GUIDE 1:71
INTRODUCTION TO THE KALĀM

In the last chapter, Maimonides reviewed the traditional Jewish view of the cosmos, and explained how it related to the philosophic view. The philosophers proved the existence of God from the motion of the spheres, indeed, "This constitutes the greatest proof by which the existence of God can be known…as I shall demonstrate." He was then ready to proceed to Part II of the Guide, which begins with this proof. Why didn't he do so?

He had said that many ideas emerging from the Midrash and Talmud make sense as explanations of cosmology and science, when understood rightly. Nevertheless, there was a serious limitation. This ancient Jewish lore had few clear explanations of creation and the nature of God. The many volumes the Muslims wrote on those subjects would have made up for this limitation, if they had any validity. It was, therefore, necessary to examine what they had said, especially since they directed most of their arguments against Aristotelian philosophy.

The key to the chapter is Maimonides' assertion that there are commandments of belief. He shares this notion with Bakhya Ibn Pakuda, whose book's title, *Hovot Ha-Levavot*, means commandments of belief. We can properly call the exploration of this subject theology, although Maimonides did not use this term. There are four of those critical commandments: we are to believe in God's existence, unity, incorporeality, and that He created the universe. We perform the commandments of belief by *convincing* ourselves of their truth (Arabic: *i'tiqad* — see Guide 1:50).

SYNOPSIS OF GUIDE 1:71

Where are the books that contain the convincing arguments for these truths? In fact, only a few passages remain in the Aggadic literature, mostly mixed with other materials that make it difficult to extract the Jewish doctrine. Why is this? Because the lore was lost (*da ki ha-mdaiim ha-rabim sh'hayu b'umateinu b'amitat devarim halelu avdu*). Maimonides surveys reasons for this loss. There are many, but they reduce to four: 1) problems connected with books and writing; 2) laws prohibiting dissemination of this material, including laws against writing the Oral Torah and against public teaching of *maaseh bereshit* and *maaseh merkavah*; 3) problems caused by the long exile among the gentiles; and, 4) the fact that most students are unqualified to pursue this lore (see Guide 1:34, and my comments).

The result is that we have few books on the subject in comparison to the many produced by the Muslims. Those books, especially those from the early *Mutazila* Kalām, had a major impact on Jewish thought. The problem was that the Muslims drew many of these ideas from Christian sources. These sources of Christian "Kalām" were a mélange of antique pre-Socratic notions recycled to vanquish the philosophic pagans in debate.

The core problem with the Kalām method was that it made the proof for God's existence depend upon the proof of creation *ex nihilo*. In other words, if the world was created then there must have been a Creator. But if we even begin to doubt creation *ex nihilo*, their structure collapses. The Kalām cannot show us that there is a God, since they have also rejected the philosophic arguments for His existence. The result is that we cannot perform the commandments of belief (*ikru...ha-makhala me'ikra*, like: "they threw out the baby with the bathwater").

At bottom, the Kalām dogmatically impose their theological requirements upon reality. In order to prove the miraculous creation of everything they ended up rejecting nature itself. By contrast, Maimonides' method accepts the philosophic argument for God, and postpones the debate over creation. This way he can prove the existence of God acceptably for both camps, fulfilling the religious requirement, without destroying the nature of perceptible reality.

WHAT HAPPENED TO JEWISH LORE ON THE FOUR TOPICS?

The most important topics are divine existence, unity, incorporeality and creation. In Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha Torah,* 1:6 he states: "It is a positive commandment to know these matters, for it is written, 'I am the Lord your God.'"

Some of the arguments devoted to these matters in Mishneh Torah are clearly Aristotelian. Nonetheless, Maimonides now says that there was once a significant Jewish lore on these topics, different in nature and methodology from Aristotelianism. This lore, "Once cultivated by our forefathers" of the tribe of Issakhar, in some respects came to similar conclusions as Greek works on these subjects, particularly on astronomy. It did not matter which books these conclusions came from if they were true, and therefore the Jewish books became redundant. (*ayn hosheshim l'mekhaber beyn sh'khabero otam nviim beyn sh'khabero otam ha'umot, sh'kol davar sh'nitgaleh taimo v'nodaa amitato b'raiot sh'ayn b'hem dofi anu somkhim al zeh*. Mishneh Torah, *Kiddush Ha-Khodesh* 17:24).

Thus, in the last chapter, he said that the Jewish lore on cosmology came to some of the same conclusions as the Greek science. Now, by contrast, when discussing the lost lore on the four topics, he does not suggest any similarity with Greek lore. He might have said, as he does elsewhere, that Israel produced its own philosophers; he could even have said that the Jews started philosophy. He pointedly refrains from doing so. He neither says nor believes that this lost lore was Aristotelianism. He says it is part of the Oral Torah, *torah sh'baal pei*, which is the entire unwritten tradition passed down from Moses, i.e., *cabala*, which means "tradition." All that we do know of this lost lore is that it dealt with the four topics.

Why was this knowledge lost? Maimonides begins by saying that the Jews were ruled by foolish (Kafih: *hasikhlim*, Schwarz: *haboorot*) foreign rulers. He does not explain this, but I take it he is summing up the entire Jewish experience of foreign rule and exile from the Babylonian empire to his day. Shem Tov has an interesting comment on this. He argues that the Jews have an obligation to study what positive learning the Gentiles possess. But since we were slaves ruled by fools, this was impossible. Learning stagnated from lack of dialogue. (*ki im hayu hem hakhamim, y'huyav aleinu sh'nada m'hem ktzat m'ha-dvarim, aval anu avadim v'hem sikhlim, lo neshaar lanu takuma*.)

PROBLEMS WITH WRITING

The more important cause of loss was the problem of writing itself. There is a Talmudic prohibition of writing down the Oral Torah, only partially quoted by Maimonides:

> "R. Eleazar said: The greater portion of the Torah is contained in the written Law and only the smaller portion was transmitted orally, as it says, 'Though I wrote for him the major portion of [the precepts of] my law, they were counted a strange thing'(Hosea 8:12). R. Johanan, on the other hand, said that the greater part was transmitted orally and only the smaller part is contained in the written law, as it says, 'For according to the mouth of these words' (Exodus 34:27) ….R. Judah b. Nahmani, the public orator of R. Simeon b. Lakish, discoursed as follows: It is written, 'Write that these words' (Ex. 34:27), and it is written, 'For according to the mouth of these words.' What are we to make of this? — It means: The words which are written thou art not at liberty to say by heart, and the words transmitted orally thou art not at liberty to recite from writing. A *Tanna* of the school of R. Ishmael taught: [It is written] 'These': these thou mayest write, but *thou mayest not write halachoth*. R. Johanan said: God made a covenant with Israel only for the sake of that which was transmitted orally, as it says, 'For by the mouth of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.'" (Talmud, *Gittin* 60b,)

Thus, the Talmud derives the prohibition against writing the Oral Torah from the Torah itself. Maimonides tells us why writing the *halakhot*, i.e., the rabbinically derived law of Israel, was forbidden. The Rabbis had

anticipated that writing the law would lead to the multiplication of opinions, sects and controversies, resulting in bad practice. While the law was still oral, this had not been the case. In those days, the judiciary in Jerusalem elaborated and enforced the commands of Torah:

> "The great court in Jerusalem developed the roots of the Oral Torah, and set up this legal tradition, and from them these statutes and judgments flowed to the rest of Israel. On them rested the preservation (*havtikha*: trust, security) of the Torah, since it says in Deuteronomy 17:11, 'According to the sentence of the law which *they* shall teach thee.'" (Mishneh Torah, *H. Mamrim*, 1:1, my trans.)

Since all legal decisions came through the great court in Jerusalem, there was no occasion for dispute. It is worth comparing this rationale with Plato's statement of the ancient concern with writing:

> "SOCRATES: I cannot help feeling, Phaedrus, that writing is unfortunately like painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence. And the same may be said of speeches. You would imagine that they had intelligence, but if you want to know anything and put a question to one of them, the speaker always gives one unvarying answer. And when they have been once written down they are tumbled about anywhere among those who may or may not understand them, and know not to whom they should reply, to whom not: and, if they are maltreated or abused, they have no parent to protect them; and they cannot protect or defend themselves." (*Phaedrus* 275, Jowett trans.)

Oral transmission is unitary and authoritative, written transmission becomes fragmentary and anarchic. Once written, the tradition is "tumbled about anywhere."

If these problems arose when writing practical laws, they multiply for *maaseh bereshit* and *maaseh merkava*. This Jewish tradition included the discussion of the four topics. In addition to the rule against writing the Oral Law, Talmud particularly restricts the students of this lore:

> R. Ami said: The mysteries of the Torah may be transmitted only to one who possesses five attributes, [namely], 'The captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator' [*u'navon lakhash*, one who is able to understand secrets] (Isaiah 3:3)." (*Hagigah* 13a—see Guide 1:34 for my comment on this passage).

Therefore, since the law forbade writing this material in books available to all, and for all the other reasons given:

> "The natural effect of this practice [of not writing] was that our nation lost the knowledge of those important disciplines. Nothing but a few remarks and allusions are to be found in the Talmud and the *Midrashim*, like a few kernels enveloped in such a quantity of husk, that the reader is generally occupied with the husk, and forgets that it encloses a kernel."

This knowledge was submerged in general halachic material. What writing we have from authentic Jewish sources on the four topics is miniscule. Worse yet, the Jewish lore was overwhelmed by the volume of influential books composed on these topics by the Muslims.

WHAT IS KALĀM?

Kalām is the Muslim theology. Kalām means "word" in its many senses. It can mean Logos, scripture, prophecy, theology, dialectics, or dogma. The term Kalām, in the sense of "word," reflects, according to Maimonides, a dogmatic concern for verbalized doctrine over the facts of existence itself. This exaltation of doctrine over reality was not confined to Islam, for we will come to speak of a Christian "Kalām," and even a Jewish "Kalām." In order to understand what Kalām is, and how it came to be more involved with speeches than with reality, we need

to review its history. (Hebrew translations do not use the terms Kalām and Mutakallimūn/Mutakallemim, which are the English transliterations, but, directly translate to *Dibur* and *Medabrim*, i.e., "Speech/Word" and "Speakers.")

Fortunately, Maimonides is a dependable reporter of this history. Despite doubts registered by Pines and others, mentioned below (on Ibn Adi), his review is generally reliable (H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, Harvard, 1976, 43-58).

<u>*The Rise of Christian Theology*</u>: The story begins early, when Christians became numerous in Syria and Greece, where philosophy "flourished" (Kafiḥ: *nitpatkha* / נשאת, not "was born," like Ibn Tibbon's *nolda*,: see Blau, *Dict.of Med. Jud.-Ar. Texts*, 693, نشأ not ناشئه). Once there, they met pagan philosophers who disputed the major Christian doctrines on the four topics, particularly creation *ex nihilo*. In response, a Christian apologetic and polemic literature appeared in Greek. Once Roman emperors became converts, after Constantine (272–337), and particularly under Theodosian II (401–450) and Justinian (483-565), there were "kings intent upon the defense of religion." They persecuted the philosophers and encouraged anti-philosophical literature.

After the Muslim ascendancy in Damascus and Baghdad, these Christian works caught the attention of Islam. Translations began to appear under Caliph Ma'mun (813-833). The works of the philosophers and their refutations by the Christians were, according to Maimonides, "transmitted" to the Muslims, by which Maimonides means that some were translated and that others were known by reference or paraphrase.

One of the earliest Christian disputants they learned of was John Philoponus (*c*. 500), author of commentaries on Aristotle. He deployed Aristotelian arguments against the philosophers' doctrine of the eternity of the universe. Aristotle had said that an infinite series cannot be traversed, and John said this was proof against the eternity of the universe, which also, allegedly, could not be traversed. He noted the philosophers' claim that the spheres of the sun and moon orbit infinitely, but have different size orbits. It followed that one orbit must be more infinite than the other, which is absurd. This is very type of the Kalām proof, a ham-handed use of philosophical dialectics to support dogma and vanquish the philosophers. Georg Cantor's (1845-1918) theory of *transfinitive sets* eventually solved the problem of different infinites. Simplicius, the defender of the philosophic tradition, rejected Philoponus' arguments in his own day, demonstrating that Philoponus' grasp of Aristotelian logic was weak. Nonetheless, the Kalām adopted his arguments.

<u>*Kalām Appropriation of the Pre-Socratics*</u>: The Kalām also resuscitated pre-Socratic theories of being that Plato and Aristotle had rejected, especially atomism, and its attendant concept of the vacuum. The atom is the indivisible smallest unit of matter, and the vacuum or void is the space between these indivisible units. The pre-Socratic Democritus (*c*. 460 BCE – *c*. 370 BCE) argued that there had to be irreducibly small things (*atom* = "uncuttable") making up the big things or everything would fall through, and that these atoms would require empty space to move in. The great Athenian philosophers argued, to the contrary, that there was no end to divisibility, and thus no ultimately small things, and no unfilled space. Our modern particle physics seems closer to their opinion.

Atomism was important to the Kalām because it explained being without requiring cosmology or natural science. In the Kalām version, the atoms do not endure more than an instant. God miraculously creates new ones at every moment to replace the old ones. This Kalām "occasionalism" is its characteristic doctrine. It means that every aspect of reality has its own separate "occasion" completely independent of anything else, except from God who creates it. By this means, the Kalām championed the entirely miraculous and non-natural character of existence. Their atomism also featured time-atoms and other strange types of atoms.

<u>*The "Kalām" of the Trinity and the Qur'an*</u>: The Kalām dealt with problems shared by the three great religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, such as the four topics of divine existence, unity, incorporeality, and creation. The Christian "Kalām" was also concerned with its own special doctrines, like trinitarianism. Similarly, the

Muslim Kalām "descended" (*hitdardaro*) to other strange doctrines and methods suggested by peculiarities of their own belief, like the eternal Qur'an, eternal attributes, and anthropomorphic divine descriptions in the Qur'an. Subsequently, when Islamic sects proliferated, they advanced their special Kalām arguments to persuade the others of the truth of their doctrines. Maimonides says that he is only interested in those Kalām arguments that touch on the four supreme topics.

The Problem of Old Books: One problem with books, dealt with by Maimonides in his Introduction to the Guide, is that they freeze authority. The reader encountering old books accepts their doctrines without questioning their provenance. This is especially true if they reach any kind of canonical status. The *later* Muslims accepted the authority of the Greek and Syrian arguments, as well as the tomes the *early* Muslims produced in their first battles with the Christians and the philosophers. The demands of those conflicts were unknown to latter day students of this lore. They thought that the doctrines were uncontroversial, that they arose from pure academic inquiry, and that there was no need to examine their premises or their sources.

MUTAZILISM AND ASHARISM

There are two major trends in the history of the Islamic Kalām. The first of these is Mutazilism, from an Arabic word that refers to ascetics or separatists. Their founder was Wasil Ibn Ata (700 - 748), who may have been an ascetic. They argued, against the orthodox Salafists ("predecessors"), that divine unity implies the denial of attributes. They also rejected the Salafist's fatalism by asserting that men had free will: i.e., justice was only just because of our free choices. Because they frequently sounded these twin themes, the Mutazilites became known as the "men of unity and justice."

Mutazilite arguments were also "taken up by kings," the Abbasid Baghdadi Caliphs al-Ma'mun (786 - 833) and al-Mu'tasim (833 - 842). Mutazila doctrines became law under the Caliphate. The Caliphate instituted the *Mikhnah*, an inquisition, to suppress the orthodox. Perhaps the caliphs found theological liberalism to be more elastic and accommodating than orthodoxy. In any event, the liberal's reign of terror was worse than anything that occurred under the orthodox, who returned to power under a victim of that reign, Ibn Hanbal (780-855), during the caliphate of al-Mutawakkil (821 - 861).

Afterward, the orthodox, according to I. Goldziher, "grew insatiable," arguing that the corporeal paper and ink Qur'an *was* the eternal uncreated Qur'an. In response to Hanbalite extremism, the second major trend in Kalām arose: Asharism, named for Abu'l-Hasan al-Ashari (d. 935). These "mediators" made concessions to the orthodox on their principal issue, agreeing that divine "speech" was indeed eternal, but that this divine speech is spiritual, not corporeal. On the other hand, they disputed the Mutazila from the orthodox side, upholding the dogmas of the "essential" divine attributes and predestination. (Goldziher: *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. by Andras and Hamori, Princeton, 1981, from German, 1910, p. 99.)

JEWISH KALĀM

Maimonides, reporting the Jewish response, says that the *Geonim* and the Karaites partly adopted Kalām methods. By *Geonim* he means the non-Andalusian Sefardic authorities, especially Saadia Gaon (882–942). The Karaite sectarians went even further than the *Geonim* in their commitment to Mutazilite arguments. Maimonides' deep interest in the Kalām ideology partly stems from his own historic battle with the Karaites in Egypt, since they embraced Mutazilite Kalām.

Insofar as the Jews followed any school, they followed the Mutazila. Their universal aversion to Asharism was not due to any critique of Asharite doctrines, but only to their acceptance of the previously established authority of the Mutazila. This is another case of the tyranny of old books, for the Asharites had defeated the Mutazila over a century before Maimonides' time. The Jews were interested in those old Mutazilite doctrines because they had produced little of their own systematic writing on the four theological topics, in comparison with the many books

of the Muslims. (On Jewish interest in Kalām, note that Rabbi Joseph, in the Guide's *Preface*, asked for an account of the Kalām, as did R.Yehuda Ha-Levi's Khazar king.)

By contrast, the Jews of *Andalusia* did not subscribe to the Kalām. That was because the Muslims of pre-Almohadic Spain favored the philosophers over the Kalām. Among those Muslims that Maimonides considered philosophers were Al-Farabi (870–950), Avicenna (980 - 1037), Ibn Bajj (d.1138), and Averroes (1126–1198). Their counterparts among the Spanish Jews were, according to Kafih (note 27, p 121, *ad loc*.), Bakhya Ibn Pakuda (second half of 11th c.), Ibn Gabirol (*c*.1020–*c*.1057), and Moshe Ibn Ezra (*c*. 1055–after 1135). Maimonides states that the later members of this group, especially, I would say, Abraham Ibn Daud (*c*.1110–1180), came close to doctrines of the Guide.

The inclusion of Bakhya by Kafih is questionable since Bakhya does use the Kalām argument for the proof of God's existence, as well as other Mutazilite methods, in his otherwise authentically Jewish system. Wolfson explains that Maimonides' reference was to the *later* members of the Andalusian intelligentsia, not including Bakhya. Bakhya's famous *Hovot Ha-Levavot*, (*Duties of the Heart*), employs the Kalām method in the first section, *Shaar Ha-Yikhud*. In Chapter 7 of that section, Bakhya writes:

> "The demonstration of God's Unity is as follows: It having been logically demonstrated that the World has a Creator, it becomes now our duty to institute an enquiry as to whether He is One or more than One." (M. Hyamson trans.)

In other words, prove the creation of the world first, and from that deduce divine existence and unity.

Wolfson noticed the problem with Maimonides' claim that the Spanish rabbis did not follow the Kalām method:

> "…While it is true that some of the Jewish philosophers in Spain abandoned the Kalām method of proving the creation of the world and the existence of God, two of them, Bahya Ibn Pakuda and Joseph Ibn Tsadik, like Saadia of the East, used the modified form of the Kalām arguments for the creation of the world and hence also for the existence of God. Undoubtedly his (Maimonides') generalization was meant to refer only to those whom he includes in what he describes as "their recent authors" and evidently Bahya Ibn Pakuda and Joseph Ibn Tsadik were not included among them." (*Kalām*, p. 85.)

BASING GOD ON THE WORLD

The worst fault of the Kalām was that they made dogma prevail over reality. Maimonides' indictment was that if reality did not confirm their doctrine, they re-imagined reality so that it would confirm the doctrine. They held that anything imagined could be real, which Maimonides found abhorrent. The nerve of our chapter is this crucial line from the pagan Aristotelian commentator Themistius (317–*c*. 388), not very clearly rendered by either English translation: We must not think that reality follows theory; rather, theory must follow reality.

The core of Kalām occasionalism is its claim that observed reality is just a "habit" (*noheg*), which could have happened differently. They therefore denied the existence of natural order. Each occurrence is a separate "atom" of reality, unconnected to any other atom. God recreates everything every moment. Our perception of the continued existence of objects is merely a projection from what we encounter *habitually* now (cf. Humian empiricism).

Not all Kalām theorists shared in occasionalism, especially the non-Muslim ones. Philoponus did not view reality through the prism of atomism, and neither do the Jewish theorists Saadia and Bakhya. They all, however, share a method. Maimonides sketches their method for us:

> "They set forth the propositions which I shall describe to you, and demonstrate by their peculiar mode of arguing that the Universe had a beginning. The theory of the *creatio ex nihilo* being thus established, they asserted, as a logical consequence, that undoubtedly there must be a Maker who created the Universe. Next, they showed that this Maker is One, and from the Unity of the Creator they deduced His Incorporeality. This method was adopted by every Mohammedan *Mutakallem* in the discussion of this subject, and by those of our co-religionists who imitated them and walked in their footsteps. Although the *Mutakallemim* disagree in the methods of their proofs, and employ different propositions in demonstrating the act of creation or in rejecting the eternity of the Universe, they invariably begin with proving the *creatio ex nihilo*, and establish on that proof the existence of God."

First prove the creation of the world, then derive that it has a Creator. This method proves the higher by making it depend on the lower. Worse, it undermines the belief in God's existence, enjoined in the First Commandment. The reason it undermines God's existence is the implication that if the universe was created, it must have a creator who is God, but if it is eternal, *there is no God* (*v'im kadum hu harei ayn eloa*).

Even the Jewish Kalām exposed itself to this pitfall. Saadia's *Emunot v'Deot* and Bachya's *Hovot Ha-Levavot* energetically address the creation issue, but if their arguments for creation fall flat, they leave the Creator in the lurch.

Moreover, Maimonides continues, the philosophers debated the creation or eternity of the universe for "three thousand years," that is, since the first philosopher, Abraham (see Kafih, note 63 *ad loc*.). The question is insoluble because the "mind stops" (*sh'ha-sekhel n'atzer etzlo*) at the boundary of the lunar sphere, beyond which we can prove nothing. The best a religiously oriented thinker (*ish ha-emet m'baalei ha-daat*) can hope to do is to cast doubt on the philosophers' arguments for eternity. Neither reason nor revelation can disprove the other.

In any event, the Kalām arguments for creation are all subject to doubt, and some destroy the nature of observed reality. People who only consider their sophistries will come to think that the existence of God has no theoretical support (*v'akher ykhashuv ki lo n'vnei m'olam klal*). If the Kalām persuade any readers that they proved creation, it could only be because those readers do not know the distinction between proof, rhetoric and sophistry.

Demonstrative proof derives from syllogisms based on verified premises; *dialectic* (rhetoric) derives from probable premises; *sophistry* bases itself on one or more false premises (*Treatise on Logic*, ch. 8).
As we will see, there is no demonstrative proof for the creation or the eternity of the universe. The Kalām "proofs" are sophistries, since they flow from their falsified view of reality. Maimonides' arguments for creation are *dialectical*, in that they are the most persuasive arguments available due to the epistemological unavailability of demonstrative proof.

A WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

These Kalām arguments are an "*upsetting of the world*," *m'hefukh ha-olam*, and a "*change in the order established at the time of creation*," *shinui seder bereshit.* The italics are from the Pines translation, but not otherwise footnoted. He italicized these phrases because they are Aggadic. See Kafih notes 73 and 74, p. 124, which locate them in the Talmud, *Pesakhim* 50a, *Baba Batra* 10b, and *Shabat* 53b. The citations to *Pesakhim* and *Baba Batra* are identical accounts of the bad dream of one of the rabbis:

> "Joseph the son of R. Joshua had been ill and fell in a trance. [After he recovered], his father said to him, 'What vision did you have?' He replied, 'I saw a *world upside down* (*olam hafukh*), the upper below and the lower above.'"

The citation to *Shabat* discussed an open miracle:

> "Our Rabbis taught: It once happened that a man's wife died and left a child to be suckled, and he could not afford to pay a wet-nurse, whereupon a miracle was performed for him and his teats opened like the two teats of a woman and he suckled his son. R. Joseph observed, Come and see how great was this man, that such a miracle was performed on his account! Said Abaye to him, On the contrary: how *lowly* was this man, that the *order of the Creation was changed* (*sh'nishtanu seder bereshit*) on his account! R. Judah observed, Come and see how difficult are men's wants [of being satisfied], that the order of the Creation had to be altered for him! R. Nahman said: The proof is that miracles do occur, whereas food is [rarely] created miraculously."

The rabbis are, generally, unhappy with miraculous intrusions into nature. In the first story, R. Joseph's trance was the outcome of *illness*. In the second, R. Abaye says that if the male wet-nurse been "great" instead of "lowly" he would not need the miracle. In any event, it is clear that these things happen only in extraordinary situations. By contrast, the Kalām make everything a miracle, and expressly refuse to accept that there is an "*order established at the time of creation,*" (*seder bereshit*). But, as Daniel Webster used to say, "Miracles do not cluster."

Nonetheless, the Kalām avowed that their "proofs" for God's existence were solid and certain. If you did not agree, they "smote with the sword" of argument to *force* your agreement (see, on this formulation, Pines, note 23, p. 180; Kafih, note 67, p. 124). Maimonides reacts viscerally to these follies of the Kalām: "When I understood their method I was disgusted, deeply disgusted, and justifiably disgusted..." (*v'kaasher hitbonanti b'derekh hazu nakaa nafshi mimenu nakia raba meod, u'b'tsedek nakaa*).

PROPHECY AND CREATION

A religious thinker could still believe in creation because the prophets revealed it, even though he rejected Kalām arguments for creation. "There is no harm in this," Maimonides says, meaning that it is a reasonable position, one that he himself comes to. (M. Fox, *Interpreting Maimonides*, p. 287).

But Maimonides asks: If we reject the Kalām proofs for creation, the case for eternity might look stronger—but can anyone believe in *prophets* if the eternal universe has no *Creator*? In other words, if the philosophers could prove that there was no miracle of creation, would they thereby undermine belief in other miracles, such as prophecy? Can anyone believe in the miracle of prophecy if creation *ex nihilo*, the paradigm miracle, did not occur?

He refrains from answering here, promising to do so later. He lays the groundwork for an answer in Chapter 2:32. There he identifies three positions on prophecy. The *Kalām* believe God can make anyone a prophet despite his ignorance (regarding Muhammad's illiteracy: Qur'an 29:48; *Al-Bukhari Hadith* 1:3). The *philosophers* believe anyone with a good intellect and imagination could be a prophet if properly trained and educated. *Maimonides* agrees with the philosophers, except God could still withhold prophecy from the properly trained candidate.

The point is that the philosophers, who do not believe that God is *Creator* of the universe, still hold that there are *prophets*. Al-Farabi, for example, maintained that a prophet is a philosopher whose excellent imagination creates and processes symbols.

Maimonides had also privileged prophecy as one of the three sources of good information (1:50). Thus, he can bring back prophecy to tip the close balance over to the side of creation. We may believe in the prophetic revelation of creation even under the philosophers' version of prophecy (which is somewhat more expansive than Maimonides' version). This works, because, as we will later see, the philosophic claim that the universe is eternal is not free from doubt. Because it is not free from doubt, there is no *demonstrative* proof for eternity, and

Maimonides could therefore advance *dialectical* arguments for creation, having laid a basis for the use of prophetic revelation as one of those privileged arguments.

MAIMONIDES' METHOD

Maimonides contrasts his own method with the Kalām method.

First, the universe must be either eternal or created from nothing. There is no other alternative.

Leo Strauss, in his introduction to the Pines translation of the Guide, p. *liv,* finds this division difficult, since he is committed to Plato's third alternative: creation from unformed matter. Maimonides probably considered this theory a subset of the philosophers' eternal universe, since the Aristotelianism he knew was neo-Platonized. The universe is thus an eternal emanation from the endless potentiality of the good—where *potentiality* is another way of understanding *hyle*. The universe is eternally generated. It follows that under Plato's third "alternative" the disjunction remains: the universe must be either eternal or created.

Nonetheless, on either account, creation or eternity, we can prove that God exists. If created, there must be a Creator. If it is eternal, there must be an unmoved prime Mover behind all causes and effects. Either way, God exists. Having reviewed the alternatives, Maimonides asserts that the proof for the existence of God should begin with the *provisional* assumption of the eternity of the world, for this way the "demonstration (of God's existence) is perfect, both if the world is eternal and if it is created."

He thus reaches the same conclusion as the Kalām, without resort to their doubtful arguments, by starting from the conclusions of the philosophers. He does not do this because he agrees with the philosophers, but because this achieves proof of the existence of God uncontestable by either side. The objective, remember, is that the believer be *convinced* of God's existence.

In recent decades, some have doubted Maimonides' support for creation *ex nihilo* (Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation," *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, I. Twersky, *ed.* Harvard, 1979, p. 16-40; W. Z. Harvey, "Why Maimonides was not a *Mutakallim*," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, p. 112, ed. Joel L. Kraemer, Oxford, 1991). They claim that he covertly opposed creationism. In his recent book, *Maimonides on the Origin of the World* (Cambridge, 2006), Kenneth Seeskin systematically refutes this claim of esoteric eternalism. Seeskin shows that there is no good reason not to take Maimonides at his word that he believes in creation *ex nihilo*.

Maimonides says that he will refrain from addressing the issue of the creation of the universe until he has first proven the existence of God perfectly from both contending perspectives. This is the exact reverse of the Kalām method, which was to prove creation first and then deduce a Creator. He can later examine the solidity of the philosopher's argument for eternity, and array against it the strongest arguments for creation. He will not find a decisive proof, for this is unavailable to the mind. Still, he will give good reasons to accept prophetic revelation's account of creation.

THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

At the end of the chapter, Maimonides makes a remarkable statement, given his times:

> "I have already told you that nothing exists except God and this universe (1:34), and that there is no other evidence for His Existence but this universe in its entirety and in its several parts. Consequently, the universe must be examined as it is: the propositions must be derived from those properties of the universe that are clearly perceived, and hence you must know its visible form and its nature. Then only will you find in the universe evidence for the existence of a Being not included therein."

Contrast the Kalām method. Starting with the need to prove the dogma of creation *ex nihilo*, they assemble as many arguments as necessary, "even up to a hundred," irrespective if the world really is as they depict it. By contrast, Maimonides tells us to look at our world, this observed, empirical reality. Learn what the world's nature really is. Only in this way can the existence of One *not* part of this reality ever be found. How liberating for science. It is the way of the good physician that Maimonides was.

Warren Zev Harvey (*ibid.*) portrays Maimonides' stance excellently:

> "If however, someone should examine the question of creation in time vs. eternity *a parte ante* with an eye to supporting creation in time, his tendentiousness will blind him to the truth. Now it is also a principle of Maimonides that only the truth (*al-haqq*) pleases God, and only falsehood angers him (Guide 2:47). It follows necessarily that the *mutakallim* who exerts himself to prove the creation of the world in time may imagine that he is serving God, but according to Maimonides, he is in reality angering God! For Maimonides, therefore, the difference between the philosopher and the *mutakallim* is the difference between someone who pleases God and someone who angers him; and anger, Maimonides teaches us (1:36, 1:54), is attributed to God only with regard to idolatry and unbelief (*kufr*). Maimonides' critique of the Kalām is thus not only a philosophic critique, but also a religious one. The tendentiousness and sophistry of the Kalām are obnoxious to Maimonides' religious sensibility. Both as philosopher and as religionist, Maimonides rejected the Kalām. Surely, Maimonides himself would say that he was not a *mutakallim* not only because he was a committed philosopher, but also—and no less—because he was a committed Jew. All this coheres with Maimonides' view that the bond between man and God is the intellect."

Maimonides promises to show in the next chapter what this world really looks like, according to accepted science of his day, and what the world's relationship to God is.

The Problem of Intuition: If we take Warren Zev Harvey's view, that the touchstone of inquiry must be the disinterested pursuit of truth, this works well for Maimonides.

There is, however, a major problem lurking in Maimonides' statements. We could, perhaps, read them as a demand for direct optical perception alone, i.e., that what you see is what you get. That is how Yehuda Even-Shmuel reads these passages. We previously quoted Maimonides saying: "Consequently, the universe must be examined as it is: the propositions must be derived from those properties of the universe which are *clearly perceived* (*k'fi sh'hu*), and hence you must know its *visible form and its nature* (*sh'ro'im b'teva*)." Earlier in the chapter he had said, "We merely maintain that the earlier Theologians, both of the Greek Christians and of the Mohammedans, when they laid down their propositions, did not investigate the *real properties of things* (*ha-gilui ha-nirei m'inyanei ha-mitziot*—lit: the properties of existence *revealed visibly*)."

Even-Shmuel says that these statements mean that the properties of the universe must be derived from "intuition" (*derekh ha-intuitzia*, p. 397, *ad loc.*), "simple intuition," (*ha-intuitivit ha-pashut*, p. 405) or "intuition and science" (*riitanu ha-intuitivit v'ha-mdait*, p. 408—this formulation is better than the other two).

This use of the term "intuition" struck me as odd, until I checked my *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 1967, which defines as follows: "1) Direct perception of truth, fact, etc., independent of any reasoning process: immediate apprehension," and "5) PHILOS.: An immediate cognition of an object not inferred or determined by a previous cognition of the same object." A direct optical perception would be an "intuition."

Even-Shmuel's restriction of knowledge to that which is "clearly perceived" as "intuited" means that our eyes should perceive this reality unmediated by prior conceptions. While this works well to exclude Kalām

dogmatism, but is not the same as Warren Zev Harvey's criterion, which was the disinterested pursuit of truth (although Even-Shmuel stumbles to this in his final formulation).

The problem with intuition is that I perceive the sun rotating around the earth. This is an unmediated perception, i.e, an intuition. But I know, through my conditioning, as well as through my own pursuit of truth, that the earth rotates the sun. Intuition may mislead, and the empiricist skeptics make the most of well-known examples, like mirages, where it does mislead. Maimonides, as physician, was well aware that what we glimpse on the surface of the human body does not truly reflect the hidden processes within it, which we can only know through the study of medicine, not by intuition. The point is that something more than direct perception is required. It may be necessary to have a working hypothesis in order to make any progress. (We should not deceive ourselves however: Maimonides would probably not have accepted solar-centrism, no matter how well articulated—but this had nothing to do with intuition, and everything to do with the state of the sciences in the 12th century; see Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, 1962).

What Maimonides meant when he said that we must base our investigation on what we clearly perceive was best captured in Even-Shmuel's final formulation, which embraced Maimonides' strong commitment to sense-data correspondence, taken in the light of scientific method. This once again illustrates Maimonides' optimistic attitude toward the acquisition of knowledge.

ANACHRONISM? THE PROBLEM OF YAHYA IBN ADI

In recalling those Christians whose ideas came to the Kalām, Maimonides mentions John Philoponus and Yahya Ibn Adi. In context, it may seem like Maimonides is saying these were the *earliest* of the Christian polemicists. However, all Maimonides was saying was that they best represented the flow of these ideas to Islam down to his own day.

H.A. Wolfson (*The Philosophy of the Kalām*, p. 55, fn. 64) takes critical note of students of this chapter who find the reference to Ibn Adi anachronistic. Those critics include all its modern translators, from Munk, to Friedlander, Weiss, and Pines, and, I might add, Schwarz in his recent Hebrew translation (fn. 21, p. 188). Schwarz' long footnote cites these critics but does not seem to notice Wolfson's defense of Maimonides.

Ibn Adi was a Christian Monophysite who lived in Iraq from 873 to 974 C.E, four centuries after John Philoponus. He wrote and translated philosophic works as well as Christian works, especially on divine unity and divine knowledge of particulars. Wolfson says, (p. 54, 58):

> "Undoubtedly Maimonides considered him as one of the main sources of the Muslims' knowledge of what he calls the Christian Kalām. Thus John Philoponus and Yahya Ibn Adi are mentioned by Maimonides not as examples of those who were responsible for the rise of the Kalām but rather as examples of those whose influence helped to shape some of the arguments for the four beliefs which he was going to deal with....
> "As an example of a Christian Greek author whose work came to be known to Muslims through translation he mentions John Philoponus, and as an example of a Christian author who wrote his work originally in Arabic he mentions Yahya Ibn Adi. These two authors were selected by him as illustrative not only because he thought they were each most outstanding in his field but also because they were sources of arguments which he had in mind later to present as characteristic of the Mutakallimūn. Finally, alluding to certain beliefs peculiar to Islam, he remarks that even in connection with these beliefs the Muslims employed the method of argumentation which they had learned from the Christians."

This last, from the point of view of Islam, is the most damning thing Maimonides can say about the Kalām.

WAS MAIMONIDES A THEOLOGIAN?

It is after Rosh Hashana, the shofar still ringing in my ears, calling to mind Maimonides' account of the shofar's "deep meaning" (*remez*): "Awake! Awake! O sleepers from your sleep; O slumberers, arouse ye from your slumbers, and examine your deeds, return in repentance and remember your Creator (*boreikhem*)." For reasons that shall remain my own, I am convinced that there is a Creator who revealed truth in His Torah. I have been blessed with moments of inspiration (*ruakh ha-kodesh*) verging on prophecy (*navua*). I know of those whose experiences were more intense than mine were. You may call me delusional, but I know that the greater delusion is to reduce the whole to corporeality. You may say that the Muslim or Buddhist would not accept my account, but I know how to answer them. I take it that this was also Maimonides' view.

It is clear to me that the Creator and His creations are part of the whole. We call the inquiry into the truth of the whole philosophy. Maimonides calls the inquiry into the divine matters in this whole the "divine science."

Leo Strauss famously argued that there is an esoteric and exoteric face to Maimonides' writing. We also accept that Strauss' writing possesses two faces.

In his *exoteric* presentation, Strauss argues that the Guide was a species of Kalām and that Maimonides was not a philosopher, but, at most, a theologian. Since the purpose of the Guide was, in his view, to defend religion by showing the compatibility of Judaism and philosophy, just for that reason alone it was not philosophy but Kalām. He qualifies this, somewhat, by saying that Maimonides built his Kalām on reason rather than imagination. This fits into Strauss' general schema that Judaism and philosophy are eternal antagonists, as are theology and philosophy, for theology is his other name for Kalām.

In Strauss' *esoteric* presentation, the Guide, a masterpiece of esoteric writing, conceals a hard Aristotelian view (or, in some interpretations, a Platonic view), including, crucially, the eternity of the universe, i.e., that it was not created. That is because, according to W. Z. Harvey (in the above quoted article), "The Aristotelian notion of eternity *a parte ante* best conforms to the *nature of what exists*" (his ital.). Since Maimonides' secret doctrine conforms to the nature of what exists, Harvey says that it cannot be Kalām, because only that is Kalām which fails Themistius' test of conforming to what exists. Harvey agrees with Strauss that the hidden doctrine is eternalism, and just for that reason denies that the Guide is, on the esoteric level at least, a species of Kalām. (For what seems like the contrary view, expressed by the young Strauss, see *Philosophy and Law*, 1987, p. 85).

Now the key to all this is Harvey's statement that eternalism best conforms to what is. He evidently felt he had no need to attach an explanation of why this should be so. Perhaps we could call this a species of "philosophic" Kalām, inasmuch as it reflects modernist atheist prejudice, which, I feel it is safe to say, also characterizes Strauss' esoteric face. Harvey does criticize Strauss for arguing that Judaism and philosophy are incompatible, but that is only because Harvey's radical Maimonideanism accepts that the Guide discovered Judaism's true inner Aristotelianism. In other words, for Harvey, reason and revelation are compatible because the Guide made revelation comport with "what exists."

Strauss comes closer, grudgingly, to truth, by his admission that philosophy must recognize that it cannot disprove revelation, and that it must remain "open to the challenge of theology." There is a vague sense in which "Philosophy must admit the possibility of revelation" (which is further than Harvey goes in his article). But Strauss' grudging admission could also mean the opposite, that philosophy must also remain open to "the challenge" of atheism. In such statements as these Strauss patronizes religion for its political benefits.

But I do not want to be patronized by such a "noble lie" since, as I am convinced, the Creator is clearly part of the whole. Moreover, I do not accept the incompatibility of reason and revelation, nor did Maimonides (and not *à la* Harvey, that revelation was reason's disguise). I also would not accept Strauss' statement that the Guide's

primary purpose was to show the compatibility of Judaism and philosophy, but, rather, that its primary purpose was to train future prophets.

I would agree with Harvey that by pursuing "uncompromised objectivity" the Guide is not a work of Kalām. It is, therefore, philosophy or theology. Philosophy and theology are not categories but activities: Maimonides was a philosopher and a theologian because he did philosophy and theology, not because a particular doctrine locked him into some category. I do not assume that all theology, the act of studying the divine things, is a kind of tendentious Kalām. The inquiry into divine things is an inquiry, as far as I am concerned, into part of that which exists.

(Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Chicago, 1952; Strauss, "The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy," Vol. III, 1979, which is the English original of the Hebrew translation in *Iyyun Hebrew Philosophical Quarterly*, Jerusalem, V, no. 1, Jan. 1954, pp 110-126; English version at the Deakin Philosophical Society website. Harvey's article, "Why Maimonides was not a *Mutakallim*," *ibid.*, is a quick decoder ring for Strauss' *Persecution*; but Harvey receives necessary correction, especially for his radical eternalism, from Herbert A. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides the Man and His Works*, Oxford, 2005, 398-402; and from Seeskin, *Maimonides on the Origin of the World*, Cambridge, 2005. See also Joseph Buijs, "The Philosophic Character of Maimonides' Guide—A Critique of Strauss' Interpretation," in *Maimonides, A Collection of Critical Essays*, Buijs, ed., Notre Dame, Indiana, 1998).

<u>*The Strauss Problem*</u>: Strauss shares a problem with many secular thinkers. It is their failure to appreciate the brilliance of the divine creation, what physicist Brian Greene calls the "Elegant Universe." This leads them to see only contradictions and faults in that creation. So it was with Strauss. He has contradictions upon contradictions. Not only does Maimonides, in his telling, use contradictions to hide an infernal Spinozism (or high-toned Aristotelianism) from the pious, but he also made reason and revelation irreconcilable, so that philosophy and theology could never reach synthesis.

How foreign all this would have been to Maimonides, who sought to reconcile our perplexities. And how foreign to the nature of the divine, whose science he sought to teach, to create a structure with so many locked gates and startling landslides. The truth is that there are no contradictions in the divine science. It might even have been the case that Maimonides intended the section on contradictions in the Guide's Introduction to steer away secular thinkers. Those who know Maimonides' method recognize how he built levels of understanding into the Guide's design, and that those seemingly irreconcilable contradictions usually reduce to those levels of understanding. Not every pill cures every disease.

Strauss was by no means the first to discover that there were problematic knots in Maimonides' writing. Centuries of halakhic scholars had learned to identify a *shvere Rambam*. They found that the hard work of reconciliation acted like nuclear fusion to produce enormous insights. This was not "hagiography" as one modern called it, but a recognition by all deeply religious thinkers that reality itself is ultimately one, together with our trust that Maimonides only sought to reveal that unity.

(Fundamental to understanding the development of the modern philosophical debate: Eliezer Schweid, "Religion and Philosophy: The Scholarly-Theological Debate Between Julius Guttmann and Leo Strauss," in *Maimonidean Studies*, vol. 1, 163. Further reading: *Philosophers and Scholars: Wolfson, Guttmann and Strauss on the History of Jewish Philosophy*, Jonathan Cohen, Lexington, 2007; chapters 3 and 4, *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy*, Marvin Fox, Chicago, 1995. Haunting all of this, though only barely mentioned, is Rudolph Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*.)

<u>*Theology vs. Kalām*</u>: Theology need not be the same thing as Kalām. The distinction here is that the forerunners of the Kalām used philosophical technique as a tool to defend the dogmas of faith. That is what prompted Themistius' condemnation of dogmatism.

Theology also need not follow the Kalām method of basing God's existence on proof of creation. This methodology grounded the higher in the terms of the lower, and was therefore opposed to the type of inquiry demanded by what Maimonides called the "divine science."

Maimonides probably would have nodded his head to the scholastic *credo ut intelligam*, "I believe in order that I may understand" (Anselm, *Proslogion*, 1). The opening of the Mishneh Torah, "The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all existence; all the beings of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them came into existence only from the truth of His being," is a statement of belief in which the *intelligibilia* clearly follow the *credo.* While he does develop proofs for these primary intelligibles, the force of the pronouncement is to establish the commandments of belief.

But those same intelligibles must be analyzed by criteria intrinsic to their reality. Indeed, there are only two things in existence, God and the universe (he says this in our chapter and in 1:33). Since we cannot analyze God, we can only learn of Him through the study of His creation. This rejection of dogmatism was a gauntlet cast before the Kalām.

What of the notion that "philosophy is the handmaiden of theology," *philosophia ancilla theologiae*? This notion became the banner under which the church fathers constructed the dogmas that later grew into the Kalām. The sense of it was that philosophy was, so to speak, a tool to help make the dogma credible, even if "philosophy" only became the rationalization for that dogma. Aquinas reinterpreted the principle in the light of our religious duty to comprehend revelation. Reason then becomes the necessary companion of any faith, *philosophia ancilla theologiae*, an entirely different approach from that of the Kalām.

<u>*Maimonides' "Divine Science"*</u>: Maimonides resisted the use of either the terms "theology" or "metaphysics." When he does use the term "metaphysics," *akher ha-teva /* בעד אלטביעה, as in our chapter, he refers to the Aristotelian book of that name, or at least to its world of commentary, not to a distinct discipline. The term he invariably uses is *mdai ha-elohut,* אלעלם אלאלאהי, "divine science" (usually mistranslated as "metaphysics"). He gives a reasonably clear précis of that discipline in Guide 1:35 and 1:34. Divine science concerns parables in the prophetic scriptures, "mysteries (*sodot*) and secrets of the law (*sitrei torah*)":

> "The attributes of God, their inadmissibility, and the meaning of those attributes which are ascribed to Him; concerning the Creation, His Providence, in providing for everything; concerning His will, His perception, His knowledge of everything; concerning prophecy and its various degrees: concerning the meaning of His names..." (Guide 1:35)
>
> "(1) What the heavens are, what is their number and their form; what beings are contained in them; what the angels are; how the creation of the whole world took place; what is its purpose, and what is the relation of its various parts to each other; what is the nature of the soul; how it enters the body; whether it has an independent existence, and if so, how it can exist independently of the body [i.e, after death]; by what means [prayer or speculation?] and to what purpose [to unite with the active intellect or with God?], and similar problems….(2) All these subjects are connected together; for there is nothing else in existence but *God and His works*, the latter including all existing things besides Him: we can only obtain a knowledge of Him through His works; His works give evidence of His existence, and show what must be assumed concerning Him, that is to say, what must be attributed to Him either affirmatively or negatively." (Guide 1:34; compare both with Commentary on the Mishnah, *Hagigah* 2:1)

As I explain in 1:33, "Why it is Harmful to Begin this Science," the relation in the second passage (from 1:34) of the (2) to (1) is not the relation of dogma to science, but rather to the demonstrable truths that follow from the investigation of the objects of divine science. As I also show there, this program was not cognate to metaphysics.

His concern in both 1:34 and 1:35, however, was not metaphysics or theology, but the defense of this inquiry itself. Maimonides condemned those who rejected it as if it "contain(ed) some secret evil, or (was) contrary to the fundamental principles of the Law, as fools think who are only philosophers in their own eyes."

If we want to say that theology is the same thing as divine science, meaning the examination of the nature of the divine things enumerated by Maimonides in these passages, then it would be appropriate to say, that in addition to his many other mantles, Maimonides was a theologian of the highest order.

In another sense, he was also a Cabalist (or, strictly speaking, a proto-Cabalist), though his Cabala was not like that of his famous students, R. Moshe De Leon's theosophic Cabala or R. Abraham Abulafia's ecstatic Cabala. Neither was it like the vulgar magicians of his day, with their amulets, abracadabras, and magic bowls.

It was his desire to remove the corporeal and the imaginary from Cabala that ironically earned him the false reputation as an anti-Cabalist.