courses but does not make these computations, one may hold no discussion with him...[And] of him Scripture saith, *They regard not the work of the Lord, neither have they considered the operation of His hands.*’ (*Shabbat 75a*, quoting Isa. 5:12). How should we think about this? Does it make a difference whether we should consider that this is or is not a commandment? (This question was prompted by the appearance of the word *mitzvah* in the subsequent Talmud passage, ‘How do we know that one is *commanded* to compute cosmic cycles and planetary courses?’).

Answer: When it says ‘Someone who knows how to compute cosmic cycles and planetary courses,’ this would include knowledge of astronomy, intercalation, and mathematics, in all of their details. And when it says, ‘Someone who knows... but does not make these computations,’ it refers to someone who has the ability to do so. These disciplines are keys of wisdom, and it refers to someone who knows their axioms and does not put them to use to make these computations. The question is, in such a case, what would be the benefit of this knowledge. Already Rabbi Meir in the *Baraita* declaimed: *Contemplate God’s works through which you can recognize He who spoke and the world came to be.*” (My trans.)

Maimonides meant that he was prepared to give the Talmud’s somewhat limited authorization of Hellenic learning a very broad construction. We are to “contemplate God’s works” in earthy nature and the heavenly cosmos. If we fail to do so, we have lost an opportunity to acknowledge divine power.

If true for calendrical calculations confronting the Jewish court, how much more must this be true for the four necessary doctrines of religion. That same Talmudic section permits study of pagan doctrine “in order to understand and instruct.” The Kalām refused to do so.

The pursuit of philosophy is the individual pursuit of the truth. In the wrong hands, it could undermine religion’s *communal* reliance on revealed law. The solution is Maimonides’ program for his student. The student, who has already mastered the law, prepares, “casting aside...passions.” He engages in serious unprejudiced study of these matters, and when properly directed emerges from perplexity. He is then *qualified* for the important philosophic demonstration that God is not a body, a demonstration that the law itself demands.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Islam saw the danger and rejected philosophy. We can date the closing of the Muslim mind from the last decade of the 12th century, when Islamic fundamentalists murdered the Illuminist philosopher Suhrawardi and exiled the Aristotelian Averroës (1192 and 1195, respectively; note that the Guide was completed in 1190). The result was that the Muslim world committed itself to the fatalist outlook that man could learn nothing from nature. Thus followed the decline of Muslim intellectual life. Bernard Lewis dates this decline from the Ottoman period in his *What Went Wrong?*, but had not gone back far enough. Maimonides, in these last few Guide chapters, revealed why their thinking went wrong.

The contrast of the Christian world with the Muslim is compelling. Thomas Aquinas adopts Maimonides and saves Christendom from the Kalāmīc impulse. At the same time, the Muslim world ignored Maimonides and persecuted its great thinkers, Averroës and Suhrawardi.

(What Went Wrong, Oxford, 2001. For the contrary view, see Peter Adamson interview: <http://fivebooks.com/interview/peter-adamson-philosophy-islamic-world/>. Recently, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, Robert Reilly, Barnes and Noble 2010 is in general agreement with Lewis, but dates the decline from before Maimonides time, from the rise of Asharism. It is a popularization based on secondary sources, but his assembly of Arabic-speaking contemporary critics is impressive).

THE CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST VOLUME

With this preface, Maimonides promises, in Book Two, to turn his attention to philosophy proper, and to show how it provides strong support for three of the four most important doctrines of religion: Divine existence, unity, and incorporeality. He adopts (*sh'naniakh*), for the sake of argument, the philosophers' eternalism, i.e., that the world was not created. He immediately says, convincingly, that he does not believe in that premise (*im ki ain anu b'dea zo*), but that he assumes it, provisionally, to secure the proofs of those other three doctrines. Having secured that needful thing, he turns to the fourth necessary doctrine of religion to dissect Aristotle's case against God's creation of the world.

The downfall of the Aristotelian/Ptolemaic earth-centered cosmology removed a major philosophical proof for the existence of God, i.e., the need for a greater force to impel the infinite motion of the cosmic sphere. Maimonides had other excellent arguments, as we will see, but to the modern way of thinking, the whole procedure seems flawed. Others, including Aquinas, took up the search for proofs of God, but since they already possessed unshakable faith, we may find it hard to see why they did so. We no longer find rabbis and theologians propounding proofs for God's existence. Why did the medieval scholastics continue to pursue such demonstrations?

The entire issue of the provability of the divine opens its own problematic. On the one hand, there is an urge to support objectively what we subjectively believe. If something is real we should be able to show it. One impressive attempt was Anselm's Ontological Proof, in its many versions. (Anselm 1033 – 1109. The proof: It is better to exist in reality than in the mind only. It would therefore be contradictory for God, defined as the being than which none greater can be conceived, to exist only in the mind. Therefore, God exists. Congratulations to Mr. Chris Hallquist for this welcome simplification of the proof.)

The reason we moderns already believe in God is twofold: 1) we recognize the reality of the dimension of the sacred in our lives (see Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*), and, 2) precisely, because we have the testimony of prophecy, which Maimonides and many ancient philosophers accepted as a reliable basis for belief (See my discussion at Guide 1:50: "Can there be *I'tiqad* of Prophecy?").

But we live in a time of rampant and aggressive atheism. As we will see in the next chapter there is good reason to revisit Maimonides' long neglected proofs for divine existence. We will find that they will deepen our appreciation of the being of God. This is part of the process by which we constitute our own active intellect, which he understood as a precondition to prophecy.

Maimonides' main purpose in the Guide was to reestablish prophecy, as I have maintained. The turn to philosophy is not the final objective of the Maimonidean project. The center of the book, from the thirty-second chapter of Volume Two until the end of that volume, is prophecy. We will later discuss why this should be so. My point now is to emphasize that Maimonides' goal is the return of prophecy to Israel.

Prophecy resembles philosophy somewhat, but the resemblance only goes so far. Prophecy requires prophets. The prophet is a religious hero who, *at minimum*, must be able to secure these four religious foundations, using the tools of philosophy as needed.

Philosophy is part of the training of prophets for two reasons. *First*, because philosophy is the individual pursuit of truth, the philosopher must learn to sort things out for himself. That is also a fundamental requirement of the prophetic pursuit:

“The *Maaseh Merkava* must not be fully expounded even in the presence of a single student, unless he be wise and *able to reason for himself*, and even then you should merely acquaint him with the heads of the different sections (chapter headings) of the subject’ (Talmud, *Hagigah* 11b). You must, therefore, not expect from me more than such heads.” (Guide: Introduction)

There are many reasons for this peculiar method of teaching, some of which we have addressed. At the deepest level of the religious pursuit, the attempt to achieve the special divine contact called prophecy, the student must think things through like a philosopher, by having an honest dialogue with himself. Prophets can be trained, to some extent, but, ultimately, they are unique individuals who must educate themselves. They are students who have mastered the law and the sciences, and who pick up hints from their teachers. These hints are the chapter headings of *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkava*, the mystery of Creation and the mystery of Providence. By *linking* heading to heading, and parable to parable, those students transform themselves, becoming channels of the divine emanation.

Secondly, both philosophy and prophecy are solitary meditative pursuits. While Judaism generally opposes the solitary pursuits in favor of the communal ones, this is not true in the case of prophecy. The prophet’s solitary pursuit resembles that of the philosopher. Solitary contemplation is the necessary preparation for prophecy. In a fascinating essay on meditation, *hitbodedut*, Maimonides’ son, R. Avraham ben ha-Rambam, explained that the biblical patriarchs’ inveterate pursuit of shepherding was really about their commitment to such solitary contemplation. R. Avraham Ibn Ezra clarified: “The sons [students] of the prophets would isolate themselves, in the hopes that each would receive power, each according to his own capacities.” It is what Maimonides meant by his frequent quotation of Psalms 4:4: “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still: *Selah*.”

The divine contact occurs on that lonely field. The prophet prepares for it, with his investigations and his meditations, but God controls the process.

That is the significant difference between philosophy and prophecy. In philosophy, God may provide the philosopher’s inspired moment, the problem-solving breakthrough, but otherwise has no manifested or exoteric role in the process. The reverse is the case in prophecy. The solution of problems and penetration of problematics is not the prophet’s primary concern. His deepest desire, expressed in his awed mystical love, is contact, mind to mind, the transforming moment when the limited meets the transcendent, and attains transcendence. He needs this contact for its own sake, not for any other purpose, however communally or personally beneficial the result may prove to be.

The first volume of the Guide represents the first stage of the prophet’s training. Through it he achieves liberation from the grip of the imagination, the corporeal unconsciousness which substitutes for thought and leads to idolatry.

(On “linking” as a higher type of meditation, see my *Introduction I*. On R. Avraham ben ha-Rambam, see his work *The Guide to Serving God*, trans. R. Yaakov Wincelberg, p. 497, Feldheim 2008. R. Avraham Ibn Ezra in his Torah Commentary, in the translation and discussion of Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*, Princeton 2007, p. 46. See recent corroboration of my conclusions in Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik’s newly transcribed 1951 lectures on the Guide, *Maimonides – Between Philosophy and Halachah*, KTAV Publishing, 2016, especially in chapters I, IV, VI, and Introduction, pp. 31-43).

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scottmalexander@rcn.com

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