The Anatomy of Figuration:

Maimonides' Exegesis of Natural Convulsions

in Apocalyptic Texts (*Guide* II.29)

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Text of Oral Presentation

Religious Studies 601.01

Interpretation of Scripture

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19 March 1990

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Introduction: Moses ben Maimon (1135–1204 C.E.)—called Maimonides by Latin authors and known in Arabic circles as Mūsā ibn Maymūn[1]—was the greatest Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, and perhaps of all time—as expressed the epitaph on Maimonides' tombstone, which read: "From Moses (Prophet) to Moses (Maimonides), there was none like Moses."[2] His influence beyond Judaism is enormous as well, superlatively so, as one biographer assesses:

> Maimonides canonized philosophy. … *The Guide for the Perplexed* consummated the "marriage" of the Bible and Aristotelianism. This philosophical success, the compromise between religion and philosophy, was construed as a "mixed marriage" and rejected. Nevertheless, these ideas exerted incomparable influence: Maimonides is the only medieval thinker to have a lasting effect on the theology of other religions, on Christians, Arabs, Karaites, and Jews.[3]

Born in the enchanting Spanish city of Cordova on 30 March 1135, into a family distinguished for its eight successive generations of scholars, Maimonides received his elementary education from his father who, like so many other rabbis of his era, was steeped not only in the rabbinic tradition but in the prevailing Arabic philosophy and

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[1] The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* entry is "Ibn Maymūn."

[2] M. Friedländer, "The Life of Moses Maimonides," in Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, tr. M. Friedländer (New York: Dover, 1956), xxv.

[3] A. Heschel, *Maimonides: A Biography*, tr. J. Neugroschel (New York: Farrar, 1982), p. 210.

science of the day as well. Oliver Leaman's new monograph on Maimonides is published as part of the *Arabic Thought and Culture* series, justified by the perspective that the Jewish philosopher must be situated within the larger Islamic thought-world in which he thought and wrote. Maimonides is thus significant as one of the important intellectual figures of his age.[4]

Soon after a Moorish invasion—which saw the fanatical Berber Almohads (*al-Muwaḥḥidūn,* "championers of the unity of God") destroy much of the Andalusian citadel of Cordova in 1148—the youthful Maimonides and his family were forced to wander for some years in Spain and North Africa. Having reached Fas (Fez) on Moroccan soil in 1160, then settling at last in al-Fusṭāṭ (Cairo, 1165), legend has it that he became physician to Saladin and his entourage in the Fatimid court.

The Fatimids, unlike the Almohad regime in al-Andalus, were hospitable in their policy towards their Jewish and Christian subjects. He was retained after the fall of the Fāṭimid dynasty in 1171. From Cairo he traveled to Palestine, then in Christian hands, and when he died his remains were interred in Tiberias, his grave an important monument to this day.

The Writing of The Guide of the Perplexed: Maimonides' literary endeavors were manifold and extensive, spanning philosophy, *halakha* (practical law), medicine (ten extant treatises), astronomy, along with an impressive array of essays on various minor topics. Except for his great legal code, *Mishneh Torah,* as well as many of his letters written in Hebrew, the works of Maimonides were all composed in Judaeo–Arabic (Arabic discourse in Hebrew script).[5] This is the case with *The Guide of the Perplexed* (hereafter abbreviated as *"Guide"*), the Arabic title of which is *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn,*

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[4] O. Leaman, *Moses Maimonides* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[5] See J. Blau, "Judaeo-Arabic and its Linguistic Setting," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 36 (1968): 1–12.

published in the year 1190 at Cairo. The question as to the origin of the title itself has been taken up by A. Gil'adi.[6]

Attacks on the Guide: In the course of time, the *Guide* proved so influential that we even hear of a Sufi in the 13th-century—Abū ʿAlī ibn Ḥūd—who was known to have taught the *Guide* to Jewish students.[7] But the *Guide* aroused the ire of traditionalists. It supplanted the letter of scripture with a new spirit. Traditional meaning was exchanged for an untraditional meaning. So revolutionary was its approach, the *Guide* gave the popular Jewish imagination an Aristotelian ideal of God—an ideal with an Islamic flavour. Scripture was infused with Aristotelian philosophy, tinged with Platonic elements of a monotheistic strain.

The old nomenclature was kept, but was used in a different sense. God, angels, the world to come, the soul, miracle, prophecy and kindred concepts—signified one thing to Maimonides, and quite another to the untutored Jew. The polemical thrust against Jews and Christians by al-Shahrastānī (d. 548 A.H./1153 C.E.) seems to caricature two of the philosophical problems confronting Maimonides: "The Jews liken the Creator to a creature, and the Christians liken a creature to the Creator."[8]

By French decree in 1232, the *Guide* was consigned to the flames at Montpellier. Three decades following the Sage's death, copies of the *Guide* were then burned by Christian authorities. This banning and burning of the *Guide* marked the opening scene in a tragic play of deteriorating medieval Jewish–Church relations.

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[6] A. Gil'adi, "A Short Note on the Possible Origin of the Title *Moreh ha-Nevukhim*," *Le Muséon* 97 (1984): 159–61.

[7] D. Ariel, "'The Eastern Dawn of Wisdom': The Problem of the Relation between Islamic and Jewish Mysticism," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, Vol. II, ed. D. Blumenthal (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), p. 153, citing I. Goldziher, "Ibn Hud, the Mohammedan Mystic, and the Jews of Damascus," *Jewish Quarterly Review* (O.S.) 6 (1894): 218–20.

[8] Cited by A. H. Wolfson, *Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 1979).

Islamic and Greek Influences on Maimonides[9]

Hellenism via Islamic Philosophy:[10] From the meteoric rise of Islam till the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Islam and Judaism exerted a profound influence upon one another. The Jews of Maimonides' day spoke, read and wrote Arabic. Philosophers who influenced Jews in this period included al-Kindī (d. ca. 870), al-Fārābī (d. ca. 950), Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 1036), al-Ghazālī, (d. 1111), Avampace (Ibn Bājja, d. 1138)—the founder of the Spanish school of Aristotelian philosophy—and Averroes (Ibn Rushd, d. 1198), though the influence of the latter upon Jewish circles was felt subsequent to Maimonides.

Four philosophical currents influenced the structure of medieval Jewish philosophy in the Islamic world: (1) Mu'tazili *kalām*; (2) Ash'ari *kalām*; (3) Neo–platonism; (4) Aristotelianism. Three of these four currents had their counterparts among the Jewish philosophers of the period: (1) Saadya Gaon (d. 942), who was the major Jewish philosopher and who followed the method and eclectic dialectic of Mu'tazilite theology, which sought philosophical resolutions to scriptural difficulties; (2) apparently no Jewish savant adopted Ash'arite thought; (3) representing Neo–platonism were Isaac Israeli (d. ca. 955) and Solomon Ibn Gabirol (d. ca. 1057); (4) spokesmen for Aristotelianism included Abraham ibn Daʾūd (d. ca. 1180) and Maimonides (d. 1204), while Judah Halevi (d. ca. 1141) was its philosophical critic in Jewish enclaves.[11] Maimonides was philosophically secure within Aristotelian premises save for their assertion of the eternity of matter.

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[9] See A. Ivry, "Islamic and Greek Influences on Maimonides' Philosophy," in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. S. Pines *et al*. (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1986), pp. 139–56.

[10] On the question of Islamic influence, see L. Strauss, "Introduction," in Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, tr. S. Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. lxxviii–cxxxii.

[11] A. Hyman, "Introduction," in *Essays in Medieval Jewish and Islamic Philosophy* (New York: KTAV, 1977), pp. xiv–xv.

Significance of Maimonides as an Exegete: Maimonides has been called the founder of rational scriptural exegesis, in seeking to explain the scriptures in light of reason. Concepts of creation, theophany, and anthropomorphism occupied the exegetes of the day, of whom the closest to Maimonides in approach was that of his elder Andalusian and Aristotelian contemporary, Abraham ibn Da'ūd, whose *Emunah Ramah* ("The Exalted Faith") treats of the various meanings of the Hebrew term Elohim in a very similar way.[12]

Maimonides was uncompromising on God's unity, for which the Guide provides a systematics. God's "oneness" implies "otherness" (cf. Isa. 40:25). As D. Silver states:

> The systematics of this "otherness" … had been developed centuries before by Saadya and others. What distinguished Maimonides' formulation was his hypostasizing the principle of otherness. … God's simplicity rather than God's significance became *faute de mieux* the touchstone of Maimonidean speculation. Where earlier interpreters had been prepared to understand the anthropomorphic passages of the Bible figuratively or metaphorically, Maimonides insisted that these terms be understood as homonyms, that is, suggestive but in no way substantively significant.[13]

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[12] L. Goodman, "The Intellectual Backgrounds of Maimonides' Philosophy," in *Maimonides, Rambam: Readings in the Philosophy of Moses Maimonides*, tr. idem (New York: Viking, 1976), p. 33. For Biblical theomorphism, see J. Barr, "Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament," in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), pp. 31–38; and C. Windsot, "Theophany: Traditions of the Old Testament," *Theology* 75 (1972): 411–16.

[13] D. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180–1240* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), pp. 35–36.

The Purpose of the Guide: At the outset of the *Guide*, Maimonides sets his agenda (in Pines' translation) as follows:

> The first purpose of this Treatise is to explain the meanings of certain terms occurring in the books of prophecy. Some of these terms are equivocal (*mushtarik*). … Others are derivative (*mustaʿār*). … Others are amphibolous (*mushakkak*).[14]

Friedländer renders these three terms as "homonymous, figurative, and hybrid," respectively.[15] The very title of the *Guide* is connected with its stated secondary purpose, i.e. "the explanation of the very obscure parables (*amthal*) occurring in the books of the prophets, but not explicitly identified there as such. That is why I have called this treatise, *The Guide of the Perplexed*."[16]

Surface Structure of the *Guide*[17]

Maimonides' Philosophy of Language: Implicit in the *Guide* is a philosophy of language which largely determines Maimonides' modes of exegesis. The relationship between God and apocalyptic is a dynamic one in the Prophets: God ostensibly acts in scripture to effect cataclysms in the cosmos which both precede and accompany the advent of Messiah. Maimonides must establish what the nature of scriptural discourse is before endeavoring to interpret it. In the interplay which Maimonides seeks between faith and reason, interpretation must first be grounded in what might term an "epistemology of language" in which the limits of technical terms and figurative

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[14] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, tr. S. Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 5.

[15] Friedländer, op. cit., pp. xl & 2.

[16] Pines, op. cit., p. 6. Arabic terms supplied by the present writer based on Pines' glossary, pp. 638–41.

[17] The present writer has not consulted S. Rawidowitz's study in Hebrew, "The Structure of the *Moreh Nebuchim*," *Tarbiz* 4 (1935): 10–40.

symbols are clearly demarcated as intellectual boundaries beyond which finite mind cannot venture.

On God's Attributes: The proper understanding of language applied to God is one of Maimonides' overall philosophical concerns. In the *Guide*, the Sage treats of language about God in two contexts: exegetical (*Guide* I.1–49) and philosophical (Guide I.50–70). Maimonides frequently criticizes the belief in real attributes. Against Ash'arite theology, in what amounts to a denial of (exterior) attributes and modes, God was distanced from all positive predications, as these compromised His incorporeality and oneness: "God has not any attribute external to His essence, but His essence is His knowledge and His knowledge is His essence" (III.20).[18]

True monotheism must be so thoroughgoing as to exclude all attributes: "As for him who believes that God is one but possesses many attributes, he says by his spoken word that God is one but believes Him in his thought to be many, and this is like the saying of the Christians: God is one but also three and the three are one" (II.50). Wolfson explains that this parry against Trinitarian beliefs is not tantamount to a charge of Christian polytheism. The criticism is rather "that they introduce into God a distinction which is logically contradictory to the conception of His unity as meaning absolute simplicity.[19]

According to the new theory, even essential properties such as existence, life, will, omnipotence, and wisdom cannot be referred to God ("God is existent, but not according to existence; and similarly He is knowing, but not according to knowledge; and He is powerful, but not according to power" (I.57)).[20] Even so, Maimonides must negate even his own positive affirmations: "You must know that God has no essential

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18 Translated by Wolfson, "Maimonides on Negative Attributes," in *Essays in Medieval Jewish and Islamic Philosophy*, ed. A. Hyman (New York: KTAV, 1977), 184.

19 Translation and comment by Wolfson, *Repercussions*, pp. 29–30.

20 Wolfson, "Negative Attributes," 184.

attributes in any manner (*wajh*) and in any mode (*hāl*) whatsoever."[21] God transcends the universe, utterly (I.50–60, 72), etc.).[22] On *Guide* I.58, Alvin Reines states: "What Maimonides seems to say is that 'God exists' means 'the nonexistence of some being of which we have no idea (but which we call "God") is impossible.'"[23]

According to Pines, Maimonides' views on divine attributes "are determined by a negative theology of Neoplatonic origin, which was foisted upon Aristotelian philosophy to which, except in its moderate forms, it is extraneous."[24] Therefore a rigorous exegetical application of the following three terms as instanced in scripture will yield a non-anthropomorphic sense from anthropomorphisms and anthropopathic texts found in such passages.

So thoroughgoing is Maimonides' purification of the concept of God that even such hallowed attributes as eternity, unity, omnipotence and the like cannot be justly ascribed. As Yoav Yovel points out: "Attributing *any* positive property (attribute) to God as his own," says Maimonides (*Guide* I:50) *"is just like attributing a body to Him!"*[25] The implications for the interpretation of scripture are dear: if what is affirmed of God is at best figurative—employing analogies we must perforce negate—so also must be the

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[21] Wolfson, *Repercussions*, p. 31.

[22] J. Sarachek, *Faith and Reason: The Conflict over the Rationalism of Maimonides* (NewYork: Hermon Press, 1935, 1970), pp. 14–17 and 23.

[23] A. Reines, "Maimonides' True Belief Concerning God: A Systematization," in *Maimonides and Philosophy: Papers Presented at the Sixth Jerusalem Philosophical Encounter, May 1985,* ed. S. Pines and Y. Yovel (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1986), p. 35, n. 1.

[24] S. Pines, "Studies in Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi's Poetics and Metaphysics," in *Studies in Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi: Physics and Metaphysics* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1979), p. 302.

[25] Y. Yovel, "God's Transcendence and its Schematization: Maimonides in Light of the Spinoza–Hegel Dispute," in *Maimonides and Philosophy,* ed. S. Pines et al. (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1986) 275.

apocalyptic pericopes which depict God's "coming" and execution of judgment upon the world.

Lexicographical Structure of the Guide

Concern over Technical Lexicographical Nuances: An old adage has it that the first thing a philosopher does is to define his terms. If we accept the perspective of Leaman and others who seek to contextualize Maimonides within the encompassing Islamic intellectual universe, it would only stand to reason that the *Guide*—on a philosophical level—could easily be classified within the genre known as *al-wujuh wa'l-naẓā'ir*.

Wujuh refers to the "aspects" or meanings of each word and glosses each accordingly, following which are adduced parallels or "analogues" (*naẓā'ir*), such enterprise corresponding roughly to the modern classification, semantic lexicology. Rippin defines this genre functionally as works which "deal with homonyms (two words which are spelt in the same manner but which are perceived—either by native speakers and. or etymology—to have different roots because of the inability to determine any connection between two senses of the word) and polysemy (where words have different senses of meaning and can be classified according to those different senses." Rippin generalizes to say that "*wujuh* texts analyse the semantic diversity on the level of context and not by syntax." Polysemy as a mode of enquiry "has a long heritage prior to the development of Quranic exegesis" and "was studied by the ancient Greeks … to develop principles in order to distinguish nuances of senses of words."[26]

On a religious level (analysis of the *Guide* should always reflect its intent to wed religion and philosophy) the *Guide* would seem to cross over into the genre known as *mushtabihāt*, which group of texts employ the mode of analysis which Rippin prefers to

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[26] A. Rippin, "Lexicographical Texts and the Qur'an," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. idem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 162–63.

term "phraseological lexicology" over John Wansbrough's "phraseological commo-cation."[27] These texts are concerned with "homiletic indexation"[28] where the term *mushtabihāt* is often taken as equivalent to metaphorical expression,[29] clearly a major concern of Maimonides.

Here we encounter a category of rhetorical origin, the linguistically-relaxed specificity and theological connotations of which could serve as a pretext for allegorical license, that of *majāz* ("figuration").[30]

Philosophical Nomenclature

Equivocal (mushtarik) Terms:[31] One of the distinctive features of the *Guide* is its postulate that scripture speaks of God's attributes through equivocal terms, or homonyms. The *Guide* was composed for those Jews challenged by the 12th-century Islamic milieu of Aristotlelian speculation. The most serious problem which arose from the encounter of reason and revelation—as posed by the many peculiar anthropo-morphisms in scripture predicated of God. Earlier interpreters were inclined to accept as figurative or metaphorical such problematic passages. Maimonides, on the other

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[27] Rippin, ibid.

[28] One of the few typographical errors is "homelitic [homelitic] indexation" on the last line of Rippin, ibid., 163.

[29] Rippin, op. cit., p. 171.

[30] Rippin cites the following studies on *majāz*: W. Heinrichs, "On the Genesis of the *haqiqa–majāz* dichotomy," *Studia Islamica* 59 (1984): 130–32; J. Wansbrough, *"Majāz al-Qur'an*: Periphrastic Exegesis," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 33 (1970): 130–32; E. Almagor, "The Early Meaning of *majāz* and the Nature of Abu 'Ubayda's Exegesis," in *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D.H. Baneth* (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 307–26.

[31] For a more technical discussion, see A. Hyman, "Maimonides on Religious Language," in *Studies in Jewish Philosophy: Collected Essays of the Academy for Jewish Philosophy, 1980–1985,* ed. N. Samuelson (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), pp. 351–65.

hand, urged such anthropomorphisms be treated purely as equivocal terms/homonyms which at most intimate but never predicate aught of God.[32]

Distinguished from univocal/derivative (*mustaʿār*) and ambiguous/amphibolous (*mushakkak*) terms alike, an equivocal term/homonym generally refers to a word having two meanings: one spiritual, the other physical. An affirmative proposition could, for instance, assert, "God is living," in which the predicate "living" is given as an *equivocal* term. Though positive in form, the proposition is negative in meaning.[33]

The *Guide* also uses the expression *bi-ishtirāk mahd* for "purely equivocally."[34] Maimonides provides one instance of equivocal predication at *Guide* I.21:

> High (*ram*) is an equivocal term having the signification of being elevated in space and being elevated in degree. … Thus: *Bear Thee on high, Thou Judge of the earth* (Ps. 94:2); *Thus saith the High, borne on high* (Isa 57:15). In these passages, the word means elevation, exalted station, and great worth, not height in space. Perhaps my saying … creates a difficulty for you. For you may ask: how can you consider that many notions (*maʿani*) are included in one meaning (*maʾna*)? However, … there should not be many attributive qualifications predicated of God; and … all … refer to one and the same notion. That notion is His essence and nothing outside of this essence.[35]

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[32] Silver, op. cit., p. 36.

[33] Wolfson, "Negative Attributes," p. 206.

[34] W. Z. Harvey, "Maimonides and Aquinas on Interpreting the Bible," in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 55 (1988): 66.

[35] Pines' translation, p. 47.

Derivative (mustaʿār) Terms:[36] Throughout the *Guide*, there appear to be four terms Maimonides prefers over the word *mustaʿār* (derivative) as set forth in his Introduction: (1) *istiʿāra* (figurative meaning or metaphor); (2) *mathal* (parable or extended metaphor); (3) *laghz* (riddle); and (4) *majāz* (figurative expression). As in II.29, Maimonides uses *istiʿāra* throughout the *Guide* as his general term for figurative language.

In the Introduction to the *Guide*, the Sage likens *mathal* to a pearl lost in a dark house, while *laghz* is compared to silver filigree set over gold—*"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver."*—which Blumenthal believes refers to terms with multivalent meanings, including exoteric as well as esoteric. *Mathal* also appears to have a general sense along with two technical usages: (1) an image wherein each term bears a special significance such as the narrative of Jacob's ladder); (2) a passage which has decipherable meaning only as a whole (such as Proverbs 7). *Majāz* is rarely used in the Guide and appears as a general term for image.[37]

Amphibolous (mushakkak) Terms:[38] Maimonides explains "amphibolous" terms as terms "which are predicated of two things, between which there is a similarity in respect to something, and that something is an accident in them and does not constitute the essence of either one of them (I.56)."[39]

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[36] For the constellation of terms discussed here, the most useful discussion is that of D. Blumenthal, "Maimonides on Mind and Metaphoric Language," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, Vol. II, ed. idem (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 123–32.

[37] Blumenthal, op. cit., pp. 127–28 and p. 131, n. 2 and 3.

[38] See also Wolfson, "The Amphibolous Terms in Aristotle, Arabic Philosophy and Maimonides," *Harvard Theological Review* 31 (1938): 151–73.

[39] Translated by Wolfson, "Maimonides and Gersonides on Divine Attributes as Ambiguous Terms," in *Mordecai M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1953), pp. 515–16.

In direct opposition to all the major Arabic philosophers, Maimonides rejects the classification of divine attributes as ambiguous since amphiboly/ambiguity implies a *similarity*, predicated by such terms, between the things themselves. But Maimonides can broach no similarity between God and creation. In the *Guide*, the expression *bi-tashkīk* likewise means, "amphibolously" and is applied to subjects apart from God as well, as in II.35: "[T]he term *prophet* is used with reference to Moses and the others amphibolously.[40]

These terms relative to each other: It is not possible for purely equivocal terms to act figuratively, strictly speaking, as there is no likeness in essence or nature by definition:

Semantic Type	Common Essence	Common Accident
Purely equivocal terms	No	No
Derivative/figurative terms	Yes	No
Amphibolous/ambiguous	No	Yes[41]

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[40] Harvey, op. cit., p. 62, n.10.

[41] Based on J. Cohen, "Figurative Language, Philosophy, and Religious Belief: An Essay on Some Themes in Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in *Studies in Jewish Philosophy: Collected Essays of the Academy for Jewish Philosophy, 1980–1985,* ed. N. Samuelson (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), p. 378.

Truth and Ruse in the Structure of the *Guide*

The Structure of the Guide: The *Guide* is structured along the lines of three principal "discourses": (1) figurative exegesis of Biblical anthropomorphisms; (2) discussion of "Aristotelian" topics; (3) criticism of metaphysics (a philosophical "science" theorizing on incorporeal beings, astronomy as well as extraterrestrial physics).[42]

Towards a Systematization of Maimonides' (intentional) Inconsistencies: For all his pervasive rationalism, we would expect consistency of Maimonides. Yet, on the nature of God, the Guide presents two basically contradictory views. Only a resolution of these contradictions would produce Maimonides' actual position on Deity. Attempting a synthesis, Reines presents the two interlocking theologies as: (1) the absolute transcendence concept; and (2) the qualified transcendence concept.[43]

A problem arises when Maimonides claims extensive positive knowledge of God, Whose stated unknowability would seem to preclude such knowledge. True to his esoteric technique in the *Guide*, Maimonides may have wished to soften his uncompromising position on the absolute transcendence of God through an obfuscating use of a more traditional, familiar, orthodox and thus more acceptable approach. As Reines puts it: "For contradictions constituted a device Maimonides employed to keep his true beliefs from the unqualified reader."[44]

Maimonides' Literary Devices: Open as to his own artifice, Maimonides resorts to a daring method of speaking half–truths, in order to outwit his opponents yet still have his say philosophically. His defense of the professedly devious nature of his writing, as

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[42] S. Pines, "The Philosophical Purport of Maimonides' Halachic Works and the Purport of *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in *Maimonides and Philosophy: Papers Presented at the Sixth Jerusalem Philosophical Encounter, May 1985*, ed. idem and Y. Yovel (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1986), pp. 9–10.

[43] Reines, op. cit., p. 24.

[44] Reines, op. cit., p. 30.

set forth in his Introduction to the *Guide,* offers "prima fade evidence for the non orthodox nature of Maimonides' beliefs, encouraging skepticism in his seeming advocacy of orthodox positions in the body of the work itself."[45]

Obliged to endorse orthodoxy, Maimonides envelopes his real views in secrecy. At the same time, he tips off the reader as to the "secret" nature of his teachings, which require concealment. Maimonides' use of contradictions is expressly set forth in the Introduction to the *Guide*. Here he enumerates seven sources of contradictions encountered as a rule among literary works generally, two of which (the fifth and the seventh) account for contradictions in the *Guide*: "Divergences that are to be found in this treatise are due to the fifth cause and the seventh."[46]

Reines conjectures that it is the seventh type of contradiction to which Maimonides resorts as an artifice wherewith to obscure his theology of absolute transcendence:[47]

> *The seventh cause.* In speaking about very obscure matters it is necessary to conceal some parts and to disclose others. Sometimes in the case of certain statements this necessity requires that the discussion proceed on the basis of a certain premise, whereas in another place necessity requires that the discussion proceed on the basis of another premise contradicting the first one. In such cases the vulgar must in no way be aware of the contradiction; the author accordingly uses some device to conceal it by all means.[48]

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[45] A. Ivry, "Islamic and Greek Influences on Maimonides' Philosophy," in *Maimonides and Philosophy: Papers Presented at the Sixth Jerusalem Philosophical Encounter, May, 1985* (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1986), pp. 141–42.

[46] Pines' translation, p. 20.

[47] Reines, op. cit., pp. 30–31.

[48] Pines' translation, p. 18.

Pines adduces passages in the *Guide* which attest to its professedly esoteric character.[49] The serious game of communicating subtle truths without wholesale profaning of them is an open admission by Maimonides. One need not be Straussian to accept the esoterism of the *Guide*. The arcane nature of the texts admits of other explanations apart from that which Strauss discloses.

The Deep Structure of the *Guide*: Way to the Messianic Era?

The Guide's Hidden Agenda?: A recent theory by J. Kraemer speculates on Maimonides' underlying motive for the writing of the *Guide*: "[I]t is proposed that Maimonides envisioned himself as one who restores the original ethical and intellectual virtues of the Jewish people; that he projected the image of a renewed *al-milla al-fāḍīla*, "The Virtuous Community," onto an eschatological screen; and that in the Mishneh Torah) and in the *Guide* he intended to regenerate the body politic and revive the *al-milla al-fāḍīla* by refining corrupt opinions and by rectifying wrong actions, and thus to prepare for an imminent messianic advent."[50] By implication, this bold thesis would extend to the writing of the *Guide*. Counter to this thesis is the fact that messianism fails to play a central role in the *Guide*.[51]

Indeed, Maimonides invokes an old family tradition which claimed that the advent of the Messiah was to be imminent after the year 1209 C.E.—or 4970 A.M. according to Jewish chronology. In his *Epistle to Yemen*, the Maimonides portends: "From the prophecies of Daniel and Isaiah and from the statements of our sages it is clear that the advent of the Messiah will take place some time subsequent to the universal

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[49] S. Pines, "The Philosophical Purport of Maimonides' Halachic Works and the Purport of *The Guide of the Perplexed*." In *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. *idem et al.* (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1986), pp. 1–2.

[50] J. Kraemer, "On Maimonides' Messianic Posture," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, Vol. II., ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 110.

[51] See A. Halkin's note in *Crisis* (see below), p. 202, n. 21.

expansion of the Roman and Arab empires, which is an actuality today." For Maimonides, the colossal struggle between Christianity and Islam at the height of the Crusades presaged the final redemption of Israel.

In apparent disregard of the rabbinic proscription against messianic speculation, Maimonides continues: "The precise date of the messianic advent cannot be known. But I am in possession of an extraordinary tradition that I received from my father, who in turn received it from his father, going back to our early ancestors who were exiled from Jerusalem," that the date of the restoration of prophecy to Israel is alluded to in the oracle uttered by Balaam in Numbers 23:23. (The restoration of prophecy to Israel is a prelude to the Messianic advent.) Once calculated, the cryptic ciphers yield the year 1209/1210 when the birth pangs of the Messiah ought follow on the heels of the return of the spirit of prophecy.[52]

This vaticination is based on a "temporal symmetry and a doubling of the time of Balaam's … prophecy in 2485 A.M.[53] Maimonides gauges this prediction as "the most reliable tradition concerning the advent of the Messiah," though he warns against "blazoning it abroad, lest some people deem it unduly postponed."[54]

On its own, the *Epistle to Yemen* cannot be used to interpret the *Guide*, as the Epistle predates the *Guide* by nearly a quarter of a century. (The *Epistle* was written in 1172, the *Guide* in 1190.) On the other hand, it would seem that the *Essay on Resurrection* would certainly have reflexive value, as both a direct as well as indirect reflection on the Guide, as the former was written just one year after the latter. The remarks which follow will be based largely on this reflexive evidence.

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[52] Maimonides, "The Epistle to Yemen," in *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*, tr. and notes by A. Halkin; commentary by D. Hartman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), pp. 121–22 and comment, 169.

[53] Kraemer, *op. cit.*, p. 118, n. 34.

[54] *Crisis*, pp. 122–23.

Making Prophecy Fulfillable via a Demystifying Exegesis?: Maimonides, in his effort to "reconcile the Law and reason" and to render prophecy "explicable," was quite definite about the fact that "in the messianic age nothing will change the law of nature."[55] Does Maimonides, beyond his stated objective, augment the possibilities for prophecy-fulfillment? Treating the eschatological imagery of natural convulsions as a figure for spiritual events, Maimonides makes it possible for his own community to realize the prospect of a messianic era. What needs to be determined is whether or not Maimonides had this outcome in mind.

Within contemporary Islamic culture, al-Ghazālī had already described the various interpretative options taken in his day: (1) the Ashʿarite option, in which the *taʾwīl* (figurative interpretation) of anthropomorphisms in scripture is permitted, but deviation from the literal meaning of eschatological passages condemned; (2) the Muʿtazilite option, which transforms into figurative significance such eschatological terms as the Bridge, the Balance, the Open Book, etc.—but not corporeal resurrection, nor Paradise with its sensual pleasures nor Hell with its torments; and (3) the philosophical option, which is more thoroughgoing in its treatment of the soul and its reward or punishment as purely spiritual.[56]

Maimonides' humanized Messiah: In the final chapters of the last book of his Mishneh Torah, Maimonides paints a very minimalistic picture of a political Messiah who will restore the Davidic dynasty, rebuild the Temple, reestablish sacrifice, and return Israel's dispersed to the Holy land. But the King Messiah is shorn of all supernatural powers. Modeled on the well-known saying of Rabbi Samuel—*"Between this world and the Messianic Age there will be no change save the end of Israel's subjection to alien governments."*—Maimonides taught that the promised King need perform no miracles

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[55] *Crisis*, p. 223.

[56] Efros, *Studies in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 117–18.

nor resurrect the dead. For proof of this, Maimonides points to the conditional acceptance of Bar Kochba as Messiah by Akiba, though the revolutionary could marshal no evidence of supernatural prowess.[57] In the *Essay on Resurrection*, Maimonides reiterates his messianic posture:

> Others were led astray because of what I wrote at the end of my major work (in his discussion of the messianic times: MT *Hilkhot Melakhim* 11:3). This is what I said: "Do not think for a moment that the king, the Messiah, will be required to perform miracles and wonders, or that he will inaugurate new things in the world, or will resurrect the dead, or anything like it." I found support of it in what I expounded.[58] … I said that the Messiah would not be required to do wonders, like miraculously splitting the Red Sea, or resurrecting the dead.[59]

Evidently, the popular conception of the Messiah held otherwise. Maimonides was at pains to correct this view, complaining here and elsewhere of "the masses" who "like nothing better … than to set the Law and reason at opposite ends."[60] Despite the imminence of the messianic tradition he stood to inherit, it is doubtful that Maimonides would consciously endeavor to "hasten," as it were, the advent of the Messiah, as Halkin points out: "Maimonides' chapters on Abraham and on messianism (in the Mishneh Torah) serve normative and educational purposes. … The notion of an imminent, necessary process in history is foreign to Maimonidean thinking.

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[57] D. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180–1240* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), p. 29.

[58] Maimonides had cited the case of Bar Kokhba, leader of the revolt against the Romans in 132–135 A.D. This revolutionary was received as the Messiah by Rabbi Akiva, though the former was no miracle worker, indicating the latter's minimalist conception of the Messiah to which Maimonides appeals.

[59] *Crisis*, p. 222.

[60] *Crisis*, p. 223

Messianism is a guiding normative ideal of the community and not a prediction of an inevitable process."[61]

Key Concepts to Unlock Prophecy

Prophecy as Metaphor (mathal): In his Introduction to the *Guide*, Maimonides sets forth a hermeneutical principle governing the interpretation of prophecy: "Know that the key to the understanding of all that the prophets, peace be upon them, have said … is an understanding of the parables, of their import, and of the meaning of the words occurring in them."[62] The Arabic term for "parable" (*mathal*) can also denote "metaphor" or "simile."[63]

Blumenthal is critical of Pines' choice of "parable" for *mathal*, overlooking its general sense as "image" or "figure of speech" (with "decipherable religious–intellectual meaning"). For its narrower sense, Blumenthal prefers "metaphor." Though elsewhere in his writings the term *majāz* ("figuration") is used, in the *Guide* (e.g. II.29). Maimonides employs *istiʿāra* as the general term for "figurative discourse."[64] Maimonides states that "figurative use of language is exceedingly frequent in the books of prophecy" (*Guide* II.47).

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[61] Halkin's comment, *Crisis*, p. 206, n. 45.

[62] Pines' translation, pp. 10–11.

[63] Wehr, *Arabic–English Dictionary*, ed. J.M. Cowan (New York: Spoken Language Services, 1976), p. 892.

[64] Blumenthal, "Maimonides on Mind and Metaphoric Language," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. idem (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), Vol. II, pp. 123–32.

Distinctions between symbolic and allegorical modes of interpretation:[65] Medieval Jewish interpretation served to keep alive and make relevant the biblical/rabbinic tradition in accord with the intellectual and cultural temper of the times. If the Jewish mysticism of the day establishes a valid context for Maimonides, this much may be said: Two coeval, rival yet interpenetrating exegetical approaches flourished (principally in Spain) during the age of Maimonides: philosophical and mystical modes of interpretation.

Philosophical enquiry makes reason the tool of metaphorical exegesis, whereby a concept may be derived from a metaphor, as a pearl pried from an oyster perhaps, except that no essential link is seen between the idea expressed and the metaphor itself. Figurative language renders lofty concepts accessible (to philosophers) in the deep structure of revelation, while its surface structure tempts commonplace literal reading.

Symbolic exegesis, on the other hand, typifies the mystical approach, which effectively develops a law of correspondences in which reality is ascribed to both symbol and referent. The symbol itself hints at a higher reality beyond reason, where logic topples and mystical knowing takes ascendancy.[66] Hence his statement in the Book of Knowledge in the Mishneh Torah: "The very foundation … of all wisdom is to know that there is a primary reality which caused all to be" (1:1).[67]

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[65] For an overview of the symbol/allegory tension in medieval Judaism, see F. Talmage, "Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages,* ed. A. Green (London: Routledge, 1986), pp. 313–55, esp. pp. 337–44, "Allegory versus Symbol."

[66] A. Rodal, "Response to David R. Blumenthal," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism,* ed. J. Dan & F. Talmage (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1982), pp. 178–79.

[67] Maimonides, *The Book of Knowledge from the Mishnah Torah of Maimonides,* tr. H. Russell & J. Weinberg (Edinburgh: Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, 1981), p. 1.

Analysis of *Guide* II.29

Caveat on the Interpretation: Maimonides ventures a *caveat* that one might hear in another's speech a familiar word which, by accident, he.she misconstrues: "For instance if an Arab hears a Hebrew man saying *'aba* (he wishes), the Arab will think that he speaks of an individual who was reluctant with regard to some matter and refused it. However, the Hebrew only wished to convey that the individual was pleased with the matter and wished it." (The two words of which the Sage speaks have the very same radicals. In Hebrew, *'aba* means "to wish" while the Arabic *'abā* means "to be reluctant" and "to refuse.")[68]

Popular Understanding as Misunderstanding: Maimonides warns that received tradition in the form of popular exegesis of prophecy is often at variance with its true meaning. Often popular notions perpetuate what in fact is diametrically opposed to the inner significance of the text:

> This is similar to what happens to the multitude with regard to the speech of the prophets, excepting certain portions that they do not understand at all. As it says: *the vision of all this is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed* (Isa 29:11). With regard to other portions, they understand what is the contrary of, or contradictory to, the true meaning. As it says: *And ye have perverted the words of the living God* (Jer. 23:36).[69]

The vulgar reading of scripture, interpreted literally and therefore misinterpreted due, in a sense, to being non interpreted, had the double-edged result of vivid theological anthropomorphism and messianic supernaturalism alike.

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[68] Pines' translation, 336 and n. 1.

[69] Pines' translation, 336–37.

Data from Colloquial Arabic Figures of Speech: Next, Maimonides draws on everyday figures of speech in Arabic to illustrate the hyperbolic nature of prophetic discourse—a comparison ventured notwithstanding the stated caveat concerning phonemically similar words in Hebrew and Arabic). Maimonides goes on to say:

> After this preface, you ought to know that in the speech of Isaiah, … it very frequently occurs … that when he speaks of the fall of a dynasty or the destruction of a great religious community, he uses such expressions as: the stars have fallen, the heavens were rolled up, the sun was blackened, the earth was devastated and quaked, and many similar figurative expressions. This is similar to what is said by the Arabs with regard to someone whom a great misfortune has befallen: his heavens were cast upside down upon his earth.[70]

On the positive side of metaphor, Maimonides instantiates further figures in colloquial Arabic (the passage following is one of the places in which Friedländer is clearer than Pines in making sense of pronouns and antecedents): "[A]nd when they (Arabs) speak of the approach of a nation's prosperity, they say, 'The light of the sun and moon has increased,' 'a new heaven and a new earth has been created,' or they use similar phrases."[71]

Devices of Mantological Exegesis

Contemporary-Historical Exegesis on the Destruction of Sennacherib: Maimonides must be credited with a consistent exegesis of cosmic imagery as found in the Prophets. To illustrate his point, he ventures what higher criticism today would term a contemporary-historical approach to apocalyptic. Citing Joel 3:3–5 ("And I will show wonders in the heavens and the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun

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[70] Pines' translation, p. 337.

[71] Friedländer's translation, p. 204.

shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come. … For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance."), Maimonides states that "the most probable interpretation is … the destruction of Sennacherib before Jerusalem."[72] Suspending any preconception as to the chiliastic nature of apocalyptic, here the reader must simply defer to Maimonides' judgment on this point, as the so-called "multitude" was no doubt weaned on a futuristic reading of the Prophets.

Once the prophecy is contextualized historically, there is no other recourse but to accept that Joel had resorted to figurative expression, as it is extremely unlikely that such cosmic upheaval of which the prophet speaks ever came to pass in past history literally. Thus, on a similar passage (Isa 13:10,13), Maimonides appeals to the rationality of the "vulgar"—that is, to common sense:

> I do not think that any person is so foolish and blind, and so much in favour of the literal sense of figurative and oratorical phrases, as to assume that at the fall of the Babylonian kingdom a change took place in the nature of the stars of heaven, or in the light of the sun and moon, or that the earth moved away from its centre. For all this is merely the description of a country that has been defeated: the inhabitants undoubtedly find all light dark, and all sweet things bitter: the whole earth appears too narrow for them, and the heavens are changed in their eyes.[73]

Inner-Biblical Exegesis (Isaiah 65:17–18) by Apposition: Maimonides reads Isaiah as providing glosses on his own text: "Accordingly the whole matter has become clear and manifest to you. For after saying, *For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth*

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[72] Pines' translation, p. 344.

[73] Friedländer's translation, p. 205.

(Isa.65:17), he immediately explains this by saying: *For, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy* (Isa 65:18)."[74]

Appeal to Targums: Maimonides appealed to Aramaic translations of scripture whenever it suited his purposes to do so. He adduces two targumists in the *Guide*: Onqelos and Jonathan. Of the former, Maimonides expresses the reason behind his predilection for the periphrastic exegesis Onqelos necessarily undertakes in the course of his translations from Hebrew into Aramaic: "Onquelos the Proselyte was very perfect in the Hebrew and Syrian languages and directed his effort toward the abolition of the belief in God's corporeality. ... Thus he renders, The Lord will descend (Exod. 19:11) by the words, The Lord will manifest Himself."[75]

Maimonides' appeal to Targum Jonathan (on Isa 24:23): In *Guide* II.29, Maimonides writes:

> At the end of the same prophecy, when Isaiah describes how God will punish Sennacherib, destroy his mighty empire, and reduce him to disgrace, he uses the following figure: "Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign," etc. This verse is beautifully explained by Jonathan, the son of Uzziel; he says that when Sennacherib will meet with his fate because of Jerusalem, the idolaters will understand that this is the work of God; they will faint and be confounded. He therefore translates the verse thus: "Those who worship the moon will be ashamed, and those who bow down to the sun will be humbled, when the kingdom of God shall reveal itself" etc.[76]

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[74] Pines' translation, p. 342.

[75] *Guide* I.28; Pines' translation, 57. His respect for Onkelos notwithstanding, Maimonides was perplexed over the targumist's idiosyncrasies in method (Guide I.48).

[76] Friedländer's translation, pp. 205–206.

Ethnicization of Prophecy as Religiocentrism: Maimonides interprets texts within a long-standing tradition of cosmic symbolism invested with political allusion.[77] Universalism is not a feature of Maimonides' interpretation. Wherever universal, cosmic, and macroscopic imagery is encountered in scripture, Maimonides particularizes such texts as referring ethnocentrically to Israel and her adversaries. An exception to this otherwise consistent exegetical technique is Maimonides' universalistic interpretation of Zephaniah 3:9 as set forth in his commentary, The Book of Judges:

> But it is beyond the human mind to fathom the designs of the Creator … All these matters relating to Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmaelite (Muhammad) who came after him, only served to clear the way for King Messiah, to prepare the whole world to worship God with one accord, as it is written: For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with one consent (Zeph. 3:9).[78]

Respecification of Prophecies:[79] In certain respects, prophecies are recyclable. They are reapplied. The messianic posture of Maimonides would suggest that he was preparing the Jewish community to see itself within an eschatological context. To conserve and to further heighten this tension, prophecy must be interpreted in such a way as to be potentially capable of "fulfillment' or realization with Maimonides' own historical present. Furthermore, his mode of exegesis would have to dovetail with his minimalist conception of the Messiah.

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[77] See M. Astour, "Political and Cosmic Symbolism in Genesis 14 and its Babylonian Sources," in *Biblical Motifs*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 65–112.

[78] Cited by Hartman, *Crisis*, p. 187.

[79] Based M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 474.

Apocalyptic Symbolism:
Natural Convulsions as Spiritual Events

Symbolism in Mantological Texts: Fishbane observes that Qumran *pesher* derives its exegetical techniques in part from an ancient and rich Near Eastern mantological inheritance: "All of the images seen in visions, dreams, and omens have a symbolism which must be decoded, even those dreams whose meaning is immediately understood (cf. Genesis 37)."[80] Maimonides developed a philosophical hermeneutic whereby eschatological imagery made symbolic sense, once relieved of the burden of sheer impossibility as demanded by a literal reading.

Below is a synopsis of how cosmic eschatological imagery has been exegetically interpreted by Maimonides:

Cosmic Symbols/Referents in *Guide* 11.29

Sun: Sunset at high noon in Amos 8:9–10: destruction of Samaria. Seven-fold increase in the sun's magnitude in Isaiah 30:26: good fortune of the dynasty brought about by Hezekiah.

Moon: Bloody moon of Joel 3:3–5: destruction of Sennacherib before Jerusalem.

Stars: Black stars of Ezekiel 32:7–8: defeat of Pharaoh by Nebuchadnezzar.

Heaven: Covered heaven of Ezekiel 32:7–8: ruin of the kingdom of Egypt. New heavens of Isaiah 65:15–19: Jerusalem and her people rejoicing. Vanishing heavens of Isaiah 51:3–6: defeat of Sennacherib.

Earth: Earth waste and void in Jeremiah 4:23: destruction of Jerusalem. Cleft earth of Psalm 60:10: weakness of religious community during Joab's expedition against Edom. New earth of Isaiah 65:15–19: joyful Jerusalem. Earth crumbled to pieces in Isaiah 24:17–20: terror throughout the land of Israel.

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[80] M. Fishbane, "The Qumran Pesher and Traits of Ancient Hermeneutics," in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Vol. I (Jerusalem, 1977), p. 111. See also A. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 46; Philadelphia, 1956).

Mountains: Molten mountains of Micah 1:3–4: the ruin of Samaria. Vanishing mountains of Isaiah 54:10: departure of great potentates from Israel. Mountains melted by blood in Isaiah 34:3–5: destruction of Edom.

Sea: Shaken sea of Haggai 2:6–7: fall of the kingdom of Medes and Persians. Sea in pain of Psalm 77:17: drowning of the Egyptians.

Conclusion

No less an authority than Wolfson says of Maimonides as to his place in the history of medieval philosophy:

Maimonides, I make bold to say, was the first, and the only one, who knowingly set out to interpret divine attributes … "in a purely equivocal sense." … All the Arabic philosophers interpret divine attributes as ambiguous terms, which … is the same as analogical terms. … The only one in the history of philosophy who openly rejected "analogy," under the guise of "ambiguity," as an interpretation of divine attributes is Maimonides.[81]

This philosophical view of God impacts on the Sage's exegesis of religious apocalyptic. If God does not intervene theomorphically, no other laws of nature are suspended in the eschaton either. Consistent with his minimalist messianic posture, there is no *deus ex machina* in Maimonides' eschaton. Once decoded, all prophecy, in Maimonides' exegesis, concerns people and what happens to them corporately, both politically and spiritually, where Maimonides as exegete draws correspondences to outer and inner metaphorical landscapes.

Beyond this, could Maimonides have had a secret intention behind his exegesis: to prepare his community for the imminence of an eschaton which his own father had taught him to expect? By exegetically rendering prophecy capable of fulfillment through a figurative hermeneutic, Maimonides overcomes the religious obstacle of

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[81] Wolfson, "Maimonides and Gersonides," p. 515; cited by Harvey, op. cit., 67–68, n. 26.

intransigent literalism, which could easily transform itself into opposition against the Messiah, whose advent was traditionally possible six years following the Sage's death. Attractive though this possibility be, we must rule out a covert messianic motive for the *Guide*. Not only is the evidence slender, despite Kraemer's closely-argued thesis, but such a heuristic approach to the *Guide* would be reading too much into the text.

A more plausible hypothesis is that of Hartman, who maintains that Maimonides "strove to neutralize religious fantasy" and "to counteract the exaggerated expectations fostered by biblical and midrashic literature."[82] In any event, Hartman argues on the basis of the texts themselves that "Maimonides did not espouse a comprehensive theory of history." Moreover, the Epistle to Yemen "cannot be treated as a paradigm of Maimonides' theory of messianism."[83]

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[82] Hartman, *Crisis,* p. 175.

[83] Hartman, *Crisis,* p. 172.

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