

**SILENCE AND SALVATION  
IN MAIMONIDES' *GUIDE***

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts**

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# Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the doctrines of Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed* from the perspective of an enquiry into the question of whether or not an isolate, as epitomised in Ibn Tufail's allegory, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, could achieve salvation with no access at all to the doctrines of revealed religion. Put another way, the matter to be investigated pertains to the possibility of extracting an entirely naturalistic soteriology from Maimonides' text.

The methodology adopted will be to show via a close reading of the *Guide* that Maimonides was deeply pessimistic about the possibility of knowledge accessible to human beings concerning God and his creation. However, this pessimism notwithstanding, he simultaneously put forward a doctrine of salvation in which as created beings, with the concomitant ontological status of all such hylomorphic beings, human beings, uniquely, can survive death by perfecting their intellects to such an extent that at the point of death they leave behind, and become independent of, the matter which has hitherto individuated them, and survive death by conjoining with the Active Intellect – a metaphysical entity, the existence of which underpins all intellectual activity in the sublunary realm. This immortality is admittedly non-personal and non-individual, but it is, for Maimonides, true salvation, being synonymous with liberation from the trammels of matter – matter being the source of evil and of corruption in general, although as divinely created is not evil in itself. Thus the *Guide* contains both a philosophical theology, which is deeply sceptical about the possibility of demonstrative knowledge in the realms of both metaphysics and physics, with silence being the ultimate counsel of wisdom for those who seek God, and a soteriology which is based entirely on noesis. A further dimension is added to the study by the suggestion, and subsequent utilisation, of a parallel between some aspects of the *Guide*, and analogous aspects of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, with a benefit of this parallel being provided in the application of the distinction between saying and showing to Maimonides' work. This parallel enables a final answer to be given to the question raised above.

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# Chapter One

## Enframing

### I

In the introduction to his translation of Averroes' *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, Simon Van Den Bergh describes the deep emotional difference between Averroes and Al-Ghazali as being, in part, that between a thinker who conceives of God as a "dehumanized principle" and one who regards God as "the Pity behind the clouds" <sup>1</sup>. This is indeed a deep difference.

Van Den Bergh explains how despite the fact that Averroes is unwilling to go as far as Aristotle in regarding man as a mortal God due to his intellectual capacity, Averroes' faith in reason "remains unshaken" <sup>2</sup>. This faith is something which Averroes shares with his fellow Andalusian, Moses Maimonides, whose *Guide of the Perplexed* can be read as providing assistance to those of his fellow Jews who had the necessary intellectual and moral training, to enable them to reconcile the fundamental tenets of their faith as laid down in the Bible and post-Biblical sacred texts with Aristotelian philosophy, at least as interpreted by Aristotle's Arabic exegetes. Maimonides' Aristotelianism differs from Averroes' insofar as the former's is heavily imbued with the Neo-Platonic interpretations of Alfarabi and Avicenna, whereas Averroes was keen to return to what he regarded as a pure Aristotelianism purged of any Neo-Platonic accretions. Maimonides and Averroes also share the dubious distinction of having been accused of heresy in their own lifetimes by their respective co-religionists due to the results of their application of independent reasoning to the sacred texts of their respective religions, and linked with this, they shared what can fairly be described as an intellectual elitism, due to their view that the aforementioned texts are aimed predominantly at the unlettered masses, and aim to communicate basic religious truths in a picturesque fashion which appeals primarily to the imagination of ordinary people. As Maimonides puts it, in a Rabbinic phrase which he characteristically appropriates for

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<sup>1</sup> *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, Translator's Introduction, Page xxxvi. The use of the adjective 'emotional' to describe the difference in question is Van Den Bergh's.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

his own purposes, "The Torah speaketh in the language of the sons of man" <sup>3</sup>. The philosophers, on the other hand, form an elite cadre who can grasp these truths conceptually by the appropriate exercise of rational thought, without any imagination-dependent adulteration <sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, philosophers and non-philosophers, for both these thinkers, form mutually exclusive groups. Generally speaking, one can either be a philosopher, and thereby a member of a small and intellectually privileged minority, or a member of the uneducated bulk of the populace which forms the majority of humankind <sup>5</sup>.

The provision of these sacred texts is interpreted by the philosophers as a divine concession to the weakness of the intellect in most people, which enables them to live in accordance with God's will for them, and in a sense can be regarded as an act of "Pity", which ensures that no human being is left without essential guidance in the important issue of how one should live one's life. Correct behaviour towards one's fellow citizens and in one's own private conduct is thereby fostered without any knowledge being required of the philosophical truths underlying this behaviour. These truths can be directly grasped by those whose rational powers are sufficiently developed. However, for those who are not so equipped, help and guidance is available from a different source – one which is external to the individual, and which is presented as a given rather than requiring acts of intensive abstract cognition. It can be seen here that there is a sense in which the provision of religious texts acts as a bridge between Averroes and Al-Ghazali with respect to the above-mentioned gulf which separates them. For those who have sufficient intellectual capability and who have the appropriate educational background, which according to Maimonides, at least, requires as a minimum training study in logic, mathematics, the natural sciences and, finally, in metaphysics <sup>6</sup>, as well as a highly developed moral character, reason will provide the maximum illumination possible to the unaided human intellect of the first principles underlying the universe,

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<sup>3</sup> This important quotation appears in *The Guide of the Perplexed* in the following places – I.26 (page 56), I.29 (page 62), I.33 (page 71), I.46 (page 100), I.53 (page 120), and I.59 (page 140). This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. The use of old English for the verb in this phrase is Pines' choice in his translation.

<sup>4</sup> Averroes comments that "...philosophy only leads a certain number of intelligent people to the knowledge of happiness...whereas religions seek the instruction of the masses generally" – *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, page 360.

<sup>5</sup> See Pines' Translator's Introduction to *The Guide of the Perplexed* (page cxix).

<sup>6</sup> He is very clear about what is required by way of what he refers to as "preliminary studies". See, for example, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.34 (page 75).

and, by extension, mankind's place within it. However, for those who have neither the time nor the aptitude <sup>7</sup> for philosophical studies, revelation will provide, at least for all practical purposes, knowledge which is missing – knowledge which is essential and without which a human life cannot be properly lived <sup>8</sup>. This revelation is a gift from God, and as a bare minimum comprises the Koran, for Averroes, and the Torah, for Maimonides. The universe may be underpinned and permeated by reason, but there is a different route to the truth and to salvation from the dilemma of how human life should be lived, and this route has been provided as a result of God's mercy towards human beings. Philosophers in the Middle Ages were, as a general rule, proud of man's capacity for rational thought, and for them, man is a created being of the genus 'animal' whose differentia is 'rationality' <sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless, they had an acute awareness of how few people were actually able to make the fullest possible use of this faculty, and while this awareness led to a radical intellectual elitism, which sometimes sits uncomfortably with us in the twenty-first century, it also led to a toleration of religious texts, which they regarded as compensating, to a limited extent, for the less than fully developed state of the intellectual faculty in most people. Ideally, one learns of God's existence, unity and incorporeality through the unaided use of reason, as indeed one learns how to behave towards one's fellow creatures, but for those who cannot do this, for whatever reason, religious texts such as the Koran and the Torah perform this function, and steer those of weaker intellectual power away from inadvertent heresy or idolatry, or from inappropriate behaviour towards others.

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<sup>7</sup> Maimonides identifies and discusses five reasons why the majority of people cannot participate in the activity of metaphysics in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.34 (pages 72 to 79).

<sup>8</sup> This view is clearly and concisely summarised by Averroes as follows: "With regard to things which by reason of their recondite character are only knowable by demonstration, God has been gracious to those of his servants who have no access to demonstration, on account of their natures, habits or lack of facilities for education: He has coined for them images or likenesses of these things, and summoned them to assent to those images, since it is possible for assent to those images to come about through the indications common to all men, i.e. the dialectical and rhetorical indications" – *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, page 59.

<sup>9</sup> A fairly typical comment is that of Maimonides in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I. 51 (page 113), where he states that "For being a rational animal is the essence and true reality of man, and there does not exist in this case a third notion, apart from those of animal and rational, that constitutes man."

Although Maimonides was a devout Jew, he was steeped philosophically, in terms of style, methodology and content, in a milieu that was very much Islamic <sup>10</sup>, and indeed the post-Aristotelian thinkers most often named or referred to in *The Guide of the Perplexed* are generally Islamic <sup>11</sup>. Like all those thinkers, he lived in a community of his co-religionists, and had been educated from childhood in the customs, mores and texts proper to his particular faith, although unlike the others he ran a considerable risk for a large part of his childhood and early adulthood by practising his religion openly <sup>12</sup>. Indeed, not only did Maimonides not grow up in a religious vacuum, he was steeped in the faith of his ancestors, and the overwhelming majority of his literary output was devoted to the clarification and codification of post-Biblical Jewish sacred texts and the religious law contained therein. Despite his view that in a sense these texts have a socio-political function, and that they are provided as a supplement to the use of unaided reason, he did not thereby automatically reject them as unnecessary for those whose intellectual faculty was sufficiently well developed <sup>13</sup>. For example, in Part III of *The Guide of the Perplexed* he devotes a considerable amount of space to establishing rational grounds for as many of the injunctions contained in the Mosaic Law as he can

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<sup>10</sup> Oliver Leaman makes this point in *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy*, on pages 16-17 and 59, to quote two examples.

<sup>11</sup> Shlomo Pines, in his Translator's Introduction to *The Guide of the Perplexed*, points out that in this particular text "Maimonides' references, or allusions, to Jewish philosophic or kalam texts are exceedingly and rather surprisingly scanty." He also describes Maimonides as having "...a marked disinterest in this literature...". Pines' extensive discussion of Maimonides' philosophical sources in this Introduction is predominantly devoted to Islamic philosophers.

<sup>12</sup> Abraham Heschel's *Maimonides* paints a graphic picture of how much the persecutions of the Jews by the Almohades rendered dangerous too public an espousal of Judaism, in certain parts of their empire, at any rate.

<sup>13</sup> This is also true of Averroes and his Islamic predecessors. How much this was due to prudence caused by the need not only not to upset the faith of the unlettered masses, but also not to offend theologians of a more conventional turn of mind, is a contentious issue in the interpretation of the philosophy of this era, but be that as it may, the public pronouncements of thinkers like Averroes were very much to the effect that religious texts could not simply be set aside on the grounds that they were superfluous for philosophers who had reached a particular level of intellectual development. He states, for example, that "... it belongs to the necessary excellence of a man of learning that he should not despise the doctrines in which he has been brought up, ..., and that, if he expresses a doubt concerning the religious principles in which he has been brought up, ... he merits more than anyone else that the term unbeliever should be applied to him, and he is liable to the penalty for unbelief in the religion in which he has been brought up" – *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, page 360.

<sup>14</sup>. He splits them into (a) those commandments whose rationale is as obviously relevant at the time he was writing *The Guide of the Perplexed* as it was in Moses' day, such as the prohibitions on murder or theft, and (b) those commandments whose rationale can only be explained by reference to relevant historical conditions pertaining at the time of their enactment – conditions which no longer obtain, such as much of the legislation regarding sacrifices. However, he does not suggest that those injunctions described in (b) need no longer apply because the historical conditions which gave rise to them do not apply. On the contrary, in the *Mishneh Torah* he states that in the time of the Messiah "All the ancient laws will be reinstituted in his days; sacrifices will again be offered; ..." <sup>15</sup>. Not only is he sympathetic to the purpose of religious texts, despite regarding them as a less effective tool for grasping truth than unaided reason, which in his day was to a large extent co-extensive with the philosophy of Aristotle, but he also appears to be unwilling for the philosopher, who, almost by definition, has a highly developed ratiocinative faculty, to be allowed to abstain from adherence to religious law in all its detail. This is certainly seen from the events of his own life. Despite his wide-ranging and eclectic grasp of the philosophy of his contemporaries and of his predecessors, regardless of their cultural origin, he remained right to the end of his life a devout Jew, the majority of whose literary output was, as stated above, devoted to the clarification and codification of post-Biblical Jewish sacred texts. Whatever philosophical insight he personally achieved, he maintained a lifelong devotion to the faith of his fathers and a full adherence to the requirements of Jewish religious law <sup>16</sup>.

One implication of the above seems to be that not only in his theory, but also in his practice, Maimonides regards religion and religious texts as having intrinsic value of some description, and does not view them as being merely of socio-political utility <sup>17</sup>, although their protreptic role is an important part of their significance in human life. Now even a cursory glance at *The Guide of the Perplexed* will reveal that some of the key doctrines contained therein appear at first glance to be difficult to reconcile with the

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<sup>14</sup> Chapters 25 to 50 in Leo Strauss's analysis of the structure of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, in his introductory essay to Pines' translation.

<sup>15</sup> *Book Fourteen: Judges*. In *A Maimonides Reader* by Isadore Twersky, page 222.

<sup>16</sup> Abraham Heschel's biography paints a vivid picture of a man who, at great personal cost, remained true to his faith, and whose theoretical and practical efforts on behalf of his co-religionists throughout the Diaspora exacted a heavy toll on his time and health.

Bible, at least as traditionally interpreted. Most of the first half of Book I is devoted to an examination of certain Biblical terms which, if interpreted literally, would connote corporeality in God, such as those whose primary signification is of bodily organs or sensory powers. Maimonides reinterprets the terms in question to remove the possibility of attributing corporeality to the deity. He believes that not only is it essential to reinterpret such terms to ensure that the ascription of corporeality to God, which demonstrative reason (in the Aristotelian sense) has conclusively shown to be improper, is avoided at all costs, but also that such ascriptions are to be viewed as worse than idolatry <sup>18</sup>. His willingness to perform such reinterpretations is a key methodological principle of the *Guide*. Once demonstrative reason has indicated that a given proposition must be true – in this case, the proposition that ascriptions of corporeality are not to be made with respect to God – then all other propositions which appear, on a literal reading, to clash with this first proposition, such as the attribution to God of bodily parts or organs, must be interpreted in a non-literal way. This principle applies even when the set of propositions to be reinterpreted is found in sacred texts <sup>19</sup>, and is relatively unproblematic, given a certain view of the power of human reason, at least when this is

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<sup>17</sup> Maimonides' receptor, Spinoza, in his *Theological-Political Treatise* took a view of religion which regarded it predominantly, if not solely, as an instrument to ensure social cohesion and political stability.

<sup>18</sup> In *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.36 (page 84), he states "Know accordingly,...that when you believe in the doctrine of the corporeality of God or believe that one of the states of the body belongs to him, you provoke his jealousy and anger, kindle the fire of his wrath, and are a hater, an enemy, and an adversary of God, much more so than an idolater." This forthright denunciation of the offending ascriptions is somewhat paradoxically worded, given the close conceptual connection in mediaeval philosophy between corporeality, materiality and the possession of emotions such as jealousy and anger. However, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.54 (page 126) explains what exactly is meant by describing God as liable to anger or jealousy. It is that "...actions similar to those that proceed from us from a certain aptitude of the soul – namely, jealousy,...or anger – proceed from Him, may He be exalted, because of the deserts of those who are punished, and not because of any passion whatever, may He be exalted above every deficiency." These descriptions are examples of what are referred to as "attributes of action", which are the only positive attributes which can be ascribed to God according to Maimonides. This doctrine will be examined later on in this dissertation, in the third and in the eighth chapters.

<sup>19</sup> In *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.25 (pages 327-8), in the context of the discussion of whether the world is eternal or has been created in time, the principle comes close to being explicitly stated. "That the deity is not a body has been demonstrated; from this it follows necessarily that everything that in its external meaning disagrees with this demonstration must be interpreted figuratively, for it is known that such texts are of necessity fit for figurative interpretation."



used properly <sup>20</sup>. What is potentially much more problematic for traditional religious faith is the uncompromising apophatic theology put forward in Book I of the *Guide*, which severely circumscribes what can be said about God in ordinary language. Put as simply as possible <sup>21</sup>, attributes to be ascribed to God must be either essential or accidental. Essential attributes must be entirely negative in content, inasmuch as they can only be used to state what God is not, and accidental attributes can only be used to describe effects of God's actions. Neither type of attribute expresses positive knowledge of His essence. If this doctrine is followed with rigour, as Maimonides appears to intend, the conception of the deity that emerges is so austere and distant that it is hard to reconcile with the traditional God of the Bible – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who created the universe from free choice, and who cares for His creation, in particular for the human element of this creation, and who while capable of inspiring love, awe, and fear, communicates with His creation. This traditional God also is not only aware of the needs of human beings, but is responsive to pleas for help, and indeed welcomes and expects human supplications and expressions of love and thanks.

We now have, on the one hand, a philosophical conception of the deity, inspired by Aristotelian logic, physics and metaphysics, and presented by Maimonides in the *Guide* – one in which God appears to be supremely and essentially unknowable, at least to mankind, as He is in Himself, as opposed to how He manifests Himself in the universe. On the other hand, we have the traditional God of Judaism, as described above, who, although undoubtedly the Supreme Being and creator of all that is, is apparently more accessible and open to human cognition, and is more evidently at work in the world. Nevertheless, in an important sense, the tension is not so much between two conflicting conceptions of God, as is the case with the contrast between Averroes' and Al-Ghazali's accounts of the deity, as between two conflicting accounts of what ordinary language can say about God and His activities in the world. After all, even if we accept Maimonides' negative theology in its full rigour, we are not thereby logically compelled to accept, for example, that God did not create the universe or does not exercise

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<sup>20</sup> As opposed, for instance, to the use made of it by the Mutakallimun, who in their zeal to rebut assertions made by philosophers which they believe to be contrary to religious principles, resort to using as axioms propositions which owe more to the imagination than they do to the intellect. This is Maimonides' primary criticism of them in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.71 et seq..

<sup>21</sup> A more detailed discussion of this theology follows in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

providential care for the beings that He has created, or even that he does not communicate with human beings via the medium of prophecy. What we would be compelled to accept is that we cannot discuss the quiddity of God, or why and how He does what He does. God's essence completely transcends not only human intellectual powers but also human language, and our statements about His actions are really being made by our drawing analogies with our own actions. The conflict between Averroes and Al-Ghazali is one between a conception of God as the eternally existing and eternally acting Prime Mover, who did not create the universe by voluntarily acting but who necessarily and eternally underpins its continuing existence by the consequences of His essence, and who is unaware of the existence of anything other than the purest, most abstract thought, and a conception of God which is in most important respects similar to that of the Torah. On his own principles, Maimonides is able to put forward a conception of God which shares many of the features of that of Al-Ghazali, insofar as he can defend the creation of the universe in time, the validity of prophetic revelation, and the existence of divine providence, but what he cannot do is to discuss God in the ordinary language used in the Torah, which is carefully crafted to meet human intellectual and linguistic limitations <sup>22</sup>. Ultimately, the apophatic theology of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, if followed consistently to its logical conclusion, forces us to acknowledge that the purest worship of which human beings are capable, once all undesirable anthropomorphic accretions have been expunged, is a silent, numinous contemplation of God. Maimonides is quite explicit about this <sup>23</sup>. Human language is a poor tool for expressing the highest truths available to the unaided human intellect, and they cannot be adequately represented in such a medium, which can only confine itself to conveying them in a pictorial, and thus easily envisaged, manner to the unlettered masses, who rely much more on the faculty of imagination than they do on the intellect. The philosopher can grasp these truths conceptually, without using the imagination but simply by applying the intellect, assuming that his or her <sup>24</sup> intellect has been adequately

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<sup>22</sup> See footnote 3 above.

<sup>23</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.59 (pages 137 to 143), near the end of the part of Book I which is devoted to the examination of the question of the divine attributes, in the context of a discussion on what can properly be stated in prayers of praise, he quotes with approval the following three dicta drawn from the Bible – the first two from the Psalms and the third from Ecclesiastes. (i) "Silence is praise to Thee" (page 139), (ii) "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still" (page 140), (iii) "For God is in heaven and thou upon the earth; therefore let thy words be few" (page 143).

<sup>24</sup> Needless to say, Maimonides himself would not have acknowledged the possibility of a woman's achieving intellectual perfection, at least in the normal course of events,

prepared, and from a purely epistemic point of view would appear not to require religious texts. Nevertheless as stated above, the philosopher is not given any dispensation to refrain, for example, from adherence to religious law, even where the law in question relates to ceremonies of worship, thanksgiving or supplication. There appear from *The Guide of the Perplexed* to be two main reasons for this. First of all, religion and the collective opinions which it fosters, and the behaviours which it engenders, are a force for social cohesion and political stability, but over and above this there is another, no less important, reason, which is rather less instrumental. The practical demands on the time of the philosopher are distractions from metaphysical thought, but cannot be entirely evaded. Worldly affairs place intellectual demands on people, which may involuntarily intrude even into times set apart for quiet reflection. Reading sacred texts, reciting prayers and performing other prescribed religious activities, may help to focus the mind on God and away from more mundane matters <sup>25</sup>.

## II

This view of the two-fold function of religion as a vehicle for socio-political stability and as an aid to facilitate the focus of thought on the divine, and, furthermore, a vehicle which is apparently as essential for the practised philosopher *qua* member of his or her community as for all the other non-philosophising members of the same community, automatically raises the question of how essential revealed religion is for a philosopher who lives in isolation. That is, for a philosopher who either does not participate in the life of the community in which he or she lives <sup>26</sup>, or in a more extreme case, who lives

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although as the passage cited later on in this chapter from *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.51 (see footnote 36), makes clear, he allows for at least one exception to this – Moses' sister Miriam. Nevertheless, in accordance with modern usage, inclusive language will henceforth be used unless the context renders this inappropriate.

<sup>25</sup> Maimonides puts it thus: "Know that all the practices of the worship, such as reading the Torah, prayer, and the performance of the other commandments, have only the end of training you to occupy yourself with His commandments ...rather than with matters pertaining to this world; you should act as if you were occupied with Him ...and not with that which is other than He" – *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.51 (page 622).

<sup>26</sup> Such as Avempace's 'Weeds' in his *Governance of the Solitary*. These are virtuous men, who, almost by definition, are philosophers, and who live in communities which are unsympathetic or even antipathetic to their values, and who are forced to live as much as is possible independently of their fellow citizens in order to live in accordance with their own principles, or even to preserve their lives. Thinkers of this epoch in philosophical thought were mindful of the fate that befell Socrates at the hands of his fellow Athenians as his 'reward' for introducing intellectual free enquiry to them. See,

completely independently of any community, both economically and geographically. The most extreme example of isolation, and one which transcends the economic and geographic isolation of Defoe's shipwrecked sailor, Robinson Crusoe, is that of Ibn Tufail's eponymous hero whose life is described in *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*. Ibn Tufail's allegory tells the life story of a man – Hayy Ibn Yaqzan – who from babyhood until middle age lives a life of total isolation on an island devoid of any other human beings, and who consequentially is unaware that such exist. Living as he does completely cut off from the rest of mankind, Hayy has no language of his own, and no access to any knowledge other than that with which his sense perception and his intellect provide him. Blessed with an acute and enquiring mind, his life story as related by Ibn Tufail is an allegory of a spiritual journey towards God, which commences with the first stirrings of interest in the corporeal world of which he is a part, and which charts his progress through to grasping intellectually the metaphysical structure upon which the sublunary world and the superlunary realm are founded, and finally, to acquiring the ability to contemplate his creator through prolonged and intensive meditation. Having reached this latter stage in his journey, he remains meditating in the cave in which he dwells unless he is forced to interrupt his contemplation by his physical needs, and at this point in his life, when he is approximately fifty years of age, for the first time he meets another human being – a man named Asâl, who is a devout resident of a neighbouring island who has come to Hayy's island seeking solitude, and is unaware of the latter's presence. The meeting between Asâl and Hayy, and their subsequent friendship introduces Hayy for the first time to language, the doctrines of revealed religion, and the ways of mankind in general, and he eventually visits Asâl's island. Hayy tries to present to the islanders the abstract spiritual truths that he has discovered, and to persuade them to put aside their crude religious parables, which lead to errors such as ascribing corporeality to God, but his teachings meet with such a hostile reception that he realises not only that the generality of mankind are incapable of digesting any other type of spiritual fare than these parables, but also that this parabolic material is what God in His infinite wisdom has provided for them as most suited to their appetites and intellectual abilities. At this point, both Hayy and Asâl return to Hayy's island, where they remain worshipping God in their own manner until their deaths.

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for example, Strauss's description of Socrates' choice of death as opposed to conformity with the opinions in his discussion of the techniques developed by Islamic thinkers to avoid sharing this fate (in the introduction to *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, page 16).

Hayy's isolation is more extreme than Crusoe's, simply because as well as experiencing the two forms of isolation described above he is also culturally isolated, and furthermore, as culturally isolated as it is possible to imagine. Crusoe is shipwrecked as a mature man, not only with the mental cultural imprints which would have been normal for an Englishman of his age, era and socio-economic class <sup>27</sup>, but in addition has the benefit of some Bibles and some prayer books <sup>28</sup>, from which he is able to draw succour and guidance when the difficulties of life as a castaway threaten to overwhelm him with despair. On the other hand, Hayy, depending on which version of his birth is allowed to prevail, is regarded as either cast ashore as a tiny baby on his island or spontaneously generated with divine assistance <sup>29</sup>, is reared by a roe, and has no human contact of any description until Asâl appears on his island when Hayy is well into adult life <sup>30</sup>. What intellectual progress he manages to achieve is entirely due to his use of his own unaided reason, and he has no religious background which may function, consciously or unconsciously, as a foundation and underpinning for his philosophical thought, which slowly and inexorably turns to God as he matures, both mentally and physically. Taking the scenario laid out in Ibn Tufail's story as the apotheosis of human isolation, it can be seen that there is little, if any, role for religion to play in such a scenario. There is no community, the members of which need to have their opinions formed, and their behaviour towards each other guided by the prescriptions and proscriptions found in many sacred texts of revealed religion, so the socio-political instrumentality of religion is not required. Neither is religion required for the second purpose identified above – that of providing a focal point by the reading of sacred texts, and the performance of ritual prayers and other duties enshrined in religious law, to allow human beings to transfer their thoughts from the pressure of everyday concerns to reflection on God <sup>31</sup>. Hayy undoubtedly has pressing concerns, if only pertaining to the difficulties of providing sustenance, clothing and shelter for himself, but there can be little real doubt that the nature of his existence away from other people would remove many of the

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<sup>27</sup> Crusoe describes himself as having been "...well instructed by father and mother", and that his parents had not failed "...to infuse a religious awe of God into my mind, a sense of duty, and of what the nature and end of my being requir'd of me" – *Robinson Crusoe*, pages 95-96.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 46-47.

<sup>29</sup> *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, 3 to 9, pages 43-51.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 110, page 165.

<sup>31</sup> See footnote 25 above.

complications and stresses that are so endemic in life in a community of any size. He does not have the feelings or wishes of any other of his species to take into account when exercising his practical reason; indeed, for a significant part of his life he is unaware that any other human beings exist. Certainly, in his everyday life as described by Ibn Tufail, there appears to be an abundance of time available to him for both physical activity and metaphysical reflection. So the question posed at the beginning of the previous paragraph – how essential is revealed religion for the philosophical understanding of the isolate? – can be refined now to focus on the ultimate isolate as represented by Hayy, rather on the merely political isolate – the virtuous man in the vicious city <sup>32</sup>. Of course, in this context, Ibn Tufail's allegorical account of Hayy's intellectual and spiritual development, which culminates in his eventual achievement of a intellect perfected to the maximum degree possible for a living human being, and subsequent salvation from death, is important mainly as a metaphor for the progress of human reason unaided by anything other than basic sense perception. This dissertation is, after all, about Maimonides' *Guide* and not Ibn Tufail's text; the point is simply that through the eponymous Hayy we are provided with a figure who is an apotheosis of the isolate, and who is, therefore, perfect as a metaphorical exemplar for an exploration of what can be achieved as far as salvation from death is concerned by human ratiocination unassisted by revelation.

Returning to Maimonides, at the very end of *The Guide of the Perplexed* he discusses human perfection, which he conceives as essentially intellectual in nature. In the course of doing so he puts forward a view which can be read as suggesting that in order to realise as fully as possible the ultimate perfection available to human beings, who *qua* living and created beings necessarily consist of matter and form, and whose perfection is correspondingly limited by the hylic element in their metaphysical constitution, any aspirant to this state would be well advised to isolate himself or herself as far as this is possible <sup>33</sup>. To achieve this level of perfection is to achieve a state which prepares one,

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<sup>32</sup> See footnote 26 above.

<sup>33</sup> "Thus it is clear that after apprehension, total devotion to Him and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him should be aimed at. Mostly this is achieved in solitude and isolation. Hence every excellent man stays frequently in solitude and does not meet anyone unless it is necessary" – *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.51 (page 621). This aspect of Maimonides' thought, like so many others, is bedevilled by controversy. He can be interpreted as having advanced propositions elsewhere in the *Guide* which it is hard to reconcile with such a view of the necessity to

as far as possible, for the eventual dissolution of the body, and the transcendence of the state of existence in which one is "screened off", as Maimonides puts it <sup>34</sup>, from God by this hylic element. Moses, Aaron and Miriam are described as having achieved this state immediately prior to their deaths, and as having "died by a kiss" <sup>35</sup>. The following passage lets him speak for himself about what befalls an individual who dies in this manner.

[The Sages] ...mention the occurrence of this kind of death, *which in true reality is salvation from death*, only with regard to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. The other prophets and excellent men are beneath this degree; but it holds good for all of them that the apprehension of their intellects becomes stronger at the separation... . After having reached this condition of enduring permanence, that intellect remains in one and the same state, the impediment that sometimes screened him off having been removed. And he will remain permanently in that state of intense pleasure, which does not belong to the genus of bodily pleasures... <sup>36</sup>

This is a considerable advance beyond the merely epistemological considerations mentioned above. What is at issue is not simply the possibility of acquiring metaphysical knowledge, but of actualising the potentiality for attaining what is explicitly referred to as "salvation from death". It will become clearer later on <sup>37</sup> that what Maimonides means by this phrase is a long way from the individual immortality as sometimes envisaged by, for instance, Islam and Christianity, but that is not relevant at this stage. The epistemological issue has not been discarded, but given that in *The*

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remove oneself from human company as far as is reasonably possible if perfection is to be achieved. For instance, in the last book of the *Guide* he claims that the highest perfection for a given individual is to achieve "...in a measure corresponding to his capacity, apprehension of Him", and that "The way of life of such an individual, after he has achieved this apprehension, will always have in view loving-kindness, righteousness, and judgement, through assimilation to his actions..." – *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.54 (page 638). The only positive knowledge of God which is admitted to be possible for us is that of the attributes of action, and this would appear to suggest that achievement of the highest perfection is inevitably followed by a life devoted to practical, rather than theoretical, reason – a comment along these lines is made by Pines, in "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides", page 111.

<sup>34</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.51 (pages 627-8).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* (my italics).

<sup>37</sup> The full explication of what, in the *Guide*, is denoted by "salvation from death" will be presented in Chapters Six and Seven below.

*Guide of the Perplexed* salvation is inextricably linked to noesis, it has been subsumed and transcended by the soteriological one.

Although a full treatment of Maimonides' soteriology will be given in later chapters, it is important to provide a brief justification at this early stage for the importation into the examination of a text by a Jewish philosopher of a notion which may be thought to be primarily, although not solely, a Christian concept. The notion of salvation extracted from the pages of the *Guide*, albeit with some assistance from Aristotle and Alfarabi, will be shown to be completely philosophical in character, and as such owing nothing whatsoever to the concepts presented in any revealed texts. Salvation, for Maimonides, will be shown to be a state of post-death existence whereby the individual incorporeal human intellect achieves conjunction with the Active Intellect <sup>38</sup> at the point of death, and although the former loses its pre-death individuality at the point of conjunction, this is a fully acceptable consequence of the fact that at death the intellect sloughs off the hylic component of its metaphysical make-up which individuated it prior to death. Textual evidence will be adduced to show that Maimonides had an almost Platonic contempt for matter, and that salvation for him consists in the sempiternal transcendence of the grossly <sup>39</sup> hylomorphic existence which is the lot of all sublunary creatures. This austere doctrine is clearly far removed from the more homely notions of salvation espoused by some versions of monotheism, whether these are conceived as primarily national or individual in nature, and the point here is that salvation in the *Guide* is philosophical rather than religious, and hence it matters little that it is a concept which perhaps traditionally has stronger Christian connotations than Jewish ones.

Obviously, there is a strong incentive for creating the right preconditions to maximise the possibility of one achieving this exalted state, at least as far as a given individual can hope to aspire to it, given the differing intellectual capacities and opportunities for development which people have. The question to be addressed now is whether on the basis of Maimonides' philosophical theology Hayy – or, to be more precise, an isolate in

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<sup>38</sup> Maimonides' exposition in the *Guide* of the Active Intellect will be discussed in Chapter Six below.

<sup>39</sup> Maimonides makes a qualitative distinction between sublunary and superlunary matter – see, for instance, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.9, pages 436-37 – hence the description above of sublunary hylomorphic existence as 'gross'.



a position comparable to that of Hayy – could attain the level of enlightenment which is described at the end of the *Guide*, or whether his complete separation from a community and an associated religious and cultural tradition would prevent him from reaching this goal. After all, the excellent man whom Maimonides advises to stay "frequently in solitude" and not to meet anyone "unless it is necessary" <sup>40</sup> is already a member of a particular tradition, in this case Judaism, and in that respect is more like Robinson Crusoe than Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, contemplating not in a vacuum, but within, and upon, that tradition. What is ultimately at stake here is the possibility of a salvation based on human efforts alone <sup>41</sup>. This type of salvation would be completely independent of the Torah, and purely philosophical inasmuch as it is based solely <sup>42</sup> on ratiocinative thought unassisted by revelation, as practised by Aristotle, for example, rather than on the teachings of Moses and the prophets <sup>43</sup>. If human language is, as Maimonides appears to believe, a tool which can only convey the truths of pure, unaided reason in a somewhat inadequate way, and the explanatory force of which is centred on the imagination rather than the intellect, then perhaps the isolate <sup>44</sup> is better placed to attain salvation by not having the opportunity to use such a tool, let alone the necessity imposed upon him or her to do so. On the other hand, perhaps the lack of a religious tradition based on divine revelation will result in a somewhat stark, architectonic

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<sup>40</sup> See footnote 33 above.

<sup>41</sup> This rather un-Maimonidean expression is intended to denote knowledge attainable by the unaided human intellect. This is broadly similar to what David Hartmann calls "independent reason", which he defines as "...knowledge not based on the authority of revelation and tradition" – Endnote 2 to Chapter 3 of *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest*, page 236.

<sup>42</sup> It has been pointed out already in the main body of the text above that the ratiocinative thought to which reference is being made is applied, as part of its operation, to the material provided by the senses, and hence is not 'pure' in the strict sense of the term. See the passage in the *Guide*, located by footnote 3 of Chapter Three of this dissertation, which makes it clear that sense perception is a legitimate tool in the search for knowledge of "the permanent nature of what exists". However, the important contrast above is between salvation through human efforts alone and that which is facilitated by revelation.

<sup>43</sup> Maimonides' view of Abraham's role in the events described in the Torah, and the development of a pure monotheistic view of God, has been interpreted as embodying a conception of the latter as a pre-Mosaic philosopher. Hartman comments that Abraham "illustrates a relationship of man to God that is not grounded in Halakhah", and that years after him "[the] community of the patriarchs, embodying the way of Abraham, is organised around the knowledge of God provided by reason" – *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest*, pages 57 and 59.

conception of salvation – one which lacks the rich content of revealed religion, which in a sense ‘puts flesh on the bones’ of the philosophical conception of salvation.

The approach to be taken in tackling this question will be by offering a reading of the *Guide* that views Maimonides' text through the early philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, and a subsidiary aim of this dissertation will be show that on purely philosophical grounds such an approach is illuminating, at least as far as the question of the possibility of an entirely naturalistic soteriology is concerned. This reading will be underpinned by the fundamental awareness common to the authors of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *The Guide of the Perplexed* that human language is an inherently inadequate tool for the work which it is called upon to perform by mankind. As will be made clear, Wittgenstein and Maimonides differ in their conceptions of what it is that lies beyond direct linguistic expression – for the Austrian, this is value in general, be it ethical, aesthetic or religious, whereas for the Andalusian, it is positive descriptions of God's essence. However, what the philosophies of the *Tractatus* and the *Guide* have in common is more important than that which separates them, at least for present purposes, and this approach is intended to be self-justifying inasmuch as the rationale behind it is best revealed as it unfolds.

Before this overarching question concerning the isolate can be addressed, however, there is one important element in it, the coherence of which needs to be justified. Reference was made two paragraphs ago to 'Maimonides' philosophical theology'. Unfortunately there is no consensus as to what Maimonides' metaphysical views actually were. Indeed, it is probably reasonable to claim that in the history of Western philosophy there can be few, if any, thinkers whose actual views were so difficult to ascertain. This is not because he was not a clear writer – on the contrary, his prose is clear and lucid, containing few of the obscurities that plague, for example, much post-Kantian German philosophy. The difficulty lies not so much in *what* he says, as in *why* he says it<sup>44</sup>, or whether he even means what he seems to say so clearly. This difficulty of interpretation has been largely fuelled by comments made in the Dedicatory Epistle

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<sup>44</sup> Unless stipulated otherwise the word 'isolate' will henceforth be used to denote the extreme example of the species, as represented by Hayy Ibn Yaqzan. The type of isolated individual described by Avempace will be described as a 'political isolate'.

<sup>45</sup> In this respect, *The Guide of the Perplexed* resembles some of the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

and his Introduction to the First Part of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, where he discusses his use of equivocal terms and other devices to hide certain secrets which must not be revealed to those readers of his book who are not properly prepared for their reception. He also claims that the diction of the book has been chosen with "great exactness and exceeding precision"<sup>46</sup>, and that any contradictory or contrary statements in a book, and hence, by extension, in his book, are due to one of seven causes, which he then proceeds to enumerate<sup>47</sup>. These comments have led to a plethora of conflicting interpretations of the *Guide*, all of which appear to receive textual support, not only in this book, but also in his other works. The existence, nature, and extent of this welter of different views makes it practically mandatory that one begin any discussion of Maimonides' work, in particular, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, with an orientation of where one stands in respect to the various schools of thought into which these different views can, with greater or lesser degrees of difficulty, be placed. The next task therefore is to undertake this process of orientation, which, in this case, is intended to make clear what 'Maimonides' philosophical theology' is intended to denote. With this in mind then, the next chapter will locate the dissertation in the context of the various hermeneutic positions taken by recent and contemporary commentators on the vexed question of how the *Guide* should be read, with the subsequent chapter extracting from the first book of this text the basic philosophical theology contained therein, which both permeates and underpins the entire text. The conclusions of both these chapters will be mutually integrated and refined in the fourth chapter, which completes the preliminary work of offering a basic interpretative position on the *Guide* which is conducive to dealing successfully with the question with which the dissertation is primarily concerned. The fifth chapter will adduce for the first time the Wittgensteinian element, to build upon the basic position constructed in the previous four chapters, and is intended to provide a helpful perspective from which texts of revealed religion can be viewed to help ascertain their indispensability or otherwise for the salvation-seeking isolate. The sixth and seventh chapters are an essential excursus to attempt a reconstruction of Maimonides' soteriology, with some assistance from Aristotle and Alfarabi, as the whole project of the dissertation only makes sense if it can be shown that a doctrine of salvation is indeed contained within *The Guide of the Perplexed*. The

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<sup>46</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Introduction, page 15.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, page 17.

eighth and final chapter draws together the hermeneutic position, the Wittgensteinian aspect, and the soteriology, and produces a final answer to the question under review.

At this stage – at the end of only the first chapter – there is no point in offering any more than the admittedly rather adumbrative thumbnail sketch given in the last paragraph. Subsequent chapters will provide more methodological explanation as they unfold.

## Chapter Two

### Leo Strauss and Oliver Leaman on how to read the *Guide*

#### I

In a recent collection of thematically-linked essays on Maimonides, Marvin Fox discusses what he calls "The Many-Sided Maimonides" <sup>1</sup>. This phrase neatly sums up the difficulty already highlighted, namely the multitude of different, and mutually exclusive, interpretations of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, all of which appear to have solid support in the book itself. However, there are two distinctly identifiable strands of interpretation. Arthur Hyman entitles them the 'naturalistic' and the 'harmonistic' <sup>2</sup>, and identifies the former with Leo Strauss, Shlomo Pines, and Lawrence Berman, and the latter with Julius Guttman, H. A. Wolfson, and himself <sup>3</sup>. Hyman's distinction between these hermeneutic strands revolves around the suggestion that the naturalistic interpretation identifies an esoteric aspect to the *Guide*, which it contrasts with an exoteric aspect, and that it emphasises the political implications of this, whereas the harmonistic interpretation focuses more on the metaphysical and epistemological issues discussed in the text, and is willing to take more seriously the exoteric teachings as representing Maimonides' real views <sup>4</sup>. Although this distinction is very broad and cannot encompass the full range of views of the *Guide* it clearly corresponds to an identifiable 'watershed' which can classify in this particular respect many commentators, and as such is a suitable point of departure for an orientation as described above <sup>5</sup>.

If, as suggested at the end of the previous chapter, it is practically mandatory that one begin any discussion of Maimonides' work with such an orientation, it is perhaps not unreasonable that this process begin with consideration of Leo Strauss, whose work in a sense revolutionised the study of Maimonides in the twentieth century. One recent commentator has described Strauss's own Jewish thought as a "return to Maimonides",

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<sup>1</sup> This is the title of the first chapter of his recent book *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy*.

<sup>2</sup> In his article "Interpreting Maimonides", pages 23 to 28.

<sup>3</sup> Although, despite his tendency towards the harmonistic interpretation, he describes himself as being "unable to close his eyes to the merits of the naturalistic school", *ibid.*, page 28.

<sup>4</sup> This is Joseph Buijs' summary of Hyman's view – see the former's introduction to *Maimonides: A Collection of Critical Essays*, page 5 to 6.

and Strauss himself as having "...made a modern effort to revive Maimonideanism as a corrective to the contemporary dilemmas and defects of modern Jewish thought" <sup>6</sup>. The process will, therefore, commence with a brief examination and analysis of Strauss's view of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, and this examination and analysis is intended not so much for its own sake, as to act as a vehicle for the adumbration of the interpretation of this text which it is intended this dissertation will adopt. This exercise will be repeated with regard to the work of more recent writers on the *Guide*, beginning later in this chapter with Oliver Leaman, whose recent book devoted to Maimonides <sup>7</sup> adopts a position which can be reasonably be described as being within the broad purview of the harmonistic tendency, and which is, in addition, strongly critical of many of Strauss's basic presuppositions, and moving on in Chapter Four to a rather different approach to the *Guide* – that of Marvin Fox. As with the critique of Strauss's position on the text in question, the scrutiny of the positions of Leaman and Fox will be aiming at laying the foundations for establishing the interpretative position to be adopted in this dissertation.

The reason for the selection of these particular post-Straussian writers is twofold. First of all, they have hermeneutic approaches to the study of Maimonides which are not only different from each other, but which are also clearly and explicitly defined – one does not have to deduce them from that which is merely implicit in their commentaries. As no act of elicitation is required, one can immediately concentrate on their interpretations of Maimonides, rather than having to conduct a preliminary examination of their commentaries to establish any underlying interpretative principles. The second reason is that they all write as philosophers, and moreover as philosophers who have a view of *The Guide of the Perplexed* as a separate and unique text. This differentiates them, in one respect at least, from those whose interest in Maimonides in general, and in the *Guide* in particular, is from a different direction, for instance, from Judaic studies. It also differentiates them from writers such as David Hartmann, whose concern in his *Torah and Philosophic Quest* is to show that much of Maimonides' legal writing, which is concerned with Halakhah, contains a philosophic core which connects this writing with *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Thus the movement in Hartmann's book is from the halakhic writings towards the *Guide*, rather than looking at the latter text as a separate entity.

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<sup>5</sup> In the penultimate paragraph of the previous chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Hart Green, in the article cited in the Bibliography – page 820.

Leo Strauss presents an approach to *The Guide of the Perplexed* which, as stated above, concentrates on its political implications and reads it as a layered text, containing, as a minimum, an exoteric teaching which is available to all, and an esoteric teaching which is concealed "between the lines" and only available to the elite, who are able to abstract this secret teaching from its place of concealment, and who are its intended receptors. The reasons for the concealment of this teaching are that its basically heterodox nature would in all likelihood draw unwelcome attention from the forces of orthodoxy – usually religious authorities, often acting with the approval, or even the active support, of the uneducated masses <sup>8</sup> – and also because the simple, unreflective faith of these same masses is likely to suffer great harm if exposed to views which are at best unconventional, and at worst downright heretical, at least when compared to the conventional views of the day <sup>9</sup>. The latter reason can be found not only in mediaeval thinkers in the Jewish and Islamic traditions, such as Maimonides and Averroes, but also in Christian philosophers <sup>10</sup>.

In his introduction to Pines' translation of the *Guide*, Strauss begins by discussing what kind of book it is.

One begins to understand the *Guide* once one sees that it is not a philosophic book – a book written by a philosopher for philosophers – but a Jewish book: a book written by a Jew for Jews. Its first premise is the old Jewish premise that

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<sup>7</sup> Leaman's book is simply entitled *Maimonides*.

<sup>8</sup> Strauss claims that "...the influence of persecution on literature is precisely that it compels all writers who hold heterodox views to develop a particular technique of writing, the technique which we have in mind when speaking of writing between the lines. This expression is clearly metaphoric", *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, page 24.

<sup>9</sup> For example, regarding Scriptural texts, it is Averroes' contention that "To explain the inner meaning to people unable to understand it is to destroy their belief in the apparent meaning without putting anything in its place. The result is unbelief in learners and teachers", *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, page 65.

<sup>10</sup> In his commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius, in Article 4 of Question 2, St. Thomas Aquinas gives an affirmative answer to the question 'Should Divine Realities be Veiled by Obscure and Novel Words?', *Faith, Reason and Theology*, pages 51 to 55. In the Reply to this Article, he cites a passage from St. Augustine which indicates that the latter thinker also held this view, and Aquinas himself states that there are some matters which are suitable for discussion only by the wise but not by the uneducated, and that when these matters have to be committed to writing they "...should be concealed with obscure language, so that they will benefit the wise who understand them and be hidden from the uneducated who are unable to grasp them", *ibid.*, page 54.

being a Jew and being a philosopher are two incompatible things. ...A Jew may make use of philosophy and Maimonides makes the most ample use of it; but as a Jew he gives his assent where as a philosopher he would suspend his assent (cf. II 16).<sup>11</sup>

The question of whether or not the *Guide* is a philosophical book is not merely a semantic one, although clearly it has a semantic element. One's response to it informs one's perception of the book's purpose, as well as of its structure and content, and a response to it will gradually emerge in this chapter; however, at this stage what is important is what Strauss thinks the book is, rather than what he thinks it is not. He reaffirms Maimonides' explicit statements of the purpose of the *Guide* made in the introduction to the first part where, in Strauss's own words, it is stated that the *Guide* is "...devoted to the true science of the Law", and that "Its first purpose is to explain biblical terms and its second purpose is to explain biblical similes"<sup>12</sup>. The fact that many such terms and similes can have both an apparent meaning and a hidden meaning leads to a particular type of biblical exegesis, one which is intended to remove the perplexity which is the result of reading all such terms and similes only in accordance with their apparent meaning<sup>13</sup>. However, according to Strauss, in order to remove this perplexity Maimonides has to breach a specific rabbinic injunction that this highly sensitive material can only be revealed to one individual at a time, and not only must such an individual be advanced in theoretical and practical wisdom, but he or she must be adept in the art of communicating by allusive means, and even to such an individual, who by definition will be one of the elite, only the "chapter headings" can be revealed<sup>14</sup>. It is difficult to state with absolute certainty why Maimonides felt obliged to pass on this secret teaching despite the apparent Talmudic prohibition against doing so. However, Strauss presents the thesis that Maimonides believed that he had rediscovered a secret doctrine which had formerly only been orally transmitted, and which had subsequently been lost to posterity due to a break in the transmissive nexus, and that to prevent such a disastrous loss to Judaism ever occurring again, which was a real risk due to the effects of the Diaspora, he would record this teaching by writing it down<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> "How To Begin To Study The Guide of the Perplexed", page xiv.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* See also "The Literary Character of The Guide for the Perplexed", page 46.

<sup>15</sup> "The Literary Character of The Guide for the Perplexed", pages 50 to 51.



In order to carry out this project without inadvertently revealing this secret doctrine to anyone outside the elite cadre, who alone were suitable recipients, he used a variety of literary devices to ensure that the doctrine was not explicit in his text, but rather was written "between the lines". Strauss identifies three such devices. First of all, Maimonides states that every word in the text is chosen with considerable care – as the majority of readers will not study the text with sufficient assiduity they will be unlikely to discover the esoteric doctrine concealed with such painstaking care <sup>16</sup>. Secondly, contradictions are inserted deliberately into the body of the text. These are difficult to detect by those not sufficiently diligent in their scrutiny of the text, but will act for the elite as signposts to a deeper understanding of what it is that the author of the *Guide* is ultimately attempting to convey – the true teaching, which must be presented esoterically. It is clear that for Strauss these contradictions are the key to understanding *The Guide of the Perplexed*. The following passage, which is worth excerpting at length, makes this clear.

Contradictions are the axis of the *Guide*. They show in the most convincing manner that the actual teaching of that book is sealed and at the same time reveal the way of unsealing it. While the other devices used by Maimonides compel the reader to guess the true teaching, the contradictions offer him the true teaching quite openly in either of the true contradictory statements. ...To discover the contradictions or to find out which contradictory statement is considered by Maimonides to be true, we sometimes need the help of hints. ...Hints are supplied by the application of the other Maimonidean devices.<sup>17</sup>

To decide which of two contradictory statements is true Strauss offers the hermeneutic principle that as Maimonides identifies the true teaching with the secret teaching, and in a sense secrecy and rarity are identical, then of any two given contradictory statements in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, or in any other work of his, it follows that statement which occurs least often is the one considered by him to be the true statement <sup>18</sup>. The third device for concealing the secret teaching is the scattering of the "chapter headings" throughout the book rather than the distribution of them in an orderly manner.

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<sup>16</sup> "How To Begin To Study The Guide of the Perplexed", page 15. Cf. Maimonides' introduction to the first part of the *Guide*, page 15.

<sup>17</sup> "The Literary Character of The Guide for the Perplexed", page 74.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* page 73.

Strauss commences his introduction to Pines' translation of the *Guide* by laying out what he sees as the architectonic of the book <sup>19</sup>. He identifies seven sections into which the text can be divided, each of which deals with a separate topic, and five of which can be further divided into seven sub-sections, each of which deals with a different aspect of the topic in question. The only section which cannot be divided into sub-sections, that on Ezekiel's chariot vision, is seven chapters in length, and Strauss clearly regards the number seven as having some as yet unrevealed significance for Maimonides. Strauss regards the simple overall structure of the book as exhibiting the fact that the book is "...sealed with many seals" <sup>20</sup>. However, he recognises and acknowledges the fact that the true science of the Law has a public element as well as a private one, and hence there is a public teaching presented in the book <sup>21</sup>. This deals with issues which are not only suitable to be presented openly to the masses, but which it is essential should be so presented, as Maimonides makes clear in the *Guide* <sup>22</sup>, such as God's unity and incorporeality, and the fact that He is not subject to affections, to take some examples from those listed in the *Guide*. The uneducated recipients of this public teaching are expected to accept what they are being taught on the basis of traditional authority, rather than by the exercise of independent reasoning. This public, and hence openly available, teaching nevertheless does not detract from the fact that *The Guide of the Perplexed* is primarily intended for the intellectual advancement of the recipients described above – the elite few who can penetrate through to the secret core of the book.

Strauss carries out a detailed analysis of the text to suggest how some of the hints which he believes have been inserted throughout it can be unearthed by suitably prepared and qualified readers. For example, he undertakes a thorough analysis of the so-called 'lexicographic chapters' in the first part of the *Guide* – those in which Maimonides discusses various words which occur in the Bible and presents a spectrum <sup>23</sup> of

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<sup>19</sup> "How To Begin To Study The Guide of the Perplexed", pages xi to xiii.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, page xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Maimonides comments that "...among men generally, every beginner will derive benefit from some of the chapters of this Treatise, though he lacks even an inkling of what is involved in speculation. A perfect man, on the other hand, devoted to Law and, as I have mentioned, perplexed, will benefit from all its chapters." Introduction to the first part of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, page 16.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the beginning of I.35, pages 79 to 80.

<sup>23</sup> He does not purport to present the full range, stating that "...when we mention one of the equivocal terms in this Treatise, it is not our purpose to cite all the senses in which

signification through which these highly equivocal words can range, from the literal meaning through to more figurative meanings. The analysis even establishes the varieties of grammatical forms in which these words are presented, and the frequency of presentation of these forms. For instance, on Strauss's reconstruction of the plan of the book in his introductory essay to Pines' translation, the second sub-section of the first section consists of chapters 8 to 28. Of these twenty one chapters, sixteen are lexicographic and five are non-lexicographic <sup>24</sup>, and of the sixteen lexicographic chapters two begin with Hebrew terms preceded by the Arabic article <sup>25</sup>; thus the norm, which occurs in fourteen out of the twenty one chapters, is for the chapters to begin with a pure Hebrew term. Of the fourteen chapters which begin with a pure Hebrew term, seven have the term incorporated into the first sentence, and seven have it preceding the first sentence, and of the same fourteen chapters seven begin with a verb and seven with a noun or a verbal noun. Strauss follows this particular section of his analysis with the somewhat understated comment that "It is one thing to observe these regularities and another thing to understand them" <sup>26</sup>. This is a fairly representative exemplar of the Straussian analysis of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, and is worth paraphrasing in detail to give an idea of the astonishingly painstaking reading to which he has subjected the text.

One clear difficulty is that having read the analyses of the book presented in his introduction to Pines' translation, and that of several years earlier in his article *The Literary Character of The Guide of the Perplexed*, one is not necessarily much further advanced in understanding the *Guide* itself. One recent commentator, Marvin Fox, although describing Strauss as having provided us with "one of the most important modern contributions to the study of Maimonides" <sup>27</sup>, points out that he is of "limited help" to his readers, and that his introductory essay to the *Guide* "...generates at least as many problems as it solves" <sup>28</sup>. Strauss would doubtless, and quite reasonably, point to the fact that his essay is entitled "How To Begin To Study The Guide of the Perplexed" <sup>29</sup>. He makes no pretence at handing over a key which can be used for the decryption of

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that particular term is used, for this is not a treatise on language", *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.10, page 35.

<sup>24</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.10, 14, 17, 26 and 27.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, I.23 and 24.

<sup>26</sup> "How To Begin To Study The Guide of the Perplexed", page xxx.

<sup>27</sup> *Interpreting Maimonides*, page 62.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, page 54.

<sup>29</sup> My underlining.

the *Guide* in any straightforward manner – a fact which Fox acknowledges, pointing out that his comments about the results of Strauss's discussions of the *Guide* are descriptive rather than critical <sup>30</sup>. Strauss's own characterisation of the role of his commentary is made quite explicit when he asserts that "...an adequate interpretation of the *Guide* would ...have to take the form of an esoteric interpretation of an esoteric interpretation of an esoteric teaching" <sup>31</sup>. This admittedly does not imply that Strauss's own interpretation would be an esoteric work of the third power, any more than Maimonides's book would be a work of the second power <sup>32</sup>. Strauss's view is that even an esoteric interpretation of an esoteric text, is intended to shed light on the latter, and assuming that the former has been constructed skilfully is invariably going to be helpful. Each text may shed light on the other while in itself remaining incomprehensible <sup>33</sup>.

Nevertheless it is difficult to see what practical assistance Strauss's analyses can provide to the student of *The Guide of the Perplexed*. He offers hints as to what esoteric doctrines might lie beneath the surface of the exoteric teaching in the book, but no more. Even if his essays on the *Guide* do not possess an esotericity to the power of three, as his contention on the practical assistance provided by the *Guide* in respect of biblical exegesis implies, they offer little real assistance to the average reader of Maimonides' text. As Fox quite rightly points out, to state this is not to denigrate Strauss's work, but rather to lay out clearly the parameters of what it was intended to achieve.

It is not difficult to suggest an answer to the question of why the essays in question offer so little by way of practical assistance to the average reader. It is an essential element of Strauss's view of Maimonides that as the author of the text on which Strauss is commenting, he was not only not concerned with imparting all of his doctrines to the average reader, but he also went to considerable lengths to conceal some of them from

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, page 55.

<sup>31</sup> "The Literary Character of The Guide for the Perplexed", page 56. The esoteric teaching referred to in the quote from Strauss is, of course, that of the Bible.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, page 60. The reference above to 'powers' of esotericity originates with Strauss here.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*. Admittedly Strauss is putting this theory forward in terms of the relationship of the *Guide* to the Bible, but by extension it applies equally to the relationship of his own

just such a reader. The type of reader at which Maimonides' most secret teachings were aimed was very much above average – he or she was a member of an elite group who were not only fully versed in the teachings of Judaism, but also in the philosophic science of the day, in the broadest sense of the term. To offer an interpretation of *The Guide of the Perplexed* which can be used to decode the text to any but its intended receptors is to depart radically from the intentions of the author. In the introduction to the first part of the book, Maimonides makes the following plea.

I adjure ...every reader of this Treatise of mine not to comment upon a single word of it and not to explain to another anything in it save that which has been explained and commented upon in the words of the famous Sages of our Law who preceded me. But whatever he understands from this Treatise of those things that have not been said by any of our famous sages other than myself should not be explained to another; ...<sup>34</sup>

For Strauss, it is clear that Maimonides is only prepared to commit the secret teaching to writing because he feels that there is more to be lost by not doing so. This can be the only reason why he, as a loyal and devout Jew, is prepared to countenance any departure from the rabbinic injunction that the teaching should not be disseminated in such a non-discriminatory manner. Maimonides is in the unhappy position of being on the one hand forbidden to transmit the teaching in writing, and on the other hand compelled by historical necessity to do so. His solution to this acute moral dilemma is postulated as having been to record the oral teaching in such a way that the breach of the injunction not to do so is minimised<sup>35</sup>, and Strauss holds firmly that an interpreter of Maimonides is to a certain extent confronted with exactly the same dilemma<sup>36</sup>, holding that "...the question of adequate interpretation of the *Guide* is primarily a moral question"<sup>37</sup>. Furthermore, intertwined with this dilemma is the difficulty perceived by Strauss that any potential interpreter who does not feel morally troubled by the prospect of offering what he or she believes to be a full interpretation of the *Guide*, and hence of the secret doctrine, is not in sufficient intellectual proximity to the text to understand it enough to offer a true and adequate interpretation. He puts it in the following manner.

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interpretation to the *Guide*, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is what his reader is expected to deduce.

<sup>34</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Page 15.

<sup>35</sup> "The Literary Character of The Guide for the Perplexed", page 56.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

It may fairly be said that an interpreter who does not feel pangs of conscience when attempting to explain that secret teaching and perhaps when perceiving for the first time its existence and bearing lacks that closeness to the subject which is indispensable for the true understanding of any book.<sup>38</sup>

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there is something of a circularity here in Strauss's position. Not only is there a moral imperative against revealing any more of the secret teaching which *The Guide of the Perplexed* supposedly contains than its author chose to reveal, but unless one recognises the very existence of this teaching beneath the surface doctrines of the book one cannot really be said to have understood the book. In other words, the claim is made that concealed within the exoteric doctrines presented in the *Guide* lies an esoteric doctrine which is the real heart of the book. If an interpreter does not agree that this esoteric doctrine exists, then by definition he or she has failed to understand the book. However, it is impossible to demonstrate the existence of this teaching to a sufficiently sceptical interpreter, because of the moral injunction, the force of which presupposes the very existence of the esoteric doctrine, that prohibits revealing more than Maimonides was prepared to reveal, which is basically hints and allusions scattered throughout the text.

In a sense, the position held by Strauss is simultaneously unassailable and indefensible. Presumably, if he was willing to depart from Maimonides' scruples about revealing to the bulk of the populace that which should be hidden from them, Strauss could simply divulge to us the content of the secret teaching, and thus render exoteric that which is currently esoteric. By doing so, however, although he would have demonstrated the existence of the secret teaching, its disclosure would entail its destruction *qua* 'secret' teaching. As a result, the distinction between the two teachings would vanish, and all that we would be left with is an account of a chapter in the history of thought, and a chapter which is now closed. The alternative, which Strauss takes, is to respect the tradition to which he believed that the author of *The Guide of the Perplexed* adhered, which takes the existence of the esoteric doctrine as axiomatic, and hence not requiring demonstration, and indeed being not even morally demonstrable. If one acknowledges its existence then there is no difficulty; however, if one cannot perceive its existence then this failure marks one out as unfit for its reception. The divide between the cognoscenti and the non-cognoscenti is by its very nature forever unbridgeable. Those

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* page 55.

who know cannot tell, and those who do not know not only never will know, but are not even intellectually fit to do so.

At this point it might be argued that by drawing attention to Maimonides' comments in the introduction to the first part of the *Guide* Strauss has proved the existence of the secret doctrine without revealing any of its content, and by doing so he has done enough to satisfy the sceptic without breaking the moral injunction against disclosing any of the doctrine to those who are not fit recipients. He has thus broken the circle referred to above. If this is so, then although the gap between the elite and those not so favoured is still unbridgeable, some of the latter can at least see that something lies on the other side, even if they cannot see what it is <sup>39</sup>, and this should be sufficient answer to those who doubt the existence of the secret teaching. This would remove the circularity referred to above, as the moral injunction not to reveal the secret teaching to anyone who is not a member of the elite presupposes only the existence of this teaching, and not its content. If the existence of the esoteric doctrine is proven by Maimonides' own comments, then the moral axiom is given a secure foundation, and it follows that nothing further than the mere existence of the doctrine can, or should, be openly revealed.

Unfortunately, the comments at the beginning of *The Guide of the Perplexed* are not sufficiently unequivocal to achieve this. It is beyond dispute that Maimonides was operating in an intellectual and cultural milieu which not only regarded it as sometimes acceptable to present one's views in an oblique or an adumbrative manner, but in which such a presentation was sometimes absolutely essential to avoid enforced suppression of the views in question and persecution of the thinker presenting them. Strauss reads the introduction to the first part of the *Guide* as providing clear evidence of the fact that if the text is to yield its innermost teachings to a reader then the latter must scrutinise it with the same degree of painstaking care with which it was constructed, because this has been done in such a way as to conceal the teachings in question by the use of obscurity, allusion and contradiction. However, there is something ironic, and even paradoxical, about this reading of the introduction inasmuch as it depends on taking

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> It is a cardinal principle of Maimonides' metaphysics, which he inherits from Avicenna, that there is an important distinction between essence and existence. See, for example, the beginning of Chapter 46 of the first part of *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

what the introduction states at face value, with the result that we are counselled not to read the remainder of the book in this open and straightforward manner. The question must be posed as to why it is acceptable to read the introduction in a manner which, if applied to the book in general, would be regarded as naïve by Strauss. There is at least one other possibility which cannot be ruled out *tout court* – Maimonides may have been employing a double bluff. Although he appears on a straightforward reading of the introduction to be indicating that there is a deep and secret teaching hidden in the text by those means indicated above, this may actually have been a feint, and what he actually intended was to reveal his most important teaching exoterically, but to conceal this fact by implying strongly that this teaching is buried in the text using various literary devices, and cannot be elicited in any straightforward manner, and by doing so appearing to devalue the exoteric doctrines of the *Guide*. This approach to a text of *falsafa* has been made in a different context by Oliver Leaman, in his discussion of how Strauss reads Alfarabi <sup>40</sup>, but can equally well be applied to Strauss's reading of Maimonides' *Guide*. On an exoteric reading of the *Guide*, its author presents views on religiously important topics such as prophecy and divine providence which do not conform easily to the corresponding views of traditional Judaism, and which he may well have wished not to be scrutinised too closely by the forces of orthodoxy. In Alfarabi's book *Plato's Laws* <sup>41</sup> the story is told of a religious ascetic who is trying to escape from a city in which he is well known, and whose ruler has issued an order for his arrest. Knowing that if he presents himself openly at one of the city's gates he will be apprehended, the ascetic disguises himself as a drunk, goes to one of the gates, and when asked his identity by the guard replies in a jocular manner that he is the noted ascetic. The guard, believing that the 'drunk' is jesting with him, allows him to go on his way unmolested. In the same way as the ascetic escapes by disguising himself and then openly telling the truth, Alfarabi is said to have avoided suffering persecution and the enforced suppression of his views by expressing them in a straightforwardly non-esoteric manner, but by disguising the fact that he is doing so by alluding to a hidden dimension to his work to throw unsympathetic interpreters off the scent. As Leaman points out <sup>42</sup>, this interpretation may seem overly subtle, but is no more so than the

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<sup>40</sup> *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy*. The final chapter of this book, Chapter 6, is a critique of the Straussian approach to *falsafa*. The reference to Alfarabi's possible double bluff is on page 198.

<sup>41</sup> Introduction, page 84.

<sup>42</sup> *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy*, page 198.



lengths to which Strauss's reading of Alfarabi's text force him to go to defend and to explicate it.

There is no reason why Maimonides' introduction to the first part of *The Guide of the Perplexed* cannot be read in the same manner. It may well seem overly subtle, but is certainly no more so than Strauss's interpretation of the book. In addition, it has the distinct advantage that it avoids the paradox of a reader who is aiming to get at Maimonides' 'real' views being forced into an allusive reading of the book by a straightforward, non-allusive reading of the introduction to the first part of it.

However, there is no real necessity to choose between these views, or any others which purport to act as signposts to what it is that Maimonides 'really' believed. Such alternatives are the result of a concentration on the teleonomic aspect of *The Guide of the Perplexed* inasmuch as they focus on a posited set of secret teachings – a hidden doctrine, the impartation of which is his ultimate goal in the book. This posit may well be fully justified, and indeed admittedly much of what is stated in the *Guide* appears to indicate that this is so. Unfortunately, no amount of painstaking textual analysis can ever establish this apodeictically, and without wishing to detract from anything that Strauss's scholarship has unearthed it will remain a highly speculative theory, which one may choose to accept or to reject, either in whole or in part. However, a rejection, whole or partial, of his theory is as hard to defend as its acceptance, hence the comment made above, that the theory is "simultaneously unassailable and indefensible". An acceptance, even in part, of Strauss's interpretation of the *Guide*, can only be reached either by an intuitive perception of the existence and location of the secret doctrine, or by an act of faith, grounded perhaps in Strauss's own reputation as a scholar of renown. It does not appear that it can be reached by rational argument.

It is at this point that the importance of Strauss's characterisation of *The Guide of the Perplexed* as an essentially non-philosophical text<sup>43</sup> comes to the fore. He attributes our willingness nowadays to describe it as philosophical in nature as a consequence of the fact that we use the word 'philosophy', and by extension the adjective 'philosophical', in a broader sense than Maimonides would have been prepared to countenance in his day. This broadening of usage Strauss traces to the separation of philosophy from science

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<sup>43</sup> See footnote 11, above.

which occurred in more recent centuries, and he describes Maimonides' view of what philosophy was in the following manner.

It is not an exaggeration to say that for him philosophy is practically identical with the teaching as well as the methods of Aristotle, ...and of the Aristotelians.<sup>44</sup>

Strauss regards Maimonides as being in fundamental opposition to the philosophers thus defined, and aligning himself with "...the community of the adherents of the law" <sup>45</sup>, and certainly on one philosophical issue – the question of the eternity of the world as opposed to its creation *ex nihilo* – he appears to be correct, at least if Maimonides' overt pronouncements on this issue are to be accepted at face value. Nevertheless, we can grant Strauss his somewhat restricted delineation of what, in Maimonides' view, constituted philosophy, without being committed to regarding the *Guide* as non-philosophical in character. If a deliberate decision is made to disregard the question of whether or not Maimonides was attempting to communicate a secret teaching in his book, and, if so, what exactly the content of this teaching was, it is possible to focus more closely on the content of the surface teaching of the *Guide*, the teaching which Strauss identifies as the exoteric one, and examine the ideas and arguments presented therein. This would be a more philosophically modest aim than the Straussian project of unearthing a secret doctrine, which Maimonides is attempting to reveal to a highly select group of recipients in a carefully crafted and controlled manner. It would amount to regarding the teaching which is presented openly in *The Guide of the Perplexed* as being in its own right a worthwhile and interesting contribution to the tradition of philosophy which has its roots in the Presocratic thinkers of classical Greece, and would abstain, for the reasons given above, from any pronouncements about esoteric doctrines concealed within this openly presented teaching. Strauss appears to regard the exoteric teaching solely as a vehicle for the protection and preservation of the esoteric teaching, thus attributing merely instrumental value to it. The position to be taken in this dissertation is to focus attention on the exoteric teaching itself, on the grounds that it contains much that is of philosophical interest.

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<sup>44</sup> "The Literary Character of the Guide for the Perplexed", page 42.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, page 43.

At this point, it might be advisable to summarise briefly the discussion and the conclusions reached thus far. Leo Strauss's interpretation of *The Guide of the Perplexed* has been expounded briefly, and it has been shown that the existence of a secret teaching is a hermeneutic presupposition which by its very nature is unjustifiable. This teaching has the status of an axiom inasmuch as there is a moral injunction against demonstrating its existence to one who doubts it, but this injunction only obtains its moral authority by assuming that which it insists should not be demonstrated, namely the very existence of this teaching. Furthermore, he claims that unless one recognises the existence of this teaching, one is said to have misunderstood the text in a fairly fundamental way, thus establishing a hermeneutic position which is, almost by definition, beyond dispute. Consequentially, Strauss's position contains an inherent circularity which prevents those who do not share his presupposition from ever entering the circle. This position fits in well with Maimonides' elitism, but philosophically it is unhelpful. Writing as a philosopher, Strauss's position is thus flawed, although the nature of the flaw prevents ultimate acceptance or rejection of his position. He establishes an unbridgeable gap, both epistemologically and metaphysically. He, like Maimonides' elite, is on one side of the gap, while those who dispute his presupposition, or who at least ask for it to be established on a more secure hermeneutic footing, are on the other. To continue the analogy, rather than try to build a philosophical bridge across this gap, it has been decided to concentrate on that material which is available to those of the non-elite who are on the side of the gap away from Strauss, namely the exoteric teaching which he appears to regard as having predominantly instrumental value, but which contains a substantial amount of interesting philosophical material. He himself describes Maimonides as making "the most ample use" of philosophy <sup>46</sup>.

This reorientation represents a move to a more universal outlook on *The Guide of the Perplexed*. It is a change in emphasis from the particularist approach of Strauss, which almost regards the ultimate aim of the text as being defined in exclusivist terms, to a more general approach, which regards the *Guide* as having something of philosophical interest to say to all those who have a sufficient grounding in the subject to understand the ideas presented therein. Needless to say, the latter group is substantially larger than the small cadre which Strauss regards as Maimonides' target readership. This change in emphasis is paralleled by a shift away from a view of the *Guide* as "a book written by a

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<sup>46</sup> See footnote 11, above.

Jew for Jews" <sup>47</sup> to a view of it as having a worthwhile contribution to make to a discipline which transcends the boundaries of any particular religion. This is a much less ambitious project than that undertaken by Strauss, but is not less worthwhile for that.

## II

This more universal view of the *Guide* is similar to that adopted by Oliver Leaman, not only in his book entitled *Maimonides*, referred to above <sup>48</sup>, but also in his earlier work *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy*, in which he discusses Maimonides as well as Al-Ghazali and the major Aristotelian Islamic thinkers. Leaman's approach initially appears to be as far removed from that of Strauss as it is possible to imagine, and is strongly critical of the latter's methodological presuppositions and hermeneutic techniques. Leaman's point of departure for the task of interpreting *The Guide of the Perplexed* in the later of the two books is best stated in his own words.

Here we will argue ...that the *Guide* is entirely philosophical in both content and form, and it presents within the context of a particular religion issues and problems which are universal in scope. The fact that its author is Jewish and its intended audience also Jewish is as relevant or irrelevant as the fact that the author of the *Summa Theologica* is Catholic and its intended audience is Catholic, or that the author of the *Incoherence of the Incoherence* is Muslim and its audience also Muslim. We have to take account of the cultural context within which all these texts have been produced, but this should not lead us to regard them as anything else but serious philosophy.<sup>49</sup>

He continues the above passage by insisting that the discussions within these texts may well focus on issues which are specific to the religion of the author and his intended readership, but that these discussions proceed by using argument and theory which transcends the limits of the religion in question, since, as he puts it, "...they extend our understanding of important aspects of our language and its possibilities." <sup>50</sup>

This is a much firmer line in respect of the interpretation of the *Guide* than he takes in his earlier book, the final chapter of which is devoted to the correct method for reading

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<sup>47</sup> See footnote 11, above.

<sup>48</sup> See note 7 above.

<sup>49</sup> *Maimonides*, page 7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

Islamic philosophy. Here, considering the possibility that *The Guide of the Perplexed* is a suitable candidate for a Straussian analysis due to the inclusion in it of contradictions, repetitions, and other literary devices apparently designed to inhibit a straightforward reading of the text, and that hence this type of analysis has some hermeneutic legitimacy, he suggests that the *Guide* should not be taken to be a paradigm of *falsafa*, a convenient classificatory term which in his view includes this text <sup>51</sup>. The basis for this uniqueness is that the rationale of the text is explicitly to deal with the apparent conflict between religion and philosophy, and in this sense he describes it as "...in many ways, a unique work" <sup>52</sup>, and implies that whereas for most works of *falsafa* a search for an esoteric meaning is quite misplaced, the singularity of the *Guide* makes it a more likely candidate for such a reading than other texts thus classified. Leaman allows Strauss a limited foothold here, claiming that the latter's method of reading the *Guide* "...leads him to discover dissimulation even where it is not present, *or not present to the extent he expects*" <sup>53</sup>. However, the following passage makes it clear that this is a rather reluctant and minor concession.

When we consider the *Guide of the Perplexed* we should be careful before we accept that the contradictions in it are a useful means of interpretation. Contradictions can sometimes be interpreted merely as the combination of different views to inform the reader of the variety which exists.<sup>54</sup>

As will become clear later on, this alternative view of the function of the contradictions in the *Guide*, is similar to that espoused by Marvin Fox, reference to which was made at the beginning of this chapter of the dissertation.

In the earlier of his two books cited above, Leaman sources the type of interpretation of *falsafa* favoured by Strauss – one which seeks an esoteric meaning hidden beneath the surface doctrines of a text – as itself a reaction to the earlier interpretation which held that the Islamic philosophers believed that they had reconciled the fundamental tenets of their faith with philosophy, and that the method of this reconciliation was manifested in their written work. This latter interpretation is held in turn to be a reaction to an even earlier one, based on Latin Averroism, which regards the Islamic philosophers as

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<sup>51</sup> Hence the extended discussion of the *Guide* in Leaman's book.

<sup>52</sup> *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy*, page 199.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, (my italics).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, page 200.

rationalists led away from the doctrines of Islam by Greek philosophy, and especially by the teachings of Aristotle <sup>55</sup>. Leaman identifies an assumption shared by Strauss's interpretation and its predecessors, namely that the conflict between philosophy and religion is of central concern to the authors of philosophical texts within the tradition of *falsafa*, and furthermore that this conflict is a crucial concern which colours *all* texts of *falsafa*. Leaman claims that on the contrary the *falāsifa* inherited from the Greeks not only a number of philosophical theories, many of which appeared at first blush to conflict with the basic tenets of Islam, but also, and perhaps more importantly, a completely new logical method for tackling the philosophical problems with which the *falāsifa* were concerned. This method presented itself as having considerable power and philosophical fecundity. The Greeks, and Aristotle in particular, offered doctrines which were based on apparently formally valid arguments, founded as they were on a deep and powerful logic, the conclusions of which were not obviously reconcilable with fundamental beliefs of Islam, such as the eternity of the world and the denial of corporeal immortality. However, according to Leaman, "What *specifically* interested the *falāsifa* was the form of the argument, not the conclusion or its premises" <sup>56</sup>, and he holds that it is a misrepresentation of *falsafa* to regard it as having an overriding concern for the apparent theological implications of these conclusions. Maimonides' *Guide* and Averroes' *Decisive Treatise* are two well known works of *falsafa* which have as their declared topic the relationship between philosophy and religion, but such works are "...frequently overshadowed in both size and importance by the expository commentaries and analyses of the Greek philosophers and logicians" <sup>57</sup>. Certainly, despite its influence, Averroes' text is a minor part of his enormous total corpus, and Maimonides' text has already been recognised by Leaman as being unique amongst the works of the *falāsifa* <sup>58</sup>. What Leaman seems to be claiming here is that it is this presupposition held by Strauss and by like-minded scholars, that all Islamic philosophical texts of this period deal either explicitly or in an oblique manner with the apparent conflict between religion and philosophy <sup>59</sup>, that partly underpins the type of

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, page 189.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, page 191 (author's italics).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> See note 52 above.

<sup>59</sup> As an extreme example of this phenomenon he cites Charles Butterworth's introduction to his translation of Averroes' *Short Commentary on Aristotle's 'Topics'*, where Butterworth refuses to accept that the treatise is simply an exposition of one of

esoteric reading of such texts which Strauss undertakes, and that just as this presupposition is unjustified, so the supposition that an esoteric doctrine is necessarily concealed within these texts is likewise unjustified. This would be consistent with his claim that *The Guide of the Perplexed* is a unique text which does indeed have this conflict as its declared topic, and the associated admission that there might perhaps be a case for an esoteric reading of it, albeit not to the extent that Strauss believes <sup>60</sup>.

However, as stated above, he takes a less accommodating line on the issue of the validity of an esoteric reading of the *Guide* in his later book, which is devoted to Maimonides, as its title implies, and predominantly to this particular text <sup>61</sup>. Whereas, as has been shown above, in *An Introduction to Medieval Philosophy* he is willing to countenance the possibility of an esoteric reading of the *Guide* which is limited in scope, in *Maimonides* this small concession to the Straussian school is not present. In the lengthy quotation from the latter book cited above he describes the *Guide* as "...entirely philosophical in both content and form" <sup>62</sup>, and in the following passage he lays out his agenda for this book with the utmost clarity.

The account presented in this book is based upon the principle that Maimonides intends to present clear and decisive arguments in favour of his theses. The suggestion that there is a hidden doctrine is entirely discounted in the chapters that follow, and if the book succeeds it will show that we must address ourselves fully to Maimonides' arguments and not to any putative hidden doctrines which owe far more to the imagination of most of his commentators than to anything we can find in the text. <sup>63</sup>

This is as clear a rejection of the esoteric interpretation favoured by Strauss as one could wish for, and in a similarly forthright manner Leaman rejects outright Strauss's postulation of a moral prohibition against revealing any of the secret teaching allegedly concealed within the text of the *Guide*, stating that "Such a view is, of course, ridiculous" <sup>64</sup>, and that "There is no reason to believe that Maimonides was consciously

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Aristotle's logical works but rather regards it as an esoterically presented attack on the *mutakallimūn* – *ibid.*, page 192-3.

<sup>60</sup> See footnote 53 above.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, page x in the preface to the book, and page 6, where he makes it clear that the focus of his commentary is very much on the *Guide*. This is hardly surprising given Leaman's wish to read Maimonides as one of the *falāsifa*.

<sup>62</sup> See footnote 49 above. The italicisation above is mine.

<sup>63</sup> *Maimonides*, page 17.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

doing what he ought not to be doing, and therefore had had to conceal his message from the ordinary reader." <sup>65</sup>

So it can be clearly seen that in *Maimonides*, Leaman lays out an interpretative position which in one respect is as far removed from Strauss's as it is possible to conceive. Unlike the stance in his earlier book, which at least gives the appearance of giving some limited credence to the esoteric view, in his later book his position is so far removed from that of Strauss that initially it seems that there is almost no common ground between them on which they can engage. Not only does he give no credence to the suggestion that there is a moral injunction which prevents Maimonides, and any subsequent commentators on the *Guide*, from divulging the content of the secret teaching supposedly hidden within the text to all and sundry, but he also rejects the possibility that this teaching exists outside the fertile imaginations of Strauss and his followers. Yet perhaps the gap between the positions of Leaman and Strauss is, at least in another respect, not as great as it appears to be. In place of the esoteric interpretation of the *Guide* he wishes to substitute a reading of Maimonides which sees the latter as putting forward a theory of religious language and meaning, which is based on the complete equivocality of predicates when attributed to God and to human beings <sup>66</sup>, and which allows for the possibility of different levels of discourse when different audiences are being addressed. For example, he states that "The view which Maimonides is proffering is that there are many layers of understanding and awareness which represent a continuum of different levels of believers" <sup>67</sup>, and later on in the book the following statement is made.

...like all the *falāsifa* he distinguished sharply between different groups of believers, and different kinds of language which are appropriate to them. It would be a mistake to address the ordinary members of the community as though they were philosophically skilled, and vice versa. The language we use must be sufficiently fluid to allow for a variety of meanings to be read into the same scriptural text with the result that different audiences gain enlightenment through their contact with the text. <sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, page 24 *et seq.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, page 33.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, page 78.



However, unlike some other *falāsifa* – Averroes, for instance – who believed that the meanings read into the text by those who are relatively uneducated are not necessarily inferior to those read into it by those of their co-religionists who have had training in philosophy, but rather are simply different perspectives on the truth, Maimonides holds that the former meanings are of much less value as far as attaining that truth in religious matters that is available to the unaided human intellect is concerned <sup>69</sup>, and in this sense are clearly inferior.

So Leaman is attributing to Maimonides the theory that it is possible for a single religious text to transmit different meanings, some of which are superior to others in terms of the truth content of the meanings, to different strata in a single audience, this single audience being the totality of the adherents to a particular religion. The possibility of multiple meanings within a single text is achieved by layers of discourse, each of which is addressed to an appropriately prepared sector of the audience. The Bible addresses not only ordinary believers through its parables and allegories, but also the more sophisticated Jews, who have knowledge of science and philosophy and who have attained an appropriate level of moral virtue, but each of these two groups extracts a different meaning from the text. The ordinary believers gain a set of rules which show them the correct way to behave, adherence to which is encouraged by the representation of God as prone to anger with those who disobey Him, and as swift to reward those who obey Him, and they also gain a limited amount of information about God, such as the facts that He is a unity. The more sophisticated believers learn what these aforementioned rules really entail philosophically in terms of what God's governance of the world amounts to, and they also attain a deeper, conceptual grasp of the nature of reality, at least as it is possible for human beings to understand it. In other words, the "enlightenment" referred to in the quotation from Leaman above <sup>70</sup> has a different content depending on who it is being enlightened.

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<sup>69</sup> For example, Leaman comments that "When believers use inappropriately ambitious language concerning God they do not have a different point of view of the same deity enjoyed by the philosophers. They are mistaken." *Ibid.*, page 168. Although admittedly he then qualifies this statement with the suggestion that perhaps Maimonides and the *falāsifa* are closer on this issue than appears at first, inasmuch as Maimonides appears to argue that although the beliefs of the ordinary believers are invalid they are signposts to valid beliefs. He discusses this latter notion of development in the direction of validity, which he appears to find quite promising and defensible, between pages 169 and 172.

Now although this theory ascribed to Maimonides is about his view of how we should read the Bible, it is isomorphic with Strauss's theory of how we should read *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Like Maimonides, Strauss advocates the possibility of a single text containing within it different and hierarchical strata of meaning intended for the enlightenment of correspondingly different and hierarchical groups of receptors, and in which the members of each of the groups below the highest are intellectually incapable of accessing the strata above their own particular stratum. The number of strata is not particularly relevant.

It is here suggested that given this isomorphism Leaman needs to do more than he does in his later book if his total rejection of Strauss's method of interpreting the *Guide* is to succeed. On his own account of Maimonides' theory of meaning, at least in respect of religious texts, Leaman has given us a model restricted to such texts which is a less-extended version of the model given by Strauss in respect of not only religious texts but also imitations of such texts, which is in essence how the latter classifies the *Guide* <sup>71</sup>. Strauss describes his fundamental interpretative principle in respect of the *Guide* as follows.

...if we wish to understand the *Guide*, we must read it according to the rules which Maimonides applies in that work to the explanation of the Bible.<sup>72</sup>

If we apply Strauss's principle to Leaman's reading of Maimonides' scriptural hermeneutic, as presented in the *Guide*, we end up with Strauss's reading of the latter text, thus showing that there is a sense in which the two philosophers are much closer together than first appeared to be the case. To avoid this unhappy and somewhat paradoxical conclusion Leaman needs to do more to demonstrate in what way Strauss's position is unsatisfactory. Textual evidence was offered above to show the decisive manner in which Leaman expresses his rejection of the esoteric method of reading the *Guide* <sup>73</sup>. However, it is difficult to pinpoint arguments against Strauss's methodology in his book, and the distinct impression is left that what Leaman basically dislikes about this method is that there is an alternative account of the intended function of *The Guide*

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<sup>70</sup> See footnote 68 above.

<sup>71</sup> On page 66 of "The Literary Character of the Guide for the Perplexed", Strauss describes the *Guide* as the "imitation or repetition" of the Bible.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, page 61.

<sup>73</sup> See footnotes 63, 64 and 65, above.

of the *Perplexed*, and of the doctrines contained within it, which is more straightforward than the explanation which he opposes. His interpretation of this text seems to be solidly based on the desideratum of optimum explanatory economy, and although this principle is nowhere stated explicitly in either of his two commentaries under discussion, it appears to be an implicit presupposition that a relatively straightforward interpretation of a text of *falsafa* is to be preferred over a more complicated interpretation, such as that advocated by Strauss, which can seem tortuous and highly forced at times. To describe this presupposition as 'implicit' is by no means a criticism. There is no reason why it should be made more explicit, operating as it does in almost every domain of thought, from literary criticism to natural science. Unfortunately, it is a fundamental tenet of Strauss's method of reading *falsafa* that the historical circumstances in the context of which the texts were written were such that their authors, the *falāsifa*, could not express their philosophical thoughts freely without grave risk of persecution, and that this fact crucially informs the form and content of what they wrote, to the extent that an explanatory principle of maximum economy is entirely inappropriate. The following paragraph illustrates well Strauss's view of the singular nature of such writing, which he does not limit to *falsafa* but also applies to texts outside this tradition <sup>74</sup>.

Persecution... gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing, and therewith to a peculiar type of literature, in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines.... The fact which makes this literature possible can be expressed in the axiom that thoughtless men are careless readers, and only thoughtful men are careful readers. Therefore an author who wishes to address only thoughtful men has but to write in such a way that only a very careful reader can detect the meaning of his book.<sup>75</sup>

The very peculiarity inherent in this type of writing, which is described as "writing between the lines" has as an inevitable consequence a rejection of an otherwise incontrovertible hermeneutic principle, which regards simplicity as a cardinal virtue. In all fairness to Strauss, his interpretations of *falsafa* would preclude the application of any principle of explanatory economy, and he would certainly reject any critique of his approach which is solely underpinned by such a principle, as Leaman's appears to be.

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<sup>74</sup> He applies his analysis also to Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, and to Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*.

<sup>75</sup> *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, page 25.

A further summary of the position reached so far now seems appropriate. This dissertation is to focus on Maimonides' openly presented philosophical arguments in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, which are regarded by Leo Strauss as merely exoteric and hence secondary to the esoteric teaching of the *Guide*, the communication of which was allegedly Maimonides' main purpose in writing his book. This concentration on the explicitly philosophical elements in the text is similar to the position put forward by Oliver Leaman in his book *Maimonides* <sup>76</sup>. However, there are two interlinked differences between the position adopted in this dissertation and that of Leaman. The first difference is that the latter, at least in *Maimonides*, clearly and unambiguously rejects the possibility of an esoteric dimension to the *Guide*, as the quotations above from his book illustrate <sup>77</sup>, whereas this dissertation takes an agnostic stance on this question, abstaining from any commitment to a clear rejection or acceptance of the existence of such a dimension. The second difference, which in a sense underpins the first one, is that whereas it has been suggested that Leaman is operating with an interpretative principle which his chief adversary would reject outright, the approach to be taken here is that Strauss's stance can be set aside <sup>78</sup> because it contains a basic circularity which effectively excises it from the realm of universal philosophical discourse, in the sense that logically there is an unbridgeable gulf between Strauss and any potential philosophical opponents. As a result of this gulf the Straussian stance can essentially be regarded as philosophically irrelevant, and hence by-passed with no commitment necessary or even possible to its basic ontological postulate, the existence of an esoteric teaching concealed within *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

Nevertheless, a decision to concentrate on the clearly presented philosophical elements in the *Guide* does not thereby provide a warrant for ignoring the internal tensions contained within this text, and although Strauss's approach is not entirely helpful, for the reasons given above, some alternative explanation must be provided for these tensions. The next two chapters of this dissertation will attempt to refine the interpretative principle adopted above by linking these tensions with Maimonides' rather pessimistic location of the limits of possible human knowledge concerning (a) God and (b) the sublunary sphere and that which lies beyond it, with the first of these being dealt with in

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<sup>76</sup> See footnote 49 above.

<sup>77</sup> See footnotes 63, 64, and 65 above.

<sup>78</sup> It is described above as being 'set aside' because, as described in the main body of the text, it cannot be formally refuted as such.

the following chapter, and the second being dealt with in the chapter subsequent to that. The importance of establishing at such lengths the hermeneutic approach adopted in the dissertation with respect to the *Guide* is only partly the result of the diversity of approaches to this text taken by those who have chosen to comment upon it, both past and present. The main reason in the present context lies in the fact that if Maimonides' text is to have any relevance to the question concerning the possibility of salvation for the isolate then the doctrines contained within it must be accessible to the isolate, equipped solely with his or her intellectual and sensory powers, and must not presuppose any exposure to a pre-existing culture in general, and one based on revelation in particular. Given this hermeneutic precondition, it can be seen why the Straussian approach had to be so firmly set to one side, anchored as it is so firmly in a particular tradition of Judaism. Now, it might be argued that the perspective which views the *Guide* as a classic which is firmly in the mainstream tradition of Western philosophy merely substitutes one tradition for another. However, the point here is that although Maimonides both utilises and builds upon the work of his predecessors such as Aristotle and Alfarabi, the work of his predecessors is itself dependent solely on rational thought, which is universal in the sense that although it is set in the context of a particular form of revealed religion, its starting points, principles, methods, and conclusions transcend that particular religion and have a universal applicability to human thought in general. This claim is of course, contestable, and inasmuch as it cannot be defended in a relatively short dissertation must be accorded the status of a methodological axiom. After all, in any intellectual investigation a point of departure must be selected, which *qua* starting point cannot in turn be defended by reference to antecedents.

## **Chapter Three**

### **What we can say about God – the philosophical theology of the *Guide***

#### **I**

The concentration in the dissertation on the overtly philosophical elements in *The Guide of the Perplexed* has illustrious antecedents. It is these universal elements, rather than those which were predominantly of interest only to Jewish thinkers, which were such a great influence on the Christian scholastics who followed Maimonides <sup>1</sup>. The 'Rabbi Moyses' who is cited so frequently and with such evident approbation by Thomas Aquinas, is the philosopher who produced valuable contributions to issues such as the nature of divine attributes, the ontogenesis of the world, and the proofs of the existence of God, rather than the thinker who theorised on the meaning of Ezekiel's chariot vision and on the Messianic Era.

At the end of Chapter One the question was posed as to whether or not someone in the position of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan could hope, on the basis of what was described as 'Maimonides' philosophical theology', to achieve the level of enlightenment described at the end of *The Guide of the Perplexed* as equivalent to salvation. The promise was made to justify the coherence of such an expression, and this promise must now be made good, but to state the whole doctrine in all its fullness of detail would be a massive project which is unnecessary for the purposes of this dissertation. It is sufficient to focus on the parts of it which could conceivably be relevant to Maimonides' soteriology, the full nature of which will emerge in later chapters. In the present chapter the focus will very much be on what Maimonides has to say about how human beings can, by ratiocination, approach a proper conception of God, trammelled as they are not only by the essential otherness of the divine quiddity, but also by intellectual boundaries in general and boundaries pertaining to language in particular. The discussion in the *Guide* of the divine attributes, which is located between Chapters 50 and 60 of the first book, is the most comprehensive presentation of his doctrine of the boundaries appropriate to

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<sup>1</sup> In respect of Maimonides, Etienne Gilson states that "...his influence on the Christian thought of the middle ages has been considerable" (*History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, page 231), and that by confronting the problem of reconciling the Old

human discussions of God, and being essentially a discussion of what knowledge human beings can achieve of the Prime Mover, the boundaries posited are applicable to our *metaphysical* knowledge. However, Maimonides also posits fairly clear epistemological boundaries to the scientific knowledge that we can obtain concerning the universe that God has created, and of the sublunary and superlunary beings contained therein, and these apply to our *physical* knowledge. The latter boundaries will be the subject of the chapter following this one, and once both metaphysical and physical boundaries have been delineated, it will be possible to refine the interpretative stance taken in the second chapter of this dissertation concerning how the *Guide* will be read. Put another way, this chapter will focus on the limits of human metaphysical knowledge, with the following chapter focussing on the limits of our physical knowledge, and out of this epistemological circumscription will emerge a different approach to the internal tensions and contradictions with which the *Guide* is permeated than those discussed thus far. At its most rudimentary, this approach will involve the suggestion that these tensions and contradictions can be explained by the fact that in the *Guide* Maimonides openly transgresses his own declared epistemological limits, and this suggestion in turn will open up the possibility of addressing the fundamental question concerning the isolate from the standpoint of the work of the early Wittgenstein. The introduction of the Wittgensteinian perspective will occur in Chapter Five.

The importance of these metaphysical and physical limits for the question in hand lies in the fact that they determine the progress that can be made by the isolate towards salvation, since although they circumscribe what we can express by our language – something which is of little concern to an alingual isolate – they are presented by Maimonides as epistemological barriers to the acquisition of knowledge through our own efforts unassisted by revelation of both the Creator and that which He has created. As far as salvation is concerned, one of the key elements in Maimonides' metaphysics is its depiction of a created world which is ontologically dependent on God, not only in respect of its creation out of nothing but also in respect of the causal activity which God has installed in the world as an integral feature of it, and through which he sustains not only the existence of the world, but also the derivative activity which takes place within

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Testament with true philosophy before the scholastics did, the latter "...profited by his example, even when they did not follow him", *ibid.*

it. In Ibn Tufail's allegory, it is by discovering the stages in this process of ontological dependence, which for both Ibn Tufail and Maimonides is fundamentally emanative in nature, that Hayy achieves the immortality that he desires, and it may be a promising point of departure for a Maimonidean isolate to attempt such a feat of noesis.

Despite the obvious tensions in Maimonides' thought, of which a little more will be said in this chapter, and much more in the next chapter, it is possible to construct a generally consistent picture of his account of the way in which the world emanates from God, and of the nature of the causal activity within it, which although derivative is invested with genuine causal power by God. One important element in this picture is manifested in his critique of the *Mutakallimūn*, which occurs late in Book I of the *Guide*, as this brings out very clearly not only the nature of the dependence in which the world stands with respect to its Creator, but also the fact that the only two tools which a genuine isolate will have at his disposal, namely sense perception and independent reason, are both admitted by Maimonides as being legitimate tools for the apprehension of truths about the nature of that which exists. In a chapter which leads in to the critique itself, Maimonides makes the following claim.

...there exists nothing except God, ...and this existent world and ...there is no possible inference proving His existence, ...except those deriving from this existent taken as a whole and from its details. Accordingly it necessarily behooves one to consider this existent as it is and to derive premises from what is perceived of its nature. For this reason it follows that you should know its perceptible form and nature, and then it will be possible to make an inference from it to what is other than it.<sup>2</sup>

The knowledge of the nature of our world, which we access by perception, is an essential starting point for the metaphysical enterprise, which will take us beyond this world to "what is other than it", and that this knowledge can be obtained by using the senses and the intellect is made quite clear. In the context of a comment on the failure of the *Mutakallimūn* to provide successful demonstrations of God's existence, unity and incorporeality, this epistemological point is made quite explicitly.

...the demonstrations ...can only be taken from the permanent nature of what exists, a nature that can be seen and apprehended by the senses and the intellect.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.71, page 183.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I.76, pages 230-31.



It is one of the cardinal errors of the *Mutakallimūn* that in their theorising they depart from the perceived nature of existence to such an extent that they deny that anything has a nature at all <sup>4</sup>. This is done to show the radical dependence of the existence of the world on God, but effectively robs the world of its intelligibility by removing the secondary, intermediary causality upon which we depend to understand the sublunar world in which we reside, and leaving only the primary causality of God which acts directly to bring about its effects rather than through intermediary causes.

However, this is moving ahead too far and too quickly. Although metaphysical knowledge is clearly possible, and indeed essential if we wish to move forward intellectually from the mundanity of the world of the senses to a more ethereal and superior realm, we are, as was made clear in Chapter One, always going to come up against the natural limits of human intellectual powers in respect of cognising adequately that which is located beyond the sublunar world, and of human language in conveying adequately that which has been cognised. Throughout the dissertation these two types of limit will be taken to be conterminous, and while it is admittedly difficult to offer unequivocal textual evidence that this is how Maimonides regards their relationship, it is equally difficult to offer evidence to counter this. It is important to take some stance on the nature of this relationship, and that adopted here is based not so much on what Maimonides actually says as on the general spirit permeating the *Guide*, although it is acknowledged that this does introduce a theoretically undesirable element of subjectivity, relying as it does on an individual reader's perception of a more or less intangible quality. However, in the absence of more explicit evidence from the author of the text himself, it is perhaps not an unacceptable way to proceed.

Even more fundamental in terms of limitation is the essential transcendence and unknowability of the divine quiddity, and Maimonides presents us with a rigorous and uncompromising apophatic theology, which shows how knowledge of God is strictly circumscribed. Although some discussions in *The Guide of the Perplexed* often appear

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Maimonides claims that "The proofs of the *Mutakallimūn* ...are derived from premises that run counter to the nature of existence that is perceived so that they resort to the affirmation that nothing has a nature in any respect" – *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.71, page 182. He also describes the *Mutakallimūn* as having undertaken "...to abolish the nature of that which exists...", *Ibid.*, II.19, page 303.

to transgress the prohibitions imposed on human thought and language against attempting to venture beyond the boundaries imposed by such a theology, the chapters in his text where he expounds it are in a sense the underpinning for the whole book, providing as they do the foundation for his views on such discrete areas as the correct method for interpreting the Bible, and the question of whether the world is eternal or was created by God out of nothing after being non-existent. Indeed, it is difficult to select a topic discussed in the *Guide* the treatment of which is not dependent on his negative theology. Any discussion of Maimonides' philosophical theology must therefore begin with an examination of this essential area, and this part of his theology is presented in Book I of the *Guide* between Chapters 50 and 60, taking the form of a painstaking analysis of what attributes can without impropriety be predicated of God, and of what exactly is entailed when such predication is made. It is not intended here to attempt a critique of his arguments, but rather to lay out his arguments for the conclusions which he reaches – conclusions which have far-reaching consequences for any human endeavour to come closer to God. If Maimonides' arguments are well understood, then we are better placed to understand the ineluctable limitations upon our thought and our language which the conclusions of these arguments describe, and consequentially we are in a better position eventually to grasp how, and to what extent, we can strive to transcend our status as creatures who are not only composed of a morphic and a hylic element, as are all denizens of the sublunary realm, but which, uniquely, are subject to a religious imperative to attempt to slough off the latter element both during life and when approaching death <sup>5</sup>.

He begins by drawing a clear distinction between what can be uttered in speech as being a belief about God, and what can actually be represented in the mind. Two definitions of belief are offered.

...the notion that is represented in the soul when it has been averred of it that it is in fact just as it has been represented.<sup>6</sup>

...the affirmation that what has been represented is outside the mind just as it has been represented in the mind.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.51, pages 627-8, which describes this transcendence of hylic limitations as death "by a kiss", and as that "which in true reality is salvation from death".

<sup>6</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.50, page 111.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*.

Any form of words can be uttered about God, but it does not necessarily follow that any mental content can be given to these utterances <sup>8</sup>. It is also entirely possible that a person may utter statements about God which are contradictory when taken together. Maimonides gives the following example, taking as a premiss that as God's Oneness entails a complete negation of both composition and the possibility of division within Him, so likewise he cannot possess any essential attributes <sup>9</sup>.

If, however, someone believes that He is one, but possesses a certain number of essential attributes, he says in his words that He is one, but believes Him in his thought to be many.<sup>10</sup>

The representation in the mind is different from, and partially opposed to, the statement which is supposed to give verbal utterance to it, and it is the former that is the real measure of what is believed, as the above definitions imply. This makes it clear that it is the representation in the mind that is fundamental, rather than any expression of it in words, and although Maimonides' example refers to speech, this should be equally true of expression of thoughts in writing <sup>11</sup>. Representation in the mind of a proposition is logically primary, and outward expression of it, whether spoken or written, is secondary and derivative, and to be judged by whether it is in accordance with the mental representation of which it is supposedly an outward manifestation. What is important is

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<sup>8</sup> " ...you will find many stupid people holding to beliefs to which, in their representation, they do not attach any meaning whatever", *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> This example presupposes the arguments in the chapters immediately following Chapter 50, the chapter in which it occurs, but this does not affect the point that Maimonides is making.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* Maimonides follows up this example with another similar one pertaining to the Christian postulation of the Trinity.

<sup>11</sup> By way of an aside, and without wishing to posit any causal link, it was suggested by William of Ockham, in his *Summa Totius Logicae*, that Boethius, in his *De Interpretatione*, separated language into written, spoken and conceptual. The latter only has existence in the intellect, and a conceptual term is defined as " ...a mental content or impression which naturally possesses signification or consignification, and which is suited to be part of a mental proposition and to stand for that which it signifies". (Excerpted in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, edited by Hyman and Walsh, page 653). Furthermore, Ockham states that "These conceptual terms and the propositions formed by them ...remain only in the mind and cannot be uttered exteriorly. Nevertheless vocal words which are signs subordinated to these can be exteriorly uttered", *ibid.*, page 654. If Ockham is correct in his attribution of this view to Boethius, it shows that there is, at least in broad sweep, a philosophically respectable antecedent to Maimonides' view, not

to represent the truth to oneself in the mind – whether it is ever given utterance is of less importance. Maimonides puts it as follows.

When you shall have ...been endowed with understanding, and shall reflect on what I say in the following chapters, which shall treat of the negation of attributes, you shall necessarily achieve certain knowledge of it. Then you shall be one of those who represent to themselves *the unity of the Name* and not one of those who merely proclaim it with their mouth without representing to themselves that it has a meaning. ...But men ought rather to belong to the category of those who represent the truth to themselves and apprehend it, even if they do not utter it, as the virtuous are commanded to do – for they are told: *Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.*<sup>12</sup>

This is one of the three advocations of silence which occur at various places in the *Guide* <sup>13</sup>.

Having laid out his belief that the representation in the mind is what is fundamental, rather than any outward manifestation of it, he continues his discussion by claiming that the denial of essential attributes is really a primary intelligible. Unfortunately, as Aristotle was forced to establish the fact of motion following the arguments put forward against it by the Eleatics, so Maimonides is obliged to defend the thesis that God has no essential attributes <sup>14</sup>. Speaking of that which in existence is "clear and manifest", namely (1) primary intelligibles, (2) that which is perceived by the senses, and (3) things that approach (1) and (2) in terms of their clarity, he makes the following statement.

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only in the tripartite distinction between spoken words, written words, and representations in the mind, but also in the subordination of the first two to the third.

<sup>12</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.50, pages 111-12 (translator's italics).

<sup>13</sup> See footnote 23 to Chapter One of this dissertation.

<sup>14</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.51 (page 112). It does appear to be rather unrealistic of him to assert that the impossibility of essential attributes in God is as "clear and manifest" as the existence of motion, but that this is what he explicitly claims. He does qualify his claim by stating that with respect to the denial of essential attributes, "...that denial is a primary intelligible, inasmuch as an attribute is not the essence of the thing of which it is predicated, but is a certain mode of the essence and hence an accident" – *ibid.*. However, notwithstanding this qualification, given his sharp distinction between the elite and the masses, it seems strange that this logical point, which would only really be obvious to one trained in Aristotelian logic, is stated to be as obvious as the existence of motion, which is obvious to anyone with anything more than a very limited intellect and rudimentary sensory apparatus.

If man had been left as he [naturally] is, he would not have needed a proof of them... Yet since strange opinions have arisen due either to people who committed errors or to people who acted with some end in view, so that professing such opinion they ran counter to the nature of existence and denied a sensibly perceived thing or wished to suggest to the estimative faculty the existence of a nonexistent thing, the men of science have had to resort to proving those manifest things and to disproving the existence of things that are only thought to exist.<sup>15</sup>

The first sentence of this passage quoted makes it clear that the isolate would actually be in an advantageous position here, as having "been left as he [naturally] is", he would not need to recreate the complicated set of arguments which Maimonides feels obliged to put forward to demonstrate the impossibility of essential attributes in order to counter the "strange opinions" which have arisen.

Once again, albeit in a different context, we can see Maimonides making clear his dislike of arguments which appear to ignore the testimony of the senses, by denying the validity of many concepts of which we appear to have direct knowledge via our sense perceptions. This quotation also illustrates his dislike of the practice of those who, like the *Mutakallimūn*, bring to their scrutiny of "the nature of existence" preconceived opinions through which they filter the results of such study<sup>16</sup>. He would clearly have had little time for the more modern view that we are so influenced by our social and cultural conditioning, that we cannot do otherwise<sup>17</sup>. For Maimonides, the nature of existence, at least in the sublunar realm, is there for us to discover using the senses and intellect, and assisted by the logical and scientific tools bequeathed to us by Aristotle.

Having stated that the denial of the essential attributes is a primary intelligible inasmuch as an attribute is an accident of that of which it is predicated<sup>18</sup>, he considers what would have to be the case if an attribute could indeed be the essence of that of which it is predicated. There would be only two possibilities: either (1) the affirmation of the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> "...all the first *Mutakallimūn* from among the Greeks ...did not conform in their premises to the appearance of that which exists, but considered how being ought to be in order that it should furnish a proof for the correctness of a particular opinion, or at least should not refute it" – *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.71, page 178; and again, "...the matter is as Themistius puts it: that which exists does not conform to the various opinions, but rather the correct opinions conform to that which exists" – *ibid.*, page 179.

<sup>17</sup> Obviously, this would be equally true of Maimonides himself, who would be bringing his own preconceptions and prejudices to his work.

attribute would be tautologous, as in the phrase 'man is man', or (2) the affirmation would simply be explaining <sup>19</sup> the term, as in the phrase 'man is a rational animal', because the essence of man is to be a rational animal, and there is no third notion which constitutes man, other than rationality and animality <sup>20</sup>. (1) is rejected out of hand, presumably because of its tautologous nature <sup>21</sup>, leaving only two possibilities – either an attribute is the essence of the entity of which it is predicated, and hence is basically an explanation of a term, or it is something different from, and superadded to, the essence of the entity in question, and hence is an accident of that entity <sup>22</sup>.

Having established this to his own satisfaction, Maimonides proceeds in Chapter 52 of Book I of the *Guide* to undertake a more detailed analysis of the notion of attribute, and presents a fivefold classification of attributes to enable him to refine further the possibilities for theologically correct discourse about God. There is neither requirement nor opportunity to expound his arguments in all their minutiae, but a certain level of exposition will permit us, in keeping with his apophatic theology, to come closer to an adequate conception of this philosophically derived theology by allowing this process of stripping away and rejecting incorrect uses of attributive language with respect to God to unfold gradually as his arguments proceed. Although he does not explicitly state that this is his methodological approach through these crucial chapters, Maimonides' aim appears to be to reach his goal indirectly by first of all laying out the general ways in which we can use terms such as 'attribute', and then by gradually removing these on logical and theological grounds, to establish what uses are left to us for use in discourse

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<sup>18</sup> See note 14 above.

<sup>19</sup> Or 'unpacking' it, to use a jarring neologism favoured by contemporary Anglo-American philosophy.

<sup>20</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.51, page 112-3.

<sup>21</sup> Strictly speaking, both (1) and (2) are tautologous in nature if 'man' is defined as a being whose essence is to be a 'rational animal'.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, page 113. In passing, Maimonides disposes of the view that God's attributes are possibly something other than His essence or something external to this essence, and in so doing provides a further example of a type of error, referred to above, when words can be uttered externally with there being no corresponding representation in the mind. This false view of the divine attributes involves the creation of "...a mean between two contraries that have no mean" (*ibid.*, page 114), analogous to the positing of an intermediate status between existence and non-existence with respect to universals. Of such false views he states that "These are things that are merely said; and accordingly they subsist only in words, not in the mind; all the more, they have no existence outside of the mind" – *ibid.*, pages 113-4.

about God which is correct in the sense that it is not replete with anthropomorphic and anthropopathic expressions.

The first group identified is that in which an individual attribute "...is characterised by the thing having its definition predicated of it" <sup>23</sup>, and has already been exemplified above in the statement that 'man is a rational animal'. Not only is an attribute in this sense merely an explanation of the term to which it is said to apply, but, more importantly, it must be denied of God because it amounts to a definition, and in the Aristotelian explanatory scheme within which Maimonides operates, definition is closely connected to the notion of causation. *The Guide of the Perplexed* puts it thus:

...He ...has no causes anterior to Him that are the cause of His existence and by which, in consequence, He is defined. <sup>24</sup>

The second group is similar to the first group, with the important qualification that it is only part of the definition which is being explained, for example, when we predicate life (but not rationality) or rationality (but not life) of man. If a partial definition is possible, then given the identity posited in this group of definition and essence we cannot evade the ascription of composition to God's essence, which as a violation of the divine Oneness is clearly unacceptable to Maimonides <sup>25</sup>. The third group pertains to attributes regarded as qualities of that of which they are predicated. This too is clearly unacceptable – quality is one of Aristotle's ten categories, and as such is regarded as one of the accidents <sup>26</sup>, the ascription of which would once again entail composition in the divine essence.

Maimonides clearly regards these first three groups as a distinct cluster inasmuch as they all relate in varying ways to the essence of the subjects of which they are predicated.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, page 114.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, page 115.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* He demonstrates the impossibility of composition with respect to God in the first chapter of Book II of *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

<sup>26</sup> "Thus if an attribute belonging to this group would subsist in Him, ...He would be a substratum of accidents", *ibid.* At this point Maimonides further sub-divides the third group to provide an example from each of the genera of qualities, but as the main point regarding the unacceptability of attribute *qua* quality is what is at issue, there is no need to track this sub-division.

With regard to those three groups of attributes – which are the attributes indicative of the essence or of a part of the essence or of a certain quality subsisting in the essence – it has already been made clear that they are impossible with reference to Him, ...for all of them are indicative of composition, and the impossibility of composition in respect to the deity we shall make clear by demonstration.<sup>27</sup>

What Maimonides has to say about the next, fourth group of attributes is of crucial importance for *The Guide of the Perplexed* as a whole insofar as this text draws in a manner, which is both rigorous and austere, a clear limit both to human thought about that which is beyond the sublunary realm in general, and about God in particular, and to the possibility of meaningful discourse about these matters. At this point in the *Guide* he presents in a fully explicit manner a doctrine of radical denial of any possibility whatsoever of a relation between God and that which is other than He, which is ultimately an exhortation to silence on these topics<sup>28</sup>.

The fourth group refers to those attributes which denote a putative relation between an attribute falling within this group and that of which it is predicated.

It is predicated of a thing that it has a relation to something other than itself. For instance, it is related to a time or to a place or to another individual...<sup>29</sup>

Attributes within this group differ from those in the previous groups insofar as their ascription does not entail the postulation of multiplicity or composition in the divine essence. For example, it is possible to state that A is the partner of B, the father of C, and the master of D, and was born in a particular town on a particular date, without implying any notion of multiplicity in the essence of A. None of these relationships relate either to the essence of A or to anything subsisting in this essence<sup>30</sup>. However, it is crucial that we are not thereby led to the belief that attributes of relation can justifiably be predicated of God. First of all, it should be clear that there can be no

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, page 116. The location of the demonstration of non-composition in God has already been cited above in footnote 25.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 23 to Chapter One of this dissertation.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 116-7.

<sup>30</sup> Maimonides puts it thus: "...this kind of attribute does not necessarily entail either multiplicity or change in the essence of the thing of which it is predicated. ...Those notions of relation are not the essence of the thing or subsisting in its essence, as do the qualities", *ibid.*, page 117.



relation between God and either time or space. This is because it is a commonplace of Aristotelian physics that via the concept of motion both time and space are conceptually linked to corporeality, and corporeality is in turn conceptually linked to composition, and hence once again the divine Oneness would implicitly be denied by inappropriate attributions with respect to God.

Accordingly there is no relation between Him and time, and in the same way there is no relation between Him and place.<sup>31</sup>

However, it is not only relationships of this type, important and frequent as they appear to be according to the Torah, which cannot be ascribed to God. For a traditional Jew, worse is yet to come.

It is clear ...that there is no correlation between Him and the things created by Him.<sup>32</sup>

A few sentences further on, he repeats this in a slightly different formulation.

There is, in truth, no relation in any respect between Him and any of His creatures.<sup>33</sup>

By these statements, whose force is magnified by their simplicity and starkness, Maimonides sweeps away the traditional understanding of God, upon which not only Judaism, but also Islam and Christianity, appear to be based. Admittedly neither statement denies the fact that God is, in some respect not made explicit at this point in the text, a God who creates. However, not only do these statements appear to be inconsistent with much that Maimonides puts forward elsewhere in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, but the allusion in the first phrase to God as having created does not sit easily with the basic proposition which it is used to express, inasmuch as the concept of a creator logically implies not only something which is the result of this creative activity, without wishing to make any unwarranted assumptions that this activity is the result of volition, but, more importantly in this context, it implies some kind of relationship between the creator and the created. As far as the second phrase is concerned, the reference to "His creatures" strongly implies some relationship between

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

God and these creatures to account for the use of the possessive pronoun. This type of issue is an example of the tension that was referred to earlier <sup>34</sup>, and whether one wishes to describe it as a 'contradiction', along with Strauss and his school, or as a 'divergence', in the way that Marvin Fox does <sup>35</sup>, there appears to be a difficulty. Yet this need not be a stumbling block to what Maimonides is saying. His two short statements quoted above could simply be taken as expressions of the absolute transcendence of God, which being absolute is beyond coherent utterance with the crude linguistic tools available to us. We may be aware that logically and metaphysically our existence is grounded in God, and that consequentially we are ontologically dependent on Him, but the transcendent nature of this dependence is such that it cannot be described as a 'relationship' in the way that we normally use that term. This is all highly speculative, but given Maimonides' repeated assertions that "The Torah speaketh in the language of the sons of man" <sup>36</sup>, it is reasonable to state that we must be careful when basing assertions about how things are in reality upon how we represent this reality through our language. To put the point another way, which anticipates the introduction of the Wittgensteinian perspective in Chapter Five, and somewhat anachronistically, Maimonides could be read as trying to say the unsayable – not because he is unaware of what he is doing, but because he also is necessarily a user of "the language of the sons of man". One quotation from Chapter 70 of the *Guide* may be used to illustrate this. In this chapter, Maimonides is concerned primarily with the correct interpretation of the biblical phrase 'The rider in the *araboth*' <sup>37</sup>, and he points out that the verb 'ride' is equivocal and can be used in a figurative manner to denote domination by the rider over that which is ridden <sup>38</sup>, and used in this sense it refers to God, with the *araboth* being the outermost sphere within which the universe is contained. The meaning of this phrase he gives as "He who dominates the highest heaven encompassing the universe" <sup>39</sup>.

...He ...is separate from the heaven and is not a force in it. Know that the expression, *the rider of the heavens*, is figuratively used of Him ...for the sake of a strange and wonderful likeness. For the rider is more excellent than that upon which he rides, yet cannot be called more excellent except through a

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, page 118.

<sup>34</sup> At the end of the second paragraph of this chapter.

<sup>35</sup> *Interpreting Maimonides*, pages 72-83.

<sup>36</sup> See footnote 3 to Chapter One of this dissertation.

<sup>37</sup> This phrase is taken from verse 5 of Psalm 68.

<sup>38</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.70, page 171.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*.

certain impropriety of language, for the rider does not belong to the same species as that which is ridden by him. Moreover the rider is he who makes the beast of burden move and go where he wishes; for it is an instrument for him that he uses as he wishes, being at the same time free from any dependence on it and not attached to it, but on the contrary external to it. Similarly the deity ...is the mover of the highest heaven, by whose motion everything that is in motion within this heaven is moved; at the same time, He, may He be exalted, is separate from this heaven and not a force subsisting within it.<sup>40</sup>

This section is worth excerpting at length since although in it Maimonides is ostensibly laying out the view on the phrase in question which was held by Jewish sages, it is clear from his overall approach in this particular chapter that he does not disagree with what he holds them to have believed. The stress on this passage is on the fact that the rider, God, must be taken to be separate from, independent of, and beyond comparison to, that which is within the outermost sphere, which in Maimonides' cosmology is taken as encompassing all else that is other than God, and, crucially, that any comparison can only be drawn by "a certain impropriety of language". This non-comparability between the rider and that which is ridden is ascribed to the fact that they do not belong to the same species, and, returning to the discussion of the possibility of attributes of relationship being predicated of God, in Chapter 52 of the first book of the *Guide*, where this theme is dealt with in a more general manner, the following rhetorical questions are posed.

How ...can a relation be represented between Him and what is other than He when there is no notion comprising in any respect both of the two, inasmuch as existence is ...affirmed of Him ...and of what is other than He merely by way of absolute equivocation.<sup>41</sup>

How then could there subsist a relation between Him ...and any of the things created by Him, given the immense difference between them with regard to the true reality of their existence, than which there is no greater difference?<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, page 172 (translator's italics).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 117-118. He continues to reiterate this point: "...relation is always found between two things falling under the same – necessarily proximate – species, whereas there is no relation between the two things if they merely fall under the same genus... If, however, two things fall under two different genera, there is no relation between them in any respect whatever" – *ibid.* It is, of course, obvious from what he has already said that we cannot even say that God and that which is other than God share a common genus, as even the existence which is predicated of them must not be understood to be univocal in nature.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, page 118.

Affirmation of any such relation would necessarily entail affirmation of the accident of relation to God, and although such accidents would not refer to the divine essence they are still accidents, with all the ontological inferiority that this connotes. However, Maimonides grants a greater indulgence with respect to affirmation of attributes of relation than he normally does to the use of inexactitudes in philosophical theology partly because such affirmations do not have the negative implications for the divine quiddity which those in the first three groups do <sup>43</sup>.

The fifth and final group of positive attributes are those where the predication pertains to an action or actions undertaken by that which is the subject of these predications. By this is not meant 'action' in the sense of the habitus of an art which the subject of the predications has the ability to perform, for example, as when someone is described as a carpenter <sup>44</sup>, but rather the particular actions that an individual has performed. Finally, an attribute has been identified which can legitimately be affirmed of God.

...this kind of attribute is remote from the essence of the thing of which it is predicated. For this reason it is permitted that this kind should be predicated of God, after you have come to know ...that the acts in question need not be carried out by means of differing notions subsisting within the essence of the agent, but that all His different acts ...are all of them carried out by means of His essence, and not ...by means of a superadded notion.<sup>45</sup>

The multiplicity of actions which originate in God do not entail a multiplicity in His essence, and his Oneness is thereby not compromised. Indeed this is true for any agent, and not just for God <sup>46</sup>. Maimonides has an example which is both simple and instantly comprehensible in order to illustrate this important point – that of fire. Fire has a number of effects depending on the nature of the objects upon which it acts at a given time – it melts, hardens, cooks, burns, bleaches and blackens, and it performs all these actions simply through the "active quality of heat", and not through the possession of as many diverse notions as there are diverse actions <sup>47</sup>. Now if this is true with respect to something which is acting through its essential nature, that is, automatically rather than

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* This is explained by the fact that such attributions belong to the species of quality.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, page 119.

<sup>46</sup> "...there need not be a diversity in the notions subsisting in an agent because of the diversity of his various actions", *ibid.*, page 120.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

by volition, how much more true must it be for a being which acts through a will, and beyond that, how much more true must it be for a being which is "above every attributive qualification" <sup>48</sup>. A second, perhaps less immediately graspable example, is that of the rational faculty which subsists in man, through which he acquires and practises a wide variety of theoretical and practical arts, such as sewing, woodworking, weaving, building, and political governance. Despite the multiplicity and diversity of these actions they proceed from "...one simple faculty in which no multiplicity is posited" <sup>49</sup>.

It accordingly should not be regarded as inadmissible in reference to God ...that the diverse actions proceed from one simple essence in which no multiplicity is posited and to which no notion is superadded.<sup>50</sup>

Maimonides could not be clearer on this basic point, which he does not tire of repeating in various guises. Nevertheless, he needs to be clearer about what might be involved when an attribution of action is made with respect to God, and he provides this information as his argument unfolds. Taking as his point of departure Moses' request to God, recounted in Chapter 33 of Exodus, that he might be permitted to be shown God's ways, Maimonides claims that these ways "...are the actions proceeding from God" <sup>51</sup>, and that "...apprehension of these actions is an apprehension of His attributes ...with respect to which He is known" <sup>52</sup>. Moses was permitted to apprehend all God's actions, which are described as follows:

...all His actions ...are the actions proceeding from Him ...in respect of *giving existence to the Adamites* and governing them.<sup>53</sup>

Now although much of the discussion of the attributes of action in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, and subsequently in the secondary literature, focuses on the moral and political dimension to these attributes, which the connection with governance brings out, it is essential to highlight the fact that the attributes of action also refer to the metaphysical grounding which the existence of the universe receives from God, hence

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, page 121.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, page 124.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, (my italics). The paragraph following this quotation explains the italicisation.

the above italicisation. This is an essential point which must not be lost to sight. Taking the giving of existence in a sense which is broad enough to include the sustenance of existence <sup>54</sup>, there has been enough said thus far by Maimonides to make it clear that not only do we have some knowledge of God through His actions, but also that these actions include the metaphysical underpinning of that which exists. For an isolate whose awareness of moral and political actions, at least in a human context, is likely to be non-existent due to the congenital and complete absence from any kind of community of beings of like species, the actions of God's which are within purview are those which relate to the creation and sustenance of existence. These actions are all taking place in the perceptible environment in which the isolate dwells – what he must do is to use the senses to perceive them by the medium of their effects, and to use the faculty of reason to work backwards from the perceptible effects to "the permanent nature of what exists" <sup>55</sup>.

Maimonides gives a number of examples of God's actions, which, as already stated, refer mainly to moral qualities. Expressing a general principle, he makes the following statement.

...whenever one of His actions is apprehended, the attribute from which this action proceeds is predicated of Him ...and the name deriving from that action is applied to Him.<sup>56</sup>

One specific example by way of illustration of what is intended by the claim that attributes of action can legitimately be predicated of God, refers to the description that is sometimes made of the deity that He is gracious.

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<sup>54</sup> There is no shortage of clear evidence in the *Guide* to support such a reading. For example, speaking of the relation of the deity to the world, Maimonides states that "...the universe exists in virtue of the existence of the creator, and the latter continually endows it with permanence in virtue of the thing that is spoken of as overflow... Accordingly if the nonexistence of the Creator were supposed, all that exists would likewise be nonexistent", I.69, page 169. Similarly, "...God has ...with reference to the world, the status of a form with regard to a thing possessing a form, in virtue of which it is that which it is: a thing the true reality and essence of which are established by that form", *ibid.* The discussion of the metaphor of overflow to account for the existence of the world occurs in II.12, pages 277-280.

<sup>55</sup> See the citations from the *Guide* given at the beginning of this chapter of the dissertation, the locations of which are provided by footnotes 2 and 3 above.

<sup>56</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.54, page 125.

...just as when we give a thing to somebody who has no claim upon us, this is called *grace* in our language ...He ...brings into existence and governs beings that have no claim upon Him with respect to being brought into existence and being governed. For this reason He is called *gracious*.<sup>57</sup>

It is not that we are stating that God actually is gracious – this would be an assertion which goes far beyond that which we could possibly know about Him. We ascribe grace to Him because when we observe His actions in bringing into existence created beings and governing these beings despite the fact that it is not incumbent upon Him to do so, we describe these actions by means of the descriptive terms which we would use if they were actions which proceed from human beings.

In a similar vein, when we perceive great calamities afflicting individual human beings or even whole tribes or regions, we describe God as jealous and angry because the divine actions in bringing about such calamities are treated as being comparable to the type of actions which we would undertake when we are afflicted by these passions. It is not that God is being literally described as being vulnerable to jealousy and anger – this would be pure anthropopathy, and correspondingly reprehensible from a philosophical point of view<sup>58</sup>. In general, the following principle clarifies the matter.

...all [His] actions are such as resemble the actions proceeding from the Adamites on account of passions and aptitudes of the soul, but they by no means proceed from Him ...on account of a notion superadded to His essence.<sup>59</sup>

This is a concrete exemplification of the principle that "The Torah speaketh in the language of the sons of man". The only way in which our religious discourse about God's activities can be meaningful and easily comprehensible to most of us is if it is rendered in a linguistic and conceptual medium with which we are familiar. We

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, (translator's italics).

<sup>58</sup> Chapter 55 of the *Guide* contains a concise summary of the errors contained in the ascription of affections to God. Affections imply change, which in turn implies not only privation and potentiality, but also a differentiation between the agent who effects the change and that which is the recipient of the change, thus compromising the divine Oneness and simplicity. In other words, if God was to be subject to affections He could not be pure actuality, and there would also have to be something external to Him which acts upon Him when He undergoes change and thereby passes from a state of potentiality to one of actuality in whatever respect the change is occurring. For the same reason, He cannot be said to be subject to privation, as this would also entail potentiality.

<sup>59</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.54, page 126.

understand that certain types of human actions are normally associated with particular human passions, and by a process of analogical reasoning we describe God as possessing these passions when we witness the appropriate corresponding actions apparently proceeding from Him. We must never allow our language to mislead us into forgetting that these predicates can only legitimately refer to His actions and not to His essence. Maimonides puts it thus:

...the attributes ascribed to Him are attributes of His actions and ...they do not mean that He possesses qualities.<sup>60</sup>

The attributes pertain to the effects of the activity, and not to the quiddity of the agent. They will have implications for the isolate and his search for salvation, but this discussion must be left to the final chapter of the dissertation as it would be unhelpfully premature to introduce these implications at this point in the argument.

## II

For a reason which will soon be apparent, it is now important to digress briefly to Aristotle's distinction between demonstrative and dialectical reasoning<sup>61</sup>. This distinction is commonly used in mediaeval philosophy in the Aristotelian tradition to act as a demarcation between philosophy and theology, with the key difference between the two forms of reasoning pertaining not to the issue of deductive validity but rather to the origin and the degree of certainty of the premisses<sup>62</sup>. According to the *falāsifa*, in whose ranks Maimonides can reasonably be included, demonstrative reasoning is considered superior to dialectical reasoning as it works with premisses which have a degree of certainty greater than that of the latter, which draws its premisses from

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, page 128.

<sup>61</sup> He describes this distinction as follows: "Now a deduction is an argument in which, certain things being laid down, something other than these necessarily comes about through them. It is a demonstration, when the premisses from which the deduction starts are true and primitive, or are such that our knowledge of them has come through premisses which are primitive and true; and it is a dialectical deduction, if it reasons from reputable opinions ...Things are true and primitive which are convincing on the strength not of anything else but of themselves ...On the other hand, those opinions are reputable which are accepted by everyone or by the majority or by the wise...", *Topics*, Book II, 100a25-100b22 – page 167 in Volume One of *The Complete Works of Aristotle*.

<sup>62</sup> The quotation from Aristotle in the previous footnote makes this clear.



generally accepted opinions, and these opinions include statements extracted from religious texts – regarded by the *falāsifa* as epistemically weak, and the acceptance of which is a matter of faith <sup>63</sup>. They would not regard use of such ratiocination as intrinsically wrong – what is regarded as unacceptable is the failure to recognise its inherent limitations, especially the fact that its conclusions have no more logical strength than the premisses from which they are derived.

The arguments of Maimonides which have been outlined thus far, clearly fall into the category of demonstrative reasoning. Their premisses are taken from the logic, physics and metaphysics of Aristotle, which are theoretically accessible to anyone with a sufficiently developed ratiocinative faculty, and not from scripture, and although the arguments are being utilised in the context of a theological debate over how discourse about God can properly be undertaken, the fact that their premisses originate thus makes them philosophical in nature rather than theological. This is not made less so by the fact that Maimonides has a practice of intermingling quotations from the Tanakh and post-Biblical Jewish writings with the strictly philosophical elements of his arguments, because this practice can be explained by seeing these quotations partly as providing non-deductive support for the conclusions which have already been given the maximum possible deductive support of demonstration, and partly as showing that the conclusions are in accord with the contents of holy writ and the traditions, providing that the latter are interpreted appropriately.

Arguing purely from the content and inter-relationship of relevant concepts Maimonides believes that it can be demonstrated that the following four types of attribution ought to be negated with reference to God. These are attributions of (i) corporeality, (ii) affection and change, (iii) privation that is subsequently removed by the relevant transition from potentiality to actuality, and (iv) likeness to something among His creatures <sup>64</sup>. He describes these negations of attributions as...

...some of the useful teachings of natural science with regard to the knowledge of the deity.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The application of the distinction in the work of the *falāsifa* is summarised succinctly by Oliver Leaman in *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy* on page 7.

<sup>64</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.55, page 128-9. See footnote 58 above for a résumé of the synopsis which Maimonides himself provides in I.55 of the *Guide*.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, page 129.

It is not even enough to know these teachings by being told that they are true – one must cognise them properly to be said to know them through demonstration, and is at a clear intellectual disadvantage if this is not done. Speaking apparently of someone who knows the conclusions of this scientific argumentation, but not the logical connections between such notions as affection, potentiality, actuality, and privation which underlie these conclusions, it is stated that "...he does not know them through their demonstrations" <sup>66</sup>. More importantly...

...he does not know the particular corollaries following necessarily from these universal primary propositions. For this reason he does not have at his disposal a demonstration of the existence of God or one of the necessity of negating these kinds of attributions in reference to Him.<sup>67</sup>

This makes it clear that for Maimonides demonstration is not only a valid pathway to such knowledge as we are able to form about the divine attributes, but it is also an essential part of such a pathway. Simple knowledge about the four types of attribution which has only been attained through having these presented as a *fait accompli*, even by an expert teacher, is insufficient – one must be able and willing to follow through the demonstrative process from premisses to conclusion to be said to have a complete grasp of the knowledge in which it terminates. The relevant implication here for the isolate is, of course, the fact that the total lack of a religious tradition which is an unavoidable corollary of his or her situation is not thereby a disadvantage when the type of metaphysical knowledge which Maimonides is discussing is being sought. Despite its inherent limitations, of which he is fully aware, human reason unaided by revelation can take us a long way, assuming that we are able to follow through the process of demonstration. At the very least, looking at *The Guide of the Perplexed* as a whole, reason can firmly establish in our minds that God exists, and that we can only legitimately discuss Him in terms of either negative attributes or attributes of action. This demonstrative process can be described as 'natural' inasmuch as it is independent not only of revelation, but also of pre-existing cultural influences – all that is required for the isolate is the willingness and the ability to grasp the initial premisses of the relevant arguments and to follow through the deductive process to the conclusions thereby reached.

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*.

Having made what is hopefully a relevant excursus in order to elicit an implication of Maimonides' philosophical theology which is both important and relevant for the position of the isolate, we can now return to the arguments in the *Guide*.

### III

Having made it clear that knowledge of the attributes of the deity can only be truly obtained by demonstration, he concludes Chapter 55 of Book I by remarking that using *reductio ad absurdum* he now intends to reveal the falsehood of the beliefs of those who would posit essential attributes, and that what follows can only be comprehended by one who "...possesses knowledge of the art of logic and of the nature of being" <sup>68</sup>. His first step is to return to his contention that there can be no possible relation between God and that which is other than He <sup>69</sup>. This thesis appears to hinge on the postulate that for two entities to be related they must share a common aspect in respect of which they can legitimately be said to be commensurate, and it is regarding this aspect that they are said to be related. For example, a mustard grain and the sphere of the fixed stars, despite the enormous difference in their magnitudes, share a common three-dimensionality and a piece of wax melted by the heat of the sun and the elemental fire are alike in their possession of heat, despite the quantitative difference in its degrees of intensity <sup>70</sup>. However, unfortunately for the upholders of the existence of essential attributes, there is no common aspect shared by God and that which is other than He. God is utterly transcendent, and any appearance of similarity between the attribution of existence, life, power, knowledge and volition, to us and to God are no more than an illusion of language – another manifestation of the now familiar principle that "the Torah speaketh

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*. Once again he makes explicit the basis of his philosophical theology. This is fully consonant with his claim quoted earlier on in the present chapter of this dissertation, and cited in footnote 3, that the nature of what exists (taken as equivalent to the nature of being) can be apprehended by the senses and the intellect. God creates that which is other than He and sustains it in existence, and we can approach understanding the nature of this creation by using our senses and our reason, which are God-given tools for this task, in addition to also being part of this creation. Our senses and intellect combine to help us to grasp "the nature of being", and our intellect on its own provides us with "the art of logic".

<sup>69</sup> See the passages from the *Guide* quoted above – the locations of these passages are given at footnotes 31 to 33, 41 and 42.

<sup>70</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.56, page 130.

in the language of the sons of man". These terms must be interpreted with a strict and uncompromising equivocation when applied to us and applied to God, sharing, as they do, only the name of the terms in question and "...not being included in the same definition" <sup>71</sup>. Maimonides puts it as follows:

...the meaning of the qualificative attributions ascribed to Him and the meaning of the attributions known to us have nothing in common in any respect or in any mode; these attributions have in common only the name and nothing else.<sup>72</sup>

At this point in his discussion Maimonides utilises the distinction referred to earlier on between what someone outwardly professes to believe, and what these professions actually manifest concerning the person's mental representation <sup>73</sup>. The essential attribute theorists may well maintain that divine and human attributes are used purely equivocally, but they fail to see that they are in reality committed by the logic of the situation to the view that they are applied univocally, so that, for example, God's power and our power differ solely by their respective locations on a sliding scale of perfection, and that while God's power is immeasurably greater than our power both have enough in common to be directly comparable. As it is put in the *Guide*:

...both notions would be, as they think, included in the same definition.<sup>74</sup>

What appears to be implied here is that a postulation of essential attributes with respect to the deity entails the proposition that these attributes are applied univocally, whether one who makes such a postulation recognises this or not.

Nevertheless, from the equivocality referred to above, Maimonides would not wish us to conclude that when, for instance, we predicate oneness of God, that we are making a positive statement regarding the divine essence. Both 'one' and 'many' are quantitative terms, and strictly speaking are accidental predicates neither of which can be applied to God in any straightforward sense. When we attribute oneness to God, something very different is being posited, and failure to understand this is an error.

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, page 131.

<sup>73</sup> See footnote 11 above, and the paragraph within which it is located.

<sup>74</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.56, page 130.

...to ascribe to Him ...the accident of oneness is just as absurd as to ascribe to Him the accident of multiplicity. I mean to say that oneness is not a notion that is superadded to His essence, but that He is one not through oneness.<sup>75</sup>

The recondite statement expressed in the second sentence of this quotation is explained by Maimonides at the end of the chapter in which it occurs.

...when we say *one*, the meaning is that He has no equal and not that the notion of oneness attaches to His essence.<sup>76</sup>

Once again, he makes it abundantly clear that if we believe otherwise then we have simply been misled by the language in which we have to express such thoughts.

These subtle notions that very clearly elude the minds cannot be considered through the instrumentality of the customary words, which are the greatest among the causes leading unto error. For the bounds of expression in all languages are very narrow indeed, so that we cannot represent this notion to ourselves except through a certain looseness of expression. Thus when we wish to indicate that the deity is not many, the one who makes the statement cannot say anything but that He is one, even though 'one' and 'many' are some of the subdivisions of quantity. For this reason, *we give the gist of the notion and give the mind the correct direction towards the true reality of the matter* when we say, one but not through oneness,...<sup>77</sup>

This passage is worth excerpting at length as it is not only an explicit statement of the limit of the power of human language to communicate abstract metaphysical truth, but also contains a readily comprehensible example of how language misleads us if interpreted too literally, while simultaneously pointing us towards how things stand in reality. The truth can, however, be grasped by one who strips these admittedly abstruse<sup>78</sup> notions of the inaccurate and misleading accretions which are the inevitable result of trying to encapsulate them in words<sup>79</sup>. Ordinary language can, at best, act as a signpost for true apprehension of divine matters. All it can do is to "give the gist of the notion" and "give the mind the correct direction", as Maimonides puts it. Once again, to put the matter in a somewhat Wittgensteinian (and hence non-Maimonidean) manner, ordinary

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, I.57, page 132.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, page 133 (translator's italics). Maimonides later claims that "...our saying that He is one signifies the denial of multiplicity", *ibid.*, I.58, page 136.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 132-3 (my italics).

<sup>78</sup> See the opening sentences of Chapters 57 and 58 of the *Guide*.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, page 133.

language – this time in the hands of the advocates of essential attributes – stands indicted with trying to say directly that which can ultimately only be shown.

As was expounded above, correct predication of oneness of God is a denial that He has any equal or that multiplicity is applicable to Him <sup>80</sup>, and the general principle with which Maimonides is operating is that by affirming a traditionally given positive attribute of Him, we are actually denying that the privation of that attribute applies to Him. When it is stated that God is A, where A is any attribute such as, for example, 'living' or 'powerful', what is actually happening, if we are using such religious language properly, is that we are negating the possibility of not-A with respect to God. To affirm life of God is to deny that He is dead <sup>81</sup>, and to affirm power of Him is to deny that He is powerless <sup>82</sup>. In the case of the latter example, this negation of powerlessness with respect to the deity connotes that "...His existence suffices for the bringing into existence of things other than He" <sup>83</sup>.

It is perhaps only fair at this juncture to point out that much of what has been represented in the foregoing passages as Maimonides' doctrine of divine attributes does not really originate with him. Isaac Husik points out that much of Maimonides' work is heavily anticipated in that of Abraham Ibn Daud, describing the latter as not only Maimonides' forerunner but also (more tentatively) as a *sine qua non* <sup>84</sup>. Even Judah Halevi, who was certainly no particular friend of philosophy, posits a doctrine of divine attributes which is very similar to Maimonides' own, allowing as he does for attributes of action, which he terms 'creative' attributes, and negative attributes <sup>85</sup>.

Maimonides sums up his doctrine thus:

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<sup>80</sup> See footnote 76 above.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, I.58, page 135.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, page 136.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>84</sup> *A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy*, pages 198 and 237.

<sup>85</sup> Halevi also allows for what he refers to as 'relative' attributes, such as blessed and holy, which are "...borrowed from the reverence given to Him by mankind", *The Kuzari*, Part Two, section 2, page 84, although he is careful to point out that the latter "...produce no plurality, ...nor do they affect his [sic] Unity" – *ibid.*. In other words, they make no positive statement about the divine quiddity.

...every attribute that we predicate of Him is an attribute of action or, if the attribute is intended for the apprehension of His essence and not of His action, it signifies the negation of the privation of the attribute in question.<sup>86</sup>

However, ever mindful of possible objections, he is aware of the fact that if there are no positive attributes which can lead to apprehension of the divine essence someone may reasonably wonder as to what manner the apprehension of God achieved by Moses and Solomon was superior to that achieved by lesser beings. Now as it is accepted by the Jewish sages and also by the philosophers that quantitative differences regarding the levels of apprehension attained by human beings are a reality, it is incumbent upon him to explain this, and he does this by the following statement.

...you come nearer to the apprehension of Him ...with every increase in the negations regarding Him; and you come nearer to that apprehension than he who does not negate with regard to Him that which, according to what has been demonstrated to you, must be negated.<sup>87</sup>

For example, let us suppose there are four individuals, the first one of whom believes that God is corporeal, the second of whom is uncertain whether or not this is so, the third one of whom knows only the demonstration of God's incorporeality but possesses no other demonstrative knowledge, and the fourth of whom knows the demonstration that affections in general cannot be attributed to God. The first person is furthest away<sup>88</sup> from God, whereas the second is slightly closer, and the fourth is closest of all. A second, more concrete example, given by Maimonides pertains to the process of coming to a true conception of what exactly a ship is, and this involves the supposition of the existence of a succession of people, each of whom knows what those people earlier in the series know, but each one of whom possesses one additional piece of information. The first person knows only that a ship exists, but does not know to what this term is applicable – even whether it is a substance or an accident; the second person knows that it is not an accident; the third that it is not a mineral; the fourth that it is not a living being; the fifth that it is not a plant; the sixth that it is not a continuous body; the seventh that it is not a simple shape; the eighth that it is not a sphere; the ninth that it is not conical; the tenth that it is not a polyhedron; the eleventh that it is not solid all

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<sup>86</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.58, page 136.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, I.59, page 138.

<sup>88</sup> Furthest away, that is, in a spiritual sense, rather than a spatio-temporal one. The example given is found in the *Guide*, I.59, page 138.

through. The last in the series has, through a process of negation, come nearly to a true conception of what exactly a ship is, and cognitively is almost on a par with someone who has a conception of a ship which consists of positive attributes. Furthermore, it can be seen that adequacy of conception increases as the series progresses <sup>89</sup>.

It is worth giving as sufficiently full an exposition as space will permit of Maimonides' view on this topic, as it is one of the cornerstones of the *Guide*, despite the fact that he often appears to depart in the text from the important principles which emerge from his discussion of it. As suggested earlier on in the present chapter of this dissertation, methodologically his discussion has proceeded by gradually eliminating unsatisfactory ways of speaking about God, until he is, he believes, left with a doctrine which stipulates which types of attribute we can correctly predicate of God, and what exactly such attributive predications connote, and this methodology is entirely consistent with the conclusions which his discussion reaches, in the sense that it itself is a exemplification of how we can use the method of gradual negation to acquire valuable knowledge. Indeed, given the exalted nature of the subject matter, the apophatic knowledge which the discussion of attributes gives us can reasonably be said to be the most important knowledge which we can ever have. In a somewhat Socratic twist, Maimonides puts forward the view that we approach God the more we negate inappropriate predicates, and consequentially the more completely we understand that He is utterly and necessarily transcendent.

As everyone is aware that it is not possible, except through negation, to achieve an apprehension of that which is in our power to apprehend and that, on the other hand, negation does not give knowledge in any respect of the true reality of the thing with regard to which the particular matter in question has been negated – all men, those of the past and those of the future, affirm clearly that God ...cannot be apprehended by the intellects, and that none but He Himself can apprehend what He is, and that apprehension of Him consists in the inability to attain the ultimate term in apprehending Him.<sup>90</sup>

This passage presents a rather less optimistic picture of the potential which the practice of knowledge by negation holds for apprehending God than his comments on the example of the ship cited above might suggest, casting doubt as it does on the possibility of obtaining knowledge of "the true reality" of that of which apprehension is

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<sup>89</sup> This particular example is found in the *Guide*, I.60, pages 143-4.

<sup>90</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.59, page 139.



sought. Once again, we see an example of the type of tension referred to earlier on in the beginning of the present chapter of this dissertation. In two closely located pages in the *Guide*, Maimonides presents two rather different views on the limits of apophasis, which although not formally contradictory or contrary are clearly difficult to reconcile fully with each other. The less optimistic view is probably the one more consistently held throughout the *Guide*, stressing as he does throughout this text that no positive knowledge of the divine essence is possible. Interestingly enough, in the passage from which this last quotation is taken, which draws such radical limits to the usefulness of apophasis, the two phrases from the Psalms <sup>91</sup> which are often used in the *Guide* as an exhortation to silence are cited. In a metaphor beloved of mediaeval philosophers of both the Judaic and Islamic traditions, the essence of God is compared to the light of the sun, which dazzles by the intensity of its light, just as our intellects quail before the intensity of the unmediated divine presence. In the face of this total transcendence, which we can only hope to approach to a limited extent, even by negation, words are of little use. In Maimonides' opinion...

...Silence is praise to Thee.<sup>92</sup>

Our attempts to magnify and exalt God can never be entirely free of deficiency.

Accordingly, silence and limiting oneself to the apprehensions of the intellects are more appropriate – just as the perfect ones have enjoined when they said: *Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still.*<sup>93</sup>

Maimonides excoriates those whose religious worship suffers not only from unnecessary prolixity but also, and even more importantly, from inappropriate predications of "qualificative attributions" which are intended to praise and magnify, but which if truly understood would be seen to connote deficiency <sup>94</sup>. He gives a helpful example of this, which originates in the Babylonian Talmud <sup>95</sup>, which simultaneously reinforces his point regarding the incomparability of divine and human attributes,

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<sup>91</sup> The other phrase, which is from Ecclesiastes (see footnote 23 to Chapter One of this dissertation) is cited at the end of same chapter of the *Guide* – I.59, page 143.

<sup>92</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.59, page 139 – excerpted from Psalm 65:2.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, page 140 (translator's italics) – excerpted from Psalm 4:5.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, page 141-2.

<sup>95</sup> Pines locates the source of the example in tractate *Berakoth*, 33b; *The Guide of the Perplexed*, page 140, note 5.

comparing this type of worship to the praise of a king for his possession of a number of silver coins, whereas in reality his treasury contains millions of coins of gold. The difference between the erroneous ascription of silver and the real extent of the regal wealth is not simply quantitative, as this would imply that the coins were of the same type, and differed only in terms of the number possessed, but is also qualitative, thus making it clear that the shortcomings of the ascription lie as much in the fact that the coinage attributed to the king is of a type which is both different from, and inferior to, what is actually possessed, as in the fact that the coinage possessed is vastly greater in terms of quantity than is ascribed. If the ascription in question had been flawed solely in terms of the number of coins possessed, Maimonides makes the following claim.

...this example would have indicated that the perfections of Him ...while more perfect than the perfections *that are ascribed* to Him, still belong to the same species as the latter. As we have demonstrated, this is not so.<sup>96</sup>

Between the divine essence and anything that we can predicate of it, there is a total and fundamental incommensurability.

...in God ...there is nothing belonging to the same species as the attributes that are regarded by us as perfections, but ...all these attributes are deficiencies with regard to God.<sup>97</sup>

We would do well to heed the words of Solomon:

*For God is in heaven and thou upon the earth; therefore let thy words be few.*<sup>98</sup>

It has already been stated in this dissertation that according to Maimonides, when we pass, cognitively speaking, beyond the sublunary world we lose the edifice of demonstrative scientific knowledge that Aristotelian logic can enable us to construct using our sense experiences of that world as a foundation, and move into a realm in which we can have no apodeictic knowledge. As far as the lunar sphere and above are concerned, our scientific curiosity must remain content with mere speculation, and this will be raised again and in more detail in subsequent chapters, as it is an important element of the physics of the *Guide*.

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<sup>96</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.59, page 142 (my italics).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, page 143.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, (translator's italics) – excerpted from Ecclesiastes, 5:1.

The reason that Maimonides wishes to expound at such length the correct manner in which discourse about God can be undertaken is made clear near the end of his discussion of the divine attributes in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, and it relates to the risk of unwittingly committing heresy and apostasy. In his view, someone who affirms positive attributes of God, other than attributes of action, does not simply have an inadequate or a misleading conception of the deity, but unfortunately such a person has, admittedly without being aware of it, abandoned his or her belief in God entirely. He likens such a person to a man who has encountered the term 'elephant', and believes that it denotes a one-legged, tri-winged animal, which lives in the ocean, possesses a transparent body and a human face, and is able to talk like a human as well as fly and swim. There is, in reality, nothing which corresponds to such a belief, and correspondingly this conception is that of a non-existent chimera to which the name of an existent creature has been applied <sup>99</sup>. It is not that such a man has an inadequate or misleading conception of an elephant – it is rather that there is nothing corresponding in reality to the representation in the mind that he calls an 'elephant'. Now it has already been shown <sup>100</sup> that for Maimonides the mental representation of something is what is fundamental, with the external representation of this, whether written or spoken, being secondary and derivative, and that the external representation need not accurately represent that which is in the mind <sup>101</sup>. Applying this to the example of the elephant, what is important is the content of the concept of the creature which the man has in his mind, and which he erroneously believes to be an 'elephant', and to such a creature no existing being belongs. Put another way, the being which corresponds to the mental representation in question is simply non-existent. The fact that it is referred to by the name of a genuinely existing animal does not thereby invest it with existence, and as such is irrelevant. Maimonides' treatment of the example of the 'elephant' is entirely consistent with the primacy accorded to the representation in the mind over any oral or verbal manifestation. The deity of which affirmative attributes are predicated does not exist.

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<sup>99</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.60, page 146.

<sup>100</sup> Earlier on in this chapter.

<sup>101</sup> See, for example, footnote 8 above, and the quotation the location of which is given by footnote 10.

I shall not say that he who affirms that God ...has positive attributes either falls short of apprehending Him or is an associator or has an apprehension of Him that is different from what He really is, but I shall say that he has abolished his belief in the existence of the deity without being aware of it.<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps at this juncture it would be appropriate to recapitulate, and in so doing to draw together the main strands of the argument of the chapter, which have been based mainly on a reading of the relevant parts of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, and justified by textual sources. In the first book of the *Guide* Maimonides presents a series of linked arguments based on Aristotelian logic, metaphysics, and physics which form part of a philosophical theology<sup>103</sup> which is independent of revealed religion and of other cultural underpinnings. The core of this theology is that God is utterly transcendent with respect to that which He has created, and which is other than He, including human beings, and that we can only predicate of Him either (a) attributes of action, which are derived by analogical reasoning from our own actions and cannot be used to make positive statements about the divine quiddity, or (b) negative attributes, which are used to deny with respect to God the privations which are the negation of the attributes in question. Notwithstanding the limitations imposed by this theology, it is possible to make some progress in the metaphysical quest to obtain such knowledge of the divine which it is open to us to discover, and the essential point of departure for such a quest is from the nature of the world around us – a nature apprehensible through the considered use of our senses and our intellect<sup>104</sup>. One of the major consequences of this theology is that in using the medium of human language to communicate that knowledge which we believe to be true of God we must exercise great caution. The use of religious language is fraught with difficulties pertaining to its inherent limitations as a tool, and can inadvertently lead to apostasy, if we do not understand comprehensively and clearly what exactly our statements about God imply. What is most important here is not so much these statements themselves, as the representations in the mind of which we take

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<sup>102</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.60, page 145.

<sup>103</sup> As already suggested, the frequent and often lengthy digressions which he makes into Rabbinic literature add little, if anything, to his arguments, and can be viewed as material which is supplementary and illustrative in function. This theology permeates and supports both the letter and the spirit of the entire text, although it is not at all practical to demonstrate this – in the case of the letter this is due to constraints on space, and in the case of the spirit this is because it is something which must be experienced, and which undoubtedly contains a strong element of subjectivity.

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, the two quotations from the *Guide*, the locations of which are given in footnotes 2 and 3 above.

them to be outward expressions. The only really certain way in which to steer clear of these doctrinal hazards and their serious consequences is to maintain a silence, thereby avoiding the use of the illusions to which our language renders us so vulnerable.

However, in the course of showing how Maimonides' theology gradually evolves in Book I of the *Guide*, some of the tensions in his thought, of which commentators have spent so much effort trying to resolve, gradually became explicit, and the next step which must be taken is to establish a position with respect to these. In the last chapter consideration was given to the interpretative method of Leo Strauss and his school in which these tensions, which Strauss usually refers to as "contradictions", play a central part, and also to that of Oliver Leaman, and in the course of this discussion reference was made to the attempt to deal with these tensions which has recently been put forward by Marvin Fox, and it is to the latter philosopher that attention will now be turned. The intention in the next chapter is to put forward a critique of the view of Fox, with a view to using this critique as a vehicle to establish the final position to be taken in this dissertation with respect to these tensions. To achieve this end, the following chapter will fall into two parts, roughly equal in length, with the first part consisting of a close and critical examination of Fox's methodological approach to the *Guide*, which will reveal some of the problems with this approach, and the second part consisting of an illustration of how an alternative explanation can be offered which accounts for these tensions without the problems linked with Fox's thesis. This second part will also show how the limits which Maimonides draws to legitimate discourse about the deity have their counterpart in his conception of the proper domain of scientific thought, and it is this somewhat pessimistic delimitation of what certain knowledge human beings can achieve which underlies the aforementioned alternative explanation for the tensions in his text.

## **Chapter Four**

### **What we can say about creation – Marvin Fox on how to read the *Guide***

#### **I**

At the beginning of the second chapter of this dissertation, two distinct strands of interpretation were identified with respect to *The Guide of the Perplexed* – the naturalistic and the harmonistic. These were described in very general terms, and associated with the names of some recent scholars of Maimonides' work. Broadly speaking, the naturalistic interpretation of the *Guide* lays considerable stress on the allegedly esoteric dimension of the text, which it uses to explain the tensions and contradictions contained therein by postulating a hidden doctrine carefully interleaved with a more open and orthodox teaching. The esoteric doctrine is aimed at the intellectual elite, while the exoteric teaching is aimed at those of Maimonides' co-religionists who are sufficiently educated in the philosophy and science of the day to understand his presentation of the conventional teachings of Judaism, but who are not part of the aforementioned elite, who by definition are a very small and exclusive cadre of scholars. By contrast, as its name implies, the harmonistic interpretation is more concerned with an attempt to reconcile the apparent opposition internal to the *Guide* between the teachings of its author *qua* devout Jew and *qua* disciple of Aristotle as mediated by his most important receptors, including Alfarabi and the remainder of the *falāsifa*.

An alternative explanation of these tensions, two of which were identified in the brief outline of the philosophical theology of the *Guide* offered in the previous chapter of this dissertation, has recently begun to emerge within the field of Maimonidean scholarship, which although drawing on elements from the two hermeneutic schools named above is clearly extraneous to both of them. The primary exponent of this explanation is Marvin Fox, who has undertaken considerable work not only to articulate and justify this explanation, but also to apply it to specific issues which are discussed in the *Guide* where Maimonides appears to be putting forward doctrines which are neither obviously nor easily reconcilable with each other. Fox's thesis is essentially that due to the profoundly difficult nature of the issues covered in the *Guide*, Maimonides' uncompromising intellectual integrity forced him into a position whereby he was

obliged to posit simultaneously doctrines which although not necessarily formally contradictory are not at all reconcilable. Fox's basic position is, in his own words, as follows.

Maimonides regularly takes seemingly opposed positions on certain issues, not because he is intellectually muddled or dishonest, or has a program for the elite which differs from his program for the untutored masses. ...On many issues, he deliberately takes the position that opposed views may each have so much to recommend them that we must commit ourselves to both and hold them in a balanced dialectical tension.<sup>1</sup>

This notion of a balanced dialectical tension is a fundamental methodological theme of Fox's, and he is careful to separate it out from what he regards as the type of artificial synthesis which he sees as the hallmark of the harmonistic school referred to above <sup>2</sup>. It informs his evaluation of many of the traditional areas of controversy in the interpretation of the *Guide*, such as the nature of divine causality, of which Fox suggests that Maimonides simultaneously offered three not fully compatible accounts, relating respectively to Aristotelian physics, Aristotelian metaphysics, and the Jewish faith, and also on the issue of prayer and the religious life, of which it is suggested that Maimonides holds two vastly differing conceptions – a philosophical one and an orthodox one <sup>3</sup>.

Although Fox makes the most comprehensive use of this notion, it has been utilised by other scholars. Howard Kreisel, who studied with Fox, also makes use of the conception of the simultaneous postulation of apparently mutually irreconcilable doctrines. Kreisel states that Maimonides' discussion of ethical issues contain a type of contradiction which is not included in the list in the introduction to the *Guide*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Interpreting Maimonides*, page 22-3.

<sup>2</sup> For example, he states that "...I am not suggesting that Maimonides offers us some kind of artificial synthesis of reason and revelation. This well-known textbook description of his method is a serious misreading" – *ibid.*, page 46.

<sup>3</sup> The discussion of divine causality takes place in Chapter 9 of *Interpreting Maimonides*, and that of prayer and the religious life takes place in Chapter 11 of the same book.

This is the contradiction that arises precisely from the desire to emphasize different points in different discussions. Each point is true from a certain perspective, but false if generalized to characterize Maimonides' entire view.<sup>4</sup>

This possibility that two apparently mutually exclusive positions may both be true when examined from different standpoints is, however, limited by Kreisel to the domain of ethical discourse<sup>5</sup> – an important qualification which Fox does not make, and which makes the latter's toleration of incompatibility much stronger than that of Kreisel. Nevertheless, the point is made that although the possibility in question is restricted by Kreisel to a relatively narrow area of philosophical activity, he is prepared to allow for its existence. For Fox, who is untrammelled by Kreisel's circumscription, it is legitimate for Maimonides to advance a position on a given philosophic topic containing divergent elements which although perhaps not standing in formal opposition to each other certainly co-exist in a precarious equilibrium, and which require a careful balancing act if they are to be simultaneously maintained, and he suggests that when examining such divergent elements it is necessary to avoid the false dichotomy of "either/or" and to be fully aware that Maimonides seeks to establish an alternative position of "both/and"<sup>6</sup>. Kreisel, although neither permitting such a universal application of this possibility, nor going to the lengths that Fox does to establish it, is clearly working along similar lines, at least in the sphere of practical philosophy.

A third scholar who is strongly sympathetic to this approach to the tensions in *The Guide of the Perplexed* is Ithamar Gruenwald, who makes the following statement.

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<sup>4</sup> *Maimonides' Political Thought*, page 184. Regarding the limit of this type of contradiction of ethics, Kreisel states that "In the final analysis... Maimonides' contradictory positions on ethics differ from the contradictions he introduces in other areas", *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> This possibility is explicitly described by Kreisel as "...the point that distinguishes the practical sciences from the theoretical ones" *ibid.*, and he claims that the practical sciences "...deal with voluntary activities in changing situations while the [theoretical sciences] deal with eternal verities", *ibid.* It seems that part of what is involved in the distinction between the two types of science is the very possibility that apparently contradictory positions in ethics may both be true when examined from different perspectives.

<sup>6</sup> This particular formulation of Fox's basic methodological principle occurs on page 43 of *Interpreting Maimonides*, and explicit discussion of the notion of opposing views co-existing in balanced tension can be found on pages 23, 45-46, 249-250, 258, 296, 297, and 319 of this book, amongst others. Indeed, it is reasonable to say that a substantial part of the first four chapters of it are taken up with the articulation and defence of this



In point of fact, more than a few of Maimonides' 'self-contradictions' may be more adequately conceived in terms of an interplay between a multiplicity of dialectical attitudes. At stake in these cases are not either-or alternatives, but complex philosophical attitudes characterized by their internal and multilayered logical difficulties.<sup>7</sup>

Having laid out in outline this recent approach to these internal difficulties which bedevil any attempt to establish a coherent and unified reading of the *Guide* it is now appropriate to turn to the arguments which are brought forward to justify it, and in view of the historical development of the approach and the extensive discussion of it in his writings it seems reasonable to turn to the case which Marvin Fox makes to establish it as a hermeneutic principle which can legitimately be applied to the *Guide*. The intention is to provide a critique of these arguments, which will occupy approximately the first half of this chapter of the dissertation, and the remainder of this chapter will involve a return to a close reading of the *Guide* itself with a view to offering an alternative approach to the types of opposition which are scattered throughout the text. This approach will hinge on showing how, subsequent to Maimonides' pessimism highlighted in the previous chapter concerning the possibility of achieving demonstrative knowledge of the deity, who is the ultimate 'object' of metaphysical thought, he has a similar lack of confidence in human ability to attain scientific knowledge of the lunar sphere and that which lies beyond it. However, having drawn what he believes to be the valid limits of our knowledge as far as both metaphysical and physical topics are concerned, he proceeds in *The Guide of the Perplexed* to discuss a variety of matters as though these limits were non-existent, and, perhaps not surprisingly, the outcomes of these discussions are not obviously compatible with his epistemological pessimism, hence the tensions in question. The importance of this alternative reading for the overall question of the possibility of a naturalistic salvation for an isolate lies in the fact that initially, at least, it would appear that Maimonides' lack of faith in the ability of the unaided human intellect to achieve certain knowledge outside a clearly limited domain would militate against the isolate achieving the type of salvation achieved by *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*.

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principle, with the remaining chapters being dedicated to exploring its ramifications for issues in Maimonides' thought pertaining to ethics, metaphysics and religion.

Fox's first point made to establish his principle is not so much an argument as a suggestion that Maimonides' use of the Arabic term which is transliterated as *ikhtilāf*, which both Fox and Pines translate as 'divergence', is intended by the author of the *Guide* to point to an esoteric dimension within it by encouraging his readers to look for types of inconsistency which are not contradictories, contraries or sub-contraries, and hence which cannot be dealt with by the canons of Aristotelian logic. Despite the fact that Fox disagrees with the Straussian approach to the interpretation of the *Guide* on many points, he has much respect for the esoteric approach, and regards himself as seeking an intermediary path between the approaches to the text which either reject out of hand the possibility of an esoteric dimension to it <sup>8</sup>, and those which like that of Strauss himself are so heavily focused on the idea of an esoteric dimension that they simply compound any esotericity present therein, and which consequentially are as obscure as the *Guide* itself. Fox believes that in seeking this path he can...

...explicate Maimonides in a way that helps to make him intelligible, *while paying full attention to the esoteric elements in his style and thought.*<sup>9</sup>

The usefulness of Fox's approach on this point stands or falls with the usefulness of the esoteric approach in general, and the latter has been discussed and set aside on logical grounds in the second chapter of this dissertation. There is no way of establishing its validity, and even if there was such a way, philosophically the esoteric approach adds little or nothing to our understanding of the content of *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

Fox has two separate but related arguments <sup>10</sup> for his thesis that Maimonides is simultaneously and deliberately holding views which he knows to be incompatible, and

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<sup>7</sup> "Beyond Philosophy and Prophecy", page 147. In footnote number 14 to the same article Gruenwald acknowledges the similarity of his approach to that of Fox.

<sup>8</sup> Such as that of Oliver Leaman, whose approach to the *Guide* was discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>9</sup> *Interpreting Maimonides*, page 66 (my italics).

<sup>10</sup> The order in which these arguments will be examined here is a straightforward reversal of the order in which Fox presents them in Chapter 4 of *Interpreting Maimonides*. The inter-linked nature of the arguments renders it irrelevant in which way they are approached, and as it is the argument from the treatment of oppositions where the propositions in question take singular terms as their subjects which has the more important consequences of the two, the approach to be taken here is to deal with this argument secondly, and at greater length, despite the fact that Fox himself proffers it first. As will be seen, the argument from the logical status, or rather from the lack of

that he does so by a delicate balancing act which maintains these views in a dialectical tension, and which often requires great intellectual effort to maintain the necessary equilibrium. The first argument involves the claim that not only are many of the divergences contained within the *Guide* not instances of opposition between contradictory, contrary or sub-contrary propositions, but also that often they are not even instances of simple opposition between propositions, being perhaps between a proposition and a jussive, or between a proposition and a statement of intent, or even between a proposition and a non-linguistic entity such as an action. The second argument involves the claim that Maimonides does not assimilate singular propositions into the standard Aristotelian logical system for dealing with cases of opposition between propositions, and that consequentially even when we have a clearly identifiable opposition of a logically standard type we cannot resolve it in a straightforward manner if the subject is a singular term. The importance of this second argument lies in the fact that many, if not all, of the divergences in the *Guide* relate to God inasmuch as they arise in the course of debate about our knowledge of Him and the nature of His activities in the universe, and obviously any term which we use to refer to the deity must be singular, especially given Maimonides' strictures against regarding Him as merely a member of a species <sup>11</sup>.

The claim that there are many instances of divergence within the *Guide* which are not cases of opposition between declarative propositions, and hence which are not formally classifiable within the standard logic of the time, is on the surface fully justified, and Fox gives clear examples within Maimonides' text of such instances. Contrasting the latter's claim, made in Chapter 35 of Book II of the *Guide*, that he will not discuss the prophecy of Moses, with his actual practice in the text of discussing it in various places and in various contexts, Fox quite rightly points out that Strauss is incorrect to refer to this inconsistency as a 'contradiction'.

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logical status, of many of the divergences in question, leads neatly into the argument from the manner in which Maimonides treats singular propositions in the *Guide*.

<sup>11</sup> Maimonides' vehement denial of the possibility of relation between God and that which is other than He, which is such a fundamental part of his philosophical theology, is important here. See, for example, Chapters 55 and 56 of *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

What we have here is a statement, followed by an action inconsistent with that statement. Now a statement can be contradicted only by another statement, not by an action.<sup>12</sup>

Another example of a divergence given by Fox pertains to the fact that Maimonides appears to endorse the rabbinic teaching which commands us to imitate God, and yet in the *Guide* he makes it abundantly clear that not only is there no likeness between God and that which is other than He, but also that there is no relationship whatsoever between them<sup>13</sup>. Here the opposition which is the cause of this divergence is again not between two declarative statements, but in this instance is between a jussive and a declarative statement, and as jussives have no truth value they cannot be formally located in a relation of contradiction or contrariety to propositions expressed by declarative statements, which do have a truth value<sup>14</sup>. Fox puts the difficulty as follows.

...there can be no contradiction between a statement and a commandment. Hence we do not have here a case of direct contradiction and contrariety, but a divergence of some sort.<sup>15</sup>

Returning to the first example, although we do not have a straightforward logical opposition between two propositions, and instead have a divergence caused by an action and a statement incompatible with that action, we cannot thereby simply exclude the tools of Aristotelian logic as a legitimate means of dealing with this divergence. Maimonides' discussion in the *Guide* of Mosaic prophecy, is not only incompatible with his declared intention not to utter a single word about it, but is surely a manifestation of an undeclared intent to discuss this phenomenon. In other words, it is implicit in his discussion that he intends to discuss Mosaic prophecy, despite his claim otherwise. His action implies a statement of intent to discuss the prophecy in question, and this implied statement is indeed contradictory to the explicit one quoted by Fox from the *Guide*. On the one hand we have a statement in the *Guide*, albeit merely implicit in a subsequent action, which indicates that Mosaic prophecy will be discussed in the book, and on the other hand we have an explicit statement in the *Guide* that it will not. As the truth of

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<sup>12</sup> *Interpreting Maimonides*, page 77. Strauss' discussion of this 'contradiction' is in his introductory essay to the *Guide*, pages xxxvi to xxxvii.

<sup>13</sup> See footnote 11 above.

<sup>14</sup> The terminology is somewhat anachronistic, but the substance of what is being claimed by Fox is unaltered by the fact that it is expressed in the language of more modern logic than that of Aristotle's *Organon*.

<sup>15</sup> *Interpreting Maimonides*, page 80-81.

either statement entails the falsehood of the other, and the falsehood of either statement entails the truth of the other, it is clear that these two statements are logically contradictory and hence should be amenable to treatment by the logical techniques available at the time the text in question was written. So while Fox is partially correct in his assertion that we are dealing with an action incompatible with a statement, it is reasonable to suggest that putting that action in a broader perspective with a view to what its performance actually implies eventually yields a contradiction out of what could initially be only described as a tension or a divergence.

Fox's second example can be approached in a similar manner, and in this instance he does so himself. In so doing he leads into an illustration of the radical consequences for metaphysics which are an important consequence of the technique by which he argues that Maimonides in the *Guide* treats singular propositions. This was adumbrated above, and described as Fox's second argument <sup>16</sup>. Looking at the incompatibility between the command to imitate God, and the absolute and uncompromising insistence in the *Guide* that between God and that which is other than He there can be neither likeness nor any other type of relation, Fox qualifies his assertion in the last quotation above as follows.

...it is immediately evident that the premise on which the commandment to imitate God rests is problematic. We must assume that the fact that we are so commanded presupposes that there is some meaningful way in which the commandment can be fulfilled. This... rests on the premise that there can be some likeness between human action and divine action, and in that respect some likeness between man and God.<sup>17</sup>

We now appear to have a straightforward logical opposition between two propositions, one of which asserts that "God is a being who has some similarity to man" and the other of which asserts that "God is a being who has no similarity whatsoever to man" <sup>18</sup>. Yet according to Fox this contradiction still cannot be resolved with the tools of the *Organon*, because the subject of the proposition is a singular term, and in the *Treatise on the Art of Logic*, a much earlier work of Maimonides, the latter refuses to assimilate such propositions to any other type, and as a result of his agnosticism with respect to the

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<sup>16</sup> See footnote 10 above.

<sup>17</sup> *Interpreting Maimonides*, page 81.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, page 81.

correct logical method for approaching them we are helpless when faced with an opposition between two of them<sup>19</sup>.

This is an extremely radical thesis, the importance of which Fox fully acknowledges<sup>20</sup>, given the prevalence in metaphysics of such propositions about God. Unfortunately the evidence adduced for it is extremely tenuous, relating as it does to the *Treatise on the Art of Logic*, which written when its author was in his mid-teens can reasonably be classed as juvenilia. There is a period of over forty years separating the writing of the *Treatise* and that of the *Guide*, and it cannot simply be assumed that Maimonides carried over into the later text all the logical doctrines that he may have expounded in the earlier one<sup>21</sup>. However, there are more factors to take into account than the time difference between the periods of construction of the texts in question. First of all, there is the fact that Aristotle, who was the founding father of classical logic, appeared to have no difficulty in assimilating singular propositions into his logical system, treating singular terms as particulars. Two examples, both from *De Interpretatione*, should make this clear.

Now of actual things some are universal, others particular (I call universal that which is by its nature predicated of a number of things, and particular that which is not; man, for instance, is a universal, Callias a particular).<sup>22</sup>

Of contradictory statements about a universal taken universally it is necessary for one or the other to be true or false; similarly if they are about particulars, e.g. Socrates is white – Socrates is not white.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Fox puts it thus: "[Maimonides] distinguishes singular propositions from all other types and makes a special point of not assimilating them to any other form of proposition. He tells us nothing at all, however, about how to integrate these propositions into the standard system of logic, nor does he give us any information about how to deal with cases of opposition between singular propositions. They evidently are not to be treated like standard cases of contradictories or contraries", *Interpreting Maimonides*, page 71-72.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, page 72.

<sup>21</sup> In any case, we cannot simply assume that Maimonides' failure to assimilate singular propositions into his presentation of classical logic has any special significance of the type and magnitude claimed by Fox. One recent scholar of the period, Arthur Hyman, discussing the *Treatise*, states that it is "...a rather conventional summary of the logic of the day", "Maimonides on Religious Language", page 177.

<sup>22</sup> *De Interpretatione*, Chapter 7, 17a38-17b1 – page 27 in Volume One of *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, as cited in the bibliography.

It is reasonable to question whether the mature Maimonides would have operated with a logical system which differed from those Aristotelian systems already in existence in such an important respect, bearing in mind the profound ramifications for metaphysics of excising singular terms from any system of logic, without actually announcing his departure from the established tradition in which singular terms are treated as either universal or particular <sup>24</sup>. It is only to be expected that any difference of view between Maimonides and his predecessors which is not simply a mere technicality, but which, on the contrary, is a difference the importance of which cannot be overestimated, would be brought clearly into view. After all, in Book II of the *Guide* where he engages with the arguments for the eternity of the world and expresses his disagreement with Aristotle on this point, he makes this disagreement fully explicit.

...all that Aristotle and his followers have set forth in the way of a proof of the eternity of the world does not constitute in my opinion a cogent demonstration, but rather arguments subject to grave doubts... <sup>25</sup>

Admittedly, this rebuttal of Fox's thesis is speculative, based as it is on historical factors rather than philosophical ones, but is no more speculative than the thesis itself. Fortunately, there are more concrete arguments against it – three, to be precise. The first argument is based on Maimonides' own practice in *The Guide of the Perplexed*. In laying out his philosophical theology, which is solidly based on Aristotelian logic, metaphysics and physics, as outlined in the last chapter, he makes free use of singular terms as part of the examples offered by way of illustration of this theology. For instance, in Chapter 52 of the first book of this text, where he explains why exactly it is that we must deny the possibility of relation between God and that which is other than He, he uses as his examples singular terms – Zayd, Umar, Bakr and Khālid – rather than particular terms, to illustrate his point that although relational attributes have no

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 7, 17b27-29 – page 28 in Volume One of *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, as cited in the bibliography.

<sup>24</sup> Fox states that Alfarabi, who was a great influence on Maimonides in all areas of philosophy, including that of logic, shared Aristotle's view that singular propositions should be classified as particular (*Interpreting Maimonides*, page 71, footnote 9), admitting as he does that the stand he is attributing to Maimonides has "no clear precedent" (*ibid.*).

<sup>25</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.16, page 293. Maimonides' claim in the previous chapter of the *Guide* that Aristotle knew well that his arguments for the eternity of the world were not fully demonstrative does not reduce the difference between him and the Greek philosopher on this point.

implications with regard to the quiddity of the terms of the relations, they cannot properly be ascribed to the deity. We can say that Zayd is the partner of Umar, the father of Bakr, and the master of Khālīd, without making any positive statement regarding the essence of Zayd <sup>26</sup>. Likewise, in Chapter 68 of the first book of the *Guide*, which Maimonides devotes to his noetic, Zayd again is used as an exemplar <sup>27</sup>. It is unlikely that Maimonides would do this if the logic underpinning his text did not integrate singular terms in any of the standard ways whatsoever, which is what Fox is claiming.

The second argument against Fox's thesis regarding the treatment of singular terms in the *Guide* follows directly from the previous one. Obviously, God is not the only entity properly referred to by a singular term, and even if one wants to say that classical logic is a weak and limited instrument for discussing God and His nature and actions, this does not entail such a radical agnosticism regarding the correct treatment of all singular terms. It is unlikely that Fox really wishes to claim that, for example, the propositions 'Khālīd is six feet tall' and 'it is not the case that Khālīd is six feet tall' are not logically contradictory <sup>28</sup>.

The third argument pertains to the fact that a proposition which has as its subject a singular term does not thereby change its truth value when it is converted to one which has as its subject either a universal or a particular term. In his discussion of the divergences in the *Guide*, Fox correctly points out that there are passages in the text where Maimonides appears to hold views regarding the possibility of demonstrating the existence of God which are not merely divergent, but are formally contradictory.

Here we seem to have an actual instance of a contradiction. One statement affirms that there are no proofs for the existence of God, while the other affirms that there are some proofs for the existence of God. A universal negative is opposed by a particular affirmative, and these are true contradictories.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The example cited occurs in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.52, page 117.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, page 165.

<sup>28</sup> This assumes, of course, that the name 'Khālīd' refers to an existing individual. If this is not so, then the propositions in question would require a different logical analysis, depending on one's preferred technique for dealing with declarative propositions in which the subject is non-existent.

<sup>29</sup> *Interpreting Maimonides*, page 85.



Fox deals with this apparent contradiction, which at first blush undermines his basic methodological principle, in the following manner.

It is logically correct to construe the propositions in question as contradictories only if we formulate them with the term 'proofs' as their subject. If, on the other hand, we decide that the correct formulation should have 'God' as the subject, the entire situation is changed. Then they would read: 'God is a being whose existence can be proved' and 'God is a being whose existence cannot be proved'. These are singular propositions which require a different analysis. We are now faced not with a set of contradictories, but with some sort of divergence. We do not have any logical tools for dealing with this difficulty, but we can give some account of what is before us.<sup>30</sup>

The account in question is, of course, the by now familiar notion of divergent views held in dialectical tension <sup>31</sup>, and Fox's solution to this apparent contradiction is to attempt to show that it is only a contradiction when viewed from a particular perspective and that a simple conversion is sufficient to remove the difficulty. However, this apparently straightforward and legitimate manipulation of the offending propositions will not achieve what it is intended to, because (i) the reformulation of the propositions so that 'God' becomes the subject rather than 'proofs' can be shown to change their logical status in the process, which defeats Fox's purpose, and (ii) the reformulation ignores an important explanatory principle to the validity of which Maimonides subscribes.

The first reason pertains to the fact that the first pair of propositions – those with 'proofs' as their mutual subject – are clearly contradictories; as Fox points out, logically one is a universal negative and the other is a particular affirmative, and the truth of each of such a pair implies the falsity of the other, as the falsity of each implies the truth of the other. However, the second pair of propositions – those with 'God' as their mutual subject – are contraries because although they cannot both be true, it is possible for them both to be false if there is no such being as God. In other words, the first pair of propositions do not state that there is a God and their logical status is not dependent on the ontic status of their mutual subject – the truth of one entails the falsehood of the other and vice versa, regardless of the existence of the subject. If the term 'God' is replaced by the term 'the Tooth Fairy' there is still a contradiction here. However, this is not the case for the

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, page 86.

<sup>31</sup> See footnote 6 above.

second pair of propositions, where God's existence *in some sense* is an integral part of what is being claimed inasmuch as the expression 'God is a being' has existential import, *however weak this may be*. The italicised phrases are intended to show that no strong ontological commitment is being made here to the deity, and indeed in the context of this attempted refutation of Fox's the strength of this commitment is not relevant – all that it is intended to show here is that in the process of reformulating the propositions an additional element is introduced which is sufficient to change the logical status of the opposition between them. If God does not exist (in any sense of the word 'exist') then both propositions are false, and as they cannot simultaneously be true it can be clearly seen that they are contraries rather than contradictories. The logical status of the opposition here is qualified by an existential statement, which is not the case with the opposition between the first pair, and if the opposition of the first pair of propositions is of a different logical type to that of the second pair, then Fox's conversion is invalid. He has not merely changed the subject of the first pair, but rather he has substituted for them two similar propositions, which differ in a crucial respect from the original ones <sup>32</sup>.

Fox would probably reply to this that regardless of whether the opposition between the post-conversion propositions is one of contradiction or contrariety, the subject of these propositions is a singular term. However, as outlined above, he has no good reasons for attributing to Maimonides such a radical treatment of singular terms in *The Guide of the Perplexed*. The invalidity of the conversion simply cannot be ignored, and although it may well turn out to be of little consequence, it is an indication that considerable

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<sup>32</sup> This can perhaps be best illustrated by symbolising the propositions in question as follows:

Px = x has the property of being a proof of the existence of God  
 Gy = y has the property of being God

A1: (x)(-Px)	there are no proofs of the existence of God
A2: (∃x)(Px)	there are some proofs for the existence of God
B1: (∃x)(∃y)(Gy & Px)	God is a being whose existence can be proved
B2: (x)(∃y)(Gy & -Px)	God is a being whose existence cannot be proved

The presence of the extra (existential) quantifier in the pair B1 and B2 and its absence from the pair A1 and A2 makes the point. The wording of B1 and B2 is Fox's.

caution is required. The appearance of the existential quantifier <sup>33</sup> may well have metaphysical implications which are not immediately obvious, but to explore the point further at this juncture would be a philosophically unprofitable and hence unnecessary excursus.

The second reason why Fox fails to achieve his aim with the argument under discussion is that even if the difficulty highlighted in the previous two paragraphs above is put on one side, then given the supposition that the conversion is valid it is unlikely that Maimonides would accept what appears to be a clear violation of Themistius' principle that correct opinions should confirm to the nature of that which exists rather than the nature of that which exists conforming to the various opinions <sup>34</sup>. It is an essential aspect of logic that it is about the formal structure of how we describe the nature of what exists, and for Maimonides and for the philosophers of his day this nature is something independent of the way in which it is described. He would not have countenanced the idea that this nature is not entirely independent of the structure of how we describe it, as has become a philosophical commonplace with Kantian and post-Kantian idealism. In other words, conversion of the type attempted by Fox, which merely involves restructuring a statement by changing its subject would not alter its essential truth conditions, which are both external to it and independent of it. If it is true that either there are no proofs of God's existence or there is such a proof <sup>35</sup>, then nothing changes when we merely reshuffle the logical constituents of these propositions – what makes these propositions true or false remains unchanged. In sum, Fox's logical sleight of hand fails both for the reason outlined in this paragraph and for the reason outlined in the two paragraphs prior to this one.

## II

However, despite the difficulties identified above with Fox's attempt to establish the fundamental methodological approach put forward in *Interpreting Maimonides*, this approach is an attractive alternative to those generally adopted by the harmonistic and

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<sup>33</sup> See previous footnote.

<sup>34</sup> This is a fairly close paraphrase of what Maimonides actually states in the *Guide* at I.71, page 179. See footnote 16 of the third chapter of this dissertation for his articulation of what has been referred to above as 'Themistius' principle'.

<sup>35</sup> Taking this disjunction as exclusive, of course.

naturalistic schools. These offer respectively either a dissolution by various ingenious methods of the divergences of *The Guide of the Perplexed* by showing how the poles of these can be reconciled, or by admitting their reality and irrefragability but attributing this to the latent and intentional stratification of the text. Fox's approach has the virtue of emphasising the comprehensive nature of Maimonides' discussions of the topics which he covers in the *Guide* – discussions which explore a wide range of different doctrines and their ramifications without ever appearing to be constructed in order to justify a preordained conclusion <sup>36</sup>. Nevertheless, not all recent commentators are sympathetic to Fox's conception of Maimonides as holding divergent elements together in a tense equilibrium. In a recent book focussed on Maimonides' theory of prayer, and the allegedly incompatible elements contained therein, Ehud Benor makes the following claim.

Fox's solution is, then, to attribute to Maimonides a conscious contradiction that cannot be resolved because neither of the conflicting views can be given up. His solution goes too far in suggesting that it is possible to affirm a self-contradictory position, with sincerity, only because one is unable to give it up.<sup>37</sup>

This is somewhat unfair, because the whole thrust of Fox's arguments is to assert that Maimonides' divergent positions on so many topics are not actually contradictory at all. However, hopefully enough has been shown above to make it clear that for a variety of reasons these arguments fail to establish what they are intended to do. Unfortunately, if this is so it raises the question of how to proceed now in order to render a more satisfactory account of the multiplicity of tensions and incompatible views, whether formal or otherwise, within *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Fox may indeed have gone "too far", but he has, nevertheless, rightly identified the question of how these difficulties are to be resolved as the key issue for any methodology which would illuminate this complex text in a manner which is both coherent and philosophically enlightening. Perhaps, at this juncture, the most promising way to proceed is to return to the text of the *Guide* itself, to ascertain if a careful interrogation of Maimonides' own words might not suggest a different solution to the problem.

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<sup>36</sup> This was one of Maimonides' accusations against the proponents of *kalām*. Speaking of the *Guide*, he advises that "...you should not desire that I should let you hear in this Treatise the argumentation of the *Mutakallimūn* that is intended to establish the correctness of their premises", *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.71, page 183.

The first and obvious point which must be made is that any proposed solution can only be speculative and somewhat tentative. It is not possible to offer a perspective on the difficulties in question which is beyond dispute. However, by taking as a point of departure the question as to whether the divergences<sup>38</sup> have any one feature held, if not in common, then at least in the majority of cases, it is possible to make some progress. It is clear from a scrutiny of much of the secondary literature on the *Guide*, and from even a casual perusal of the text itself, that many of the divergences relate to metaphysical theses such as the ontogenesis of the world, the nature of divine providence and causality, and the correct way to worship God<sup>39</sup>. They even extend as far as such fundamental questions as the very possibility of proving the existence of God. In many places he indicates that this is entirely possible.

...the heaven proves to us the existence of the deity, who is its mover and its governor...<sup>40</sup>

...these two principles, I mean the existence of the deity and His being one, are knowable by human speculation alone.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, in at least one place in *The Guide of the Perplexed* he is much less optimistic about this possibility. Speaking of the heavens, he makes the following statement.

...even the general conclusion that may be drawn from them, namely, that they prove the existence of their Mover, is a matter the knowledge of which cannot be reached by human intellects.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Worship of the Heart*, page 68.

<sup>38</sup> To continue with Fox's preferred terminology, which he borrows from Maimonides.

<sup>39</sup> Although, initially, this does not appear to be a matter for metaphysics, it is reasonable to state that any conclusions on how such worship should be carried out will be supported, either explicitly or implicitly, by a metaphysical underpinning.

<sup>40</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.18, page 302.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, II.33, page 364. The general context in which this quotation is embedded, which pertains to the equal status of the prophet and the philosopher as far as the cognition of demonstrative truth is concerned, makes it clear that although Maimonides does not explicitly claim in either of the passages cited that God's existence can be demonstrated, only 'proved' or 'known by speculation', in the second quotation it is implicit that the existence of the deity can be demonstrated. Pines' footnote 10 on page 291 of his translation of the *Guide* is relevant here.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, II.24, page 327. Admittedly, the contradictory of this radical claim – that the human intellect can deduce the existence of God from the heavens – occurs much more frequently in the *Guide* than the claim itself, and the latter is made in a context where Maimonides is drawing strict limits to rational thought, and hence might understandably

If there are divergences in the text concerning such foundational theses then the very possibility of the metaphysical enterprise as a whole is in question, at least as far as superlunary metaphysics is concerned, and in the part of Book II of the *Guide* where Maimonides is attempting to adjudicate between the opposing views of the origin of the world offered by Aristotle and his Islamic expositors, on the one hand, and that of the devotees of the Mosaic Law, on the other, one of his main lines of argument is based on the fact that Aristotle's doctrines are limited in scope as far as their truth is concerned. There is neither need nor opportunity to delve too deeply into the subtle and complex debate on this topic which is contained in *The Guide of the Perplexed*. All that needs to be said at this juncture is that a central plank of Maimonides' argument against the doctrine that that which is other than God is a necessary and immutable effect of His essence, in which purposive and volitional activity play no part <sup>43</sup>, is to cast doubt on the ability of Aristotelian philosophy to yield sure and certain knowledge of the lunar sphere and that which is located beyond it, and it is in this context that the sceptical citation above occurs.

Maimonides delimits the scope of applicability of Aristotle's philosophy to the universe in a number of places. For example, he makes the following statement.

Everything that Aristotle has said about all that exists from beneath the sphere of the moon to the center of the earth is indubitably correct... On the other hand, everything that Aristotle expounds with regard to the sphere of the moon and that which is above it is, except for certain things, something analogous to guessing and conjecturing.<sup>44</sup>

Further on in the discussion he reiterates this point.

All that Aristotle states about that which is beneath the sphere of the moon is in accordance with reasoning; ...However, regarding all that is in the heavens, man grasps nothing but a small measure of what is mathematical; ...I shall

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wish to emphasise the weakness of the human intellect. Nevertheless, this does not alter the fact that as quoted he states clearly and unambiguously that a proof of God's existence drawn from the nature of the heavens is beyond human ratiocination.

<sup>43</sup> The first paragraph of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.19, pages 302-312, contains a concise summary by Maimonides of the view which he is opposing.

<sup>44</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.22, pages 319-20.

accordingly say in the manner of poetical preciousness: *The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth hath He given to the sons of man.*<sup>45</sup>

Although the first quotation is *ad hominem*, the second quotation makes a universal point about proper place of mankind in the universe, and the concomitant cognitive limitations that this entails, and this is immediately reinforced by Maimonides.

...the deity alone fully knows the true reality, the nature, the substance, the form, the motions, and the causes of the heavens. But He has enabled man to have knowledge of what is beneath the heavens, for that is his world and his dwelling-place in which he has been placed and of which he himself is a part. ...For it is impossible for us to accede to the points starting from which conclusions may be drawn about the heavens; for the latter are too far away from us and too high in place and in rank.<sup>46</sup>

This latter quotation precedes the quotation above in which Maimonides is shown to be casting doubt on the possibility of proving the existence of the deity by reasoning from the nature of the heavens.

As is normally the case when interpreting *The Guide of the Perplexed*, it is important to locate any citation from the text in the particular context in which it occurs. These statements, which well illustrate Maimonides' awareness of the proper limits of human knowledge, occur as stated above in a part of the text in which he is attempting to refute the type of metaphysical explanation for the origin of the world customarily offered by his predecessors who subscribed to Aristotle's theories regarding this area. A central plank of his argument is to reveal areas of Aristotle's astronomy and metaphysics in which no explanation in terms of necessary causation can possibly be satisfactory, while simultaneously acknowledging the explanatory force of the same philosopher's metaphysics and physics in unearthing the hidden mechanisms which govern the sublunary world – the world of generation and corruption. In place of the all-generating causal nexus posited by his opponents, the activity of which is inexorable to the point where talk of God's will must be interpreted in a figurative manner, Maimonides wishes to substitute God's purposive and volitional activity to which all generation in the superlunary world must ultimately be referred. He undertakes a detailed analysis of the structure and movements of the heavens in an attempt to show that only

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, II.24, page 326-27 (translator's italics).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, page 327.

particularisation <sup>47</sup> by a purposing being can satisfactorily explain why they are constituted as they are and why they move as they are observed to. Two examples should suffice to illustrate his methodology here. Firstly, if we consider the sphere of the fixed stars then on Aristotle's theory we are left unclear as to why these stars, which vary considerably both in size and in density of distribution throughout the body of the sphere, are located in their respective parts of the sphere. As the body of the sphere is "...one simple body in which there are no differences" <sup>48</sup>, we cannot account for this by the differing receptivity of the matter of the different parts of the sphere. We can, however, explain it by postulating the particularising activity of the deity, the wisdom and rationale behind which it is not given to us to know. Secondly, given that each sphere is induced to move by desire for its particular separate intellect, then as these intellects are incorporeal and hence not spatially located we need to explain why one sphere moves in a westerly direction whereas another moves in an easterly direction, and this can only be done by postulating a purposing and particularising deity rather than a deity from whose essence the universe proceeds in a non-volitional and eternally unchanging manner. Once again Aristotle's theories are found by Maimonides to be inadequate, and not simply because mathematics has moved on so significantly since the Greek thinker developed his philosophical astronomy <sup>49</sup>, but because the whole project of attempting to explain the nature and activity of the superlunary world within the same schema which accounts so satisfactorily for that of the sublunary world is fundamentally misconceived. These two examples are supplemented by a plethora of others <sup>50</sup>, based on the best astronomy of Maimonides' day, and all designed to make it clear that when we consider what we can observe of the heavens we are inexorably led to postulate the existence of a particularising deity.

Although Maimonides' arguments are primarily intended to support a more traditional conception of a personal creator-God as against the impersonal cosmic first cause advocated by Aristotle and his receptors, they have as a consequence the clear marking

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<sup>47</sup> In his enumeration of the methods of the *Mutakallimūn*, Maimonides approvingly discusses the method of particularisation stating that "...this is to my mind a most excellent method", *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.74, pages 218-19, although he makes a very different use of it than they do.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, II.19, page 310.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.19, pages 307-8, and II.24, page 326.



out of an epistemological boundary between, on the one hand, the world below the sphere of the moon, and on the other, the lunar sphere itself and that which lies above and beyond it. As rational human agents, capable of rigorous intellectual thought about that which lies around us, the sublunary world is not only our proper domain as far as scientific thought, conceived as that which operates solely by strict demonstration in the technical sense given in Aristotle's *Organon*, is concerned. The boundary of this world also delimits that which is rationally knowable. This is, of course, not to say that we cannot speculate about the lunar sphere and beyond, where this includes not only the corporeal spheres but also the Separate Intellects and other incorporeal beings, such as the souls of the spheres <sup>51</sup>, merely that we cannot expect our conclusions to possess the status of apodeictic, scientific knowledge. They are, at best, "...something analogous to guessing and conjecturing" <sup>52</sup>, and despite the incontrovertible fact that as objects of thought the heavens are infinitely superior to, and more noble than, the contents of the lunar sphere, in terms of their epistemological status these conclusions are very different from the type of knowledge which we are capable of obtaining about our own realm via Aristotelian logic, metaphysics, and physics. To put the matter another way, if we start from the centre of our earth and move outwards, cognitively speaking, we do not proceed along a smooth epistemological continuum to the outer sphere, the boundary of the extended universe. On the contrary, when we reach the lowest sphere – that of the moon – we pass a boundary which is qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from that which precedes it.

This rather pessimistic and radical scepticism regarding the possibility of scientific knowledge of the superlunary realm has one particular important consequence for the question of how the many and varied divergences in *The Guide of the Perplexed* can be interpreted. By his own account Maimonides has cast serious doubt on the likelihood of obtaining certain knowledge of many areas of traditional metaphysics, insofar as these areas are shown to be not susceptible to the rigorous treatment of demonstrative science.

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<sup>50</sup> Most of these examples are contained within the relatively lengthy Chapter 19 of Book II of *The Guide of the Perplexed* (pages 302-12).

<sup>51</sup> Maimonides' ontology of the heavens is scattered throughout a number of chapters of *The Guide of the Perplexed*. There is a concise summary contained within II.10, especially on page 271, which commences with a suitable qualification given the speculative nature of the subject matter: "It is likewise possible that the arrangement of the universe should be as follows".

<sup>52</sup> See footnote 44 above.

Consequentially the question of how the results of this "guessing and conjecturing" are to be evaluated now arises. Demonstration guaranteed that providing the initial axioms of a scientific enquiry are carefully selected as "true and primitive" <sup>53</sup> and are only subjected to deductive treatment fully in accordance with the established rules of logic, then the conclusions yielded by the enquiry are true and apodeictic. This guarantee of veracity, which acted as a bulwark against poor science and philosophy has now been removed, at least in terms of superlunary science and metaphysics, and the benchmark against which the results of these activities could have been evaluated has been similarly afflicted. Furthermore, Maimonides does not even allow for the possibility of speculation regarding the nature of the heavens to be evaluated by the degree with which it accords with the observed movements therein. In his view, the purpose of the astronomer is to develop a system of celestial physics which is in accordance not only with observation but also with certain basic principles of Aristotle's metaphysics, such as the need for the movements of heavenly bodies to be circular and of constant velocity, rather than to yield true and certain knowledge of the actual structure and movement of these bodies. Maimonides is entirely explicit and unambiguous in his delineation of the somewhat limited and theory-bound role assigned to the astronomer, speaking of whom he makes the following statement.

*...his purpose is not to tell us in which way the spheres truly are, but to posit an astronomical system in which it would be possible for the motions to be circular and uniform and to corresponded to what is apprehended through sight, regardless of whether or not things are thus in fact.*<sup>54</sup>

On this view, the astronomer's proper function is limited to accounting for the observed movements of the heavenly bodies in accordance with sound Aristotelian principles, rather than the more lofty task of providing information about the quiddities and activities of these bodies. Put another way, albeit somewhat anachronistically, the astronomer's core task is to construct in a prescribed manner mathematical models of the heavenly bodies which are consistent with data obtained by empirical observations of these same bodies, and hence astronomy, in the Maimonidean sense, does not profess to yield scientific knowledge, except in an attenuated and non-Aristotelian sense of the term, of the superlunary realm. The significance of this is that it reveals that *The Guide of the Perplexed* presents a restricted version of astronomy – a science which might

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<sup>53</sup> See footnote 61 to Chapter Three of this dissertation.

otherwise have been thought to succeed in transcending the limitations of attainable demonstrative knowledge stated by Maimonides, and articulated in the three quotations above <sup>55</sup>.

It may be arguable that even Maimonides' rather narrow conception of astronomy undermines his general thesis that the lunar sphere forms the lower boundary of a realm unknowable by demonstrative science. After all, the ontology of the spheres, which in varied forms was a commonplace to mediaeval philosophers, is not the result of pure reflection, that is to say, reflection devoid of an empirical component – on the contrary, it is largely the result of metaphysical reflection on the observable heavenly bodies. The sophisticated mathematical models of the heavens available in the twelfth century were the culmination of centuries of pure metaphysical speculation combined with both an increasingly sophisticated mathematics and a legacy of careful astral and planetary observation. If the astronomical element in this mixture is claimed to have no epistemological value, then doubt can reasonably be cast on the very existence of the fundamental entities of this ontology such as the matter of the spheres themselves, their intellects and souls.

However, it is not necessary to explore further the possibility of such an argument. What is relevant at this point is what Maimonides actually states in the *Guide* regarding the limits of human knowledge, and this is clearly expressed in the passages cited above. If what he states is taken seriously, and in the absence of a Straussian approach to the text there is no reason not to do this, then what has been presented is an extremely radical and far-reaching trammelling of human cognitive powers concerning that which transcends the sublunary world, in the sense that it is not naturally found within it, and obviously this would encompass all putative topics of knowledge from the lunar sphere itself right up to God. What is left as the epistemological domain proper to man would, for example, include the type of biological and physical investigations undertaken by Aristotle and those of his successors who were sufficiently empirically-minded to engage in the sense-based pursuit of knowledge of mundanities rather than the purely intellectual enquiry into exotica such as the superlunary spheres, which are the preferred topic of investigation of the metaphysician. This is not to say that we cannot indulge in

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<sup>54</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.24, page 326 (my italics).

<sup>55</sup> See footnotes 44 to 46 above.

speculation concerning metaphysical topics, merely that we cannot expect our investigations to yield true and certain knowledge, as would be yielded by properly conducted scientific investigations confined to sublunar entities. Maimonides has set in place an unambiguous demarcation of legitimate topics of scientific investigation, and yet it is crystal clear from a mere acquaintance with the contents of *The Guide of the Perplexed* that its author makes no attempt whatsoever to limit his discussions to topics which lie within the realm to which he claims demonstrative knowledge is limited. Indeed, as the beginning of Strauss's introductory essay to Pines' translation of the *Guide* reveals in three concise pages, Maimonides touches on almost every conceivable metaphysical topic current in his day <sup>56</sup>. Now if Maimonides is sincere in his description of Aristotle's speculations on the heavens as "something analogous to guessing and conjecturing" <sup>57</sup>, and in his contention that regarding the heavens "man grasps nothing but a small measure of what is mathematical" <sup>58</sup>, and, as stated earlier in this paragraph, it is assumed here that he is sincere, then by coupling these two assertions it is made clear that a substantial part of *The Guide of the Perplexed* must be qualified in the same way that Aristotle's speculations on the heavens are said to be qualified. If this is so, then it is not surprising that the Maimonidean text is bedevilled by divergences, whether these are logical oppositions in the sense of propositions which are contradictory, contrary or sub-contrary, or non-logical tensions between grammatically different entities, as discussed earlier in this chapter. This is not to say, of course, that it is not possible to extract from the *Guide* a fully coherent *Weltanschauung*, where this term is taken in a sufficiently broad sense to encompass both sublunary and superlunary realms, and also both corporeal and incorporeal entities <sup>59</sup>, merely that this coherence will clearly be neither incontrovertible nor straightforward.

What is now being suggested is, first of all, that the peculiar character that the *Guide* has in terms of the divergences within it which are elicited when his pronouncements on a given topic, which are normally scattered throughout the text, are aggregated, could very possibly be illuminated by the fact that the text contains a fundamental pessimism regarding the possibility of superlunary metaphysics and physics, which is both unambiguously articulated and uncompromising. Secondly, despite this pessimism

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<sup>56</sup> "How to Begin to Study The Guide of the Perplexed", pages xi to xiii.

<sup>57</sup> See footnote 44 above.

<sup>58</sup> See footnote 45 above.

<sup>59</sup> Including the deity, as allegedly demonstrably incorporeal.

Maimonides makes no effort to remain within his self-diagnosed cognitive limits, but on the contrary continues to deal comprehensively with many themes which are a basic element of such metaphysics and physics, giving no indication that he regards his discussions and conclusions as only conjectural in nature. If this is indeed so, then some explanation is required. Maimonides explains in the introduction to the first part of his book that he expects his readers to exhibit care when reading it, and to be aware of how much thought has gone into the selection of each word which it contains.

If you wish to grasp the totality of what this Treatise contains, so that nothing of it will escape you, then *you must connect its chapters one with another*; and when reading a given chapter, your intention must be not only to understand the totality of the subject of that chapter, but also to grasp each word that occurs in it in the course of the speech, even if that word does not belong to the intention of the chapter. For the diction of this Treatise has not been chosen at haphazard, but with great exactness and exceeding precision...<sup>60</sup>

Maimonides is craving the indulgence of his readers who, once the process of aggregation referred to above has been undertaken, will be aware of the tensions within the contents of the book. Shortly after setting forth this warning, he makes the following statement.

One of seven causes should account for the contradictory or contrary statements to be found in any book or compilation.<sup>61</sup>

Although he does not overtly state that this principle applies to his own book, he is not required to do so – it is expounded as a principle of universal application. He then enumerates these seven causes, identifying the fifth cause, which pertains to pedagogics, and in particular to instruction concerning abstruse matters, and the seventh cause, which pertains to the need to conceal some discussions from the unlearned masses, as those which account for the divergences in the *Guide*<sup>62</sup>. Now, although it would hardly be reasonable for any disclaimer advanced in the introduction to a book in respect of subsequent contradictory or contrary statements to be found therein, to be expected to absolve the author from having his or her work subjected to close scrutiny, it would equally unfair to assume that any such statements are simply the result of human error

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<sup>60</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I. Introduction, page 15 (my italics).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, page 17.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, page 17-20.

<sup>63</sup>, an assumption which Marvin Fox accuses contemporary academic philosophy of being overly ready to make, regarding not only Maimonides, but also the other great philosophers <sup>64</sup>. This principle implies that the imputation of error to a philosopher of Maimonides' stature should be the last resort when dealing with divergences such as those evident in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, and this appears all the more reasonable when it is considered just how evident these divergences are. Many of them lie exposed, so to speak, on the surface of the text – they do not lie buried waiting for a detailed analysis of the type favoured by Leo Strauss and his school to unearth them.

The suggestion made above, that these divergences could be viewed in the light of Maimonides' declared limits to the scope of demonstrative knowledge, which for a mediaeval philosopher of Aristotelian leanings would have been considered to be the unqualified apotheosis of natural reason, will be explored in the next chapter. However, the perspective to be adopted there will be to approach *The Guide of the Perplexed* using as a point of departure the early work of Ludwig Wittgenstein – a twentieth century philosopher who at first blush may appear to have little in common with Maimonides, or at least little which might perhaps shed any light on the strange tensions with which the *Guide* is transpierced, but whose early work can hopefully be shown to offer a useful and different route to tackling the latter text. The immediate objective is to use Wittgensteinian ideas to construct a different manner of interpreting Maimonides' strictures on not attempting to transgress the limits to which, as hylomorphic and created beings, we are necessarily subject; these limits applying both to the domain of natural reason, as epitomised by demonstrative knowledge, and to that of proper discourse about the deity <sup>65</sup>. The rationale for adopting this philosophical perspective will unfold as the next chapter proceeds, and this act of unfolding will be concluded in

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<sup>63</sup> Human error is not included in Maimonides' list of causes of contradictory or contrary statements – presumably because, although he does not actually say so, his list is a list of such statements where the opposition in question is intended by the author of the statement.

<sup>64</sup> Fox, instead, suggests the following hermeneutic approach to textual difficulties of the type under discussion: "One must work long and hard before finally concluding that Plato was silly or that Descartes was incapable of seeing an elementary logical fallacy. They were only human, and it is always possible that they slipped. However, readers earn the right to make such a judgement only if they know what it means to read a text with meticulous care and mature understanding, and if they have exhausted every effort to understand the author seriously in his or her own terms" – *Interpreting Maimonides*, page 64-65.

<sup>65</sup> This was discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

the final chapter of the dissertation. Broadly speaking, the intention is to highlight several features which the doctrines of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and Maimonides' *Guide* have in common, which are relevant to the main question concerning the possibility of the isolate achieving salvation, concerning, as they do, the limits of human language and knowledge. There is, of course, no attempting to deny the vast differences between these doctrines in many other respects, nor is there any attempt to suggest that Wittgenstein was in any way whatsoever influenced by Maimonides <sup>66</sup>.

At this juncture it might be helpful to review briefly the implications of the latter half of this chapter for the isolate. These are apparently severe given that the posited isolate, as epitomised by Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, is existing in a congenital and total vacuum in terms of language, religion, culture, and fellow human beings, and is totally dependent on unaided human reason not only to meet his daily needs for shelter, sustenance and safety from attack by predatory animals, but also to progress intellectually to the point where salvation from the contingencies and vagaries of the transitory hylic existence allotted to all created beings can be reached. It is this unaided human reason that Maimonides regards as a weak instrument for gaining real and certain knowledge of the sphere of the moon and that which is 'above' it, both literally and metaphorically. The need to understand the sublunary world, if only to meet essential human needs, is well within the declared limits of mankind's rational powers, but transmundane objects of thought, ranging from the lunar sphere through to the transcendent and essentially ineffable numen, are far beyond these limits. As a consequence, it would appear that the necessary progress from brute, empirical reality to the deity, by which Ibn Tufail's hero achieves salvation, would seem to be an impossibility if one takes Maimonides' above-quoted utterances on the topic as seriously as they should be taken. Certainly, speculation on the nature of the superlunary realm would still be possible and may eventually lead to the concept of a creator God, of whom no positive attributes can be predicated and of whom positive discussion is only possible by drawing analogical inferences from human actions and the emotions which are thought to underlie these actions <sup>67</sup>. However, speculation is still only "something analogous to guessing and conjecturing", even when undertaken by such a master of philosophical thought as Aristotle, and in Chapter Six of this dissertation, when the soteriology found in *The*

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<sup>66</sup> See footnote 6 to the next chapter for a brief expansion of this point.

<sup>67</sup> This was also discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

*Guide of the Perplexed* is laid out by undertaking the process of aggregating Maimonides' comments on this topic, it will be clear that something more solidly based than conjecture is required to enable us to transcend our status as hylic and correspondingly finite creatures. In the same chapter, Maimonides' epistemological pessimism will be interpreted in a manner which will allow for a conception of salvation based on noesis, as achieved by the eponymous hero of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*.

This in itself will not provide an answer to the overall question of whether a Maimonidean isolate will attain salvation, and there are two reasons for this. First of all, Ibn Tufail's soteriology is not necessarily identical, or even relevantly similar, to that of Maimonides, and after all, it is the latter's text that is being examined – the relevance of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* in this context lies in the fact that it provides a vivid and powerful backdrop to the question of whether a naturalistic conception of salvation is to be found in the *Guide*. Secondly, it would be unreasonable to ignore the statements in the *Guide* which would tend to imply that Holy Writ and the post-Biblical writings sacred to Judaism are essential to salvation, and a lack of exposure to which, such as that of an isolate, would completely debar a salvific seeker from attaining his or her goal. Put another way, in more contemporary parlance, it may well be that a soteriology which insists on a certain level of intellectual development for salvation to be possible may well be one in which noesis is a condition for salvation which is necessary but not sufficient. This final hurdle for the isolate to overcome will be addressed in Chapter Eight. However, this is moving ahead too quickly. Following this brief methodological excursus in the last two paragraphs, the next step is to examine the question of the Maimonidean limits of human scientific thought and philosophically proper language concerning the deity from the standpoint of the early work of Wittgenstein.



## Chapter Five

### Using Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* to approach the Guide

#### I

At first blush it might seem as though Wittgenstein and Maimonides have so little in common that there is nothing in the work of the Austrian thinker that could usefully illuminate difficult areas of Maimonides' thought. Certainly, when a comparison is made of their backgrounds and life circumstances some points of contact spring to mind without much reflection. Both were Jewish <sup>1</sup>, both were highly influential thinkers who undertook the vast majority of their work removed from their respective homelands and in a cultural and intellectual milieu which was foreign to them, and both lived difficult lives in highly turbulent times. In terms of their work, both were multifaceted writers, who were individually regarded in highly different and often incompatible ways, by their respective receptors. In Maimonides' case this has already been discussed in Chapters Two and Four above. In Wittgenstein's case these various interpretations relate predominantly to his earlier work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which for a long time after its publication was viewed as predominantly a logical tract in the tradition inaugurated by Frege and Russell, at least by modern philosophers in the Anglo-American analytic tradition, and a tract the elliptic nature of which even led to its author being regarded as one of the founding fathers of Logical Positivism, a school of thought whose *Weltanschauung* was completely antipathetic to that of Wittgenstein <sup>2</sup>. However, in the last thirty years a completely different school of interpretation has emerged concerning the *Tractatus* in particular, and Wittgenstein's early work in general. This school does not deny the historical importance of this work in terms of its influence on modern philosophy, including logic, but takes as a hermeneutic point of departure the

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<sup>1</sup> Although he was not a practising Jew, three of Wittgenstein's four grandparents were Jewish, and his attitude towards his Jewishness continues to be a topic of contemporary controversy. See, for example, Ray Monk's biography, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, Chapters 14,18 and 19; David Edmonds' and John Eidinow's account of Wittgenstein's legendary confrontation with Karl Popper – *Wittgenstein's Poker*, Chapters 9,11 and 12; and the two papers on the topic in *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, edited by James C. Klagge – "Wittgenstein and the Idea of Jewishness", by Brian McGuinness, and "Was Wittgenstein a Jew?", by David Stern.

<sup>2</sup> Monk offers a clear account of the temperamental differences between Wittgenstein and the members of the Vienna Circle, quoting Carnap's comparison of these

view that the motivation underlying the aphoristic *Tractatus* is a desire not so much to make contributions to epistemology, metaphysics, or logic, but to present a view of the world which is fundamentally and irreducibly ethical in nature, and one which is committed to the primacy of those areas of human experience transcending easy, or more significantly, possible, encapsulation in rational discourse, such as ethics, aesthetics, and religious belief. The best way to indicate the purpose of the *Tractatus* is to let its author speak for himself, as he does in the brief Preface to the book.

The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.

Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. should have to be able to think what cannot be thought).

It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense.<sup>3</sup>

This passage, with its reference to the limit of valid expression of thought and the consequent need for silence, gives a prefatory view of the perspective that the *Tractatus* will be used to give on *The Guide of the Perplexed*. However, before proceeding any further it is essential to detour briefly to make more precise the nature of this suggested perspective. The intention is most definitely not to represent Maimonides as holding a doctrine which is a mediaeval prefiguration of that of the *Tractatus* – a project which would be both anachronistic and indefensible. Rather it is to participate in the quintessentially (later) Wittgensteinian practice of 'seeing connections'. There is a concise and useful explication of this notion in a recent article by Ray Monk on the nature and value of philosophical biography<sup>4</sup>, and although his remarks are made in a different context, they are equally relevant in the context under discussion. Speaking of

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differences as those which separate a creative artist or a religious seer from a scientist – *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, page 244.

<sup>3</sup> Preface to *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, page 3. Those who regarded the book as a contribution to the dissemination of the embryonic doctrine of Logical Positivism would have believed that the classification of that which lies outside the limit as "nonsense" would support their view of the book, but Wittgenstein's point is that it is precisely this "nonsense" which is ultimately what really matters. This point is nicely made in the quotation from Paul Engelmann, a friend of Wittgenstein's, cited on page 220 of Janik and Toulmin's *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, a work which in terms of the interpretation of the *Tractatus* as primarily an ethical work was epoch-making.

"the understanding that consists in seeing connections", Monk makes the following claim, which is worth quoting at length.

In Wittgenstein's later work, this is explicitly contrasted with *theoretical* understanding, and this is one of the most important respects in which he believed himself to be swimming against the tide of what he called "the spirit which informs the vast stream of European and American civilization". Whereas that spirit seeks to construct theories, Wittgenstein seeks merely to *see* clearly. Thus the form Wittgenstein's later work takes is not to advance a thesis and then to defend it against possible objections, but rather to say, "Look at things this way". ...Drawing out connections is a perilous business because it can often appear as if one is making assertoric statements, claims to truth, to the effect that there *is* such and such a connection, and then there can arise the question, "Well, is there, in reality, such a connection or not?"<sup>5</sup>

To ask for logical or epistemological grounds for offering such a connection is to misconceive the notion itself. Hence what is being suggested in this dissertation is most definitely not that there is an irrefragable and clearly verifiable link between the early work of Wittgenstein<sup>6</sup>, and that of the mature Maimonides, rather it is being suggested that if we "look at things this way" we may, perhaps, find that positing such a connection illuminates those aspects of Maimonides' text which were identified in the previous chapter as being a hindrance to answering the question of whether an isolate such as Hayy Ibn Yaqzan could have achieved salvation according to the teachings of *The Guide of the Perplexed*. As discussed, these relate mainly to issues concerning the limits of what can be discovered by unaided rational thought, and, concomitantly, the possible need for the texts of revealed religion to supplement such thought in order that

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<sup>4</sup> "Philosophical Biography: The Very Idea", pages 3-15 of *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, to which reference was made in footnote 1 above.

<sup>5</sup> "Philosophical Biography: The Very Idea", page 5 (Monk's italics and use of quotation marks).

<sup>6</sup> Wittgenstein's reading in the history of philosophy was notoriously unsystematic, and there is no evidence that he ever encountered *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Given what is known about his preferred texts, it is unlikely that he would have been attracted to much mediaeval philosophy, whether Jewish, Islamic, or Christian, considering its often rather dry and apparently detached approach to its subject matter. One of the main contentions of those who regard the *Tractatus* as primarily an ethical book is that the most philosophically significant influences on Wittgenstein were not logicians such as Frege and Russell, but writers such as Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, whose writings appear to manifest more emotional involvement with their subject matter than might be thought desirable or possible with philosophers whose subject matter is more overtly technical – a feature common to much mediaeval philosophy as well as to modern logic. Georg Von Wright neatly sums up Wittgenstein's approach to classic texts of philosophy in his "A Biographical Sketch", pages 18-19.

salvation might be brought within the grasp of a committed seeker. On the other hand, it may be counter-claimed that the enterprise does not cast any light on these issues and that the posited connection between Wittgenstein and Maimonides is no more than a chimera, and just as the existence of the connection cannot be established by factual and logical grounds, neither can such a counter-claim be rebutted in this manner. All that can be done with such an opponent is to attempt to facilitate the 'seeing' of the connection by highlighting relevant aspects of its poles – in this case, on the one hand, certain aspects of Wittgenstein's early work, and on the other hand, certain aspects of *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Monk compares this process of showing the connection to trying to illustrate a facial likeness between a mother and her baby by adverting to particular facial features which may be thought to be good manifestations of the likeness<sup>7</sup>.

It is this illustrative process that will initially be undertaken in this chapter, although its full implications will not become clear until it is completed in a later chapter. It will be carried out in three parts, the first two of which take place in the present chapter, with the third one being located in the final chapter of the dissertation<sup>8</sup>. The first part is to outline as briefly as is compatible with a coherent presentation of Wittgenstein's theory how he arrives at the position quoted above that "what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence"<sup>9</sup>. The core of this theory lies in the two important and linked distinctions between 'saying' and 'showing', and between what can be articulated in language and what cannot be thus articulated and about which, therefore, we must remain silent. It would be possible simply to present Wittgenstein's conclusions without any of the preceding argumentation, but it would be harder to present them accurately without the logico-metaphysical context whence they are derived and which gives them their significance. One of the main reasons for this is that part of what is involved in understanding his conclusions is the realisation that they radically undermine the arguments which provide their underpinning. Wittgenstein himself referred to the propositions in his book, the bulk of which is engaged in constructing an elaborate logical and metaphysical edifice upon which its ethical terminus rests, as recognisable as nonsense once this terminus has been reached, and in a strikingly memorable metaphor compares them to a ladder which one

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<sup>7</sup> "Philosophical Biography: The Very Idea", page 5.

<sup>8</sup> There is a prefiguration of this part at the end of the present chapter.

discards after having climbed up it <sup>10</sup>. The second part, which immediately succeeds the first one, is to connect this somewhat paradoxical notion of a doctrine which undermines the arguments upon which it is based with the suggestion made in the previous chapter that the unusual character that the *Guide of the Perplexed* has as far as its internal consistency is concerned can perhaps be explained by regarding Maimonides' text from a similar, although not identical, perspective. The third part, which, as stated above, will be located in the final chapter, is, firstly, to look at what these distinctions mean for Wittgenstein by highlighting the type of material in which he believes that that which lies beyond direct linguistic articulation makes itself manifest, and, secondly, in the light of this to provide what will hopefully be a final answer to the overall question posed by this dissertation – whether or not salvation is attainable on a Maimonidean framework for an isolate in the sense defined by *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*.

The point of departure for any explication of the *Tractatus* must necessarily lie in a theory of meaning which has become known as the 'Picture Theory', however, it would be neither desirable nor practical to explain fully this abstruse and difficult theory <sup>11</sup>. The aim now is to render a schematic account of it in order to proceed to the conclusions which it enabled Wittgenstein to draw, which, for the purposes of this dissertation, are more pertinent and interesting than the theory itself <sup>12</sup>, and this will be done by using either his own words or uncontroversial synonyms, as far as this is possible. This approach, by attempting to resist the understandable temptation to exegesis, has the distinct advantage that it removes the risk of a supervenient layer of inadvertent and potentially distortive interpretation, which would be inappropriate in the circumstances, and fortunately the aphoristic nature of his rather terse account of the theory lends itself well to a brief, albeit extremely skeletal, representation.

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<sup>9</sup> See footnote 3 above.

<sup>10</sup> *Tractatus*, 6.54, page 74.

<sup>11</sup> A full explanation would necessitate an engagement with the enormous secondary literature on this aspect of the *Tractatus*, and such an engagement would be an unnecessary diversion in the present context.

<sup>12</sup> He later repudiated this theory, viewing it as conceived out of, and consequentially dependent on, an unnecessarily restricted view of the function of linguistic expressions. One clear expression of this dissatisfaction occurs in paragraph 23 of *Philosophical Investigations*, page 12e.

Essentially, the theory is an ontology which consists of a linked atomistic metaphysics and a theory of language, which posits an isomorphism between the realm of meaningful linguistic utterances, conceived primarily as consisting of assertoric sentences, and an underlying reality which these sentences are used to describe. He launches his account by explaining that "The world is all that is the case", the world being described as "...the totality of facts, not of things" <sup>13</sup>, and a "fact" is defined as "the existence of states of affairs", the latter being defined in turn as "a combination of objects (things)" <sup>14</sup>. The atomistic nature of Tractarian reality is made clear by the following three statements.

Objects are simple.

Every statement about complexes can be resolved into a statement about their constituents and into the propositions that describe the complexes completely.

Objects make up the substance of the world. That is why they cannot be composite.<sup>15</sup>

These simple objects provide an immutable and stable element in the world – what changes is their configurations, and it is these differing configurations which bring about differing states of affairs <sup>16</sup>, and it follows from all the foregoing that the structure of a given combination of objects is equivalent to that of the corresponding state of affairs <sup>17</sup>, which in turn is equivalent to that of a fact <sup>18</sup>. The world is identified with (1) "the totality of existing states of affairs" <sup>19</sup>, with this totality also determining which states of affairs are non-existent <sup>20</sup>, and, equivalently, with (2) the "sum-total of reality" <sup>21</sup>; "reality" being defined as "the existence and non-existence of states of affairs", with the conjuncts being called "positive" and "negative" facts, respectively <sup>22</sup>. Unlike in the atomism of the *Mutakallimūn*, discussed in Chapter Three above, the aggregations of atoms which constitute complex entities have an inherent structure, and it is this

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<sup>13</sup> *Tractatus*, 1 and 1.1, page 5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 and 2.01, page 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.02, 2.0201 and 2.021 respectively, page 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.0271 and 2.0272, page 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.031 and 2.032, page 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.034, page 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.04, page 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.05, page 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.063, page 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.06, page 8.

structure which permits the state of affairs which results from a particular combination to be linguistically representable. This representation is described as occurring via the notion of a picture, where "picture" is taken in a sufficiently broad sense to encompass, for example, the manner in which music is represented by a written score <sup>23</sup>. A picture is described as "a model of reality" <sup>24</sup>, and there is a correlation between the components of the picture and that which is being pictured or modelled <sup>25</sup>, which in this case is extra-linguistic reality. This correlation is called the "pictorial relationship", and it is this relationship which makes a picture into a picture <sup>26</sup>, as well as the fact that its component parts are mutually related in a specific manner <sup>27</sup>. The importance of this mutual relationship is explained as follows.

The fact that the elements of a picture are related to one another in a determinate way represents that things are related to one another in the same way.  
Let us call this connexion of its elements the structure of the picture, and let us call the possibility of this structure the pictorial form of the picture.<sup>28</sup>

This notion of pictorial form is crucial for this account of how language obtains its purchase on reality, and is elaborated several times in quick succession by Wittgenstein, after he has introduced it.

Pictorial form is the possibility that things are related to one another in the same way as the elements of the picture.<sup>29</sup>

Once again:

What a picture must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it – correctly or incorrectly – in the way it does, is its pictorial form.<sup>30</sup>

It follows from the definitions of pictorial relationship and pictorial form that in the picture there must be elements corresponding to those in the depicted reality, as well as an isomorphism between picture and depicted.

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example, *Tractatus*, 2.182, page 10, and also 4.014 and 4.0141, page 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.12, page 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.13 and 2.131, page 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.1513 and 2.1514, page 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.14, page 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.15, page 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.151, page 9.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.17, page 9.

Wittgenstein applies this rather abstract theory of representation in general to thought and language, and thus gives it a more concrete content. The pictorial vehicle in both is the proposition, which is given utterance through a propositional sign, namely a sentence in a given language, and which is described as an expression of a thought which is perceptible by the senses, with the propositional sign being described as a sign "with which we express a thought" <sup>31</sup>. A proposition is described as a picture or model of reality, and if initially it does not appear to be a model of extra-linguistic reality, it must be remembered that neither does musical notation initially appear to be a model of the music which it represents <sup>32</sup>, and a proposition enables a thought to be expressed in such a manner that there is a correlation between its objects and the elements of the propositional sign <sup>33</sup>. These elements are the atomic components of language – Wittgenstein refers to them as "simple signs" or "names" <sup>34</sup>, and explains that the meaning of a name is an object, which as stated above is a simple entity. The relationship between names and the objects is further elaborated as follows.

The configuration of objects in a situation corresponds to the configuration of simple signs in the propositional sign.

In a proposition a name is a representative of an object.<sup>35</sup>

Putting the above together, it appears to be the case that a name is a simple entity which is a linguistic proxy for an equally simple object whence it derives its meaning, and that each proposition represents a (possible) state of affairs, and fulfils this representational role by (a) sharing a common structure with the corresponding state of affairs, and (b) being constituted of atomic elements each of which correlates with a constituent element of the state of affairs. However, obviously the assertion of a proposition is not a guarantee that the state of affairs thus represented actually obtains, hence the bracketed qualification that the proposition represents a *possible* state of affairs, the existence of which is independent of the assertion in question.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.1 and 3.12 respectively, page 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.01 and 4.011 respectively, pages 19-20.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.2, page 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.201 and 3.202, page 12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.21 and 3.22 respectively, page 13.



A proposition constructs a world with the help of a logical scaffolding, so that one can actually see from the proposition how everything stands logically *if it is true*.<sup>36</sup>

To understand a proposition means to know what is the case *if it is true*.  
(One can understand it, therefore, without knowing whether it is true.)  
It is understood by anyone who understands its constituents.<sup>37</sup>

This can be related back to Wittgenstein's account of the notion of pictorial form<sup>38</sup>, in which it is the *possibility* of isomorphism between picture and associated depicted reality which is being posited. For a picture to be a genuine picture it is only necessary that there is a logical possibility that the elements of that which is depicted share a common structure with the elements of the picture itself with which they are correlated. If this possibility is never actually realised this does not affect the status of the picture *qua* logical picture – a picture which presents a situation which does not obtain in reality can still be acceptable as a picture, albeit a wrong one<sup>39</sup>. In this sense the world of the *Tractatus* is the aggregate of all possible states of affairs and not merely of those that are existent. If a proposition is asserted, then what is being asserted is that the state of affairs represented by it obtains in reality, however, this obtention is independent of the proposition itself, and its non-existence entails the falsehood of the proposition, which does not thereby lose its sense<sup>40</sup>. Wittgenstein explicitly identifies the total collection of true propositions with "the whole corpus of the natural sciences", of which philosophy is not one, being "not a body of doctrine, but an activity"<sup>41</sup>. Philosophy's

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.023, page 21 (translator's italics).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.024, page 21 (my italics). Also relevant here is Wittgenstein's comment that "It must not be overlooked that a proposition has a sense that is independent of the facts...", *ibid.*, 4.061, page 23.

<sup>38</sup> See footnotes 28, 29 and 30 above.

<sup>39</sup> In Wittgenstein's *Notebooks*, written between 1914 and 1916, while he was on active service in the Austrian Army, and while he was developing the doctrine that would eventually find final articulation in the *Tractatus*, he makes the following observation: "Can one negate a *picture*? No. ...I can only deny that the picture is right, but the *picture* I cannot deny. ...By my correlating the components of the picture with objects, it comes to represent a situation and to be right or wrong" – *Notebooks*, entry for 26<sup>th</sup> November 1914, page 33e (translator's italics).

<sup>40</sup> Wittgenstein puts it thus: "Every proposition must *already* have a sense: it cannot be given a sense by affirmation. Indeed its sense is just what is affirmed" – *Tractatus*, 4.064, page 24 (translator's italics). Elsewhere he claims that "The sense of a proposition is its agreement and disagreement with possibilities of existence and non-existence of states of affairs" – *ibid.*, 4.2, page 30.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.11, 4.111 and 4.112, respectively, page 25. Later on in the *Tractatus*, speaking of elementary propositions, which are propositions with minimal internal

proper activity is clarification of propositions and of the thoughts which these are used to express, rather than the production of specifically philosophical propositions<sup>42</sup>.

Philosophy sets limits to the much disputed sphere of natural science.

It must set limits to what can be thought; and, in doing so, to what cannot be thought. It must set limits to what cannot be thought by working outwards through what can be thought.

It will signify what cannot be said, by presenting clearly what can be said.<sup>43</sup>

At this point it is possible to see that despite the enormous differences between the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *The Guide of the Perplexed*, in terms not only of the proper task of philosophy, but also of the metaphysics underlying the texts, that both Wittgenstein and Maimonides share a common concern with the limits of thought and language. Despite the enormous advances in natural science in the period of over seven hundred years between the production of these two texts, which had exposed the limitations and weaknesses of the Aristotelian underpinnings of the science of the twelfth century, Wittgenstein here expresses an unequivocal recognition of the limits of the knowledge available through natural science – limits which are not simply a function of the state of development of the science in question, but which are conceptually inherent in the science itself. His reason for positing the limits relates to the accessibility of the manner in which language through propositions represents reality. The following three sections of the *Tractatus*, which are worth quoting in their entirety, make this abundantly clear.

Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be put into words can be put clearly.

Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – logical form.

In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say outside the world.

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complexity (4.21, 4.211 and 4.22, page 30), he states that "If all true elementary propositions are given, the result is a complete description of the world. The world is completely described by giving all elementary propositions, and adding which of them are true and which false" – 4.26, page 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.112, page 25.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.113, 4.114 and 4.115, respectively, pages 25-26.

Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them.  
What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent.  
What expresses *itself* in language, we cannot express by means of language.  
Propositions *show* the logical form of reality.  
They display it.<sup>44</sup>

The logico-pictorial form which enables propositions to represent possible states of affairs in the world is not something which can itself be represented explicitly in language. This form is shown or displayed in the very articulation of the propositions, but it is not, and cannot be, directly expressed as they themselves are – this would require a transmundane logic, the existence of which would directly contradict the assertion made in the opening aphorism of the *Tractatus* <sup>45</sup>. Wittgenstein expresses this limitation in his usual terse manner, claiming that "What *can* be shown, *cannot* be said" <sup>46</sup>. The truth of a proposition is partly dependent on the existence of a common logical form shared by the proposition and the posited part of extra-linguistic reality which it represents, and referring to this possession of logical form as a "structural property", or an "internal property", when it concerns facts, or as a "formal property" when it concerns objects or states of affairs <sup>47</sup>, Wittgenstein clearly lays out the inherent inability of propositions to express in a direct manner the nature of this structure.

The existence of an internal property of a possible situation is not *expressed by* means of a proposition: rather, it *expresses itself in* the proposition representing the situation, by means of an internal property of that proposition.  
It would be just as nonsensical to assert that a proposition had a formal property as to deny it.<sup>48</sup>

This notion is neatly exemplified in the treatment given in the *Tractatus* to tautologous and contradictory statements, which are the limiting cases <sup>49</sup> of the logical principle that the truth-conditions of a proposition are a function of the truth-possibilities of its atomic components <sup>50</sup>. A tautologous statement is one in which the proposition which it expresses is true for all truth-possibilities of its components, and, at the other end of the

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.116, 4.12 and 4.121, respectively, page 26 (translator's italics).

<sup>45</sup> See footnote 13 above.

<sup>46</sup> *Tractatus*, 4.1212, page 26 (translator's italics).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.122, page 26.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.124, page 27 (my italics).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.46, page 34, and 4.466, page 35.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.3, 4.4, 4.41, 4.431, pages 32-33.

spectrum, a contradictory one is false for all truth-possibilities of its components <sup>51</sup>. In between these extreme cases are, of course, those statements which form the majority of declarative propositions and which are true for some combinations of their elementary components and false for others, and this trichotomy can be expressed modally as between necessary, impossible and possible propositions respectively <sup>52</sup>. Tautologies and contradictions have no "sense" in the meaning of this word already given <sup>53</sup>, and hence make no assertions regarding extra-linguistic reality.

Tautologies and contradictions are not pictures of reality. They do not represent any possible situations. For the former admit *all* possible situations, and the latter *none*.<sup>54</sup>

There is no state of affairs the obtention of which could render a tautology false, or conversely, which could render a contradiction true; put in Tractarian terms, they possess no truth-conditions, being unconditionally true and under no condition true respectively <sup>55</sup>. The important point for present purposes is that despite appearing to *say* something substantive about the world, they merely *show* their lack of sense.

Propositions show what they say: tautologies and contradictions show that they say nothing.<sup>56</sup>

The tautology *shews* what it appears to *say*, the contradiction shews the *opposite* of what it appears to say.<sup>57</sup>

To use Wittgenstein's own example, the statement "either it is raining or it is not raining" adds nothing to the general stock of meteorological knowledge, but does, however, reveal something about the relations between its constituent symbols, namely that "it is raining" and "it is not raining" are contradictory <sup>58</sup>. The logical structure

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.46, page 34.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.464, page 35.

<sup>53</sup> See footnote 40 above. Their lack of sense does not thereby render them nonsensical – they are identified as being part of the symbolism (presumably of logic) in a similar way as '0' is an arithmetical symbol – *Tractatus*, 4.4611, page 34.

<sup>54</sup> *Tractatus*, 4.462, page 35 (translator's italics).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.461, page 34.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>57</sup> *Notebooks*, entry for 14<sup>th</sup> October 1914, page 12e (translator's italics).

<sup>58</sup> The example comes from *Tractatus*, 4.461, page 34. The interpretation of the application of the distinction between saying and showing to tautologous and

underpinning extra-linguistic reality is exhibited in a non-direct manner by such statements, although they themselves say nothing directly about the world thus underpinned.

A further example of the crucial distinction between saying and showing appears later on in the *Tractatus*, this time in the context of a discussion of the process of logical inference. The simplest possible occurrence of the logical inference known as *modus ponens* is of the general form:  $((Q \rightarrow P) \ \& \ Q) \rightarrow P$ . The validity of this inference becomes obvious to anyone who understands the symbols in which it is expressed <sup>59</sup>, however, there is no further way of explaining it to someone who does not understand other than an ostensive exhibition of its validity, and such an exhibition of validity clearly belongs in the realm of showing, not that of saying. Wittgenstein puts it as follows.

If  $p$  follows from  $q$ , I can make an inference from  $q$  to  $p$ , deduce  $p$  from  $q$ .  
The nature of the inference can be gathered only from the two propositions.  
They themselves are the only possible justification of the inference.  
'Laws of inference', which are supposed to justify inferences... have no sense, and would be superfluous.<sup>60</sup>

A person who truly understands the symbols in a statement which instantiates the process of logical inference, whether these are formal, as in the general form of *modus ponens* given above, or linguistic, in an non-formal instantiation, will comprehend the validity of the inference. If the inference is especially complicated then it may need to be analysed into readily cognisable parts, however, the principle still applies.

Logic must look after itself...  
In a certain sense, we cannot make mistakes in logic.<sup>61</sup>

Self-evidence... can become dispensable in logic, only because language itself prevents every logical mistake.<sup>62</sup>

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contradictory statements in general, and to this example in particular, comes from Anthony Kenny's book *Wittgenstein*, page 45.

<sup>59</sup> These can be formal, as given, or non-formal, as in the rather hackneyed text-book example: given 'if Socrates is a man then Socrates is mortal' and 'Socrates is a man' then it follows that 'Socrates is mortal'. Once it is fully understood what the constituent words mean then the validity of the inference is undeniable.

<sup>60</sup> *Tractatus*, 5.132, page 39.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.473, page 47.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.4731, page 47.

The principles of logic manifest themselves in our language – they cannot be explained directly because such an explanation would presuppose their very existence and use, and hence would only be fully comprehensible to someone who did not actually require it, namely, a totally fluent user of the language in which it was couched. In the by now familiar Tractarian terminology, logical form can only be shown, not said.

The above two instantiations of the utility of the saying/showing distinction are both drawn from logic, or to be more precise, from metalogic. However, on Wittgenstein's own account metalogic is an impossible discipline if conceived as an attempt to describe directly, whether verbally or symbolically, how exactly our linguistic and extra-linguistic reality is permeated by a common logical form. That it must be thus permeated is a condition of propositions representing extra-linguistic reality, as the picture theory has already made clear, and yet this theory has rendered impossible the existence of a meaningful metalogic. Logical form *expresses itself in* our language, but cannot be *expressed by* our language <sup>63</sup>. Wittgenstein himself fully acknowledges this – indeed, it is a fundamental tenet of the school of thought that interprets the *Tractatus* primarily as an ethical treatise, where ethics is taken in a sufficiently wide sense to include value in general, that the severe Tractarian circumscription of what can be directly expressed through language is the whole point of the book. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, he uses a vivid and oft-quoted metaphor at the end of the book in which he compares his doctrine to a ladder which can be discarded after one has used it to ascend to a higher vantage point. Once a reader of the *Tractatus* has reached the higher perspective afforded by an understanding and appreciation of the theory of logical and linguistic representation contained therein, he or she will recognise the lack of "sense", in the Tractarian usage of this term <sup>64</sup>, of the propositions in which this theory is expounded, and consequentially will recognise the necessity of transcending them in order to "see the world aright" <sup>65</sup>. Concerning what is revealed from this higher, or transcendental, perspective, Wittgenstein makes the following comments.

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<sup>63</sup> See the quotation above, the location of which is given by footnote 48.

<sup>64</sup> See footnote 40 above.

<sup>65</sup> *Tractatus*, 6.54, page 74.

There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.<sup>66</sup>

The fact that the mystical is not effable in any direct linguistic manner results in a counsel of prudence, which is expressed in the powerful and deeply memorable aphorism with which Wittgenstein closes the *Tractatus*, and which is immediately redolent of Maimonides' similar counsels in *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.<sup>67</sup>

These things that are beyond linguistic expression are not such as can be addressed by natural science, which is not surprising given the identification of the whole of natural science with the "totality of true propositions" <sup>68</sup>. Both these are solely concerned with how things stand *in* the world, which is, according to the *Tractatus*, "...a matter of complete indifference for what is higher" <sup>69</sup>. How things stand *in* the world is not appropriately described by predicates pertaining to value concepts.

All propositions are of equal value.<sup>70</sup>

In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: *in* it no value exists... If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case.<sup>71</sup>

## II

The linked issues of what it is that is being referred to as "higher", and how it manifests itself, will become important in the final chapter of this dissertation. However, the

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.522, page 73 (translator's italics).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, page 74. See, for instance, footnote 23 to Chapter One of this dissertation for some of Maimonides' similar counsels.

<sup>68</sup> See footnote 41 above.

<sup>69</sup> *Tractatus*, 6.432, page 73 (see footnote 76 below). The really important questions of life are not amenable to scientific resolution: "We feel that even when all *possible* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer", and "The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem" – *ibid.*, 6.52 and 6.521 respectively, page 73 (translator's italics).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.4, page 71. This presumably refers to the fact that all that is really important as far as propositions are concerned is their *possession* of a truth value, and from this point of view their truth or falsehood is irrelevant.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.41, page 71 (translator's italics).

aspect of Wittgenstein's early thought which is most apposite now pertains to this important notion of a text which contains discrete and clearly identifiable teachings which are not only incompatible with other, similarly qualified teachings in the same text, but which also overtly exclude the very possibility of the latter teachings. In Chapter Four the suggestion was made that the tensions or divergences with which *The Guide of the Perplexed* is permeated may be accounted for by the clear and deliberate transgression by Maimonides of the epistemological limits prescribed therein. This suggestion will now be refined in the light of the assessment at the end of Wittgenstein's text that once understood properly the *Tractatus* can be seen to have transcended itself, and in so doing rendered itself otiose, and that this is because it is an attempt at a project which it itself ultimately declares to be impossible to carry out. In Wittgenstein's case this project is to say that which can only be shown, or put another way, to say the unsayable. In Maimonides' case, it is the analogously improper project of appearing to support simultaneously, in several parts of the *Guide*, doctrines which are the poles of the tensions or divergences identified and discussed in earlier chapters of this dissertation, at least some of which appear to make knowledge claims concerning not only (a) the nature of the deity in positive terms which are not obviously describable as attributes of action, but also (b) the nature of that part of His creation which we know as the superlunary world, despite the clear and cogent arguments elsewhere in the text against the propriety of such exposition. As an examples of (a) one could adduce (i) the conception of God identified in the *Guide* which appears to present Him as sufficiently mutable to respond favourably to human prayers of petition inasmuch as He is represented in the Tanakh as altering His intentions in accordance with the content of such prayers <sup>72</sup>, and (ii) the discussion of the divine noesis located in Chapter 68 of the first part of the *Guide*, in which the following claim is made.

...He is the intellectual cognition as well as the intellectually cognizing subject and the intellectually cognized object... <sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> See, for instance, Marvin Fox's discussion of this issue in Chapter 11 of his *Interpreting Maimonides*, to which reference was made in Chapter Four of this dissertation (in footnote 3).

<sup>73</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.68, page 163. Now although Maimonides, as an Aristotelian, would undoubtedly claim that this statement is entailed by God's unity, it is, nevertheless, hard to construe it as anything other than a positive statement about the divine quiddity which cannot simply be justified by claiming that it is an attribute of action. This point is also made by Shlomo Pines, in a different context when discussing the phrase quoted above: he states that "It is obvious that, if Maimonides' epistemology



Reference to an example of (b) has already been made in Chapter Four by the suggestion that Maimonides' very strictures against the possibility of apodeictic knowledge of the superlunary realm are couched in terms which presuppose the astronomical knowledge the possibility of which he is denying.

If Maimonides' arguments against the validity of such knowledge claims are accepted then they cast doubt on the very possibility of an adequate treatment of many of the issues dealt with throughout the book. His repeated insistence on the need for silence as the ultimate expression of worship of the deity, at least for those who are suitably equipped intellectually and educationally, and his strictures against not only those whose religious discourse presupposes the legitimacy of knowledge of the divine essence in terms of positive predicates which are not action-related, but also those who assert the possibility of apodeictic knowledge of the realm above the sublunary world, are couched in clear and unambiguous terms. Consequentially they undermine much of the material contained elsewhere in the *Guide* which transgresses the aforementioned proscriptions, at least some of which is couched in a similarly clear manner.

At this point it is important to qualify what is being suggested here in order to meet what might otherwise be a fatal objection to the parallel drawn between *The Guide of the Perplexed* and the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The objection is that there are two important and highly pertinent asymmetries between the texts in terms of (a) the authorial attitude to the oppositive tensions contained within them, and (b) the logical relationship between what has hitherto been referred to as the 'poles' of these tensions. It is true that Wittgenstein not only explicitly acknowledges at the end of his book that he has rendered much of his preceding argumentation devoid of 'sense', at least in his terminology, but also that this argumentation is an indispensable step in the journey towards the conclusion, albeit one which is ultimately redundant – this is the whole point of the ladder metaphor.

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognises them as nonsensical, when he has used

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is accepted, man cannot possibly have the knowledge of God that is presupposed in the 'dictum of the philosophers'" – "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides", page 104.

them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up on it.)<sup>74</sup>

There is a logically unidirectional transition from the bulk of the book, which is ostensibly a tract on logical theory, to the final part – normally defined as proposition 6.4 until its end – in which such non-logical notions as that of the mystical suddenly appear. That which is proscribed is both temporally and deductively antecedent to the actual proscription, or equivalently, one pole of the opposition is both temporally and deductively antecedent to the other one. The situation is certainly different as far as Maimonides and his text are concerned, in terms of both authorial attitude and the relationship between the poles of the tension as described above. In the Introduction to the first part of the *Guide* he declares that any "contradictory or contrary" statements found therein have two causes, referring to pedagogics and the need to protect the beliefs of the unlearned respectively <sup>75</sup>, and there is no indication that he regards any contradictory or contrary statement (or set of statements) as denuding its correlative statement (or set of statements) of epistemic content. This leads naturally to the second part of the objection, concerning the relationship between the poles of the opposition. Unlike the situation in the *Tractatus*, in the *Guide* neither pole has temporal or deductive priority over the other. To extend Wittgenstein's metaphor, one can climb both upwards and downwards on Maimonides' ladder, and neither direction justifies a subsequent abandonment of the ladder.

So the proposed parallel must be qualified to make it clear that it is limited in what it is indicating. What is being suggested is that both texts, despite the enormous differences in their underlying metaphysical presuppositions and in the philosophical orientation of their respective authors, have the following material features in common.

1. A concern to delineate in a radical and unequivocal manner both
  - (i) the limits of what human language can properly be used to discuss, and
  - (ii) the proper domain of the natural sciences, despite the very differing conceptions of the scientific enterprise held by the authors.

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<sup>74</sup> *Tractatus*, 6.54, page 74.

<sup>75</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Introduction to the First Part, pages 17-20.

2. A concern to establish that regarding the issues which are ultimately the most important for human beings <sup>76</sup>,
  - (i) these lie beyond direct linguistic articulation, and hence
  - (ii) silence is the final and predominating counsel of wisdom.
3. There is an area of thought which cannot be directly communicated (= said), but which is, however, amenable to indirect communication (= shown).

Of course, 'silence' is not necessarily to be equated with an absence of speech as such as with an absence of any attempt to convey knowledge in a factual, conceptual, and discursive manner. As will be seen in the final chapter, one of the most important media of indirect communication lies in the telling of stories, and this is very much a linguistic activity. The importance of this medium is quite clear in Wittgenstein's early thought, and is made explicit even in letters produced later in his life <sup>77</sup>. It will be suggested at the conclusion of the final chapter not only that it is also implicit in Maimonides' *Guide* but, furthermore, that this activity is quintessentially a communal one, presupposing a pre-existing cultural and linguistic framework within which the story is firmly rooted. This suggestion has obvious implications for the isolate, who, by definition, is without such a framework, and these implications will be drawn in the appropriate place.

Before bringing this chapter to a close, it might be helpful now to locate it again within the overall structure of the dissertation. It has been part of the intended purpose of the previous chapters up to and including the present one to establish the first two features posited above by drawing out the salient features of *The Guide of the Perplexed* and the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* by a close reading of the two texts. Evidence for the third feature has been adduced earlier on in this chapter, at least from the side of the

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<sup>76</sup> These are taken to be issues which, in a sense not easy to define, centre around the deity. Wittgenstein claims that "*How things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world*", *Tractatus*, 6.432, page 73 ( translator's italics). It is implicit in this that that which is higher is in some sense connected with the numinous. It is not so easy to make the same claim for Maimonides, other than to say that an assertion that those issues which are ultimately the most important for human beings are *not* those which centre around the deity, flies in the face of the spirit which fills the entire *Guide* – a text whose basic ontology is uncompromisingly focussed on God and His actions.

<sup>77</sup> See footnote 22 to Chapter Eight below, and the letter from Wittgenstein to Norman Malcolm, the location of which is provided in the footnote.

*Tractatus*, and given its author's explicit utterances on this aspect of his book the process has been relatively easy to accomplish, although as stated near the beginning of this chapter *what* is shown and *how* it is shown will be illustrated in the eighth and final chapter. The manner in which this illustration will be achieved will be by selecting what is one of Wittgenstein's own favourite examples of this phenomenon – the short stories of Tolstoy – and showing how in Wittgenstein's eyes these simple moral fables accomplish what no number of treatises of conventional moral philosophy can ever do, simply by expressing indirectly that which the latter vainly try to express in a direct manner. The position is somewhat different from the Maimonidean side, and the evidence, which will not be adduced until the final chapter, is much more oblique and open to differing interpretations, based as it is on a reading of the view of religious texts expressed in the *Guide*, and not on statements by Maimonides which are as explicit as those of Wittgenstein. Essentially, what will be suggested is that the role of showing, which for Wittgenstein is fulfilled by art and literature <sup>78</sup>, is fulfilled for Maimonides by Holy Writ, and that the parables and histories contained within the Tanakh express in a suitably indirect manner to their Jewish receptors the sort of didactic material that is not effable in a more direct manner, and which is communicated to adherents to the Christian faith by the Old and New Testaments as well as by non-revelatory and non-canonical literature such as Tolstoy's short stories. To advert to the clarificatory point made at the beginning of this chapter, and so concisely summarised by Ray Monk in the quotation located there <sup>79</sup>, this is more an instance of "seeing a connection" – of offering a different perspective which someone else may (or may not) find helpful and illuminative – than of asserting that not only does the connection definitely hold, but furthermore that it is clearly demonstrable <sup>80</sup>.

However, further preparatory steps need to be completed before the overall question regarding the possibility of an isolate achieving salvation within the metaphysical framework expressed in *The Guide of the Perplexed* can be answered. The next stage in this process is to look at the conception of salvation with which Maimonides operates in the *Guide*, as without a reasonably clear view of this conception it is obviously difficult,

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<sup>78</sup> 'Literature' in the sense intended here must be construed in a sense broad enough to encapsulate folk tales.

<sup>79</sup> See footnote 5 above.

<sup>80</sup> Demonstrable, that is, in a non-Aristotelian sense of the word.

if not completely impossible, to establish whether it is attainable by a total isolate such as Hayy Ibn Yaqzan. This task will be undertaken in the next two chapters.

## **Chapter Six**

### **A reconstruction of the soteriology of the *Guide***

#### **I**

Salvation is, of course, predominantly discussed in terms of human salvation, and it might be helpful to preface the discussion of the conception of salvation found in *The Guide of the Perplexed* with a brief excursus pertaining to the philosophy of man<sup>1</sup> which Maimonides offers in his text.

As with so many topics in the book, this one is approached from a healthy variety of perspectives, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and the emphasis of each of which is determined by the context in which it is embedded. For example, in Book III he commences his treatment of the problem of evil with a description of mankind's place in the overall hierarchy of the universe which punctures any inflated views held as to our status within it, with the only available consolation being provided by his assertion that at least we can be considered superior to other, non-human species who dwell with us in the sublunary world. He puts it as follows.

...all the existent individuals of the human species and, all the more, those of the other species of the animals are things of no value at all in comparison with the whole that exists and endures.<sup>2</sup>

...among the things that are in existence, the species of man is the least in comparison to the superior existents – I refer to the spheres and the stars. As far as comparison with the angels is concerned, there is... no relation between man and them.<sup>3</sup>

Consider... your substance and that of the spheres, the stars, and the separate intellects; ...and you will know that man and nothing else is the most perfect and the most noble thing that has been generated from this [inferior] matter; but that if his being is compared to that of the spheres and all the more to that of the separate beings, it is very, very contemptible.<sup>4</sup>

The reason why the ontological value of man is commensurable with that of the celestial bodies, but strictly speaking not with that of the angels, is because the former

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<sup>1</sup> The usual qualification applies that this term is being used in its generic sense.

<sup>2</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.12, page 442.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, page 443.

are metaphysically similar to us inasmuch as they are material bodies, albeit bodies the constitutive matter of which is of a more rarefied and superior kind to that of the bodies contained within the sublunary world, whereas the angels, which Maimonides identifies with the separate intellects, are immaterial beings<sup>5</sup>. Here, as throughout the *Guide*, he is operating here with a basic classificatory scheme<sup>6</sup>, which proceeds in a hierarchical manner upwards from (1) sublunary entities, which are constituted in part by low-grade matter, (2) the spheres, and the stellar and planetary bodies affixed therein, which are metaphysically constituted in part by a higher grade matter, (3) the separate intellects, which are non-material, and (4) God. Admittedly, this way of describing the scheme is slightly misleading inasmuch as it can be read as implying that the elements in this hierarchy are on a single scale of superiority, proceeding from (1) to (4), and hence are in a sense commensurable. The true situation, as Maimonides repeatedly emphasises throughout the *Guide* is that God cannot be compared to any of His creatures, or even posited as standing in any relationship with them<sup>7</sup>.

However, this somewhat negative evaluation of the ontic status of humankind is not the whole, or even the most important part, of Maimonides' philosophy of man. Right at the very beginning of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, in what is not only the first chapter of the entire book, but also the first of what are normally referred to as the 'lexicographic' chapters, he examines the uses of the Hebrew terms normally translated as 'image' and 'likeness' respectively. He shows how on a figurative reading of these terms in Scripture they can be interpreted as revealing the correct meaning of Genesis 1:26, in which God is described as stating His intention to make man in His image and likeness. On a literal reading of this verse we are led into the dangers of attributing corporeality to the deity, whereas on the non-literal reading proposed by Maimonides we can understand that

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, III.13, page 455 (translator's brackets).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, I.49, page 108, where the angels are explicitly described as "intellects separate from matter", and also II.4, page 258, II.6, page 262, II.10, page 273, and II.12, page 280, where they are explicitly identified with the separate intellects. It is, however, important to point out that for Maimonides the term 'angel' is sufficiently equivocal to encompass not only the incorporeal intellects, but also corporeal entities such as the spheres and the elements, inasmuch as all these entities carry out (God's) orders, albeit with qualitatively different levels of apprehension and volition – this is clear from the brief discussion in II.7, page 266.

<sup>6</sup> Obviously this scheme is only a bald outline and does not take into account any subdivisions within each category, such as the tripartite distinction within category (1) between ratiocinative beings, non-rational animals, and plants.

<sup>7</sup> This point was stressed in Chapter Three above.

what is intended is that the faculty of intellectual apprehension, which is found in man alone of all the denizens of the sublunary world, is what links us with God <sup>8</sup>. It is important to be careful not to read more into the postulation of this link than what is intended. Maimonides points out that there is a sense in which our apprehension can be compared to that of the deity inasmuch as in its exercise no corporeal faculties are required, but that this comparison must not be pushed too far <sup>9</sup>, although despite this qualification he is clear that this link is sufficiently strong to be described as a type of conjunction.

...because of the divine intellect conjoined with man ...it is said of the latter that he is *in the image of God and in His likeness*, not that God ...is a body and possesses a shape.<sup>10</sup>

Here, right at the beginning of the *Guide*, two important and persistently recurring themes of the book – God's incorporeality and His connection with man through the latter's intellectual faculty – are adumbrated. As far as the deity's incorporeality is concerned, this has been discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation, and the posited connection between God and man through the process of noesis will be elaborated upon in the what follows in this chapter. As should be clear by the end of this chapter, the

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<sup>8</sup> This, at least, is one instantiation in *The Guide of the Perplexed* of the view of Marvin Fox and Howard Kreisel, which was discussed in Chapter Four above, that some of the apparent contradictions in this text can be explained by Maimonides' technique of stressing in different places in the text what appear to be incompatible viewpoints on a given topic purely for pedagogic purposes. In the given example, when he wishes to locate man closer to his creator in the metaphysical hierarchy he focuses on our intellectual capacity which differentiates us from, and lifts us above, other sublunary creatures, and when he wishes us to retain an appropriate humility with respect to our location in this hierarchy he focuses on our essential animality and inferiority to the created beings in the superlunary realm.

<sup>9</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.1, page 23.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, (translator's italics). In the second chapter of the first book of the *Guide*, Maimonides interprets Adam's fall as involving a move from intellectual cognition, which is concerned with truth and falsehood, to a focus on "things generally accepted as known", which are not only not the subject of intellectual cognition, but which are concerned with evaluative terms such as 'good' and 'bad' rather than truth and falsehood. This is clearly interpreted as a move from the higher to the lower. Maimonides puts it as follows: "...when man was in his most perfect and excellent state, in accordance with his inborn disposition and possessed of his intellectual cognitions – because of which it is said of him: *Thou hast made him but little lower than Elohim* – he had no faculty that was engaged in any way in the consideration of generally accepted things, and he did not apprehend them. ...However, when he disobeyed and inclined toward his desires of



admittedly rather schematic noetic scattered throughout the *Guide* is essential for eliciting the soteriology contained in the text. For reasons given in the next paragraph, it is not possible to reconstruct Maimonides' noetic in much detail, and for present purposes it is not necessary — what is required is to offer in broad outline, based primarily on his own statements in the *Guide*, what his conception of salvation involves. It will be shown that Maimonides held an uncompromisingly intellectual conception of salvation, which essentially involves the possibility of some form of conjunction with the Active Intellect, and an important consequence of which is that salvation is not of the individual soul, but necessarily involves the dissipation of all that individuates a human being <sup>11</sup>.

Unfortunately, Maimonides never produced a *De Anima* or a *De Intellectu* of his own, nor did he produce a commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*. In order to show that his soteriology is closely and inextricably linked with his noetic it is necessary to piece together comments scattered throughout the *Guide* — whether these relate to individual human intellects or to the incorporeal separate intellects. The only instance in the text of a complete chapter being dedicated to the intellect is Chapter 68 of Book One, and due to the rather diffused manner in which this topic, like so many others in the *Guide*, is treated, it is not really feasible to locate his position fully within the mediaeval debate on the intellect <sup>12</sup>, which was directly rooted in a few terse sentences in Aristotle's *De Anima*. Fortunately, for present purposes such location is not essential; nevertheless, it is not possible to reconstruct his thought in this area without some reference, however limited, to some of his post-Aristotelian predecessors, due to the paucity of his

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the imagination and the pleasures of his corporeal senses ...he was punished by being deprived of that intellectual apprehension", *ibid.*, I.2, page 25 (translator's italics).

<sup>11</sup> The topic of *what* it is that survives death will be covered in the next chapter, as logically it must be preceded by showing that Maimonides actually *has* a conception of post-death salvation, albeit one which is expressed in a manner which is adumbrative to the point of requiring supplementation by reference to the doctrines of some earlier thinkers who clearly influenced his thought in this area.

<sup>12</sup> At least one recent commentator on the *De Anima* has characterised the mediaeval debate on the intellect which arose from Aristotle's text as otiose. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, in his introduction to his translation of the *De Anima*, describes the debate as "a museum piece" and "now antiquated" (pages 92 and 93 respectively), and, even worse, both "empty of real philosophical substance" and "unAristotelian" (page 93). There has been a revival of interest in the *De Anima* recently, but this has tended to focus more on the less abstract epistemological interests which have so preoccupied post-Cartesian philosophy, such as those pertaining to sense perception, than on questions of pure intellection.

statements on some important aspects of it, especially concerning the doctrine of the acquired intellect. Therefore, the approach to be taken in this chapter has three parts, as given below.

- (1) To draw forth from the *Guide* a preliminary view of the Active Intellect as described by Maimonides.
- (2) To give an account of the relevant parts of the noetic of Alfarabi<sup>13</sup>, as expressed in his treatise *Concerning the Intellect*<sup>14</sup>, in order to (i) introduce the concept of the acquired intellect, and (ii) show that the acquisition of this is the culmination of man's intellectual 'ascension', and that this ascension results in a loosely specified relationship with the Active Intellect, with this relationship being identified with the afterlife<sup>15</sup>.
- (3) To show how Maimonides' noetic in the *Guide* is fully consistent with that of Alfarabi in the text cited, in terms both of the ascension of form and of the role of the Active Intellect in salvation.

Interwoven with these three parts, there is also a partial dialogue conducted both in the main discourse and in the footnotes with Shlomo Pines and Howard Kreisel, both of whom have commented extensively on the relevant parts of the *Guide*.

As far as both (1) and (3) are concerned, the sub-procedure adopted here is to identify relevant extracts from the text of the *Guide*, and, where necessary, examine these in the direct light of the *De Anima* itself. This allows the Aristotelian roots of his doctrine to be recognised and given a part to play in the hermeneutic process, without entering into the predominantly historical question of which other<sup>16</sup> post-Aristotelian philosophers

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<sup>13</sup> Alfarabi is described by Pines as second only to Aristotle in terms of his philosophical influence on Maimonides – Translator's Introduction to *The Guide of the Perplexed*, page lxxviii.

<sup>14</sup> Pines describes this treatise as being "repeatedly referred to in the *Guide*" – *ibid.*, page lxxxi. This is a rather curious comment given that in the index at the very end of his translation (pages 657-58), which locates, amongst other things, references in the text of the *Guide* to non-Biblical writers and writings, only one explicit reference – to page 299 (II.18) – is made regarding Alfarabi's treatise.

<sup>15</sup> Pines also adverts to the fact that Alfarabi, in his lost commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, is believed to have expressed very different views concerning the possibility of such conjunction and the resultant possibility of an afterlife yielded thereby – *ibid.*, pages lxxix-lxxxii. See also his essay "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides".

<sup>16</sup> Other, that is, than Alfarabi.

influenced his work in this area, and also avoids the awkward fact that other <sup>17</sup> important expositors of Aristotle who may have influenced Maimonides, such as Alexander of Aphrodisias, and (possibly) Averroes <sup>18</sup>, offered differing and incompatible interpretations of the Greek philosopher's teaching on the topic in question <sup>19</sup>. The reason why Alfarabi is an exception to this process pertains to the doctrine of the acquired intellect, references to which are somewhat meagre in the *Guide* <sup>20</sup>. As suggested above, his primacy in terms of post-Aristotelian influences on Maimonides, coupled with a noetic which, it will hopefully be shown, is fully compatible with that of Maimonides, make him eminently suitable as a candidate for the augmentation of Maimonides' rather scattered and sketchy treatment of intellection in the *Guide*. This is not to ignore the fact that he appears at some stage in his life to have held views related to the topic in question which were incompatible with not only his own doctrine in *Concerning the Intellect* and *The Political Regime*, but also with that of *The Guide of*

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<sup>17</sup> Other, that is, than Alfarabi.

<sup>18</sup> Pines' comments in his examination of the philosophical influences on Maimonides in his Translator's Introduction are relevant here – on page cviii he claims that "...there is no conclusive proof that at the time of the writing of the *Guide* Maimonides was in any way influenced by Averroes' doctrines".

<sup>19</sup> Apart from other factors, this approach has the undoubted advantage of addressing the problem of availability of space, inasmuch as a more historical approach would inevitably extend the discussion to an impractical length. However, in any case it is not necessary for the purposes of expounding the soteriology in *The Guide of the Perplexed* to identify the historical influences from which this doctrine has risen and which have shaped its development. While this may be an interesting project, it is not essential for present purposes.

<sup>20</sup> A fact noted by Howard Kreisel in his discussion, which is not limited to *The Guide of the Perplexed*, of the Maimonidean noetic, in Chapter 4 of *Maimonides' Political Thought*. Although impossible to prove beyond doubt, it is quite possible that Maimonides' noetic is deliberately presented in such a schematic and scattered manner in an attempt to avoid antagonising his more orthodox peers. This is not to posit an esoteric doctrine encrypted in the text, in the manner envisaged by Leo Strauss and his school – merely to suggest that he tactfully avoided a single, unified presentation of his doctrine of the afterlife, as this would have unnecessarily drawn attention to views which he must have known would be controversial. If this was indeed his intention then, with the benefit of hindsight, it must be described as a failure. His teachings in the *Guide* on the purely incorporeal nature of the afterlife embroiled him almost immediately in controversy with many of his Jewish readers, who recognised the extremely heterodox nature of his views, despite the diffused and attenuated treatment which the topic receives in the text. As a result of this controversy he was forced to write the *Treatise on Resurrection*, which although not exactly a recantation presents a very different doctrine from that of the *Guide*, although Maimonides rather belligerently (and disingenuously) asserts right at the beginning of the later text that he is merely repeating what he stated in the earlier one.

*the Perplexed* <sup>21</sup>. However, it is impractical to comment on this question in this dissertation, and in any case, all that is being asserted here is that there is at least one work of Alfarabi's which can usefully augment the rather sparse treatment of the intellect, and even more sparse treatment of immortality and salvation, in the *Guide* <sup>22</sup>.

## II

Although the historical trail between Aristotle's *De Anima* and *The Guide of the Perplexed* in all its richness and specificity will not be relevant here, there is a particular tradition running through mediaeval Aristotelian philosophy concerning the Active Intellect, which is, at least in outline, standard fare amongst those philosophers, who even if not necessarily full-blown devotees of the Stagirite, are sympathetic in outlook to his general *Weltanschauung*. Maimonides expounds this tradition early on in the second book of the *Guide*, and perhaps it would be a useful point of departure to be clear about how he describes the Active Intellect, given its crucial importance for his doctrine of salvation. The universe is the end result of an emanative process ultimately originating in God in which existence "overflows" from Him in such a manner as to bring into being not only the incorporeal entities such as the separate intellects and the souls of the spheres, but also corporeal entities such as the matter of the spheres themselves and the entire contents of the lowest sphere – that of the moon. This is how he describes this process of overflowing, which, he is careful to explain, must not be understood as anything other than a simile <sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> See footnote 15 above.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Pines' comments in "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides", page 105-06.

<sup>23</sup> In *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.12, pages 279-80, it is made abundantly clear that while the notion of overflow is the most adequate metaphor that can be found to describe the emanative process, its use is another indication of the difficulty that human beings have in representing non-corporeal action without accompanying imaginative representations, which, dependent as they are on a faculty which is inextricably linked to the human body, are inevitably inadequate to capture non-corporeal action. The notion of overflow is especially suitable to describe emanation because it not only connotes action in all directions simultaneously, but (although Maimonides does not say so at this point) it also connotes action which does not entail the depletion of the activity of the agent, in this case the source of the emanation, due to the fact that the action – the overflow – is an excess, which *qua* excess is not required by its source for its own existence and activity.

...the overflow coming from Him ...for the bringing into being of separate intellects overflows likewise from these intellects, so that one of them brings another one into being and this continues up to the Active Intellect. With the latter, the bringing into being of separate intellects comes to an end.

Moreover a certain other act of bringing into being overflows from every separate intellect until the spheres come to an end with the sphere of the moon. After it there is the body subject to generation and corruption, I mean the first matter and what is composed of it.<sup>24</sup>

In an earlier chapter, he expresses the metaphysical origin of the Active Intellect thus:

...the intellect that causes the sphere that is contiguous with us to move is the cause and principle of the Active Intellect. With the latter the separate intellects come to an end, just as bodies begin similarly with the highest sphere and come to an end with the elements and what is composed of them.<sup>25</sup>

The Active Intellect stands in the same relationship to the contents of the sublunary world, as the other separate intellects stand to their respective celestial spheres<sup>26</sup>. Our awareness of its existence is the product of reflection on the Aristotelian principle that a potential X can only become an actual X through the activity of something which is already an actual X. When this principle is applied to intellect, it is seen that for an intellect in potentia to become an intellect in actu, there must be an already acting intellect to effect this change, and this is the Active Intellect<sup>27</sup>, whose activity is, however, not simply confined to helping us to realise our cognitive faculty. According to Maimonides it has another function, being responsible also for the fact that the forms of sublunary beings are brought into a state of actuality after having been contained in their matter in one of mere potentiality<sup>28</sup>. This metaphysical function is connected with

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<sup>24</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.11, pages 275-76.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, II.4, page 258.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* Given that the Active Intellect is ontologically commensurable with the other separate intellects, being merely the termination of the branch of the emanative process which created them all, and given the identification of these intellects with the angels, it follows that it is the angel of the sublunary world, and in a very real sense is 'our' angel inasmuch as 'we' are occupants of the world contained within, and thereby bounded by, the sphere of the moon.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, page 257-58.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* Oliver Leaman adverts to Maimonides' care in selecting his words in describing the effect of the existence of the Active Intellect, pointing out that Maimonides does not specifically refer to its causal action, however, it is clear that there must be some type of causal activity at work here. Maimonides does indeed refer to metaphysical features of the world and our cognitive activity which both indicate the existence of the Active Intellect, but in such a way for it to be clear that these effects are the result of the Active

the cognitive function in that it is by form that we cognise individual beings, so by actualising the forms of the entities in the sublunary world it thereby renders them cognisable.

In a section of his *De Anima* – Book III, Chapter 5 – which is worth quoting at length due to its immense historical importance, Aristotle puts the point as follows.

Since in every class of things... we find two factors involved, a matter which is potentially all the particulars included in the class, a cause which is productive in the sense that it makes them all..., these distinct elements must likewise be found within the soul.

And in fact thought... is what it is by virtue of becoming all things, while there is another which is what it is by virtue of making all things: this is a sort of positive state like light; for in a sense light makes potential colours into actual colours.

Thought in this sense of it is inseparable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity...

...When separated it is alone just what it is, and this alone is immortal and eternal...<sup>29</sup>

This section highlights in seminal form aspects of the Active Intellect which will be shown later on to be crucial to the theory of salvation in the *Guide*, and these include its essential and incessant<sup>30</sup> activity, and its immortality.

Now at this point it must be admitted that some of the material pertaining to the separate intellects in the *Guide* is located in a context in which Maimonides is apparently simply expounding the views of 'the philosophers', which normally means Aristotle and his Arabic exegetes. However, as mentioned in Chapter Four above, the principle adopted in this dissertation is that where Maimonides disagrees with the views of the philosophers, as he does, for instance, on the topics of prophecy and the origin of the

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Intellect's activity and hence are in some sense caused by it – *Moses Maimonides*, page 112.

<sup>29</sup> *On the Soul*, 430a10-23, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Volume One, page 684.

<sup>30</sup> It should be pointed out at this juncture that the activity of the Active Intellect is only incessant when the latter is considered in itself. When considered in respect to the matter upon it works it can be described as not acting if the matter in question is not suitably disposed to receive its activity – this is made abundantly clear in *The Guide of*

world, then he says so clearly and unambiguously. At no point in the *Guide* does he take issue with what the philosophers have said about either human intellectual activity or the separate intellects. He appears throughout the text to accept much of the metaphysical apparatus pertaining to this topic which was the stock in trade of those of his peers and his predecessors who were of Aristotelian leanings, and this apparent acceptance is here being taken at face value <sup>31</sup>. At the beginning of the second book of the *Guide*, he explicitly states that his purpose is not to add to the existing stock of philosophical texts, and in the Introduction to this (second) book he issues a disclaimer to the effect that his purpose in writing the *Guide* was not "...to transcribe the books of the philosophers..." <sup>32</sup>. Later on, in the second chapter of the same book, he issues a more detailed disclaimer to the effect that his purpose was not to treat of either natural or divine science or to provide demonstrations for that which they have already demonstrated, nor was it to give an account of the disposition and number of the spheres. As he puts it: "...the books composed concerning these matters are adequate" <sup>33</sup>. Obviously this rather glosses over the fact, referred to above, that the sum total of what these books contain is not an internally coherent body of knowledge, but at least his declared willingness to accept the work of his predecessors, and to use it as a tool for the furthering of his own ends <sup>34</sup>, is consistent with the methodological principle outlined above that Maimonides accepts whatever philosophical doctrine he expounds in the *Guide*, unless he indicates otherwise. As highlighted in a previous chapter of this

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*the Perplexed*, I.68, page 166, and II.18, pages 299-300, also Pines' footnote on page 300.

<sup>31</sup> Kreisel, who like so many other recent commentators on this area of Maimonides' thought, discusses the latter's theory of intellect in the context of a broader discussion pertaining to the issue of human perfection, quite reasonably points out that given the radical disagreement between Maimonides' predecessors on this topic, the scant treatment that it receives in the *Guide*, ostensibly on the grounds that the philosophers have already treated it adequately, is somewhat disingenuous. Kreisel regards this as a possible manifestation of an esoteric doctrine – *Maimonides' Political Thought*, page 142. However, another possible interpretation is simply that there is sufficient common ground between the philosophers in question for Maimonides' purposes. The topic of the intellect is one of those philosophical topics concerning which he appears quite genuinely not concerned with augmenting the existing treatments by his predecessors, being content with using existing material for his own declared ends.

<sup>32</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Introduction to the Second Part, page 239.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, II.2, page 253. Slightly later on in this chapter, citing "particular philosophic notions" such as the separate intellects, the spheres, matter and form, and the divine overflow, he states that "...these notions have been expounded in many books, and the correctness of most of them has been demonstrated" – *ibid.*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 253-54.

dissertation <sup>35</sup>, he certainly questions the certainty which superlunary metaphysics possesses, being unwilling to accede to it the status of demonstrative knowledge, but he does not argue against it, and appears content to use it as an established working model, albeit one which is merely speculative rather than established beyond rebuttal <sup>36</sup>.

### III

It is now appropriate to move to the second part of the procedure outlined above – that pertaining to Alfarabi's doctrine of the ascension of man through the various stages of intellection. In his treatise *Concerning the Intellect*, he claims that Aristotle in the *De Anima* posited a fourfold classification of intellect: (i) intellect in potentiality, (ii) intellect in actuality, (iii) acquired intellect, and (iv) active intellect <sup>37</sup>. The first of these is described as follows.

The intellect which is in potentiality is some soul, or part of a soul, or one of the faculties of the soul, or something whose essence is *ready and prepared* to abstract the quiddities of all existing things and their forms from their matters, so that it makes all of them a form for itself or forms for itself.<sup>38</sup>

These forms thus abstracted from the matters in which they are embedded become forms for the potential intellect, and are known as 'intelligibles'. The potential intellect is compared to matter in which the forms abstracted from their matters come to adhere, but whereas corporeal matters remain separate in their essences from the forms which inhere in them, the potential intellect *qua* matter for the abstracted forms is not differentiated in respect of its quiddity from the quiddities of the forms which come to inhere in it. However, the potential intellect thus conceived is only truly describable as 'potential' while it is devoid of any inherent forms <sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Chapter Four.

<sup>36</sup> In *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.24, he does engage in a technical astronomical dispute, but this is not relevant for present purposes.

<sup>37</sup> *The Letter Concerning the Intellect*, page 215. Arthur Hyman refers to the 'agent' intellect in his translation, however, for reasons of consistency, the term 'active' will be used in place of 'agent'.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* (my italics).

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, in the *De Anima*, comments that "...that in the soul which is called thought (by thought I mean that whereby the soul thinks and judges) is, before it thinks, not



...as long as there is not within it any of the forms of existing things, it is intellect in potentiality. However, when there come to be in it the forms of existing things... then that essence becomes intellect in actuality. This is the meaning of intellect in actuality.<sup>40</sup>

This transition from intellect in potentiality to intellect in actuality entails that forms, which prior to their abstraction from their matters, were intelligibles in potentiality become intelligibles in actuality. Furthermore, the intellect in actuality becomes the intelligibles. To describe the intellect as thinking is to state that "...the intelligibles become forms for it, according as it itself becomes those forms" <sup>41</sup>. The meaning of the statement that the intellect is thinking is that...

...'thinking in actuality', 'intellect in actuality', and 'intelligible in actuality' is one and the same meaning... <sup>42</sup>

The existence of the intelligibles in actuality is ontologically different from their existence as forms in matters, which is their existence in themselves, and one of the differences upon becoming intelligibles in actuality is that they become included in the class of entities existing in the world <sup>43</sup> and hence thinkable.

Since this is the case, it is not impossible that the intelligibles insofar as they are intelligibles in actuality, and this is the intellect in actuality, can also be thought. And that which is thought is then nothing but that which is in actuality an intellect.<sup>44</sup>

However, it is possible to be simultaneously not only an intellect in actuality in relation to a form which has already come to inhere in it, that is, one which is an intelligible in actuality, but also an intellect in potentiality in relation to a different form which is still only embedded in its matter and hence still only an intelligible in potentiality. When this intelligible in potentiality becomes an intelligible in actuality the intellect becomes an intellect in actuality in relation to both forms. Extended logically, this process of accumulating forms culminates in a position in which there are no more intelligibles in

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actually any real thing" – *On the Soul*, 429a22-24, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Volume One, page 682.

<sup>40</sup> *The Letter Concerning the Intellect*, pages 215-16.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, page 216.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 39 above.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*.

potentiality. Of the resultant intellect in actuality, Alfarabi makes the following statement.

...when it becomes an intellect in actuality in relation to all intelligibles and it becomes one of the existing things because it became the intelligibles in actuality, then, when it thinks that existing thing which is an intellect in actuality, it does not think an existing thing outside of itself... but it only thinks itself.<sup>45</sup>

The intellect in actuality thinks of itself *qua* intellect in actuality, and becomes what is in effect a second order intellect in actuality – one which was not, prior to being thought, an intellect in potentiality, but an intellect in actuality, or put another way, the complete aggregate of intelligibles in actuality, which are forms which had already been abstracted from their respective matters.

...[the intelligibles] were first thought, according as they were abstracted from their matters in which their existence is and according as they are intelligibles in potentiality, but they are thought a second time in such a way that their existence is not that previous existence, but their existence is separate from their matters, according as they are forms which are not in their matters and according as they are intelligibles in actuality. When the intellect in actuality thinks the intelligibles which are forms in it, insofar as they are intelligibles in actuality, then *the intellect of which it was first said that it is the intellect in actuality, becomes now the acquired intellect.*<sup>46</sup>

Alfarabi likens the relationship between the acquired intellect and the intellect in actuality to that between a form and its matter, and the relationship between the intellect in actuality and the intellect in potentiality likewise. The acquired intellect is explicitly characterised as the least perfect of the incorporeal forms, that is, those forms "...which are not at all in matter, which never were nor ever will be in matter..."<sup>47</sup>. What he appears to be envisaging is a process, which is purely metaphysical rather than temporal, whereby form 'ascends' in discrete steps from prime matter, which is by definition devoid of form, through the basic four elements, through (corporeally) enmattered form, through the intellect in potentiality, and through the intellect in actuality, finally reaching the status of the acquired intellect. This ascension appears to operate on the principle that each lower stage is regarded as "substratum and matter" to

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, page 217 (my italics)

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, page 218.

the "form" of the stage immediately above it <sup>48</sup>. Upon attaining the lofty status of the acquired intellect...

...one will have reached that which is like the stars and one will have reached the limit to which those things which are related to hyle and matter ascend. When one ascends from this, then one will have ascended to the first stage of existing things which are immaterial, and the first stage is the stage of the [active] intellect.<sup>49</sup>

The Active Intellect is an immaterial form, and as well as being in a sense "close in likeness to" the acquired intellect, it is the principle responsible for the transition between intellect in potentiality to intellect in actuality, and for that between intelligible in potentiality and intelligible in actuality <sup>50</sup>. Using a metaphor widely used among post-Aristotelian philosophers who have utilised the noetic of the *De Anima*, Alfarabi compares the Active Intellect to the sun, the light of which brings the sense of sight from a state of potentiality to one of actuality, and which performs an analogous transition in respect of visible objects <sup>51</sup>. He explains how the Active Intellect is responsible for a process in which the originally enmattered forms are brought gradually to a state of immateriality until the acquired intellect comes into existence. At this point man reaches a metaphysical pinnacle:

...the substance of man or man, insofar as he becomes a substance through it, becomes something closer to the [Active Intellect]. This is the ultimate happiness and the afterlife, namely that there comes to man some other thing through which he becomes a substance.<sup>52</sup>

This closeness to the Active Intellect is, in part, a consequence of the fact that the subsistence of the acquired intellect does not require the existence of a corporeal substratum, nor does its activity require "...the help of an animate power in a body ...[or] any corporeal instrument at all" <sup>53</sup>. When man's intellect attains the status of the acquired intellect, dependence on bodily-related powers such as the sense and the imagination is transcended.

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<sup>48</sup> See footnote 76 below.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 218-19.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, page 220. This "some other thing" is the Active Intellect.

The nature of the relationship between the acquired intellect and the Active Intellect is not exactly clear here. Earlier on, Alfarabi describes the Active Intellect as being "of the species of" the acquired intellect <sup>54</sup>, but this does not suggest anything as strong as union between the two, whereas in a different work, *The Political Regime*, he suggests that man can achieve union with the Active Intellect through the acquired intellect, a view which he ascribes to Aristotle, and he describes the acquired intellect as being like "matter and substratum" to the Active Intellect <sup>55</sup>. Even the term 'union' is not entirely unambiguous, however, but fortunately the intention in this dissertation is not to give a precise articulation to the relationship in question, but, less ambitiously, (1) to introduce the concept of the acquired intellect in a more explicit way than Maimonides does in the *Guide*, in order to shed light (at a later stage of this chapter) on the doctrine of salvation contained therein, and (2) to advert to the fact that for Alfarabi, at least in the treatise *Concerning the Intellect*, salvation from death involves some sort of loosely described relationship between the acquired intellect and the Active Intellect. It is suggested not only that Maimonides' conception of this relationship, which, like Alfarabi, he sees as essential for the possibility of post-death salvation, is similarly vaguely defined, but that this is an unavoidable consequence of the subject matter, and that the relationship in question is no more capable of precise articulation than that of the 'overflow' referred to above is, and that both must be understood in a figurative manner <sup>56</sup>.

It is clear from Alfarabi's account of the Active Intellect that regardless of how this putative conjunction with it is conceived, it is an entirely naturalistic phenomenon, and does not require any divine revelation. His comment to the contrary in *The Political Regime* in which he compares the manner in which the Active Intellect acts upon the intellect in potentiality through the medium of the acquired intellect as being revelation <sup>57</sup> may be regarded as a piece of typical dissimulation by one of the leading *falāsifa*, or it may equally legitimately be regarded as a valid and sincere reinterpretation of a more conventional notion of revelation <sup>58</sup>. Nevertheless, the question here is not so much

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, page 219.

<sup>55</sup> *The Political Regime*, page 36.

<sup>56</sup> See footnote 23 above.

<sup>57</sup> *The Political Regime*, page 36.

<sup>58</sup> The latter interpretation may be suggested by what follows the comparison mentioned above. After likening to revelation the emanation from the Active Intellect 'down' through the acquired intellect to the intellect in potentiality of the supreme (human)

Alfarabi's intention. The crucial question here is whether or not the process which he figuratively describes as ascension from prime matter to the acquired intellect, and the concomitant conjunction with the Active Intellect is a natural one, and the account of this process which he gives in *Concerning the Intellect* is entirely so.

Another important, albeit subsidiary, point that is worth making before returning to Maimonides, is that Alfarabi states clearly that the essence of the Active Intellect is identical with its activity, and the fact that it acts at some times and not at others is to be explained not by any deficiency on its part, but rather is caused by deficiency in the matter upon which it works <sup>59</sup>. This point is also made by Maimonides <sup>60</sup> and it will hopefully be shown that it is a key element of his soteriology. One obvious consequence of this is that the activity of the Active Intellect is dependent on the pre-existence of suitably disposed matter, and hence its existence <sup>61</sup> is necessary not in itself but through another <sup>62</sup>, to put the point in terms somewhat redolent of Avicenna.

#### IV

It is now possible to proceed to the third part of the methodological process outlined above. As mentioned earlier on in this chapter, Maimonides only devoted one complete chapter of *The Guide of the Perplexed* to the issue of noesis, namely Chapter 68 of Book One, in which he draws an analogy between man's intellect and that of the deity.

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ruler, Alfarabi makes the following statement: "Now because the Active Intellect emanates from the being of the First Cause, it can for this reason be said that it is the First Cause that brings about revelation to this man through the mediation of the Active Intellect" – *The Political Regime*, pages 36-37. Given the identification, so common in *falsafa*, of angels with the separate intellects, of which the Active Intellect was the ultimate and 'lowest' emanation, then it would seem reasonable, albeit rather heterodox, to regard the Active Intellect as an angelic messenger from God to man. This view would certainly fit well with Maimonides' own view of angels as messengers or intermediaries from God to man – see, for example, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.6, pages 262-65.

<sup>59</sup> Of the apparent failure of the Active Intellect to act continuously, Alfarabi explains that it "...does not come from its essence, but either from the fact that the [Active Intellect] does not always encounter something in which it can act because there does not exist prepared the matter and the substratum in which it can act, or from the fact that it has an impediment from outside of it, so that it ceases, or from both of these things together" – *The Letter Concerning the Intellect*, page 220.

<sup>60</sup> See footnote 30 above.

<sup>61</sup> The existence, that is, of the Active Intellect.

<sup>62</sup> *The Letter Concerning the Intellect*, page 220.

He commences this chapter by referring to what he calls a "dictum of the philosophers" to the effect that God is the intellect as well as the intellectually cognising subject and intellectually cognised object, and that these three apparently discrete notions are actually one single unified notion <sup>63</sup>. Citing the Arabic root of the word which he translates as 'generally admitted', Pines argues that Maimonides' qualification of this dictum as 'generally admitted' neither proves nor is intended to prove anything <sup>64</sup>. Now certainly, Maimonides' statement regarding this unification goes beyond what his metaphysics and epistemology would permit him consistently to assert – a point highlighted in Chapter Four of this dissertation, and also made by Pines himself. However, Pines' argument ignores Maimonides' statement at the end of the first paragraph of Chapter 68 which allows much more logical force to this dictum.

...this notion is a matter of demonstration and is quite clear, as the theologizing philosophers have explained.<sup>65</sup>

To describe something as "a matter of demonstration" is, for an Aristotelian like Maimonides, to put it beyond any possible doubt, and it would seem reasonable to assert, in contrariety to Pines' assertion, that Maimonides *is* intending to show something by his use of this dictum. He appears to be drawing attention to the fact that this tripartite identity can apply to a human intellect as well as to that of God, at least, as explained shortly, whenever (and insofar as) the former is in actuality.

First of all, he makes it clear that as far as human intellection is concerned, the intellect in potentiality and the intelligible in potentiality <sup>66</sup> are different until the form is abstracted by the intellect from the matter which it informs. Once this abstraction occurs, the pure abstract form that was the intelligible in potentiality becomes the intelligible in actuality, and likewise the intellect in potentiality becomes the intellect in actuality, and post-abstraction the intellect and intelligible are identical. He uses the example of cognising a piece of wood in order to make his point.

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<sup>63</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.68, page 163.

<sup>64</sup> "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides", page 103.

<sup>65</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.68, page 163.

<sup>66</sup> For the sake of consistency, the phraseology used by Arthur Hyman in his translation of Alfarabi's *Concerning the Intellect* will be used, unless quoting from the *Guide* itself. Hyman refers to 'in potentiality' and 'in actuality', whereas Pines prefers 'in potentia' and 'in actu'.

...the thing that is intellectually cognized is the abstract form of the piece of wood, ...this form is identical with the intellect realized in actu, and ...these are not two things – intellect and the intellectually cognized form of the piece of wood. For the intellect in actu is nothing but that which has been intellectually cognized,<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, intellect in actuality is identical with its act – as Maimonides puts it, "...the true reality and quiddity of the intellect is apprehension", or, put another way, "...its act is identical with its essence" <sup>68</sup>. Now, nothing pertains to an intellect in actuality other than form that has been abstracted from matter, and as such has changed from being intelligible in potentiality to intelligible in actuality.

Accordingly it is clear that whenever intellect exists in actu, it is identical with the intellectually cognized thing. And it has become clear that the act of every intellect, which act consists in its being intellectually cognizing, is identical with the essence of that intellect. Consequently the intellect, the intellectually cognizing subject, and the intellectually cognized object are always one and the same thing in the case of everything that is cognized in actu.<sup>69</sup>

This identity only applies to intellect in actuality – as far as intellect in potentiality is concerned, there is necessarily a dichotomy between the "intellectually cognizing subject" and the "intellectually cognized object". Additionally, that which is in potentiality must have a supporting substratum, so there is in reality a trichotomy between the potentially cognising subject, the substratum supporting this potentiality, and the potentially cognised object – the latter potentiality having as its supporting substratum the material object which is informed by the form as yet to be abstracted. To continue with Maimonides' own example of the cognition of a piece of wood, there is a tripartite distinction prior to cognition between Zayd's intellect in potentiality, Zayd himself, who is the supporting substratum for the intellect in potentiality, and the intelligible in potentiality, which is the potentially cognised form pre-cognitively enmattered in the piece of wood <sup>70</sup>. These three are only unified when the act of cognition occurs <sup>71</sup>. Although Maimonides is more explicit than Alfarabi regarding the

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<sup>67</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.68, page 164.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 164-65.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, page 165.

<sup>71</sup> Of the pre-cognition trichotomy, he states that "In the example in question, this would be as if you said: man, hylic intellect, and the form of the piece of wood – these being

postulated identity of intellect, "intellectually cognizing subject", and "intellectually cognized object" when actual cognition has occurred insofar as Alfarabi only makes explicit reference to the identity between intellect (as act) and object of intellection, it is clear that they are operating along the same lines here, with Maimonides going rather further in his introduction of the subject of intellection. The important point for present purposes is that in both the Maimonidean and the Alfarabian noetics there is a post-intellection identity of intellect in actuality and intelligible in actuality.

Maimonides is now in a position to assert that given there can be no potentiality in God, that in respect of this identity of intellect, subject and object there is an analogy between God's intellection and human intellection insofar as the latter is in actuality. He is absolutely explicit and unequivocal about this.

It is... clear that the numerical unity of the intellect, the intellectually cognizing subject, and the intellectually cognized object, does not hold good with reference to the Creator only, but also with reference to every intellect. Thus in us too, the intellectually cognizing subject, the intellect, and the intellectually cognized object, are one and the same thing whenever we have an intellect in actu.<sup>72</sup>

The key difference in this respect between us and the deity is that whereas the latter must be necessarily, unceasingly, and immutably devoid of potentiality, intellectually we pass only intermittently from potentiality to actuality; given our status as hylomorphic entities this is unavoidable. This difference is also pertinent if we compare the Active Intellect and the deity, however, in this case the difference lies not in the metaphysical constitution of the Active Intellect as in the fact that although it is pure form it can only act on suitably disposed matter. Put another way, the difference between our intellectual activity and that of God is embedded within in our essence, whereas the corresponding difference between the Active Intellect and God is due to an obstacle separate from the former's essence, rather than being integral to it. Nevertheless the two differences in question have one factor in common, namely, the limiting nature of matter – in the first case, the matter which is an essential metaphysical component of us *qua* sublunary creatures, albeit creatures possessing the faculty of intellection, and in

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three separate notions. When, however, the intellect is realized in actu, the three notions become one" – *ibid.*, page 165.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, page 166.



the second case, the matter upon which the Active Intellect is operating <sup>73</sup>. The limiting nature of matter will become increasingly prominent as the project of extracting a coherent soteriology from *The Guide of the Perplexed* unfolds.

Thus far, the link with Alfarabi's doctrine in *Concerning the Intellect* is clear. Unfortunately, following the stage in which the intellect in potentiality becomes the intellect in actuality, as described above, the trail in *The Guide of the Perplexed* analogous to that in Alfarabi's text which describes the ascension from prime matter to the attainment of the acquired intellect, and the consequent conjunction with the Active Intellect, goes cold, or to be more precise, rather tepid. Maimonides makes little direct mention of the acquired intellect <sup>74</sup>. There is one explicit reference to it, which suggests that he views it along the Alfarabian lines expounded above.

Know that it behooved us to compare the relation between God...and the world to that obtaining between the acquired intellect and man; *this intellect is not a faculty in a body but is truly separate from the organic body* and overflows toward it. We should have compared, on the other hand, the rational faculty to the intellects of the heavens, which are in bodies. However, the case of the intellects of the heavens, that of the existence of separate intellects, and that of the representation of the acquired intellect, *which is also separate*, are matters open to speculation and research.<sup>75</sup>

The rational faculty referred to here is likely to be the intellect in actuality, although if interpreted broadly enough it may also extend to the intellect in potentiality. Although there is no mention of the process whereby the acquired intellect is attained, it is beyond dispute that this intellect is not dependent on matter for its existence, presumably because the intelligibles in actuality which are matter to its form <sup>76</sup> are themselves pure

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*. See also footnote 30 above.

<sup>74</sup> This is not just a feature of *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Howard Kreisel points out that he seldom mentions the acquired intellect in any of his writings – *Maimonides' Political Thought*, page 138.

<sup>75</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.72, page 193 (my italics). Given his comments on the difficulty which man has in cognising that which is neither a body nor a force in a body, it is entirely consistent that he follows the passage quoted above with a warning that concerning these topics..."The proofs with regard to them are well hidden though correct; many doubts arise with regard to them;" – *ibid.*. Comments on the difficulty which we have cognising that which is neither a body nor a force in a body, are made usually in the context of a critique of our tendency to over-reliance on the imagination, for example, *ibid.*, I.46, page 98, and II.12, page 279.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Alfarabi's statement that "...the intellect in actuality is like a substratum and matter for the acquired intellect..." – *The Letter Concerning the Intellect*, page 217.

forms which have been abstracted from their original hyllic matter. Another more indirect reference to the acquired intellect appears to have been made in the first chapter of Book One of the *Guide*, in which Maimonides discusses the interpretation of *Genesis* 1:26.

...man possesses as his proprium something in him that is very strange as it is not found in anything else that exists under the sphere of the moon, namely, intellectual apprehension. In the exercise of this, no sense, no part of the body, none of the extremities are used; and therefore this apprehension was likened unto the apprehension of the deity, which does not require an instrument, although in reality it is not like the latter apprehension, but only appears so to the first stirrings of opinion.<sup>77</sup>

Given that Maimonides has already been shown to hold that the acquired intellect is not a corporeal faculty, but, on the contrary, is "truly separate" from the corporeal body, it is reasonable to read the term 'intellectual apprehension' in the passage just quoted as referring to the acquired intellect. If this reading is accurate then this first chapter of the *Guide* is postulating that it is by virtue of the acquired intellect that man can be said to be "in the image of God and in his likeness", as Maimonides puts it at the end of the chapter, although it is important, as he counsels with his customary caution, not to push this likeness too far. It would then appear to follow that in the second chapter of Book One of the *Guide* Maimonides is interpreting Adam's fall as involving a loss of the acquired intellect<sup>78</sup>. This would be consistent with Maimonides' statement that prior to his fall Adam had been given the intellect that God causes to overflow towards man and the possession of which is man's ultimate perfection<sup>79</sup>. Now, the topic of man's ultimate perfection is one of the areas of Maimonides' thought that has generated an extensive secondary literature<sup>80</sup>. This is entirely understandable, given that he makes a number of pronouncements on this topic in the *Guide* which even by Maimonidean standards are

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<sup>77</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.1, page 23. Howard Kreisel suggests that in his interpretation of this Biblical passage in the *Laws of the Principles of the Torah* in the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides is alluding to the acquired intellect – *Maimonides' Political Thought*, pages 138-39.

<sup>78</sup> See footnote 10 above.

<sup>79</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.2, page 24.

<sup>80</sup> As a brief sample of some of the commentaries on this area of the *Guide*, the following are relevant: Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, Chapters 4 and 5; Ehud Benor, *Worship of the Heart*, Chapter 1; Marvin Fox, *Interpreting Maimonides*, Chapter 6; Oliver Leaman, *Moses Maimonides*, Chapter 9; Miriam Galston, "The Purpose of the Law according to Maimonides"; Ralph Lerner, "Maimonides' Governance of the Solitary"; Steven Harvey, "Maimonides in the Sultan's Palace".

notoriously difficult to fit together in a coherent and unequivocal manner. It would be unhelpful for present purposes to get entangled in this controversial topic <sup>81</sup>, which hinges on the respective values to be assigned to theoretical, contemplative reason and practical, action-oriented reason, and the mutual relationships between the two. However, fortunately it is not essential to enter this particularly labyrinthine area of Maimonidean studies, for the very simple reason that it is overwhelmingly focused on human perfection as far as living the best possible human life is concerned, whereas this dissertation is exploring the possibility within *The Guide of the Perplexed* of an entirely naturalistic salvation following death. It will become clear shortly that for this purpose the only really relevant part of a human life is the part immediately prior to death, when life is already starting to slip away. This is contrary to the debate on the proper conception of human perfection in the *Guide*, which is very much grounded in the examination of how a whole, adult human life is best lived. The procedure to be adopted in what follows now is to examine what Maimonides says regarding intellectual perfection, without being concerned about other pronouncements in the *Guide* that appear to assign conflicting values and roles to the other <sup>82</sup> main form of perfection, which is practical in the sense of being directed towards action in the world, being concerned with moral virtue rather than the theoretical virtue. The reason for the focus on intellectual perfection will be defended shortly, and is that it is by attaining this state that man transcends his status as a mortal creature, whose fragile existence in this world is dependent on the continuing integrity of his short-lived and vulnerable corporeal body, and whose only chance of immortality is by perfecting his formal element in preparation for the final dissolution at the moment of death of the hylomorphic mixture which makes him a live human being.

Maimonides posits two distinct aims of the Mosaic Law. These pertain to the welfare of the soul and of the body, with the former being identified with the acquisition by the multitude (commensurate with their individual capacities) of correct opinions, and the latter being identified with the improvement of people's ways of living as part of a

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<sup>81</sup> For reasons of space, as much as anything else.

<sup>82</sup> In the final chapter of the *Guide*, III.54, Maimonides, following "the ancient and the modern philosophers" identifies four species of perfection: (1) perfection of possessions, (2) perfection of the bodily constitution and shape, (3) perfection of the moral virtues, and (4) perfection of the rational virtues. Discussion of the perfections in the secondary literature normally focuses on (3) and (4) and, in particular, on their interrelationship.

community. The welfare of the body is promoted by two methods: (i) the abolition of mutual wrongdoing, and (ii) the inculcation of moral qualities which have utility as far as advancing harmonious and ordered communal life are concerned <sup>83</sup>. The welfare of the body is an essential prerequisite for the welfare of the soul. This is due to the fact that to these two types of welfare there correspond two types of perfection – a first perfection, which is that of the body, and an ultimate perfection, which is that of the soul, and these two stand in the same relation to each other as the two types of welfare. The perfection of the body involves being healthy, and having all essential bodily needs adequately met. The perfection of the soul for man is described as follows.

His ultimate perfection is to become rational in actu, I mean to have an intellect in actu; this would consist in his knowing everything concerning all the beings that it is within the capacity of man to know in accordance with his ultimate perfection.<sup>84</sup>

One aspect of the above description of the ultimate perfection to which attention must be drawn, is that when he refers to the "intellect in actu" the context implies that he must be referring to the acquired intellect rather than to the intellect in actuality, at least if the Alfarabian reading of Maimonides' noetic is correct. There are two considerations which support this view: (1) as he refers to "ultimate" perfection he must be referring to the acquired intellect as this is a higher faculty than the intellect in actuality, and (2) it is the acquired intellect rather than the intellect in actuality that knows all that can be cognised by the human intellect <sup>85</sup>.

By way of a very brief, but highly relevant, aside, it is important to acknowledge his comment that bodily necessities, which are an indispensable prerequisite for perfection of the body, cannot be attained by an isolated human being, and consequently that

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<sup>83</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.27, page 510.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, page 511. Maimonides quite reasonably points out that pain, hunger, thirst, and excessive heat or cold, will interfere in the process of representing intelligibles to oneself, hence the fact that perfection of the body is a precondition for perfection of the soul, as defined above. The sentence following the passage quoted, which unequivocally denies that "actions or moral qualities" belong to the perfection of the soul, is the sort of statement that has contributed to the controversy in Maimonides' moral philosophy mentioned above, contradicting, as it appears to, other equally unequivocal statements elsewhere in the *Guide* to the opposite effect.

<sup>85</sup> See the passage above from Alfarabi's treatise *Concerning the Intellect*, the location of which is given by footnote 46.

political association is required <sup>86</sup>. This is the thesis, articulated by Socrates in Plato's *Republic*, that human society originates in the fact that an individual is not self-sufficient as far as meeting his or her essential bodily needs is concerned <sup>87</sup>. If this thesis was to be accepted, and if, as will be shown shortly, perfection of the soul is essential for salvation, then given also that perfection of the body is a precondition for perfection of the soul, it follows that salvation cannot be attained by an isolate – such as Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, for example. The obvious rejoinder to this is that the insistence that human society is essential for the satisfaction of essential bodily needs, and hence that living completely apart from any human society is not a practical possibility, is not only merely an empirical assertion, and hence undemonstrable, but that there have been a number of instances throughout history of men and women – some of whom have survived disasters such as shipwreck, and some of whom have chosen to disengage from society – who have lived totally self-sufficient lives, albeit not especially comfortable ones, for periods extensive enough to prove the thesis in question to be false.

Returning now to the issue of ultimate perfection, Maimonides makes the following statement.

...once the first perfection has been achieved it is possible to achieve the ultimate, which is indubitably more noble and is *the only cause of permanent preservation*.<sup>88</sup>

What he means by "permanent preservation" cannot be ascertained without reference to what follows this sentence from the *Guide*. Giving a gloss on *Deuteronomy* 6:24, he identifies the phrase "for our good always" as referring to the ultimate perfection.

...He puts the ultimate perfection first because of its nobility; for... it is the ultimate end. It is referred to in the dictum: *For our good always*.<sup>89</sup>

...the intention of His dictum here, *For our good always*, is this same notion: I mean the attainment of *a world in which everything is well and [the whole of which is] long*. And this is perpetual preservation.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>86</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.27, page 511.

<sup>87</sup> The extended discussion of this issue commences in *Republic*, Book Two, 369b.

<sup>88</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.27, page 511 (my italics).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* (translator's italics).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, page 512 (translator's italics).

It is clear from the context that "permanent" is intended to be equivalent to "perpetual". Compared to the permanent (or perpetual) preservation which intellectual perfection offers, bodily perfection offers merely a preservation "...which lasts for a certain duration..."<sup>91</sup>.

This can be read as implying that "for a certain duration" is equivalent to 'finite', and is contrasted unfavourably with "permanent" or "perpetual", which is equivalent to 'non-finite', that is, not terminating at death. In other words, bodily perfection leads to benefits for a limited period, whereas intellectual perfection leads to benefits which are not only more noble<sup>92</sup>, but which are for an unlimited period. It cannot be denied that this particular passage of the *Guide* is not exactly unambiguous, and alternative readings of it could certainly be offered. For example, the permanent preservation may simply refer to permanent throughout the span of life of the individual who achieves intellectual perfection following this achievement, that is, not surviving the death of the individual concerned, whereas the bodily perfection may be of lesser duration insofar as it does not extend throughout the complete post-achievement span of life. This latter reading, however, is rendered less plausible by the implication that there would have to be a period when the individual would have intellectual perfection without bodily perfection, and this is clearly contrary to Maimonides' insistence that the first perfection is a precondition of the ultimate one.

Some other descriptions in the *Guide* of ultimate perfection are similarly equivocal in terms of the duration of the benefits concomitant with its attainment. For example, in III.54, when discussing the fourfold classification of perfections contained therein, he describes the perfection and its effects in the following manner.

...it consists in the acquisition of the rational virtues – I refer to the conception of intelligibles, which teach true opinions concerning the divine things. This is in true reality the ultimate end; this is what gives the individual true perfection, a perfection belonging to him alone; and *it gives him permanent perdurance*; through it man is man.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, page 511.

<sup>93</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.54, page 635 (my italics).

Once again, this can be read as referring to salvation, but the passage is as ambiguous as those quoted above, and the question can reasonably be asked as to what period of time is denoted by "permanent perdurance". Fortunately, there are passages elsewhere in the *Guide* which are not so open to conflicting interpretations, but before moving on to discuss what is probably the most crucial chapter in the book for the linked questions of intellectual perfection and post-death salvation – III.51 – there is one further point regarding the ultimate perfection, which Maimonides makes clearly in a passage from III.54, shortly after the one just quoted. Rejecting the first three perfections – those of possessions, bodily constitution and shape, and the moral virtues – as being unsuitable for man to take a justified pride in or to desire, he makes it clear that only intellectual perfection is a suitable candidate for this role.

...the perfection of which one should be proud and that one should desire is knowledge of Him... which is the true science.<sup>94</sup>

He follows up this statement with a passage from *Jeremiah* <sup>95</sup>, which he glosses as providing scriptural warrant for not only his devaluation of the first three perfections compared to the fourth one, but also his identification of intellectual perfection with apprehension of God. Presumably, given his comments elsewhere in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, he means apprehension inasmuch as this can possibly be within human capacity. So now it can be seen that ultimate, intellectual perfection is not just a matter of cognising intelligibles, but that it also involves some type of apprehension of God. This link becomes important when considering III.51, which as stated above, contains what is probably the most unambiguous statement in the entire text concerning the possibility of some type of survival beyond death.

Following his famous parable at the beginning of III.51, which identifies seven different strata of mankind in respect of their respective attitudes towards God, he compares the prophets to those who have achieved perfection in the divine science, i.e. intellectual perfection, and who subsequently renounce all that is other than God with the intention of maximising their intellection of His governance of all that He has created. Both within and above this exalted company, there is Moses – the prophet who achieved such success in this endeavour that he enjoyed direct communication with the deity, as

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, page 636.

<sup>95</sup> *Jeremiah* 9:22-23.

scripture reveals to us, during which "...his intellect attained such strength that all the gross faculties in the body ceased to function" <sup>96</sup> Now, according to Maimonides, "the gross faculties in the body" refers to the different types of the sense of touch <sup>97</sup>. As a good Aristotelian, he would be aware that according to the Stagirite the sense of touch is that which underpins the operation of the other four particular senses, and the sole sense the possession of which is a precondition of survival. In Aristotle's own words:

...without touch it is impossible to have any other sense; for every body that has soul in it must... be capable of touch.

...the loss of this one sense alone must bring about the death of an animal. ...it is the only one which is indispensably necessary to what is an animal.

All the other senses are necessary to animals... not for their being, but for their well-being.<sup>98</sup>

It may be reading more into what might merely be a casual comment about the physical effect on Moses' body of the great strengthening of his intellectual powers, but what is implied in the above extracts from the *De Anima* is that while in this state of direct communion with God, Moses somehow transcended the need for his normally essential bodily faculties, and that although his sense of touch ceased to function he did not thereby die. This would be consistent with Aristotle's view that the intellect, despite its status as one of the faculties of the soul, which itself is basically the form of the corporeal body, is somehow both separable <sup>99</sup> and immortal <sup>100</sup>. The transcendence as

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<sup>96</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.51, page 620.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>98</sup> *On The Soul*, 435a13-14, 435b4-7, 435b20-21, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Volume One, pages 691-92.

<sup>99</sup> The separability thesis is expressed in the *De Anima* in Aristotle's customary slightly hesitant manner. For example: "...it is clear that the soul is inseparable from its body, or at any rate that certain parts of it are (if it has parts)...Yet some may be separable because they are not the actualities of any body at all" – *ibid.*, 413a3-7, page 657; and also, "We have no evidence as yet about thought or the power of reflexion; it seems to be a different kind of soul, differing as what is eternal from what is perishable; it alone is capable of being separated. All the other parts of soul, it is evident from what we have said, are... incapable of separate existence..." – *ibid.*, 413b25-29, pages 658-59.

<sup>100</sup> The notion that through contemplative intellectual activity man can transcend his status as an essentially finite creature is particularly clearly expressed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X. Discussing the life of contemplation of theoretical (as opposed to practical) 'objects', he states that "If intellect is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal,



described above was, however, only temporary because it took place while Moses was still alive, and *qua* living man was still liable to interference from external, corporeal factors, for example, his prophecy ceased when he was upset by the incident of the spies. When Moses was approaching death his corporeal faculties were weakening accordingly, but his intellectual powers were actually strengthened in direct proportion to the waning of the bodily powers, and as well as attaining the maximum apprehension of the deity of which a created being is capable he attained the passionate love of God which is consequent on this level of apprehension. This process continued to the moment of death, and at the actual point of death Moses' intellect was separated completely from his body – only this time the separation was permanent – and he remained sempiternally in the state of intense pleasure which is an inseparable concomitant of apprehension of the divine vision, however this is to be conceived. Citing the Talmudic sages, Maimonides describes this process as "death by a kiss", and attributes such a death to Aaron and Miriam, as well as to Moses, and equates it with "salvation from death".

[The Sages]... mention the occurrence of this kind of death, which in true reality is salvation from death, only with regard to *Moses, Aaron, and Miriam*. The other prophets and excellent men are beneath this degree; but it holds good for all of them that the apprehension of their intellects becomes stronger at the separation... After having reached this condition of enduring permanence, that intellect remains in one and the same state, the impediment that sometimes screened him off having been removed. And he will remain permanently in that state of intense pleasure, which does not belong to the genus of bodily pleasures...<sup>101</sup>

The passage above, despite its brevity, contains within it two important elements of Maimonides' soteriology. First of all, it makes it clear that Moses' salvation was not related to his uniqueness as a prophet<sup>102</sup> – this is clear from the fact that this salvation from death is also shared not only by Aaron and Miriam, but also by "the other prophets and excellent men". Although there is a sense in which those in the latter category are

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to think of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, *make ourselves immortal*, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us" – *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b30-34, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Volume Two, page 1861, (my italics).

<sup>101</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.51, page 628.

<sup>102</sup> For the uniqueness not only of the content of Mosaic prophecy but also of the method whereby it was communicated to Moses by God, see, for instance, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.34, II.35, and II.39.

not exalted to the same degree as the named trio, they are clearly included in those who achieve immortality as conceived by Maimonides, and consideration must be given to who this category includes – a crucial issue since what is at stake is no less than the possibility of immortality. If it is accepted as being reasonably clear who "other prophets" are, the issue is really one of identifying the "excellent men" referred to. It is suggested here that given the constant connection in *The Guide of the Perplexed* between intellectual activity and human perfection, that the excellent men are those whose rational faculties are affected by the divine overflow which reaches man through the medium of the Active Intellect but are not actually prophets as such. Maimonides defines prophecy as follows.

...the true reality and quiddity of prophecy consist in its being an overflow overflowing from God... through the intermediation of the Active Intellect, towards the rational faculty in the first place and thereafter towards the imaginative faculty. This is the highest degree of man and the ultimate term of perfection that can exist for his species.<sup>103</sup>

This intellectual overflow does not produce equal effects in all men. In III.37, Maimonides distinguishes between three classes<sup>104</sup> of men who are disposed to receive it: (1) those whose rational and imaginative faculties are perfected by the overflow, (2) those whose rational faculty is perfected but whose imaginative faculty is not, and (3) those whose imaginative faculty is perfected but whose rational faculty is not. The members of these three classes are, respectively, (1) the prophets, (2) the philosophers<sup>105</sup>, and (3) a miscellaneous class including, for example, legislators, soothsayers, and dreamers of veridical dreams. It is suggested in the *Guide* that the reason for the existence of the second and third classes is in part a deficiency in the faculty which does not receive the overflow – the imaginative faculty in the case of the philosophers, and the rational faculty in the case of the members of the miscellaneous class. There is a sub-division within the first two classes between those who receive sufficient measure of the overflow to enable them to transmit some of their received perfection on to others, and those who receive sufficient measure to perfect only themselves. What Maimonides has in mind is laid out clearly in this chapter of the *Guide*, and can be represented by the table overleaf.

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<sup>103</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.36, page 369.

<sup>104</sup> The order of the classes is different here from the account in the *Guide*.

Range of overflow	Effect of overflow	Category of recipient
intellect and imagination	perfects individual and moves him to call to the people/teach	prophet
	perfects individual only	prophet
intellect	perfects individual and moves him to write and teach	philosopher
	perfects individual only	philosopher

Maimonides makes it clear that to be a prophet it is not necessary to have received a sufficiently large measure of the intellectual overflow to be in a position to transmit perfection on to others. It is enough to have one's own rational and imaginative faculties perfected – such an individual is no less a prophet than those whose greater level of perfection permits an overflow on to others, which manifests itself by a call to the people or by teaching <sup>106</sup>. The same is true of the philosophers – "the men of science engaged in speculation" – all of whom are philosophers, whether they write and teach others or not <sup>107</sup>. The passage from III.54 quoted above <sup>108</sup> makes it clear that perfection of the rational faculty is the ultimate human end. In Maimonides' own words, it is the "true perfection" through which "man is man". It is inconceivable that the "excellent men" can be anything other than the philosophers, who by definition are not prophets. They certainly cannot be the members of the third, miscellaneous class, whose

<sup>105</sup> Maimonides actually refers to them here as "the men of science engaged in speculation" – *ibid.*, III.37, page 374.

<sup>106</sup> "Sometimes the prophetic revelation that comes to a prophet only renders him perfect and has no other effect" – *ibid.*, page 375.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>108</sup> See footnote 93 above.

imaginative faculty alone is perfected, and who are discussed in a contemptuous and dismissive manner in the second paragraph of III.37<sup>109</sup>.

The second element in the soteriology of the *Guide*, described as being present in the passage quoted above from III.51<sup>110</sup>, pertains to the "impediment" which is removed at death. This is a clear and unambiguous reference to matter. Following his discussion of Ezekiel's Chariot Vision, at the beginning of the third book of the *Guide*, Maimonides subjects matter to a blistering critique, highlighting the fact that although it must at all times be joined to form it can never remain for long with the same form, but on the contrary is constantly putting aside one form in order to take on another one. Described in rather un-Maimonidean language, the nature of matter pertains more to 'becoming' than to 'being' – it is responsible for corruption and, in the case of animals, including human beings, it is responsible for illness, ageing, and death<sup>111</sup>. Once again, the Aristotelian roots of Maimonides' thought are revealed, although it should be pointed out that this view of matter was held by Plato as well as by Aristotle. In the *De Anima*, Aristotle makes the point thus:

...thought seems to be an independent substance implanted within us and to be incapable of being destroyed. If it could be destroyed at all, it would be under the blunting influence of old age. What really happens is, however, exactly parallel to what happens in the case of the sense organs; if the old man could recover the proper kind of eye, he would see just as well as the young man. The incapacity of old age is due to an affection not of the soul but of its vehicle, as occurs in drunkenness or disease. Thus it is that *thinking and reflecting decline through the decay of some other inward part and are themselves impassible*.<sup>112</sup>

The decay of our intellectual powers is due not to any defect in these powers themselves, but to the inherent instability of the material substratum in which they are embedded throughout our existence as hylomorphic denizens of the sublunary world, and this instability is the direct result of the liability of this substratum to corruption. Once free of this substratum and the limitations which it imposes on us – which pertain not only to the duration of our contemplative activity, which is constantly interrupted when grosser material needs impose themselves on us, but also to our access to the

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<sup>109</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.37, page 374.

<sup>110</sup> See the passage located by footnote 101 above.

<sup>111</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.8, pages 430-31.

<sup>112</sup> *On the Soul*, 408b18-25, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Volume One, page 651 (my italics).

proper objects of this contemplation – our intellectual powers are untrammelled and hence able to participate in their proper immortality. Maimonides describes matter as a veil which prevents us from apprehending that which is immaterial as it is in reality, and this applies not only to the "dark and turbid" matter of the sublunary world, but even to the "noblest and purest" matter of the superlunary realm <sup>113</sup>. He extends this metaphor of matter as veil to provide a gloss on the passages in the books of the prophets which describe God as hidden from us by meteorological phenomena such as heavy cloud or mist, or even by darkness <sup>114</sup>. Such passages advert to the following important fact:

...the apprehension of His true reality is impossible for us because of the dark matter that encompasses us and not Him... for He... is not a body. <sup>115</sup>

On the contrary:

...near Him... there is no darkness, but perpetual, dazzling light the overflow of which illumines all that is dark – in accordance with what is said in the prophetic parables: *And the earth did shine with His glory.* <sup>116</sup>

The idea seems to be that God is described figuratively as light which would illumine our intellects more fully were it not for the fact that while we are alive they are veiled by the coarse matter which is our corruptible, hylic component, and from which the corporeal body is constituted which is informed by a human soul. If, immediately prior to, and at, the point of death, we focus our thoughts (to the extent that this is within our limited power) on that which is incorporeal and eternally true, through the acquired intellect and the concomitant conjunction with the Active Intellect, then when the moment comes when our body finally corrupts to the point when we are no longer viable as individual human beings we become part of the purely intellectual world which we have been cognising, which *qua* intellectual is not susceptible to corruption and is consequently eternal, and thus we achieve immortality.

It has now hopefully been shown that provided Maimonides' statements in *The Guide of the Perplexed* are illuminated by appropriate supplementary statements by some of those thinkers whose thought influenced his own, in this case Aristotle and Alfarabi,

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<sup>113</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.9, pages 436-37.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

that there is an entirely non-revelatory soteriology in this text. Nevertheless, there are a number of residual issues which must be addressed before a definitive answer can be given to the question of whether or not an isolate, as defined earlier on in this dissertation, could achieve salvation in accordance with the doctrines of the *Guide*. To reiterate, this question was posed in the context of Ibn Tufail's allegory, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, whose eponymous hero lives a life of separation from the society of other human beings which is congenital and as total as could be conceived. This contextualisation was intended to present a setting where salvation, if obtained at all, would be through the use of rational thought which is as 'pure' as possible, in the sense of being unadulterated by any religious, cultural or linguistic mental imprints. These imprints, as the example of Robinson Crusoe used in Chapter One shows, would render it impossible to ascertain to what extent salvation had been achieved by the use of unaided reason – unaided, that is, apart from the intellectual overflow from God via the Active Intellect – and to what extent it had been achieved using knowledge gained from pre-isolation exposure to the ideology and cultus of revealed religion, and any associated cultural or linguistic practices. There are three obvious issues outstanding, the first of which concerns the nature of the contemplative activity, the practice of which will enable us to attain immortality. In the quotation above from *De Anima*, Book III, Chapter 5<sup>117</sup>, reference was made to the activity that is the essential nature of the Active Intellect, and it is important to be clear regarding what is entailed by the notion that it is by maximally actualising our intellectual potential to the point at which we achieve conjunction with the Active Intellect, that we thereby achieve salvation. In Aristotle's philosophy, the term 'actuality', like so many others, is not used univocally, and it is essential in order to illuminate the soteriology of *The Guide of the Perplexed* that it is made clear in what sense it is being used in this context. The second issue pertains to the question of how much the conception of salvation extracted above from the *Guide* differs from more individualistic ones sometimes espoused by adherents of the three main Occidental monotheistic religions; in particular, as regards the notion of *what* it is that survives death. The importance of this question is intensified in the light of the fact that in his *Treatise on Resurrection*, which arose out of responses to the *Guide* from the rabbinic communities elsewhere in the Jewish world, Maimonides appeared to depart from the totally intellectual and non-material conception of salvation

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* (translator's italics).

<sup>117</sup> See footnote 29 above.

offered in the earlier text in favour of a rather more conventional conception. The third issue pertains to the fact that Maimonides, in the *Guide*, makes comments which would appear to suggest that revelation is essential for salvation, despite the argument offered above to the effect that there is a completely non-revelatory doctrine of salvation contained within this text. This is yet another instance of his practice of making statements on a given topic throughout the *Guide*, which, although not formally contradictory or contrary, are difficult to reconcile in anything other than a forced and highly artificial manner. The first two issues will be dealt with the next chapter of this dissertation, and the third one will be tackled in the final chapter – Chapters Seven and Eight respectively.

## Chapter Seven

### A reconstruction of the soteriology of the *Guide* – some further details

#### I

Much of what has been suggested in the previous chapter would undoubtedly not be universally accepted. For example, in a recent book on the topic of death and immortality in Jewish thought, the theologian Neil Gillman discusses Maimonides' answer to the question of what type of existence, if any, lies beyond death. Although Gillman gives the answer that the latter's conception of immortality is that it is ultimately spiritual in nature – a view of the matter which is apparently in accord with that presented in the previous chapter – for present purposes, what is especially noteworthy in Gillman's analysis is the fact that he denies that *The Guide of the Perplexed* contains any material relevant to the issue. He identifies three relevant sources in the Maimonidean corpus as a whole: the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, the *Mishneh Torah*, and the *Treatise on Resurrection* <sup>1</sup>, and goes on to make the following claim.

Notably missing from this list is Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, completed around 1190, his most elaborate and extensive attempt to resolve the apparent philosophical contradictions between Torah and Greek philosophy. By any criterion, the *Guide* is the single most significant philosophical work ever penned by a Jew. Yet on the issue of the afterlife, it is totally silent, probably because Maimonides did not view resurrection as a philosophical issue, but rather as a miracle that has to be accepted on faith alone.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that as far as his view of the purpose of the *Guide* is concerned, Gillman is an adherent of the harmonistic school of interpreters of this text rather than of the naturalistic school <sup>3</sup>, viewing it as he does as not only a "philosophical" work, but one

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<sup>1</sup> *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish thought*, pages 146-49. He refers throughout the chapter on Maimonides to the *Essay on Resurrection* rather than the *Treatise on Resurrection*, however, for reasons of consistency, unless directly quoting from Gillman, the term 'treatise' will be used instead of 'essay'.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, page 148.

<sup>3</sup> See the beginning of Chapter Two of this dissertation for this distinction. Having located Gillman thus, it is only fair to point out that he does allow for the possibility, at least as far as the *Treatise on Resurrection* is concerned, that a Straussian analysis of the purpose of this text may have some legitimacy – *ibid.*, page 164-66.



which is intended to bridge the gap between traditional Judaic thought and that of Aristotle and his receptors. Admittedly the *Guide* is indeed silent on the issue of the resurrection of the body, but given that the text can in a sense be read as an extended and uncompromising polemic against the attribution of corporeality to God, with a concomitant denial of the importance of corporeality for ultimate human perfection, both pre-death and post-death, this is not entirely surprising. However, it is simply not true to state that it is "totally silent" on the afterlife, discussion of which is admittedly a mere whisper compared to the clarion call with which Maimonides commands his readers to put aside all attachment to corporeality, concerning both things divine and things human. Discussion of the afterlife is certainly there in the text, and can be extracted more easily if the assistance of Maimonides' main philosophical influences – Aristotle and Alfarabi – is sought. Gillman may be correct in his assertion that Maimonides regarded resurrection as a reality which, as miraculous, has to be accepted by faith rather than ratiocination, but the issue of the afterlife is not solely concerned with resurrection; indeed, as stated above, Gillman believes that Maimonides posited a type of immortality which is ultimately spiritual, once the resurrected body has been rendered unnecessary following a second death <sup>4</sup>.

Returning now to the issues identified at the end of the previous chapter as requiring clarification, it will be recalled that the first issue concerned the actualisation of the potential intellect, which, if achieved to a sufficient degree by an individual, results in the acquisition of the acquired intellect and conjunction with the Active Intellect, which, for Maimonides, is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for salvation. What is at stake here can perhaps be well highlighted by a concern expressed by Hayy Ibn Yaqzan during the early stages of his own intellectual journey to God that if death overtook him when he was not engaged in contemplation of God then he would not achieve salvation. Discussing what he refers to as the "Vision" of "self-existent Being", he expresses a fear that if he dies while distracted by physical needs from the concentration on this Vision which is essential for post-death bliss then he will not attain salvation. Ibn Tufail expresses Hayy's aim as follows.

Being thus satisfied that the Perfection and Happiness of his own Being consisted in the actual beholding that necessarily self-existent Being perpetually, so as not to be diverted from it so much as the twinkling of an Eye, that Death

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<sup>4</sup> *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish thought*, pages 160-61.

might find him actually employ'd in that Vision, and so his Pleasure might be continu'd, without being interrupted by any pain; he began to consider with himself by what Means this Vision might actually be continu'd, without Interruption.<sup>5</sup>

Hayy's problem is not only that while still living he has certain unavoidable physical needs which must be met, although he may strive to keep these needs to a minimum, but also that he is susceptible to external distractions such as animal noises and extremities of temperature. Both the needs and the distractions necessarily intrude upon his contemplative activity, and require appropriately practical and non-contemplative responses<sup>6</sup>. Such responses, however, pose a real risk to his achievement of salvation, at least to his way of thinking, because while he is dealing with these needs, and also, when, having dealt with the needs and recommenced contemplation, he is attempting to return to the previous state of numinous consciousness, he is unavoidably vulnerable.

...he was afraid that Death should overtake him at such a Time as his thoughts were diverted from the Vision, and so he should fall into everlasting Misery and the Pain of Separation.<sup>7</sup>

Given Hayy's difficult living conditions, in which he is sometimes required to clothe and feed himself by obtaining animal products by hunting, and to defend his stocks of food against animal predators<sup>8</sup>, it would not be an unreasonable fear if he is simply afraid that meeting his physical needs could result in premature death, and certainly he is at much greater risk of death when out hunting than he is when sitting quietly meditating in his shelter. However, what is relevant here and more interesting is that the fear is rather that he would forfeit salvation if he was not actively engaged in contemplation of "self-existing Being" when death claimed him, and consequentially it is clear that this contemplation, which is necessary for salvation, is an 'activity' in a very strong sense of the word. It is not enough to have a disposition to cognise God in order

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<sup>5</sup> *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, Section 67, page 116.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 116-17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, page 117.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Section 30, pages 72-73. Although when he becomes more spiritually and intellectually developed Hayy modifies his initially rather cavalier and utilitarian approach to the animals which whom he shares the island, he finds himself unable for health reasons to abstain completely from the consumption of sentient beings to provide nourishment. The best that he can achieve is to select where possible that which has merely a vegetable soul – only turning to animals to meet his needs for clothing and

to achieve immortality – one must be actively cognising him when the union of soul and body is dissolved at the moment of death, and this aspect of Ibn Tufail's soteriology is not far removed from that presented in *The Guide of the Perplexed*. After pointing out that love of God is proportionate to apprehension of Him, Maimonides makes the following claim.

...the intellect which overflowed from Him...toward us is the bond between us and Him. You have the choice: if you wish to strengthen and to fortify this bond, you can do so; if, however, you wish gradually to make it weaker and feebler until you cut it, you can also do that. You can only strengthen this bond by employing it in loving Him and in progressing toward this... And *it is made weaker and feebler if you busy your thought with what is other than He.*<sup>9</sup>

It is not enough to have possession of intellectual knowledge of God, to the extent that this is possible for human beings.

...even if you were the man who knew most the true reality of the divine science, you would cut that bond existing between you and God if you would empty your thought of God and busy yourself totally in eating the necessary or in occupying yourselves with the necessary. You would not be with Him then, nor He with you. For that relation between you and Him is actually broken off at that time. It is for this reason that excellent men begrudge the times in which they are turned away from Him by other occupations...<sup>10</sup>

Immediately following the passages quoted above, in a passage which will be important for the next chapter of this dissertation, Maimonides claims that the purpose of the practices of Jewish religious worship are intended to help man to focus on God, rather than on the type of practical, mundane matters which constantly intrude on our more reflective moments. He has a solution to Hayy's dilemma concerning the unavoidable albeit temporary need to refrain from contemplation, but before presenting this solution it might be helpful to return, once again, to Aristotle's *De Anima* for conceptual clarification of the metaphysical underpinnings of this dilemma. The relevance of Aristotle here is revealed by Maimonides' comment that knowledge of "the true reality of divine science" is not enough in itself to maintain the intellectual bond between God and man. When it is stated that it is by actualising the potential for the acquired intellect

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nutrition when this is unavoidable, and, even then, being sparing in his depredations – *ibid.*, Sections 76-78, pages 128-32.

<sup>9</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.51, page 621 (my italics).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 621-22 (my italics).

that salvation is attained, there is an important equivocation pertaining to the use of the term 'actuality' (and, by extension, to that of the term 'actualisation') that must be identified in order to obtain the required increase in precision concerning this fundamental principle of Maimonidean soteriology, at least as expressed in *The Guide of the Perplexed*. In the opening chapter of Book II of the *De Anima*, in the context of his definition of soul as an "actuality of the first kind of a natural organized body" <sup>11</sup>, Aristotle identifies two distinct senses of the term 'actuality', which are related by one being a progression beyond the other. He illuminates the distinction by means of a comparison between knowledge and reflection; an actuality of the first kind corresponds to knowledge, whereas an actuality of the second kind corresponds to reflection <sup>12</sup> – in other words, the distinction highlights the difference between actually reflecting on that which is known rather than simply possessing the ability to do so. In general terms, what appears to be intended is the distinction between being suitably prepared to undertake a given activity and being engaged in that activity; we can be prepared for reflection by being given possession of knowledge, which is the material for the reflection, but mere possession without use is only a precondition for reflection, and is an actuality (or actualisation) of the first kind. It is only when (and while) we are engaged in the process of reflecting on that which is known, the acquisition and passive possession of which was a precondition of the reflective activity, that there can be said to be an actuality (or actualisation) of the second kind <sup>13</sup>. Returning to Maimonides' comment above that knowledge of divine science is not enough to sustain the intellectual link between God and man, it can now be seen that possession of such knowledge without active contemplation of its content is a first actualisation of the intellect, and that it is not until we are actively engaged in contemplation of this content that there is the second actualisation of the intellect which is indispensable for salvation. That this is what Maimonides has in mind is reinforced by a passage in the *Guide*, that follows a few pages after the last two cited above, in which he is discussing the fact that divine providence watches over an individual during the period that, and to the extent to which, that individual is intellectually occupied with God, and, conversely, once the

<sup>11</sup> *On the Soul*, 412b4-5, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Volume One, page 657.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 412a10-11 and 412a22-23, page 656.

<sup>13</sup> In his introduction to his translation of the *De Anima*, Hugh Lawson-Tancred explains the distinction, which can be drawn for artificial entities as well as for natural ones, by stating that for any particular hylomorphic entity, it is in virtue of its first actuality "...that its Matter is so arranged as to render it capable of performing its characteristic functions and it is in virtue of the second that it 'actually' performs them" – page 70.

occupation with God is interrupted then that providence is withdrawn <sup>14</sup>. Maimonides likens such an individual, when the thought of the latter has been temporarily diverted from God, to a skilful scribe who is not actually engaged in his craft <sup>15</sup>. In this example, the mere possession (without use) of the necessary scribal skills would be a first actualisation, and the actual utilisation of these skills in the art of scribing would be a second actualisation.

If it is indeed Maimonides' contention that the actualisation of the potential intellect to the degree necessary for the attainment of the acquired intellect is an actualisation of the second kind, then at first blush it would seem that Hayy's fear of meeting death while not engaged in an appropriate level of contemplation of the divine is fully justified. A Maimonidean isolate would be at risk of losing the chance for immortality if the intellect at the point of death was not in a state in which it was actively focussed on the deity, and this would make attainment of salvation something of a lottery, being dependent on events and needs external to, and uncaused by, the isolate. Fortunately, Maimonides has a solution – a peculiar solution, it is true, but a solution nevertheless. What he envisages is a situation in which after having undergone a lengthy period of appropriate training, the seeker after God achieves a level of intellectual inwardness in which he or she can be simultaneously dealing both with practical affairs, relating, for example, to family or occupation, and with the highest topics of pure metaphysics, that is, with apprehension of that which pertains to the divine.

...there may be a human individual who, through his apprehension of the true realities and his joy in what he has apprehended, achieves a state in which he talks with people and is occupied with his bodily necessities while his intellect is wholly turned towards Him... so that in his heart he is always in His presence... while outwardly he is with people... <sup>16</sup>

This description is redolent of a passage in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, when, at the beginning of the book, he outlines the doctrine of the philosophers, and indicates what the latter regard as the maximally perfect individual.

His organs – I mean the limbs of such a person – only serve for the most perfect purposes, in the most appropriate time, and in the best condition, as if they were

<sup>14</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.51, page 624-25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, page 625.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, page 623.

the organs of the Active Intellect, but not of the material and passive intellect, which used them at an earlier period, sometimes well, but more often improperly.<sup>17</sup>

Such an accomplished individual will, admittedly, be rare – Maimonides only mentions Moses and the Patriarchs as having achieved this exalted state<sup>18</sup>, and claims that he himself could not possibly aspire to it<sup>19</sup>. However, he does point out that more realisable for lesser human beings than the four mentioned is the rank prior to that just described, which involves training oneself to focus during religious worship on the object of that worship to the exclusion of all else, and not merely to participate in the prescribed rituals and prayers with the tongue and limbs alone, and when undertaking the actions which the Law prescribes to concentrate fully on the actions being performed. On the other hand...

...occupy your thought with things necessary for you or superfluous in your life, and in general with *worldly things*, while you eat or drink or bathe or talk with your wife and your small children, or while you talk with the common run of people. Thus I have provided you with many and long stretches of time in which you can think all that needs thinking regarding property, the governance of the household, and the welfare of the body.<sup>20</sup>

What he appears to have in mind here is a compression of occupation with external matters into the minimum time required, thus freeing up the intellect for concentrating on higher and more noble matters to the maximum extent compatible with domestic and commercial obligations.

When... you are alone with yourself and no one else is there and while you lie awake upon your bed, you should take great care during these precious times not to set your thought to work on anything other than that intellectual worship

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<sup>17</sup> *The Kuzari*, Part One, page 37. This comparison is also drawn by Howard Kreisel – *Maimonides' Political Thought*, pages 139-40. Kreisel, however, goes rather further, in his likening of Maimonides' doctrine to that represented by Halevi, when he quotes the passage in the *Kuzari* preceding the one quoted here, in which the perfect individual actually *identifies* himself with the Active Intellect. Of course, Kreisel's conclusions regarding the nature of the conjunction between the acquired intellect and the Active Intellect are based on the whole Maimonidean corpus, rather than the *Guide* in isolation, which text has been the sole focus of this dissertation, at least as far as Maimonides' writings are concerned. There is insufficient discussion in the *Guide* to draw any firm conclusions from this text alone regarding the nature of this conjunction.

<sup>18</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.51, page 623.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, page 624.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, page 623 (translator's italics).

consisting in nearness to God and being in His presence in that true reality that I have made known to you and not by way of affections of the imagination.<sup>21</sup>

Maimonides is ever mindful of the external demands on people's time that despite their wishes and intentions will rob them of opportunities to approach God by seeking to conjoin with the Active Intellect<sup>22</sup>, and he offers a method whereby these demands can be met with minimum expenditure of non-contemplative time, at least by suitably prepared and intellectually endowed people, who will, despite his method, be few in number<sup>23</sup>. In terms of reducing the risk which concerned Hayy, of losing the opportunity for salvation by sudden and unforeseen death, the method laid out in the *Guide* is probably the best that can be expected – it is not only unrealistic but vaguely heretical to expect even the intellectual elite, for whom Maimonides was writing, to attain the lofty rank of Moses and the Patriarchs, for whom alone was contemplation of God sufficiently uninterrupted to guarantee them salvation. Put another way, only Moses and the Patriarchs could be said to be guaranteed salvation because only they were constantly occupied with the apprehension of God, inasmuch as this is possible for hylomorphic creatures, whereas all other "excellent men" must strive to maximise the possibility of attaining salvation by minimising the amount of time spent in any activity other than apprehension of the deity. For a member of the latter group, the likelihood of achieving salvation is directly dependent on that individual's success in compressing non-contemplative activities so that he or she occupies the minimum amount of time required for their successful completion.

## II

The second issue identified at the end of Chapter Six concerned the dissimilitude as far as the question of *what* it is which survives death is concerned, between Maimonides' doctrine of salvation and the more personalised doctrines sometimes posited by Jews, Muslims, and Christians. The salvation portrayed in *The Guide of the Perplexed* contrasts very strongly with representations of the afterlife which some, although by no means all, of the adherents of these faiths have put forward, if a comparison is made

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.34, pages 72-79, in which he shows a full awareness of the reasons why many will never achieve salvation, at least as he conceives it.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, page 79.

regarding the issue of who or what the entity is that survives death and attains immortality. Without wishing to make an inaccurate generalisation regarding these religions in general, it is fair to say that some of their adherents have postulated a post-death survival in which some vestige of individuality is retained, at least in the minimal sense of being a discernibly separate entity from other such survivors of death, whether this is conceived of as involving an admixture of corporeality or as being purely spiritual in nature. As the problem of individuality is one of those classic philosophical issues which has defied satisfactory and universally accepted resolution since it was first raised, it is impractical to give a properly precise definition of what is meant here by describing such conceptions of salvation as individualistic. Fortunately, such a definition is not necessary for present purposes – all that is intended is to contrast a broad notion of post-death salvation in which pre-death individuals survive death in some recognisably and appropriately differentiated manner, with the Maimonidean notion, at least as found in the *Guide*, in which post-death survival for such pre-death individuals essentially involves incorporeal participation in an absolutely undifferentiated and sempiternal conjunction with the Active Intellect.

As is case with so much concerning Maimonides' noetic, in order to establish the non-individual nature of the soteriology contained within the *Guide*, it is necessary to examine his diffuse comments in the text on this issue, which occur within a variety of contexts. He makes one of his rare statements on the topic near the end of the first book, during his critique of the *Mutakallimūn*, and as is so often the case in this text, when interpreting his remarks it helps to consider the context in which they are embedded. The statement in question occurs in a passage in which he is considering what he regards as one of the particular spurious arguments which these theologians use to establish the truth of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. The argument in question is a simple *reductio ad absurdum*, which proceeds by claiming that the assumption of the eternity of the world entails an existing infinite number of the immortal souls of those people who had died in "the limitless past", and that as an existing infinity is impossible it follows that the world must have had a beginning in a finite past <sup>24</sup>. In his brief discussion of this argument, Maimonides refers with apparent approval to the refutation of this argument by later philosophers, who claim that as the immortal souls are not bodies they would neither be spatially locatable nor infinite in number.

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<sup>24</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.74, page 220.



...regarding the things separate from matter – I mean those that are neither bodies nor forces in bodies, but intellects – there can be no thought of multiplicity of any mode whatever, except that some of them are the causes of the existence of others and that thus there is a difference among them since one is the cause and the other the effect. However, what remains of Zayd is neither the cause nor the effect of what remains of Umar. Consequently all are one in number as Abū Bakr Ibn al-Sa'igh and others who were drawn into speaking of these obscure matters have made clear. To sum up: premises by which other points are to be explained should not be taken over from such hidden matters, which the mind is incapable of representing to itself.<sup>25</sup>

Presumably the type of non-material causal relationship to which he is referring here is that exhibited in the process of emanation whereby each of the separate intellects emanates the intellect of the sphere 'below' it, and hence stands with respect to the latter in a relationship of cause and effect. Obviously, as he points out, this type of casual nexus is not applicable to human beings, and hence once our hylic component is corrupted to the point at which death occurs then we cease to exist as separate individuals. Immortality awaits those who have been fortunate enough to have achieved prior to death the requisite level of intellectual development which results in the attainment of the acquired intellect, and, although Maimonides does not make this clear, for those who for whatever reason have not attained the acquired intellect it would seem to follow that dissolution without trace into the raw material of the universe awaits, to express it in rather un-Maimonidean terms. Whether we achieve salvation or not, it seems that individuality ceases with death.

There is another passage, which occurs earlier in the first book of the *Guide* than that quoted above, on what happens to people after death, which is also relevant to the question of whether or not salvation in the *Guide* is collective in nature, and which appears to give an affirmative answer to that question.

...the *souls* that remain after death are not the *soul* that comes into being in man at the time he is generated. For that which comes into being at the time a man is generated is merely a faculty consisting in preparedness, whereas the thing that after death is separate from matter is the thing that has become actual and not the *soul* that also comes into being; the latter is identical with the spirit that comes into being. Because of this the Sages have numbered the *souls and spirits* among

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, page 221. As Pines points out (in footnote 10) 'Abū Bakr Ibn al-Sā'igh' is Ibn Bājja.

the things that come into being. What is separate is, on the contrary, one thing only.<sup>26</sup>

Certainly, some commentators have interpreted Maimonides thus. Oliver Leaman, for example, makes the point that as far as Maimonides is concerned, it is not the pre-death individual *qua* individual which survives death, but the abstract thoughts contained in the perfected intellect of such an individual; that is to say, it is the thoughts themselves which are immortal rather than the intellect which, when actualised by a living human being, apprehended them<sup>27</sup>. Furthermore, the perfected intellects all contain the same set of thoughts, and hence in this sense must be identical to each other, and given the objective nature of the process whereby people gradually perfect their intellects, this seems to be a fair comment<sup>28</sup>. However, as with so many areas of Maimonides' thought in the *Guide*, this interpretation has not met with universal acceptance. Shlomo Pines accepted it when he was actually translating the text, but subsequently changed his mind<sup>29</sup>. Citing the passage from I.74 quoted above, he points out that it can be viewed in two different ways: (1) as indicating Maimonides' approval for Ibn Bājja's doctrine of the unity of the surviving intellect after death, or (2) indicating Maimonides' agnosticism concerning the possibility of the survival of the intellect. Pines originally accepted the first interpretation, but eventually decided that the second one was more likely to fit with the argument of I.74, although even then he conceded that Maimonides might still have approved of Ibn Bājja's doctrine as far as philosophical theology is concerned<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, I.70, pages 173-74 (translator's italics).

<sup>27</sup> *Moses Maimonides*, page 114. As discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, Maimonides holds that the intellect *in actu* is identical with both the act of intellectual apprehension and the object of apprehension, and hence this distinction would be, for him, fairly academic.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*. Leaman also comments that "Every step forwards in the direction of immortality is matched by a step backwards in the direction of impersonality" – *ibid.*.

<sup>29</sup> "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides", pages 106-07, and endnote 75 on page 120, and also *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.74, page 221, footnote 11.

<sup>30</sup> He does make the proviso that such a theology must not be "...wary of putting forward assertions that the limited human intellect is unable to verify" – "The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides", page 106. That Maimonides does not allow himself to be restricted in his speculations by his metaphysical agnosticism is acknowledged by Alfred Ivry, who adduces examples of Maimonides' implicit and understated acceptance of a Neoplatonic underpinning to much of the *Guide*. This underpinning is not logically demonstrable in any strict sense – Aristotelian or otherwise, and it does not confine its theories to the sublunary world, which, Maimonides claims, forms the sole proper domain for Aristotelian science. There is, perhaps, little surprise that "...he was uncomfortable with

These two interpretations may well be different, but they are not necessarily incompatible. Certainly if Maimonides' declared metaphysical agnosticism, which was discussed above in Chapter Four, is accepted, then he would find it well nigh impossible to claim demonstrative status for any doctrine of the intellect's immortality, collective or otherwise, and he does indeed indicate in the passage from I.74 quoted above that this doctrine pertains to an area of thought which lies beyond the boundaries within which human thought is confined.

Maimonides' own comments in the text, as quoted above, should settle fairly conclusively the issue of whether or not, in the *Guide*, he is positing as an important element of his soteriology an afterlife which involves the stripping away at the point of death of all possible individuating features of suitably prepared people, and leaving only the objective contents of their acquired intellects to survive through undifferentiated conjunction with the Active Intellect. Nevertheless they are not so unequivocal that the interpretation of them offered here would not benefit from the support of the fact that it is consistent with other relevant aspects of his metaphysics, which have been discussed earlier on in the dissertation, albeit in different contexts. First of all, returning to the critique of matter early on in the third book of the *Guide*, which was outlined at the end of Chapter Six above, it can be seen that a substantial part of what individuates us as human beings is derived from our hylic element. Matter is not only responsible for corruption<sup>31</sup>, but also for our differentiation into separate human beings while we are living, and hence necessarily enmattered, beings. The critique of matter flows seamlessly into a discussion of evil, the existence of which is conceptually linked with the existence and nature of matter, during which Maimonides, pointing out that generation would not be possible if it was not for corruption, makes the following claim.

He who wishes to be endowed with flesh and bones and at the same time not be subject to impressions and not to be attained by any of the concomitants of matter merely wishes, without being aware of it, to combine two contraries, namely, to be subject to impressions and not to be subject to them. For if he were not liable to receive impressions, he would not have been generated, and

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endorsing this world view, and that he refers to it as sparingly as possible" – "Neoplatonic Currents in Maimonides", page 138.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.8, page 430, and III.10, page 440.

*what exists of him would have been one single individual and not a multitude of individuals belonging to one species.*<sup>32</sup>

As Pines' footnote to this passage indicates <sup>33</sup>, if man were neither subject to impressions nor generated the human species would be a single instantiation species, and as both these features of our existence are concomitants of matter it follows that matter must be the principle of individuation. Pines points out that the bodies and souls of the celestial spheres are single instantiation species, and it might appear that the fact that these bodies are themselves material entities rather undermines this attribution to Maimonides of a hylic principle of individuation, however, this is not necessarily a difficulty. Maimonides makes it abundantly clear that the matter of the sublunary world is qualitatively different and vastly inferior to that of the superlunary realm, with the former being described as "earthy, turbid, and dark" <sup>34</sup>, and the latter described as "the purest and most luminous" <sup>35</sup>. Presumably the idea is that it is sublunary matter alone that is the source of corruption.

Shortly after the passage from III.12 which was quoted above, Maimonides enunciates a general proposition which may be read as reinforcing his view on the subject.

Everything that is capable of being generated from any matter whatever, is generated in the most perfect way in which it is possible to be generated out of that specific matter; the deficiency attaining the individuals of the species corresponds to the deficiency of the particular matter of the individual. Now the ultimate term and the most perfect thing that may be generated out of blood and sperm is the human species with its well known nature consisting in man's being a living, rational, and mortal being.<sup>36</sup>

What this passage implies is that it is matter which accounts for the differences between individuals. It is the human species in *the* perfection appropriate to it – or, to be more precise, the perfection appropriate to it in the hierarchy of Maimonides' ontology – which is *the* optimum which can be generated from sublunary matter. There is no suggestion that there is more than one such perfect state, divergences from which are

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, III.12, page 443-44 (my italics).

<sup>33</sup> Footnote 12.

<sup>34</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.8, page 431.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, III.13, page 455. Although Maimonides does, in the same passage, describe celestial matter as "obscure, dark, and not clear", this is only when the (material) heavens are compared to the (immaterial) separate intellects.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, III.12, page 444.

caused by the various defects in the matter of the various members of the human species. Admittedly, this passage is weaker evidence than the previous one for the view posited here concerning individuation, but, as so often is the case in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, the evidence for a particular thesis is scattered throughout the text and is not always as unequivocal as might be thought to be desirable.

The second previously discussed element pertains to the process, discussed in the last chapter, whereby the acquired intellect is obtained, allowing conjunction with the Active Intellect. It is only necessary to refer to the fact that the forms which were described as ascending from uninformed prime matter, onward through the elements and the various stages of the intellect, until the acquired intellect is attained, are objectively existing entities, which *qua* objective are the same for all those who are sufficiently intellectually developed to apprehend them as forms abstracted from their matters in which they were originally embedded. This links in with Leaman's point, referred to above <sup>37</sup>, that that which actually survives death is these abstracted forms. As explained above <sup>38</sup>, this is not a problem for Maimonides, because he identifies the intellect in actuality with both the act of intellection and the object of intellection, separable only in thought. The salient point here is that not only is it matter which individuates human beings – it is *only* matter which can do this. Pure, abstracted form cannot do this as the contents of all acts of intellection do not vary from individual to individual. The noetic ascension described by Alfarabi is a journey which does not vary from one thinker to another, being an objectively existing pathway rather than a subjective one. In Maimonides' Aristotelian world, form is a reality which we find through a process of intellectual abstraction already there in the world – we do not each put it there. If matter individuates and pure form does not, then it seems reasonable to conclude that when our material component degenerates beyond a certain point and we die, then there is no longer any barrier between those who have attained the stage of intellectual development requisite for salvation, and they lose their identity as they conjoin with the Active Intellect and participate in its immortality. Indeed, to be perfectly accurate, it is no longer appropriate to refer to 'they', as this term implies differentiation.

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<sup>37</sup> See footnote 27 above.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*.

This non-individual conception of salvation locates Maimonides closer to the Hindu tradition regarding what happens after death than to that of at least some varieties of the three main Occidental monotheistic religions, as the following excerpt from the Chandogya Upanishad shows.

As the rivers flowing east and west merge in the sea and become one with it, forgetting they were ever separate rivers, so do all creatures lose their separateness when they merge at last into pure Being.<sup>39</sup>

Obviously, it would not be wise to push the comparison too far – the somewhat austere Maimonidean vision of the post-death experience of the perfect man is a long way from that of Hinduism. Apart from other considerations, it will be clear that for Maimonides post-death conjunction with the Active Intellect is an exalted state which few people will achieve, whereas for the Hindu the dissolution of the individual into "pure Being" is a state which all people will eventually achieve. The point of the comparison here is to suggest that in terms of his conception of what happens after death to those suitably prepared individuals who achieve conjunction with the Active Intellect, Maimonides is so far removed from the individualistic conception of salvation which is an element of some Occidental monotheistic soteriology, that his doctrine is closer in this respect to at least one major Oriental religion. This difference is neatly encapsulated by Neil Gillman, to whom reference was made at the beginning of this chapter, and who, although writing as a Conservative Jew, gives eloquent expression to the more orthodox conception of individual immortality prevalent throughout Judaism, which he regards as a powerful and important myth.

I insist that my resurrection must affect all of me in my concrete individuality because I understand the central thrust of the doctrine of the afterlife as establishing the everlasting preciousness to God of the life I led here on earth. A doctrine of the afterlife that has my soul merging into some cosmic soul after my death would defeat the entire purpose of the myth.<sup>40</sup>

Judaism, according to Gillman, insists that...

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<sup>39</sup> Chapter VI, verses 10.1 and 10.2, pages 184-85. The context from which the quotation is extracted is an explanation of what happens to human beings when they die, given by Uddalaka to his twelve year old son, Shvetaketu.

<sup>40</sup> *The Death of Death*, page 271. Gillman writes in favour of the notion of resurrection as corporeal as well as spiritual, but this does not affect his basic point.

...it is precisely the single human being in all his or her individuality that is most precious to God. It is that individuality that God will preserve forever.<sup>41</sup>

This view of immortality is clearly diametrically opposed to that offered in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, and if (for the sake of the argument) Gillman's statement is accepted, then it is clear that what Maimonides has to offer in its place is as heterodox as it is possible to imagine, without actually denying the possibility of salvation altogether.

The intention of this chapter was to address the first two of three issues that arose out of the soteriology of the *Guide*, as it was reconstructed in the last chapter. The first issue was the need to render more precise what is entailed by stating that it is by fully actualising our intellectual potential until we reach the stage of the acquired intellect that we achieve conjunction with the Active Intellect, and attain the immortality that this entails. This need for precision developed out of an equivocation in the use of the word 'actuality' in Aristotle's *De Anima*, and an explanation of how Aristotle uses it made it possible to understand the nature of the contemplative activity that both Maimonides and Ibn Tufail regard as the route to man's ultimate perfection. The second issue referred to the need to clarify what exactly it is that survives death in Maimonides' soteriology, and this was tackled by showing that all differentiation between individual human beings ceases at death, and that this is due to the fact that such differentiation is a function of sublunary matter and once their metaphysical status as hylomorphic entities ceases so also do the differences between them. For those who achieve immortality, that which survives is pure form – objective abstract ideas, the intellection of which is carried on sempiternally by the Active Intellect. To modern sensibilities, this is certainly a strange conception of the afterlife, but in the intellectual climate in which Maimonides wrote the *Guide* it was almost a philosophical commonplace that it is noesis which provides the bridge between human beings *qua* members of the animal kingdom, and *qua* creatures made in the image of God.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, page 272.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Showing that which cannot be said** **– in Tolstoy and in the Torah**

#### **I**

The soteriology identified in the last two chapters, which appears to have as its foundation the likeness through noesis between God and man, and the subsequent and associated possibility of salvation for the latter through intellectual conjunction with the Active Intellect, should not obscure the crucial fact that for Maimonides we are unable to make any positive assertions concerning the quiddity of God, and are confined to negative assertions alone. Any positive assertions which we make must, if they are to be legitimate, pertain not to God's essence, which is eternally unknowable, but to His actions as perceived by us in the world. This is standard Maimonidean philosophical theology, as presented throughout the *Guide*, but especially in Book One <sup>1</sup>, and outlined in Chapter Three of this dissertation. It is perhaps appropriate at this juncture to issue a warning that despite the optimism inherent in the doctrine of salvation contained within the *Guide* – a doctrine which the last two chapters have endeavoured to present – it is important to reiterate that for Maimonides, the inherent limits which trammel our metaphysical investigations and the associated linguistic representation of the results of these investigations, whether verbal or written, cannot be transcended, and, as his many biblical proof texts show <sup>2</sup>, we are compelled to adopt silence as the ultimate counsel of wisdom. In the effort to extract a conception of post-death survival from *The Guide of the Perplexed*, which, when extracted, turns out to be underpinned by a rather optimistic view both of man's place in God's creation and of the possibility of purely intellectual metaphysical knowledge, it is all too easy to lose sight of this principle, despite the frequency and force with which Maimonides draws attention to it. One possible reason for this is the phenomenon mentioned in a number of previous chapters whereby Maimonides will focus more heavily in various places in the text on different, and not obviously mutually compatible, aspects of a topic under discussion depending upon what his pedagogical intentions are in a given place. So, for example, in the part of the first book of the *Guide* where he discusses the divine attributes he will stress God's unknowability, and His ontological and epistemological distance from mankind,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.50-60, pages 111-47.



whereas at the end of the third book, during his discussion of man's final perfection and the possibility its realisation offers for immortality, he stresses the intellectual link between us and the deity <sup>3</sup>. This link is introduced right at the beginning of the *Guide* <sup>4</sup>, and is referred to frequently throughout the text, in a variety of contexts, and although it sits uneasily with Maimonides' apophatic theology the two are not formally contradictory or contrary – at least as he presents them – mainly due to the fact that the enlightened few can achieve immortality not by direct intellection of the deity, but by preparing themselves prior to death for post-death conjunction with the Active Intellect, which is the last of the angels or incorporeal messengers to emanate from God, as described in Chapter Six of this dissertation, but which is most definitely not the deity Himself. God always remains ultimately unknowable as He is in Himself, and, as Maimonides explains, can be known only by the *via negativa* or through His actions in the sublunary world, neither of which give human beings cognition of His essence.

It was suggested in Chapter Five above, that this emphasis on silence, which is a direct and ineluctable result of the inherent inability of man to articulate anything positive regarding the divine quiddity, is a doctrine common to both Maimonides and Ludwig Wittgenstein, although the two thinkers arrive at this doctrine in very different ways, and attribute very different domains to that of which we must remain silent. For Maimonides, it is of the divine essence that we cannot speak, inasmuch as we cannot describe God's quiddity in any direct, positive sense, whereas for Wittgenstein, it is of value in general, where this would include the content of what is normally encompassed by ethics, aesthetics and religious belief. It was clear from the explanation given, in Chapter Five above, of the Austrian's metaphysic as articulated in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, that the two philosophers have an enormous gulf between them in a number of other important respects, not the least of which are the very different scientific presuppositions which underlie the *Tractatus* and the *Guide*, and the purposes declared by their respective authors in respect of the production of the two texts. However, at the end of Chapter Five some clear parallels were identified between the texts concerning (1) the stance taken regarding the limits of human language, and the implications of these limits for the delineation of the domain of the natural sciences, and (2) the declaration that those issues which are ultimately the most important for

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, footnote 23 to Chapter One of this dissertation.

<sup>3</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.51, pages 618-28.

mankind cannot be articulated, or their truths communicated, in any direct manner, and that any attempt to do so will, if pushed to its rightful limits, end in silence. At this point it was suggested that there is a third parallel, namely, that although the aforementioned truths cannot be directly communicated, they can, however, be indirectly communicated – in the parlance of the *Tractatus*, although they cannot be 'said', they can be 'shown' – and that the validity of this parallel will be illustrated in the present chapter. The procedure to be followed now will be to illustrate <sup>5</sup>, first of all from Wittgenstein's side, what type of truths can be shown but not said, and how they can be shown, then to indicate how *The Guide of the Perplexed*, at least as interpreted thus far in this dissertation, implicitly contains a similar doctrine. There is no suggestion that Maimonides consciously espoused a doctrine similar to that of Wittgenstein – merely that one is implicit in the doctrine of the attributes of action. Finally, the relevance of this parallel for the overarching question of whether there is within the *Guide* a totally naturalistic soteriology such that a congenital isolate like Hayy Ibn Yaqzan could achieve salvation, will be shown.

At the beginning of Chapter Five, it was mentioned that the *Tractatus* has been interpreted in a variety of different and incompatible ways since its publication in 1921 <sup>6</sup>. Many of the original Logical Positivists – what is normally referred to as 'the Vienna Circle' – believed for a number of years that Wittgenstein was a kindred spirit, due to the fact that the book can superficially be represented as advocating an epistemology which was similar to theirs, which, to put it at its baldest, divides the range of meaningful utterances into (1) truths such as those the natural sciences present, which are (at least in theory) empirically verifiable, and (2) the tautologous truths of logic and mathematics. Anything which falls outside these categories could be safely dismissed as nonsense. Such an epistemology thus dismisses utterances of religious belief as, at best, expressions of approval or disapproval or, at worst, meaningless. Unfortunately, the members of the Vienna Circle were mistaken in their assimilation of Wittgenstein to their cause <sup>7</sup>, and eventually they realised this all too clearly. However, the last few

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, I.1, pages 21-23.

<sup>5</sup> Almost by definition, it is impossible to expound Wittgenstein's doctrine directly.

<sup>6</sup> The book was published in German in 1921, and published in English translation the following year.

<sup>7</sup> Janik and Toulmin summarise the nub of the mistake as follows: "The logical positivists were overlooking the very difficulties about language which the *Tractatus* had been meant to reveal; and they were turning an argument designed to circumvent *all*

decades have seen the emergence of a strand of thought <sup>8</sup> which regards the *Tractatus* as attempting a much more subtle project – to show that those issues of ultimate importance to mankind, such as those which form the subject matter of ethics and religion, are far from being meaningless, but transcending as they do the normal boundaries of discursive language, their truths cannot be communicated directly as in traditional ethical and religious discourse, but can only be communicated indirectly. These truths are what is *really* important, and are, as such, 'outside' the world, with the problems of science and philosophy being confined to the domain of world-based, factual discourse, the importance of which is exhausted once their inherent limitations have been revealed. This is why Wittgenstein believed that his book had said all that was worth saying about philosophy, and how little had been achieved once this had been done. At the end of the preface to the *Tractatus*, he makes this abundantly clear.

...the *truth* of the thoughts that are here communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems. And if I am not mistaken in this belief, then the second thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved.<sup>9</sup>

Earlier in the preface he utters the same aphorism with which he closes the book:

...what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.<sup>10</sup>

Following this aphorism, he explains that the purpose of the *Tractatus* is to locate the rightful limit of the expression of thoughts.

It will... only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense.<sup>11</sup>

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philosophical doctrines into a source of *new* doctrines, meanwhile leaving the original difficulties unresolved" – *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, page 216. See also footnote 2 to Chapter Five above.

<sup>8</sup> See the first pages of Chapter Five above, and footnote 20 (to the current chapter) below.

<sup>9</sup> *Tractatus*, Preface, page 4 (translator's italics).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, page 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*.

However, despite the Logical Positivists' interpretation of this remark, it must be remembered that nonsense is literally that which does not have sense, and 'sense', for Wittgenstein, is a technical expression denoting the state of affairs which obtains if the proposition is true <sup>12</sup>, and a state of affairs is defined as "a combination of objects (things)" <sup>13</sup>, the existence of which is described as a "fact" <sup>14</sup>, with the totality of facts being identified with the world <sup>15</sup>. Without wishing to recapitulate the reading of the *Tractatus* put forward in Chapter Five, it is easy to see that the concept of sense is logically and inextricably bound up with that of fact, and so a perfectly valid reading of the last quotation from the *Tractatus* would be that a statement has sense if and only if it is referring to a possible fact, that is to the existence of a possible state of affairs in the world. Conversely, a statement has no sense if it is not referring to a possible state of affairs in the world, and this entails that as ethics and religious belief are concerned with value, which by Wittgenstein's definition lies outside the world <sup>16</sup>, statements of ethics and religious belief literally have no sense, that is, are non-sense. There can be no ethical or religious 'facts' – in early Wittgensteinian ontology the very notion is oxymoronic. Fortunately, this does not entail that those matters which have ultimate significance for us, such as, for example, the existence of God, the nature of morality, and death – to name but a few – are totally ineffable. Rather it is the case that they are not communicable in the straightforwardly direct and discursive manner that we use to communicate facts of natural science, but only in a non-direct manner; and this can be done in a variety of ways – by music, fine art, and imaginative literature <sup>17</sup>, to name the most powerful ones – and these communicate by 'showing' rather than 'saying'. These matters of ultimate significance for us are not problems for mankind in the sense that, for instance, physicists' current search for a Grand Unified Theory is a problem. On the contrary, although they are issues in which we constantly strive for enlightenment, they are not 'problems' for us as such, being of a different order to problems within the world. A lengthy quotation from the final paragraphs of the *Tractatus* should make this clear.

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<sup>12</sup> See footnote 40 to Chapter Five for references to the relevant parts of the *Tractatus*.

<sup>13</sup> *Tractatus*, 2.01, page 5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, page 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.1, page 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.41, page 71.

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 78 to Chapter Five.

When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words.

*The riddle* does not exist.

If a question can be framed at all, it is also *possible* to answer it.

Scepticism is *not* irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical, when it tries to raise doubts where no questions can be asked.

For doubt can exist only where a question exists, a question where an answer exists, and an answer only when something *can be said*.

We feel that even when all *possible* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer.

The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem.

(Is not this the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense?).

There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.<sup>18</sup>

So, when it comes to the really important existential issues which human beings face, not only are there are no clearly and directly articulable answers to questions which we might be tempted to ask, but also the questions themselves cannot be properly formulated in such a manner either. To look for resolution of these issues in traditional ethics<sup>19</sup> and religious thought would, in Wittgenstein's terms be an error; we must turn to writers, composers, and other artists, if we would remove some of the perplexity which bedevils us<sup>20</sup>, and it is from the first of these groups that an example will be

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<sup>18</sup> *Tractatus*, 6.5, 6.51, 6.52, 6.521, and 6.522, respectively, page 73 (translator's italics).

<sup>19</sup> This is true of *any* system of ethics, whether utilitarian, deontological, or virtue-based.

<sup>20</sup> Obviously this view of the *Tractatus* cannot be proven to be irrefutable, almost by the nature of what is being claimed, and certainly it is far beyond the purview of this dissertation to attempt to do so. It is being adopted here, admittedly rather axiomatically, as a plausible reading of the text – one which was persuasively presented almost thirty years ago in *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, by Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, and which has received more recent support from Ray Monk, in his 1990 biography of Wittgenstein, and also from Bryan Magee in two recent books, the autobiographical *Confessions of a Philosopher*, and *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, (the latter of which illustrates clearly the enormous influence which Schopenhauer exerted over the doctrines of the young Wittgenstein). It also receives support from Robert C. Solomon, who, in a short history of continental philosophy since the middle of the eighteenth century, describes Wittgenstein's intention in writing the *Tractatus* as being "...to make us realize that rational thought should be transcended" – *Continental Philosophy since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self*, page 147. This view of the *Tractatus* does at least

selected here to illustrate what he means by his thesis. The writer Leo Tolstoy had an influence on Wittgenstein which is well documented and difficult to overestimate <sup>21</sup>. This influence was not only through his *The Gospel in Brief*, which Wittgenstein discovered by accident during his military service early during the First World War, and which he read countless times over the following years, but also through shorter tales such as *Hadji Murat* – a story of derring-do set in the context of Russian military activity in the Caucasus in the middle of the nineteenth century – and, perhaps more importantly for present purposes, other short stories which could perhaps be fairly described as moral fables or folk tales, such as those published under the collective title *Twenty Three Tales*. With the exception of *The Gospel in Brief*, Wittgenstein was most impressed with Tolstoy's works which make their respective points in a manner which is implicit rather than explicit. In a letter to Norman Malcolm written in 1945 he uses a neat metaphor to highlight this aspect of his reading of Tolstoy.

I once tried to read 'Resurrection' but couldn't. You see, when Tolstoy just tells a story he impresses me infinitely more than when he addresses the reader. When he turns his back to the reader then he seems to me *most* impressive. ...It seems to me his philosophy is most true when it's *latent* in the story.<sup>22</sup>

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have the inestimable advantage of accommodating the somewhat gnomic utterances in the text from proposition 6.4 to the end of it, which more traditional interpretations of the books, which view it as primarily a treatise on logic, find rather an embarrassment – indeed it regards these utterances as providing the core of the text, rather than being an inexplicable aberration.

<sup>21</sup> Janik and Toulmin describe Tolstoy as having exerted "...the deepest and most direct moral influence on him", *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, page 177, and certainly those who have written with any first hand knowledge about Wittgenstein's life and intellectual influences have acknowledged the writings of Tolstoy's which helped to shape the Austrian's *Weltanschauung*. See, for instance, the references to Tolstoy and his writings not only in *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, but also in Norman Malcolm's *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, and in G. H. Von Wright's "A Biographical Sketch", which introduces Malcolm's book. Toulmin, Malcolm, and Von Wright all knew the Austrian personally.

<sup>22</sup> Letter dated 20.9.45, "Wittgenstein's Letters to Norman Malcolm", page 98 (Wittgenstein's emphasis). This assertion is not inconsistent with Wittgenstein's oft-remarked passion for *The Gospel in Brief* – a book which he describes in a letter to a friend as having "...virtually kept me alive" – quoted in Ray Monk's *The Duty of Genius*, page 132. The assertion in question relates explicitly to Tolstoy's stories, and *The Gospel in Brief* is described in Tolstoy's introduction as "...[a] fusion of the four Gospels into one, according to the real sense of the teaching" – *The Gospel in Brief*, page 16. Hence it certainly is not a work of fiction, at least in the sense of it originating in Tolstoy's imagination.

Although this comment was made relatively late in his life, and certainly well after his public repudiation of much of what the *Tractatus* had to say, at least as far as the philosophy of language is concerned, it can be taken as stating in picturesque and non-Tractarian terms that Tolstoy is at his most effective as an ethico-religious philosopher when he is communicating his points by showing rather than by saying.

The writing to be selected now as an example of how a simple short story by Tolstoy can illustrate an ethical and existential point which could not conceivably be directly articulated, is *Master and Man*, rather than one of those mentioned above. The reason for this choice, which may appear to be somewhat perverse, given that it is not one of those normally cited by writers who comment on Tolstoy's influence on Wittgenstein, is quite solely and simply that out of all Tolstoy's writings I personally find it to be the one which best exemplifies the Tractarian thesis that that which *really* matters can only be shown and not said, and furthermore, that it does this in a manner which is both simple and powerful in a way which does not diminish on subsequent readings of it. What follows is a synopsis of the story, and an attempt – however illegitimate and ill-founded by Tractarian standards it might be – to articulate briefly how this tale exemplifies the thesis in question.

The story takes place in a time period of less than twenty four hours, and concerns a journey made by a merchant called Vasilii Andreich and his hired hand, Nikita. Vasilii Andreich is driven by an all-consuming passion for profit to make an ill-advised journey through a snowstorm, accompanied by Nikita, to secure the purchase of a nearby coppice from its owner, as he is aware that timber merchants from a nearby town are also interested in the property, and he wishes to ensure that he is not prevented from making what he envisages will be a highly profitable transaction for him. Although Vasilii Andreich is pictured as a family man, and not a character entirely devoid of redeeming characteristics, he is clearly driven by avarice, and he is averse neither to funding part of his proposed purchase with an unofficial loan of 2,300 roubles of the church money for which he is steward, nor to exploiting his man, Nikita, who has been rendered penniless by alcohol abuse, and who consequentially exists in a relationship to his master of what can only be compared to feudal servitude. As result of his poverty Nikita is unable to provide himself with clothing adequate to protect him properly against the ferocious Russian winter – a problem which his master does not have.

The weather is poor enough when the journey begins, but deteriorates rapidly once the horse-driven sledge containing the two men is on the road. Ignoring, in his haste, good advice offered by Nikita concerning the best route for the poor conditions, Vasilii Andreich, who is driving the sledge, soon gets into difficulties, and gets lost, eventually driving the sledge into a ditch. After a struggle against the elements they reach a nearby village where they are offered overnight shelter by a family who know them, and who counsel Vasilii Andreich against proceeding any further on his journey. Needless to say, the advice is ignored by the merchant, who sets off again with a reluctant Nikita, into the storm which is continuing to worsen, and eventually they get lost again, partly due to Vasilii Andreich's reluctance to trust the route-finding instincts of his horse, Dapple, and have to face up to the unpleasant fact that this time they will have to spend the night out in the open, sheltering as best they can with only the sledge and their clothing to protect them from the biting, snow-laden wind. Settling down for the night, dangerously exposed to the elements, obviously sleep does not come easily to either man, with Vasilii Andreich mentally running through his business accounts, both present and future, and Nikita pondering sombrely his difficult life, as they wait silently in the snow. Some time afterwards, but still early in the night, Vasilii is startled by a wolf howling nearby, and with little difficulty persuades himself that he is justified in making a break for safety using Dapple without the sledge, even though this means abandoning Nikita. Unhitching Dapple, he climbs onto the horse's back, and drives it off into the obscurity of the storm, but unfortunately after a terrifying journey in what he believes is the direction of safety, during which what little remaining of his courage and composure finally abandons him, he finds himself back within fifty yards of the sledge, where he finds Nikita succumbing to hypothermia. At this point, Vasilii Andreich climbs into the sledge, digs the snow from Nikita, and, opening his own coat to provide cover for his servant, lies down on top of him, and both men drift into unconsciousness. In the morning, Nikita awakes to find himself with some frostbite, but alive, thanks to the shelter provided by the clothing and body of his dead master, who is frozen stiff. Shortly after Nikita's awakening, Dapple also dies of exposure. Nikita survives, and after spending two months in hospital, lives for another twenty years.

The somewhat prosaic account given above of this tale should not be permitted to mask or distort the moral lesson presented by Tolstoy, in a powerful depiction of how one



man casts aside his previous worldly values, and in a spontaneous act of supererogation, which transcends rationality as opposed to being simply non-rational, discovers real value and the joy of self-sacrifice for the benefit of another. The lesson is heightened by the fact that Vasilii Andreich had previously regarded and treated Nikita as very much his inferior. It would be impossible to communicate the lesson of this story in a direct manner. No treatise of discursive and analytic moral philosophy, regardless of length and profundity, could encapsulate the simple, plain human wisdom manifested in *Master and Man* – a deeply moving tale which never at any point yields to sentimentality, and which illuminates a truth far beyond direct statement in language. It is the fact that Vasilii Andreich undergoes an unexpected and unsought change of his fundamental values, which had hitherto been focussed on himself, and his wants and needs, that renders this so. One of the basic contentions of the latter part of the *Tractatus*, is that what value there is must lie outside the world, but for Wittgenstein direct statement in language of a given truth must take place by the medium of propositions, and if propositions are confined to picturing possible states of affairs in the world, then it clearly follows that propositions cannot be used as a vehicle for the direct expression of that which is by definition extra-mundane<sup>23</sup>.

Needless to say, what has just been said in the previous paragraph is unquestionably an attempt to *say* that which can only be *shown*, but one which is heuristically unavoidable. Of course, the methodologically most pure approach would be to present the synopsis of Tolstoy's story without further explanatory comment, but this would not be particularly helpful.

Once again, as with so much concerning the mystical side of Wittgenstein's early philosophy, this presented exemplification of his central claim cannot be logically demonstrated. *Master and Man*, like so many of Tolstoy's short stories, contains a wisdom concerning what may be loosely referred to as 'the meaning of life' which is beyond logical exposition, and, as such, only amenable to indirect expression<sup>24</sup>. If a reader initially cannot see the lesson contained within a particular tale then

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Five above for the initial presentation and expansion of this point.

<sup>24</sup> "The meaning of life was no more an academic question for Wittgenstein than it had been for Tolstoy. It was not, and could not, be answered by the reason, since it is resolved only by the way in which one lives" – *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, page 198-99. The

unfortunately he or she cannot be led to see it in any discursive manner – all that can be done is to advert to certain features of the story in the hope that the wisdom which is latent within it will eventually be intuited by the reader in question. The situation here is directly analogous with the situation concerning the status of the putative comparison made earlier on in Chapter Five above between elements of Wittgenstein's early thought as manifested in the *Tractatus*, and that of Maimonides in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, which was discussed at the beginning of that chapter. There the suggestion was made that the comparison was an instance of the quintessentially Wittgensteinian practice of 'seeing connections', which involves adopting a particular perspective on a given issue without actually making an assertoric, and hence potentially refutable, statement that the proposed connection holds in reality <sup>25</sup>. As far as Tolstoy's tales are concerned, the 'seeing connections' involves recognising from the existential situations and dilemmas in which his characters are placed, and their actions therein, concrete embodiment of the types of situations and dilemmas in which we too find ourselves placed, and subsequently recognising the eternal validity of the spiritual values which having served Tolstoy's characters so well are equally valid for us too. It is the facilitation of this latter recognition that Tolstoy's lessons are intended to accomplish. Unsatisfactory as it may be from the point of view of modern analytic philosophy, which insists on an underpinning of logical argumentation for all claims, there is nothing more that can be offered to defend this viewpoint. To say any more is to risk transgressing the Wittgensteinian injunction not to try and say that which can only be shown. Admittedly this injunction only has force for one who accepts the importance and absolute nature of this distinction; but unfortunately this acceptance can only, by the very nature of the case, be grounded experientially rather than discursively. If one grasps, or, at least, thinks that one grasps, the message that Wittgenstein is intending to convey, then there *is* nothing more that can be said without breaking faith with both the spirit and the letter of the message.

Before returning to Maimonides, however, there is one minor point which should be made. Despite Wittgenstein's acceptance of much of Tolstoy's philosophy of life – an

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depictions of lives being lived that one encounters in Tolstoy's tales may well be fictional, but they are not less suitable for conveying moral and spiritual lessons for that.

<sup>25</sup> See the quotation from Ray Monk early in Chapter Five, the location of which is given by footnote 5 of that chapter, and the paragraph in the dissertation which follows it.

acceptance which was not merely academically intellectual, but which led him to seek a more materially impoverished and simpler way of life once he returned from his captivity at the end of the war – he did not believe that it is only Tolstoyan literature, which can show that which cannot be said. This role is attributed to art as a whole. The Russian writer is simply adduced here as being an example of an artist who achieved this through his work, who happens to be particularly suitable for this purpose due to the fact that Wittgenstein's admiration for this work is especially well-attested historically. To sum up the whole position it is perhaps worth giving two final quotations from *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. This is particularly appropriate as this book is a foundational text for those who interpret the *Tractatus* as primarily intended to carry out a project which is more important than simply the furtherance of the philosophies of language and logic, namely the clear differentiation between what language can convey directly and what it can only convey indirectly – between saying and showing.

On this interpretation, the *Tractatus* becomes an expression of a certain type of language mysticism that assigns a central importance in human life to art, on the ground that art alone can express the meaning of life. Only art can express moral truth, and only the artist can teach the things that matter most in life. Art is a mission.<sup>26</sup>

Subjective truth is communicable only indirectly, through fable, polemics, irony, and satire. This is the only way that one can come to "see the world aright." Ethics is taught not by argument, but by providing examples of moral behaviour; this is the task of art. It is fulfilled in Tolstoy's later *Tales*, which explain what religion is, by *showing* how the truly religious man lives his life.<sup>27</sup>

## II

Having laid out the essentials of Wittgenstein's doctrine it is now appropriate to return to *The Guide of the Perplexed* to make good the earlier promise to establish, as far as this is possible, the parallel with the *Tractatus* as far as the distinction between saying and showing is concerned, with both texts containing<sup>28</sup> the common doctrine that there is an area of thought which is of central importance for how we live our lives, but which is only communicable indirectly – direct communication being confined to the fact-based scientific realm of discourse.

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<sup>26</sup> *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, page 197.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, page 198 (authors' italics).

<sup>28</sup> As stated above, in the case of the *Guide* the doctrine is implicit rather than explicit.

Much of the groundwork for this comparison on the Maimonidean side has already been undertaken in earlier chapters of the dissertation, and what is now required is to bring the various strands of this groundwork together, with the first step in this process being the highlighting of a crucial difference between the doctrines of Wittgenstein and Maimonides concerning the nature of the distinction between that which can be said and that which can only be shown. For Wittgenstein, the distinction in question is an absolute one, which is objectively grounded in the respective natures of the world, logic and human language, and the value which transcends the world. It is not a function of intellect, with people with highly developed intellects being more able to acquire wisdom by 'saying', that is, by having it communicated directly to them, than those whose intellectual faculties are developed to a lesser extent, and who consequentially are more dependent on indirect communication, that is, who are dependent more on being 'shown', as far as the acquisition of wisdom is concerned. The differing intellectual capacities of human beings are not relevant to the doctrine of the *Tractatus*, and there is no sense in which the distinction is a function of development of intellect.

For Maimonides, however, the position regarding limits is more complicated. In Chapter Four above, it was shown that he draws a clear limit to the domain of human ratiocinative thought, in as unambiguous and uncompromising a manner as does Wittgenstein. For Maimonides this limit is the lunar sphere, with all that this sphere contains being the proper object for natural science, and amenable to treatment in accordance with the laws of physics laid down in the works of Aristotle <sup>29</sup>, and the sphere itself, all that lies beyond it, and the incorporeal Separate Intellects being outside this domain, and beyond any science – even that of the Stagirite. In other words, generally speaking <sup>30</sup>, the lunar sphere forms the boundary between that which is

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<sup>29</sup> See the passages quoted from the *Guide* in Chapter Four located by footnotes 44, 45, and 46, which are clear statements of his position.

<sup>30</sup> This qualification reflects a slight equivocation in Maimonides' statements on the topic, located as per the footnotes referred to above from Chapter Four. Discussing Aristotle's thought on the lunar sphere and that which is above it, Maimonides claims that it is "...except for certain things, something analogous to guessing and conjecturing" – *The Guide of the Perplexed*, II.22, page 320 (my italics); and later on he claims that "...regarding all that is in the heavens, man grasps nothing but a small measure of what is mathematical;" – *ibid.*, II.24, page 326 (my italics). However, although mankind is not completely excluded from scientific knowledge of the lunar

knowable by demonstration and that which is not so knowable, with the sphere itself lying on the unknowable side of the boundary. However, in addition to this limit, which circumscribes the domain of legitimate discourse in physics, there is also another limit – that which delimits the proper realm of discourse about God. This latter limit, discussed in Chapter Three above, and referred to at the beginning of this chapter, restricts such discourse to negative assertions about God, with positive statements being limited to those that refer solely to His actions with respect to that which He has created, and not in any manner to His essence. Thus we have a metaphysical limit, in addition to the physical one, although these limits, like those of Wittgenstein are absolute – they are not a function of development of intellect. After all, Aristotle himself, for whose philosophical acuity Maimonides makes no secret of his admiration, was unable to gain apodeictic knowledge of the superlunary world, and Moses, whom Maimonides regarded as the greatest human being who ever lived, was unable to grasp God's essence<sup>31</sup>. Nevertheless, unlike the *Tractatus*, *The Guide of the Perplexed* is permeated throughout with comments referring to what, for Maimonides, is a very real distinction between the elite and the masses, with the primary manifestation of this distinction being degree of development of intellect. An awareness and public<sup>32</sup> recognition of this distinction is something which Maimonides shared with the other *falāsifa*, as discussed in Chapter One above, as is a corresponding elitism, associated with the fact that the practitioners of philosophy are able to grasp in an unadulterated and purely conceptual form, those truths which non-philosophers can only comprehend when they are presented in appropriate imaginatively pictorial language. As a result of this, the *falāsifa* had a particular tolerance for the apparently non-philosophical content of religious texts, as these latter were in their opinion particularly suited to this task of presenting important spiritual truths in a manner fit for mass consumption. Averroes puts the matter as follows.

...the religions are, according to the philosophers, obligatory, since they lead towards wisdom in a way universal to all human beings, for philosophy only leads a certain number of intelligent people to the knowledge of happiness, and

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sphere and the superlunary world above it, it is clear that such knowledge is very limited in extent.

<sup>31</sup> For God's refusal to grant Moses' request that he should be permitted to know God's "essence and true reality", see *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.54, pages 123-25.

<sup>32</sup> Describing this recognition as 'public' in this context means solely that they referred openly to it in their published writings.

they therefore have to learn wisdom, whereas religions seek the instruction of the masses generally.<sup>33</sup>

...since the primary purpose of Scripture is to take care of the majority..., the prevailing methods of expression in religion are the common methods by which the majority comes to form concepts and judgements.<sup>34</sup>

This does not entail, at least for Averroes, that the philosopher can simply disengage from the religious laws and prescribed observances of his or her particular faith community<sup>35</sup>, but there is a clear functional differentiation between religious and philosophical texts intended here, with each type of text teaching by methods appropriate to its primary readership.

Admittedly, as far as Maimonides is concerned, this boundary between what is fit for the elite only, and what can be shared with the masses, is not located quite where some of the *falāsifa* would locate it, nor is it quite so unbridgeable as they would view it. The existence and importance of the distinction between these two classes of citizens is constantly reiterated throughout the *Guide*, and treated as something of an axiom, as is the concomitant distinction between the appropriate mental fare for each group, but he does at least attempt in this text to present philosophical theses to the masses, albeit devoid of the argumentation by which they are underpinned. For instance, he goes to considerable trouble to ensure that none of his co-religionists can be left in any doubt of the incorporeal nature of God, His incommensurability with His creation, and the inapplicability of attributing affections to Him.

...the negation of the doctrine of the corporeality of God and the denial of His having a likeness to created things and of His being subject to affections are matters that ought to be made clear and explained to everyone according to His capacity and ought to be inculcated in virtue of traditional authority upon children, women, stupid ones, and those of a defective natural disposition...<sup>36</sup>

Maimonides is not only willing to present these notions to all his fellow Jews, he is uncompromisingly insistent that it should be done. If a person can grasp these important truths about God by unaided reason then well and good, but if this is not possible then the full weight of traditional authority must be invoked in order to underpin the lesson

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<sup>33</sup> *Tahafut Al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence) Volumes I and II*, page 360.

<sup>34</sup> *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, Chapter Three, page 64.

<sup>35</sup> *Tahafut Al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence) Volumes I and II*, page 360.

<sup>37</sup>. Ralph Lerner, in a recently published book, has drawn attention to the unusual extent to which Maimonides attempted to make certain philosophical theses part of the intellectual heritage of every Jew, not just those who had a certain level of education.

Maimonides is a rare case, perhaps unique among individuals of his rank, in attempting to bring some basic notions of philosophy within the ken of ordinary men and women... [he] understands from the outset that he cannot teach the people philosophy... But he can impart a few of the conclusions that philosophy or science has reached.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, this differentiation of Maimonides from other writers of his rank, taking this to include the *falāsifa* as a minimum, does not alter the fact that he fully subscribes to a fundamental distinction between an elite cadre of thinkers who grasp philosophical truths in their conceptual form, without any assistance from the imagination, and the rump of the populace, who are incapable of grasping these truths in any form other than through the imagination.

Now despite the unyielding determination with which he upholds this distinction, and the manner in which he constantly refers to it throughout the *Guide*, it is important not to write him off through the more liberal eyes of the twentieth century simply as a mono-dimensional intellectual elitist. Apart from historical anachronicity, such a judgement would not take into account the fact that in one chapter of the *Guide* he discusses this question in terms which make it very clear that he regards innate intellectual ability as only one of five factors which hinder human beings from progressing in metaphysical enquiry<sup>39</sup>. The five factors identified are as follows: (1) the nature of the subject matter, which is difficult, obscure and subtle; (2) differences in intellectual ability, including the variety of degrees to which people have the opportunity to actualise their intellectual potential; (3) the length of the requisite preliminary studies; (4) the variety of natural aptitudes amongst people to attain the moral virtues, which are necessary for acquisition of the rational virtues; (5) the need to provide for the necessities of the body, not only for oneself, but also for one's dependants. Although rather understated, his discussion is flavoured with compassion for his fellows for the everyday burdens under which they laboured – not only the

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<sup>36</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.35, page 81.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>38</sup> *Maimonides' Empire of Light*, page 11.

necessity of earning a living, but also congenital disadvantages such as limited potentiality to acquire the moral and rational virtues. Certainly, if one examines Maimonides' own life, it is difficult to visualise him as anything other than a man driven by a desire to ease the lot of his fellow Jews. Beneath the often harsh language of the *Guide*, there is a sub-current of concern for others, which doubtless manifested itself in his own lifestyle, in which he spurned the comparatively <sup>40</sup> easy life of a man solely and professionally devoted to scholarship, for a life as an overworked physician, and religious leader and administrator, into which he still managed to fit a prodigious amount and range of study and writing. In displaying this compassion, and in seeking to enhance the depth and extent of his co-religionists' understanding of God, Maimonides was complying with the Talmudic principle expressed in the first book of the *Guide*, that in striving to become as like to our creator as it is possible for created beings to become, we should seek as far as we can to assimilate our actions to His actions.

...the utmost virtue of man is to become like unto Him, ...as far as he is able; which means that we should make our actions like unto His, as the Sages made clear when interpreting the verse, *Ye shall be holy*. They said: *He is gracious, so be you also gracious; He is merciful, so be you also merciful.*<sup>41</sup>

Now, given the reality of the insurmountable obstacles to the acquisition of wisdom on the part of the masses, identified by Maimonides, which not only make it well nigh impossible for the bulk of the populace to acquire important metaphysical wisdom, but which also impede even their recognition that such wisdom exists and is of vital importance if the twin perils of heresy and apostasy are to be avoided, God has given a clear manifestation of His graciousness and mercy by providing a non-intellectual route to a non-metaphysical presentation of His truths. This is done through the Torah, which presents wisdom in a more easily mentally digestible manner than the treatises of the philosophers can. Throughout the first book of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, he constantly reiterates that the Torah addresses us as human beings in purely human language which is fit for all, regardless of educational background or intellectual ability, and scatters throughout the text references to the Torah as speaking "in the language of

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<sup>39</sup> The chapter in question is I.34, pages 72-79.

<sup>40</sup> Given the turbulent times in which he lived it is difficult to envisage him having an easy life no matter how he had chosen to earn a living.

<sup>41</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.54, page 128 (translator's italics).



the sons of man" or, occasionally, "according to the sons of man" <sup>42</sup>. He describes the meaning of this phrase as follows.

...everything that all men are capable of understanding and representing to themselves at first thought has been ascribed to Him as necessarily belonging to God...Hence attributes indicating corporeality have been predicated of Him in order to indicate that He... exists, inasmuch as the multitude cannot *at first* conceive of any existence save that of a body alone; thus that which is neither a body nor existent in a body does not exist in their opinion.<sup>43</sup>

Historically, the masses have had a tendency to regard God through the categories through which they perceive the sublunary world, and the objects and activities contained therein. Unable to conceive an abstract existent which is not linked to corporeity, they have needed to be presented with an image of God which will be accepted by their imaginations, which are generally far stronger than their ratiocinative powers. At first blush, this passage from the *Guide* may appear to be inconsistent with the later passage quoted above from I.35 <sup>44</sup>; however, as the italicised words indicate, it can be rendered fully consistent if it is borne in mind that Maimonides, throughout the *Guide*, makes it clear that he is a believer in the ability of his people, throughout a sufficiently long period of time, to achieve increasingly refined conceptions of their creator, albeit ones which will still be primarily pictorial in nature. He can plausibly be interpreted as being of the view that at the time of writing the *Guide* the Jewish people were ready to be presented with the truth that no attribute linked to corporeality, however remotely, can properly be ascribed to God, whereas in Biblical times, their collective religious development was at a more rudimentary stage, at which the deity had to be represented by grossly corporeal attributes, including the possession of some human bodily parts, such as hands and feet, in order for belief in His existence to be secure. One of the clearest instances of this belief in religious progress occurs in the third book of the *Guide*, during his discussion of the origin of the institution of sacrifices, in the course of which he refers to God's "wily graciousness and wisdom" in weaning the Israelites away from their pre-Biblical pagan beliefs by transferring the purpose and focus of the institution away from the Sabian deities towards Himself alone

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.26 (page 56), I.29 (page 62), I.33 (page 71), I.46 (page 100), I.47 (page 105), I.53 (page 120), I.57 (page 133), and I.59 (page 140).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, I.26, page 56 (my italics).

<sup>44</sup> See footnote 36 above.

<sup>45</sup>. During his discussion he identifies a number of ways in which God has wrought necessary changes in His people by altering their behaviour, beliefs, and attitudes, and even their physical dispositions, in such a subtle and gradual way that no sudden discontinuities in their basic human nature are required. For example, when the Israelites originally left Egypt under Moses' leadership they were accustomed to humiliation and servitude, and mentally and physically unfit to conquer the promised land, but instead of miraculously changing them at once into a nation which was mentally and physically ready for conquest, God led them around the wilderness for forty years. This ensured that they were hardened through the austerity of their lifestyle and through the birth of new generations who did not have to acquire the slave mentality necessary for survival in Egypt, and the resulting fortitude equipped them to cross the river Jordan and to fight successfully for the country which God had promised would be their own <sup>46</sup>.

Although Maimonides appears to have believed that some of the anthromorphisms of the Torah were no longer necessary, he does not criticise the inclusion of these in the scriptures, being more concerned with offering explanations as to why exactly they are there, for the benefit of his educated fellow Jews, who were perplexed as to the apparent discord between the Jewish scriptures and the dictates of reason as expressed by Aristotelian philosophy <sup>47</sup>. The general rule which determines the inclusion of the words and phrases in question in the Torah is presented as pertaining to the multitude's perceptions of deficiency and perfection.

...none of the things apprehended by the multitude as a deficiency or a privation are predicated of Him... On the other hand, everything that the multitude consider a perfection is predicated of Him, even if it is only a perfection in relation to ourselves – for in relation to Him... all things that we consider perfections are the very extreme of deficiency.<sup>48</sup>

This in itself is insufficient to explain the use of anthropomorphic language in the Torah, and a further explanation is given later on the first book of the *Guide* to account for the fact that God's posited perfections are represented in a manner which Maimonides, from his lofty standpoint of religious propriety, and with the benefit of

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<sup>45</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.32, pages 525-31.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 527-28.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, Introduction to the First Part, pages 5-6.

more than fifteen hundred years' hindsight, finds so unacceptable. Speaking of the multitude's knowledge of God's existence and perfection, and His possession of life, apprehension, power, and activity, he gives a fuller account of the phenomenon in question.

The minds of the multitude were... guided to the belief that He exists by imagining that He is corporeal, and to the belief that He is living by imagining that He is capable of motion. For the multitude perceive nothing other than bodies as having a firmly established existence and as being indubitably true... That, however, which is neither a body nor in a body is not an existent thing in any respect, according to man's initial representation, particularly from the point of view of the imagination. Similarly the multitude do not represent to themselves the notion of life as anything other than motion and consider that that which has no local motion due to its will is not alive...<sup>49</sup>

As he explains the reason for terms in the Torah attributing local motion to God by the masses' need for these to enable them to conceive of Him as living, Maimonides likewise explains terms attributing sensation to God as being required to encourage belief in His apprehension of that which is other than He, as that is the only manner in which the masses imagine apprehension to take place. In this way he accounts for all anthropomorphisms in the Torah, but it would take too long to expound in full how he does this, and for present purposes it is not necessary to do this anyway – all that is necessary here is to give the general tenor of his technique, and one or two illustrative examples, and this has now been done. Underpinning the whole account is a deep and rather pessimistic view of the multitude's ability to arrive at truths essential for salvation by the use of reason alone – a state of affairs ameliorated only by God's mercy in providing for mankind a more easily accessible pathway to correct belief in His existence as creator of that which is other than He, and to the concomitant beliefs and behaviours which should follow on from an apprehension of His existence, than that offered by philosophy. There is a strong sense in which the Torah is a signpost, the function of which is to point out the pathway to the right life for all human beings – not just those who have the inclination and the aptitude to study metaphysics – and which carries out its function by vividly illustrating in imaginatively pictorial form what must be done in order to follow this pathway. At one point in the *Guide*, Maimonides describes the Torah as "that book which guides all those who seek guidance toward

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, I.26, page 56.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, I.46, page 98.

what is correct and therefore is called Torah" <sup>50</sup>, and it is implicit in this description that the function of Torah is to *point the way* to the truth rather than already containing the truth within itself. Indeed, it clearly cannot be said to contain the truth inasmuch as on a literal reading – which is the way in which most of its readers will view it – it repeatedly advocates a manner of regarding the deity which is palpably untrue, namely as being describable by attributes which connote corporeality <sup>51</sup>. Continuing the metaphor of Torah as a signpost, it is clear that a signpost is, almost by definition, separate from that to which it is a signpost, and, furthermore, to state this is not to denigrate in any way the signpost itself – merely to advert to its proper function. It is also important to point out that its function as a signpost is consistent with its being a multi-layered text, which the masses will subject to a literal reading, and which the cognoscenti will read in a figurative manner.

This interpretation of Maimonides' view of the Torah might appear to be inconsistent with what he states elsewhere in the *Guide* about the fact that the philosophers, despite their more abstractly conceptual view of reality, which is as a consequence nearer to the truth than that conveyed in conventional religious texts, have not thereby earned the right to ignore the injunctions contained within the Mosaic Law, which is a key part of the Torah. In other words, even if the philosophers have a superior and more adequate grasp of the truths presented pictorially to the masses they cannot simply ignore the signposted path which is contained within the Torah, but must follow it like all their co-religionists, at least as far as the legal code contained therein is concerned. The philosophers' status as a small, elite cadre of intellectuals is irrelevant in this respect.

...the Law does not pay attention to the isolated. The Law was not given with a view to things that are rare.<sup>52</sup>

Unlike medical treatment, which, as Maimonides would have been very well aware, needs to be tailored to the particular circumstances of each individual patient, the

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, III.13, page 453.

<sup>51</sup> As Arthur Hyman points out, if the Torah does indeed speak "in the language of the sons of man", then "...it cannot avoid language which is anthropomorphic and anthropopathic in its literal sense" – "Religious Language", page 181.

<sup>52</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.34, page 534. As a measure of the rarity of the true philosopher, it is helpful to refer to Maimonides' description of himself as the man who, in writing his treatise, chose to give satisfaction to "a single virtuous man" at the cost of displeasing "ten thousand ignoramuses", *ibid.*, Introduction to the First Part, page 16.

prescriptions of the Law have universal validity regardless of the individual circumstances of those who are bound by it, and there can be no acceptable bespoke variation in adherence to it.

...governance of the Law ought to be absolute and universal, including everyone, even if it is suitable only for certain individuals and not suitable for others; ...matters that are primarily intended in the Law ought not to be dependent on time or place; but the decrees ought to be absolute and universal...

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This status of the Law as absolutely and universally binding is still valid despite the fact that it does not take minority interests, such as those of the philosophers, into account. Of its decrees, Maimonides states that...

...only the universal interests, those of the majority, are considered in them... <sup>54</sup>

The Law is aimed at the welfare of the community as a whole, and *qua* part of that community, the philosophers must accept it without question and not distance themselves from it – like Averroes, he holds that the philosophers must remain fully integrated into whatever faith community they belong <sup>55</sup>. The philosophers can theorise about the nature of the Mosaic Law, as Maimonides himself does at considerable length in the *Guide*, but there are good theoretical and practical reasons why they must both adhere to it and be seen to adhere to it – an example of the former being that it is of divine origin <sup>56</sup>, and of the latter being that given its importance to the multitude of the people, perceived non-adherence to it would not only be perilous for the non-adherent, but would also risk undermining the universal faith in it <sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, III.34, page 534-35.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, page 535.

<sup>55</sup> See footnote 35 above, for a relevant reference to Averroes' view of this matter.

<sup>56</sup> "...the Law is a divine thing;" – *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.34, page 534.

<sup>57</sup> As Maimonides puts it: "...if it were made to fit individuals, the whole would be corrupted..." – *ibid.*, page 535. Howard Kreisel also acknowledges the utilitarian element in Maimonides' thought on this issue, when he makes the following comment: "Maimonides' desire to protect and preserve Judaism from the various challenges facing it, and his conviction in its superiority over the other religions, are crucial elements in appreciating the positions he adopts. The possibility of formal abrogation of any of the commandments paves the way for an abandonment of Judaism as a whole in favour of the other religions that also claim divine authority" – *Maimonides' Political Thought*, page 23.

However, the presentation of the Law is only a part of the Torah – it is not the Torah in its entirety, and while it may be indeed be a key part there are other, non-legal aspects of the complete Torah which are equally important. The legal code promulgated by Moses is embedded within the histories and genealogies of the non-legal parts of the Pentateuch, and it is upon these latter parts to which the focus must now be turned. Setting aside the legal code as a corpus of law which has been shown, in Maimonides' view, at any rate, to be binding on all members of the Jewish faith, we have a body of non-legal writings which include histories, genealogies, and purely devotional material. If the histories are considered in isolation, there is a continuous series of interlinked narratives which, when Torah is taken in its narrow sense as applying solely to the Pentateuch, commence with God's creation and continue through to the death of Moses, and which, when it is taken in a broader sense as including the prophetic books and the other, non-prophetic writings included in the Tanakh, continues to a much later period in the history of the Israelites. Given that Maimonides draws on examples from the whole Tanakh in his discussion on the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic terms in the scriptures, it would make sense to take 'Torah' as including this second, larger body of material, which unlike the Law does not have to be interpreted in a manner which is mandatory for all. Indeed, it is one of the main functions of the first part of *The Guide of the Perplexed* to show that much of this material is highly equivocal, with a literal meaning, the function of which is to guide the masses, and which is strictly speaking false when thus interpreted, and at least one higher level of figurative meaning which is only for those whose possess the requisite educational background and intellectual apparatus to grasp it properly. Now, given Maimonides' strictures on the importance of recognising, and not attempting to transcend, the limits of human physical and metaphysical knowledge, to which reference was made at the beginning of this chapter, and the textual bases of which were demonstrated in earlier chapters, there is implicit in his doctrine a sense in which this lower layer of literal interpretation which is aimed at the uneducated masses achieves something which higher, non-literal levels of interpretation cannot. This achievement is that it illustrates in a highly pictorial manner, which appeals to our imaginative faculty, the manifestation of God's presence and interest in the workings of the world that He has created. Put another way, it shows God *acting* in the sublunary world, and, of course, attributes pertaining to His actions are the only positive attributes which Maimonides acknowledges to be legitimately ascribable to Him. Even Moses, who is frequently described in the *Guide* as having a uniquely

privileged position with respect to God <sup>58</sup>, could not be granted knowledge of any positive attributes of the deity other than those of His actions, and his requests for knowledge of God's attributes and of His essence was only partly successful.

The answer to the two requests that He... gave him consisted in His promising him to let him know all His attributes, *making it known to him that they are His actions*, and teaching him that His essence cannot be grasped as it really is.<sup>59</sup>

...whenever one of His actions is apprehended, the attribute from which this action proceeds is predicated of Him... and the name deriving from that action is applied to Him.<sup>60</sup>

When we perceive a given action of God's, we attribute to Him the attribute that we would do to a human agent when an analogous action is performed by that agent. So, for example, we describe God as "gracious" because He has created and governed beings who have no claim at all to such favourable treatment, and such beneficence on the part of a human agent would attract this descriptor to the agent himself. Likewise, we refer to the deity as "angry" when we perceive great calamities occurring in the world, because such actions would, if carried out by human agency be described as being motivated by a turbulent and destructive emotion such as anger <sup>61</sup>. Of course, our attributions do not entail that God is really gracious or liable to wrath – this would be pure anthropopathy – but given the severe constraints on what we can properly say about God, such reasoning by analogy from His actions in the world is the best that we can hope to achieve.

Now whether the histories of the Torah are regarded as entirely factual records of events that have occurred in the past, or whether, at the other end of the scale, they are believed to be entirely fictitious, or whether they are viewed as a combination of history and myth, is not necessarily relevant inasmuch as they serve their pedagogic purpose equally well irrespective of the verisimilitude of the events narrated therein. What is important about them is not simply that they present a view of God, and of the correct attitude that mankind should adopt towards Him, and how they should behave amongst

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<sup>58</sup> For instance: "...what has been apprehended by [Moses]... has not been apprehended by anyone before him nor will it be apprehended by anyone after him" – *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.54, page 123 (translator's brackets).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* (my italics).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, page 125.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 125-26.

themselves as a result of their common status as His subjects. These narratives, whether historical or otherwise, also are the only means which we have of apprehending what is denied to us by more abstract means, namely, knowledge of God, albeit obtained by analogy rather than through direct ratiocination, at least if Maimonides' extremely austere and apophatic philosophical theology is taken as seriously as he appears to wish it to be taken. The narratives, which result from a low-level, literal reading of the text of the Torah – ostensibly suitable only for the masses – show us God acting in the world, and reveal aspects of His creative and governing activity which conceptual thought can never yield to us, even on the lofty level attained by Aristotle and his interpreters. A single example should suffice to make the point, which refers to God's mercy and expectations of human beings, and also to the attitude of absolute faith that we should adopt towards Him. In Genesis 22, the story is told of how God instructs Abraham to take Isaac, the much-cherished son of his old age, on a journey of three days to the land of Moriah, and there to sacrifice him to God. The Torah shows Abraham as making the preparations for the journey and carrying it out, accompanied by Isaac and also by two servants, without any recorded complaint or questioning of God's command. It is only when he has actually picked up the knife with which he is to slay Isaac that an angel instructs him not to proceed any further, and a ram is provided as a sacrificial victim in Isaac's stead. A second angelic message reveals to him the due reward for his obedience.

As is usual in the Torah, the narration is spare to an extreme degree, with no embellishment at all, however, even where the reader is given no indication of the emotions felt by the primary participants in the drama, this literary characteristic enhances rather than detracts from its force, and as might be expected, the story has been read in a variety of different ways. Søren Kierkegaard made it the focal point of his short polemic, *Fear and Trembling*, and in a recently published edition of this work the translator, Alastair Hannay, in his introduction, makes the following comment.

The Old Testament story of Abraham's journey to the mountain to sacrifice Isaac has been read in widely different ways. It was used by the early Christian Church to celebrate faith and obedience... In Jewish culture the story was later used to invoke God's mercy...<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Fear and Trembling*, (translator's) Introduction, page 7.



Now Maimonides' primary view of Abraham is not so much as a "knight of faith" <sup>63</sup> than as a 'knight of monotheism', who argued against the Sabians, and their polytheistic and idolatrous star-worship, and who is represented in *The Guide of the Perplexed* as something of a proto-philosopher, whose importance for Judaism should not be underestimated, and who is described as "the pillar of the world" <sup>64</sup>. Nevertheless, given Maimonides' stricture that the only legitimate positive attributes which can be predicated of God are those which pertain to His actions it is important to realise that God's action in respect of the demand which He made of Abraham, indicates clearly not only what He may demand of us by way of faith and willingness to sacrifice that which is most precious to us, but also His great mercy. These notions would be impossible to represent in an abstract discursive manner without inadvertent transgression of the Maimonidean injunction not to discuss God in terms of positive attributes, but by presenting us with a particular action of God's in the Torah, they are represented clearly and in a memorably imaginative manner which the sparsity of the narrative does not impair. Indeed, perhaps this sparsity makes the lesson more effective by requiring us to draw on our existing imaginative resources to augment the account in the Torah – a task which Kierkegaard undertakes in his discussion of the story. To put the matter another way, the story in the Torah provides a lesson about faith and God's mercy by *showing* us God acting in the world – a lesson that on the fundamental principles of Maimonides' philosophical theology cannot be imparted by *saying*, as the latter method of impartation would lead us into the forbidden territory of positive essential attributes. Furthermore, as stated above, the actual historical accuracy of Genesis 22 is irrelevant inasmuch as the lesson is conveyed equally well whether the events narrated actually happened or whether the story has purely mythic status <sup>65</sup>, and this is a characteristic that it shares with, for example, Tolstoy's moral fables – the lesson of *Master and Man* does not lose its heuristic power by the fact that the story originates in Tolstoy's imagination. For a story to show us something important, whether this is about transmundane value (in Wittgensteinian terms) or about God's attributes of action (in Maimonidean terms), it does not thereby need to be possessed of a solid and attestable historical basis. After all, the procedure makes no claim to the demonstrative rigour beloved of Aristotle and the *falāsifa*, which must be based on true premisses. Admittedly, if historical accuracy is not essential to successful conveyance of the

<sup>63</sup> Kierkegaard's characterisation of Abraham in this role.

<sup>64</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.29, page 516.

message that is being expressed by the narrative in question, what is required instead is that the narrative is somehow appropriate as a vehicle for the message in question, and that the recipient of the message possesses a faith in, or rather, acceptance of, the context in which the narrative is set <sup>66</sup>. The reason for this need for faith is that a potential recipient must, in some sense which is not easy to define be *receptive* to the message or lesson that is being conveyed, otherwise there is a real risk of it being rejected. Put less abstractly, by way of example, a devotee of an anti-Christian philosopher such as, for instance, Nietzsche, would presumably completely reject the lesson of *Master and Man*, as adumbrated above, regarding Vasilii Andreich's sacrifice of his life for that of his serf as a foolish and misguided act, rather than as an admirably supererogatory one. In a Maimonidean context, in order to 'see' God acting in the world and intervening in the history of the Israelites, one must already to a significant extent believe in the notion of a personal, omnipotent deity who is both knowledgeable of, and concerned with, the affairs of the sublunary world. Without this underlying faith, receptivity to the lessons contained in narrative episodes such as the binding of Isaac would be greatly reduced. Once one possesses this underlying faith, however, it is possible to see what is being shown by this episode without any guarantee of historical veracity. It is enough that this narrative is consistent with the faith in a personal and historically active God for it to function successfully as an educational vehicle, although, of course, this is not say that such a narrative *must* be fictitious in character, but merely that it *can* be, and this is a much weaker claim.

The truths that are shown in the Bible cannot, at least according to Maimonides' metaphysics, be known directly, which (for him) means by demonstration. In reading the stories in the Bible we can see such difficult notions as that of God's mercy being worked out in people's lives, which in this case are those of the Israelites, and through these stories we are shown attributes of action which we cannot discover through abstract speculative thought. In this sense, the literal reading of the Torah is superior to that of the figurative methods of reading the text, which are recommended by Maimonides as being more suitable for the elite. A literal reading pictorially communicates aspects of God *qua* agent in our sublunary world, and in doing so

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<sup>65</sup> Needless to say, Maimonides would not necessarily agree with this view.

<sup>66</sup> Robert C. Solomon, to whom reference was made in footnote 20 above, describes Wittgenstein as wanting "...to limit reason ...and defend a wordless moral *faith*" – *Continental Philosophy since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self*, page 148 (my italics).

conveys His attributes of action more powerfully than speculative philosophy can ever hope to achieve.

### III

Maimonides would undoubtedly not be happy either with the claim that in a sense the literal reading of the Aggadic aspects of the Torah permit a perception of God's attributes of action denied to more sophisticated and figurative approaches to the text, or with the associated claim that for this to be possible the Torah need contain little by way of historical fact. The whole text of the *Guide* is an overt attempt to resolve the perplexities experienced by his fellow educated Jews in their encounter with philosophy by explaining how many of these perplexities can be dissipated by a suitably non-literal reading of the Torah <sup>67</sup>. As far as the question of the accuracy of the apparently historical facts presented in the Torah is concerned, even a casual perusal of Maimonides' book reveals a devotion to the Torah and its teachings, and a concern to ensure that passages which are problematic due to their inconsistency with demonstrated philosophical theses are interpreted correctly rather than simply being rejected as false, which would be a more appropriate course of action if he felt that their veracity was in question. However, it is neither necessary nor practical to delve too deeply into these claims, which arise from the doctrine of divine attributes posited in the first book of the *Guide*, but which are not by any means intended to spearhead a critique of this doctrine. The sole intention now is to provide a final answer to the question which has been hovering in the background of the dissertation thus far, of whether or not a Maimonidean isolate, as defined in the first chapter of it, can attain salvation by entirely naturalistic means, that is, without any assistance from revelation. The answer appears, at least from the soteriology teased out from within the pages of Maimonides' text and presented in Chapters Six and Seven, to be hesitantly affirmative, but the question of the epistemological status of a literal reading of revealed texts is important as a counterbalance to this optimism, as will become clear below.

Such an isolate is, like Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, living a life in absolute separation from other human beings, and does not have the advantage enjoyed by Robinson Crusoe of being possessed of texts of revealed religion, and the associated cultural imprints lodged in the

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<sup>67</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Introduction to the First Part, page 5.

memory of having formerly belonged to a world in which such texts ostensibly provide a ethical and religious underpinning for daily life. Indeed, in the manner of Hayy, prior to the arrival of Asâl, such a person is actually pre-lingual in fact and in outlook, and literally has no other aids to facilitate the achievement of salvation than his or her own reason assisted by nothing other than sense perception. As explained early in Chapter Three, this equipment is perfectly adequate for the acquisition of knowledge of the sublunary world, and there is a sense in which being left as "he naturally is" such an isolate would not be required, as Maimonides felt himself to be, to expend valuable intellectual effort on refuting doctrines such as that which posits essential attributes in the deity <sup>68</sup>. In addition, the lack of revealed texts and the religious heritage within which these are normally interpreted would also entail that the isolate would not be subject to the pitfalls that such texts can pose to unwary readers, such as believing that God is possessed of any attributes which connote corporeality, or is subject to affections, or contains any admixture of potentiality – the type of dangers which can inadvertently lead to heresy or idolatry, or even to unbelief, and against which Maimonides never ceased to struggle on behalf of his fellow Jews. Certainly, if Hayy's intellectual and spiritual progress as recounted by Ibn Tufail is examined it can be seen that as he works his way up through the hierarchy of sublunary and superlunary forms until he eventually reaches the notion of a producer of these forms, who is their efficient cause, he very soon realises that such a producer cannot conceivably be a body but, on the contrary, must be incorporeal <sup>69</sup>. His reasoning is untrammelled by any preconceptions of the creator to which he may have been exposed by religious doctrines, which are primarily expressed through imaginative language readily comprehensible by the masses. Ibn Tufail describes how Hayy is able to proceed entirely by reasoned reflection on the empirical material provided by his sense organs without any subconscious indoctrination to distort or limit the horizon of his investigation, which starts as being purely physical and moves very quickly to being metaphysical, and he eventually attains the conjunction with the Active Intellect which is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for immortality. Admittedly what he has discovered through careful contemplation, which initially is focussed on the sublunary

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<sup>68</sup> See the quotation from the *Guide*, the location of which is provided by footnote 15 to Chapter Three of this dissertation.

<sup>69</sup> Hayy's progress from the realisation that "...every thing that was produc'd anew must needs have some Producer" to the fact that "...the World stands in need of an

world in which he is corporeally located and which soon takes a more transcendent and incorporeal focus, is shown to be in a sense a more abstract version of the teachings of revealed religion to which Asâl's fellow citizens adhere.

When Asâl heard him give an Account of those Truths, and those Essences which are separate from the Sensible World, and which have the Knowledge of the Essence of that *True One*... and heard him give an account of the Essence of that *True One* with its sublime Attributes, and describe, as far as was possible, what he witness'd (when he had attained to that Union) of the Joys of those who are near united to God, and the Torments of those whom the Veil separates from him; he made no doubt but that all those things which are contain'd in the religious Law concerning God, his Angels, Books and Messengers, the Day of Judgement, Paradise and Hell, were symbols of what Hayy Ibn Yaqzan had seen. ...and he found that the Teaching of Reason and Tradition did exactly agree together.<sup>70</sup>

However, this only becomes clear after Hayy has reached his own, self-tutored enlightenment.

So there is a strong sense in which his natural state is particularly suitable for the attainment of salvation, even if no consideration is given to the practical advantage that he has far more time at his disposal for meditation than he would if he was living in a more complex society, in which there would be other demands on his time than merely meeting his unavoidable bodily requirements for sustenance and for shelter from the elements, which although kept to a bare minimum by the ascetic Hayy never disappear altogether. Bearing this in mind, if consideration is given to the soteriology identified in Chapters Six and Seven above of this dissertation as being contained within the *Guide*, which is, at least in its most important elements, compatible with the soteriologies of *falāsifa* such as Ibn Tufail and Alfarabi, it would appear that the final, definitive answer to the question as to whether according to Maimonides' metaphysics as presented in *The Guide of the Perplexed* an isolate like Hayy Ibn Yaqzan could attain salvation would have to be unequivocally affirmative. Yet there seems to be something missing – an important factor in Maimonides' metaphysics of which his soteriology does not entirely take account, at least as far as the isolate is concerned. Salvation, in the *Guide*, is attained by achieving conjunction with the Active Intellect, which is the lowest in the

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incorporeal Creator" is recounted between sections 49 and 56 inclusive of Ibn Tufail's text – pages 92-102.

<sup>70</sup> *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, pages 165-66 (translator's italics).

emanation of the incorporeal intelligences from God – a deity who can only be known either through negative attributes or through attributes of action, that is, attributes which are predicated following a process of analogical reasoning applied to human actions, with which we are fully familiar. Maimonides summarises this two-fold doctrine as follows.

...every attribute that we predicate of Him is an attribute of action or, if the attribute is intended for the apprehension of His essence and not of His action, it signifies the negation of the privation of the attribute in question.<sup>71</sup>

Now, although Maimonides does not explicitly say so, it is clear from the examples that he provides in the *Guide* when he discusses the notion of attributes of action<sup>72</sup> that it is scripture that gives this doctrine its context. One is unlikely to comprehend what the doctrine entails unless one has a prior conception of a personal God who cares for his creation, and who consequentially intervenes in history in appropriate circumstances, and this is precisely the conception imparted by the products of revelation such as the Torah – it cannot be reached solely by human ratiocination unaided by anything except sense perception. This is mainly because the notion of attributes of action appears to be closely bound up with human emotions and activity in an interpersonal and moral context, and it is precisely such a context that an isolate can have no means of comprehending. It can be no coincidence that the examples used by Maimonides in his discussion of these attributes relate to how we can describe God as merciful, gracious, angry, or vengeful, nor that Hayy's discovery of God is not in terms of such attributes. Attributes of action are, in a sense, an interpretative device to render theologically acceptable a previously existing description of God as subject to, and possessing, emotions, and such a description is not likely ever to have occurred outside revelation. To say this is not to disparage them – they provide a conception of the deity which is richer, fuller, and consequently more meaningful, than pure apophysis; it is merely to suggest that they can only be relevant to one who is familiar with a broader and more populated social canvas than an isolate like Hayy Ibn Yaqzan can ever have envisioned, to the point at which without them it is difficult to get beyond the purely metaphysical concept of God as Prime Mover to God as supreme moral agent. A Maimonidean isolate would not, therefore, be able to grasp the whole portent of the philosophical theology

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<sup>71</sup> *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.58, page 136.

<sup>72</sup> The main discussion takes place in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.54, pages 123-28.

contained within the first book of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, and as a result the search for salvation would be a search for a hopelessly inaccessible and unknowable God, approachable purely by the *via negativa*. The alternative, and more accessible, route to God discovered by Moses would remain forever hidden, and the contemplative activity of the Maimonidean isolate would remain focussed in a one-sided and wholly negative manner on the deity, in complete ignorance of the richer and more complete conception of God as manifested through His activity in the world, which we can describe in a positive, albeit analogical, manner. To put the same point in another way, it would only be God as transcendent first cause that the isolate could discover, and not God as the immanent creator and provider for his creatures, whose involvement in that which He has created is an integral feature of it <sup>73</sup>. This is yet another of the internal tensions within the *Guide*, which have already been identified and discussed earlier in this dissertation.

For all the doctrinal pitfalls created by the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic expressions with which they are replete, texts of revealed religion, like the Torah, contain material which give proper body to the otherwise rather abstract and schematic conception of attributes of action. Certainly, speculation on the sublunary world as accessed by sense perception may reveal the activity of a metaphysical Prime Mover, as it does for Hayy, but there is nothing specifically divine about this activity – it reveals God *qua* Prime Mover, rather than God *qua* willing creator of that which is other than He, and governor of, and provider for, His creatures. As far as accessibility and degree of abstraction are concerned, the deity that Hayy discovers is more akin to that of Aristotle or Plotinus than to that of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is only when we turn to the aforementioned revealed texts that we are shown God acting in all His fullness,

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<sup>73</sup> It is important to qualify this if Maimonides is not to be misrepresented. It is quite clear in the *Guide* that the degree of providence which is exercised over a given individual is a function of the degree to which that individual has perfected his or her intellect and received the divine overflow which comes through the Active Intellect. He puts it thus: "...when any human individual has obtained, because of the disposition of his matter and his training, a greater portion of this overflow than others, providence will of necessity watch more carefully over him than over others – if, that is to say, providence is, as I have mentioned, consequent upon the intellect" – *The Guide of the Perplexed*, III.18, page 475. This does not entail that God makes no provision for 'lesser' creatures, as Maimonides points out in an earlier chapter, where he claims that "...the more a thing is necessary for a living being, the more often it may be found and the cheaper it is... This is a manifestation of the beneficence and munificence of God..." – *ibid.*, III.12, pages 446-47.

not only through the events in the natural world, but also in the lives of His creatures. In the case of the Torah, the activity is focussed on the Israelites, but in the sacred texts of religions other than Judaism the focus obviously lies elsewhere, although it is still rounding out the notion of God as acting in the world in a manner without which the concept of divine activity is a rather attenuated and impoverished metaphysical doctrine.

In the end, there can be no final resolution of this difficulty which is not subjective in nature. For an isolate who is a true Maimonidean there can indeed be a salvation which is independent of revelation, and it will not require an awareness of the attributes of action – the apophatic approach to God will suffice as far as the soteriology of *The Guide of the Perplexed* is concerned. However, it is a salvation which may ultimately only be attractive to, and attainable by, those as pure in spirit and with as powerful an intellect as Hayy Ibn Yaqzan. An isolate who is perhaps more 'human', in the sense of requiring more emotional nurturing, may well find the salvation described in Maimonides' text, which involves attaining at death conjunction with the Active Intellect – an entity which is the terminus in the series of incorporeal intellects emanated from a God known solely by negative attributes – so austere and remote as to be less than wholly attractive. The attributes of action, despite their analogical nature, bring not only life but also a moral dimension to the deity, which makes Him a more attractive support and comfort to those entangled in the hopelessly intractable difficulties which are an unavoidable part of being a creature separated from the Creator by the hylic veil, which enmeshes all such creatures prior to death.

The matter can be put another way. Right at the beginning of the first chapter of this dissertation reference was made to Simon Van Den Bergh's description of God as conceived by Al-Ghazali as "the Pity behind the clouds" <sup>74</sup>. The salvation conceived by philosophers such as Ibn Tufail and Maimonides, achievable without revelation, is perhaps only suitable for philosophers located in a mental world within which there may well be clouds aplenty, but behind which clouds there is little, if any, real evidence of any Pity.

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<sup>74</sup> See footnote 1 to Chapter One above.



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