**GUIDE 1:69**
**LIFE OF THE WORLDS**

## Overview

Maimonides' object in this group of chapters is to seize as much Aristotelian ground as possible. By showing how much of Aristotle's philosophy he agrees with, he reveals himself as an insider when, in Section Two of the Guide, he turns against Aristotle on the crux issue of creation.

He also takes this opportunity to contrast his sophisticated, effective approach with the creaky dogmatics of the Kalam theology. The upcoming chapters on Kalam theology fulfill a promise that Maimonides made to Rabbi Joseph in his prefatory epistle to the Guide:

> "I noticed that you desired additional explanation, urging me to expound some metaphysical problems; to teach you the system of the *Mutakallemim* (the Kalam theologians); to tell you whether their arguments were based on logical proof; and if not, what their method was. I perceived that you had acquired some knowledge in those matters from others, and that you were perplexed and bewildered; yet you sought to find out a solution to your difficulty."

Shem Tov and Narboni view our chapter in the context of the preceding chapter. Both chapters establish a kind of unified field theory; 1:68 announced the unity of mind, while 1:69 sets up the unity of divine causation, whereby God is the soul, cause and form of the world. All of this leads to the microcosmic/macrocosmic convergence of 1:72, such that, as we explain there, from The One only one thing comes.

Maimonides does not make the task of his readers easy in Chapter 69. He begins with an obscure discussion of distinctions that the Kalam made in the terminology of causation. He then sketches a rather abstract presentation of Aristotelian causation. He provides some relief with three simple examples that make the abstract account comprehensible. His last parable throws light on Maimonidean political philosophy.

Perhaps the reader should read the chapter inside out, starting with the homely examples, moving to the Aristotelian account, and then finally to the Kalam debate. But before we get to that debate we need some historical contextualization, so that we can put ourselves back in the 12th century with Maimonides and his Kalam opponents.

## THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

> "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk."
> —G.W.F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right (1820), "Preface"

Philosophy makes its appearance in the Arab world upon the translation into Arabic of Greek and Roman texts. It reaches its fruition in the work of Ghazali (1058-1111) and Averroes (1126 –1198) at a time when Arab civilization enters its decline.

An important part of that decline is the defeat of the philosophic impulse by the Asharite Kalam. In this latter period, we find Islam's mood more defensive and conservative than it was at the height of the Baghdad Abbasid and the Cordovan Umayyad Caliphates. It was a time of breakup and reconstitution of the several Caliphates of Maimonides' youth. New pressures arose from the Christians in the north and the Mongols to the east. New forces, like Saladin's Ayyubids, in the 1170's and 80's, displaced the Fatimids in Egypt. In this era of upheaval, Muslim traditionalists feared incipient heresy with the introduction of Aristotelian philosophy.

The Kalam theologians reacted against Aristotle's rejection of divine volitional creation of the world by defending creation *ex nihilo*. Recognizing that philosophy based its position on its own logic, the Kalam rejected that logic. In the process, they also rejected Aristotelian physics. In its place, they substituted the weird mélange of atomism and incessant miraculous intervention that we now call "occasionalism." It turned the miracle of creation from a unique event into the normal state of the universe.

It is important to keep this historical backdrop in mind when reading the next eight chapters.

## SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

### 1. CAUSATION IN GENERAL

Both Jerusalem and Athens recognized that there was regularity in the universe and sought an adequate explanation for it. The result, after many false starts, was the general theory of causation by means of four "causes." We may better grasp these as four "becauses," that is, four sciences that we still use to explain this regularity.

What they called the "material" cause is what we still use when we practice material science and particle physics: they tell us what makes up the things around us. The "efficient" cause is what we use when we try to discover the art or process that produced the regular phenomena we experience. The "formal" cause tells us what the thing becomes after its change, which we classify with various systems such as taxonomy or phylogenetics. Aristotle sometimes identifies that formal cause with the "final" cause, which is what the change was for, which we also try to explain when we engage in debates over evolution.

It is critical for us to recognize that the ancient philosophers believed in God as well as in the comprehensibility of the world. This religiously directed optimism is hard for us to recognize in our largely atheistic philosophers, who speak a different language than philosophers did in the classical period. At the end of my treatment of this chapter, I consider the direction this discussion takes in modern philosophy and its continuing relevance.

Three general terms for causation also apply to divine causation: *illa*, *siba*, and *poel*. The actual Arabic terms that Maimonides uses are Semitic cognates of these Hebrew terms. The philosophers called God "cause" and "principle," *illa* and *siba*. These two terms, in context, meant the same thing. The philosophers preferred those terms because they *generically* represented the four Aristotelian causes.

These four causes were called the material, formal, efficient and purposive (teleological/final) causes, *ha-khomer*, *ha-tzur*, *ha-poel*, *v'ha-takhlit*. The philosophers thought that God was the ultimate cause, but insisted that He was also the ultimate formal, efficient and final cause. Maimonides emphatically agreed, *u'mahashkafoteihem asher aini kholek aleikhem*, identifying himself with them against the Kalam. The philosophers only refrained from calling God the material cause, *ha-khomer*, since they agreed with Maimonides that God is incorporeal.

<u>*Kalam Opposition to General Causation*</u>. When the philosophers used the term *poel*, they meant "effective cause," which was the Aristotelian cause closest to what we modernly mean by "cause." By contrast, the Kalam only called God "actualizer," *poel*, by which they meant "creator."

Since the Kalam only accepted direct causes, they eliminated teleological causation, which is the idea that anything actually has a purpose beyond the blind will of Allah. Since they did not believe in the potential/actual distinction, they deleted formal and material causes as well.

The Kalam chose not to understand the philosophers' actual use of these three terms. They worried that calling God the *illa* and *siba* necessarily implied Aristotelian eternalism. They divided sharply between causation, which they did not accept, and divine creation. Their argument was that a cause must be simultaneous with its effect,

and that the effect is the necessary result or production of the cause (modern philosophers also commit this Kalam error).

Thus, if God "caused" the universe, it must exist *with* Him, necessarily and simultaneously. They thought that the philosophers chose their terminology to express that all things necessarily emanate eternally from God, on the analogy of light from the sun. This was the claim of medieval neo-Platonism. The Kalam believed that the Aristotelian quaternary causal structure necessarily led to the heresy of an eternal universe existing with God. They suspected that the philosophers' insisted on using *siba* and *illa* (general causation), rather than *poel* (direct causation), in order to smuggle eternality and necessity into the account of creation.

The Kalam, by contrast, preferred using the term *poel* to express miraculous creation *ex nihilo*, on the assumption that the *poel* (unlike the *illa* and *siba*) always precedes its creation in existence. Their peculiar occasionalist physics eliminates all the Aristotelian causes except for the direct cause, which is God. God is the single effective cause of every existence in their universe, who miraculously recreates the existence of everything at every instant, *ex nihilo*.

Maimonides responded that we do not need to begin the debate over eternity or creation yet. He addresses this issue in Section Two of the Guide. This chapter, like the last, is really about *Maaseh ha-Merkavah*, i.e., providence; not about creation, but about the divine sustenance of the universe. That this chapter becomes involved in issues of creation is due only to Kalam confusion.

<u>*Causes Without Effects*</u>. Maimonides explains that *illa, siba*, and *poel* are equivalent in their use, in that none of these terms demands the simultaneity of cause and effect. These causes could precede their effects despite of what the Kalam otherwise imagined.

Causes precede their effects in two ways. First, a cause can be a potential cause. Thus, when the cause is still a potential cause it exists without its effect yet existing *in actu*. Second, an effect may be lacking, or non-existent, but if its cause is unhindered, it can produce the effect at any time.

The first instance, the case of the potential cause, cannot involve God since there is no potentiality associated with Him. The second instance, the non-existent effect, does involve God. Since God can at any moment do anything, He can always produce the universe, even from nothing. Nothing hinders or impedes His power to effectuate His will. Thus, in neither the first nor the second case is the effect simultaneous with its cause. This is true of the *illa* and *siba* as well as the *poel*, as it is true across all four of the Aristotelian causes.

To make the first case less abstract, he provides the down-to-earth example of a carpenter who has not yet built a house. At that point the pile of wood is only a potential house and he is only its potential builder, although he holds in mind the form of the house. When he has imposed that form on its matter, the house becomes *actual*, and he is the builder *in actu.* Only through the *action* of building does the material become an *actual* house. In this case, the builder is at different times a potential and an actual *poel*, as well as being both a potential and actual *illa* and *siba* (in that he also imposes the formal and final causes upon the house). In the state of actuality, the builder and the house exist *simultaneously* despite his being a *poel*, thus there is no advantage in that respect to the use of *poel* over *illa* and *siba* (*v'im khen lo hirvakhnu meiuma b'ha-adafet shem poel al shem illa v'siba*).

Crescas discusses this example in terms of the second case, that of the non-existent effect. The builder is not really the true creator of the house because he did not produce its originally non-existent materials. God, the remote cause, in whom nothing is *in potentia*, is its true creator, since even though the house and its materials were at one time non-existent, nothing hindered Him from creating them. Again, this is true whether we speak of the form (*tzur*) or purpose (*takhlit*) of those materials or whether we speak of them generically, as *illa* and *siba*.

*The Kalam Reject Nature as an Illusion*. Since the Kalam only believed in the direct effective cause (*poel*), they had no concept of potential and actual causes. Moreover, since they refused to accept the distinction between proximate and remote causation, they rejected the existence of intermediate causes. This led them to reject God's system of nature, which is about such deferred intermediary processes.

In opposition to all this, the Kalam insisted that God is the only direct effective cause of each of the occasional occurrences in the universe, *at each moment*. These creations only last one moment (one "time-atom"). God miraculously reproduces and re-creates all effects from nothing. It only seems as if events are connected. Nature was, therefore, an illusion.

They rejected any effects that were simultaneous with their causes, fearing that, otherwise, they would have to admit that the world existed simultaneously with God as an eternal partner with Him. This "partnership" (*shirk*, *shituf*) was the very name of heresy. Such "partnership" excluded creation *ex nihilo*, and since they thought that general causation implied "partnership" they denied that God is a "cause" (*illa*, *siba*) but only "creator" (*poel*).

Indeed, as Shem Tov points out, they could not conceive of an eternal *poel*, since each direct action, even from God, was independent of every other action. This is the basic tenet of occasionalism: each action is a different occasion. They, therefore, would not have called the sun the efficient cause of its sunlight. (*ki mi sh'yipal tamid aino raui sh'yikra poel, ele mi sh'lo haya poel v'shav poel….ki ha-shemesh lo yikra poel ha-or l'fi daat elu*. Shem Tov, *ad loc.*, p. 102b). The Kalam would have it that God as *poel* recreated the sun's rays *ex nihilo* in every moment. They suspected that the emanationists called God *illa* or *siba* rather than *poel* to make God an eternal involuntary source of emanation, just as the sun is an eternal involuntary source of light. The Kalam replied that Allah freely recreates the world at every moment *ex nihilo* as *poel*, not eternally emanating it out of hylic matter within Himself. (But see below, "The Convergence of Emanation and Creation Theories".)

Responding to them, Maimonides explained that the terms *illa*, *siba*, and *poel* are equivalent. They imply nothing about the order of creation.

*God is a special case*. Suppose the universe is non-existent. Since no internal or external thing *hinders* or *predisposes* God's creating it, He can create it *ex nihilo* (*v'shkhmo sh'anu korim oto poel, v'af al pi sh'paalo ne'eder, ho'il v'ain m'nia v'ain m'atzur l'fanav m'l'poel matai sh'yirtza*).

Schwarz, note 7, *ad loc.*, supposes that Maimonides' statement here was an intentional "contradiction," since by juxtaposing the example of the homebuilder with God's creation, Maimonides implied that prior to creation the universe was only a *potential* universe. I do not agree. Maimonides had frequently rejected this emanationist idea elsewhere, since there is no potentiality in God. The point of the homebuilder example was not to show that the universe, like the house, was potential before creation. The point was to show that causes need not be simultaneous, and, further, that causes do not always necessitate their effects. Crescas saw this more clearly than Schwarz, when he suggested that God had to create the matter from which the house was constructed, not that this matter stood for some sort of hylic potentiality from which God constructed the universe.

We will see, however, as Maimonides examines the meaning each of the causes, that God is not precisely a "cause" in any of the senses described. In other words, when we say that God is the *effective* cause (*poel*), the *formal* cause (*tsur*), and the *final* cause (*takhlit*), this is only on the analogical level. He could not be the form or the efficient or even the final cause of His creations since He is so radically different from them; *nonetheless*, He is the cause of them all, in these three senses, since His creation would be nonexistent if He, as its ultimate cause, in all senses of the term, did not exist.

The inevitable conclusion is that this is another "late" lexical chapter, and "cause" is another homonymous term, different in meaning for God than for us. We might even call God the "fifth" cause, like Aristotle's indefinable "fifth element." Through His existence, all things exist (Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei ha-Torah*, 1:1).

The point is that when we examine *any* of the terms used for causation, they are only *sometimes* simultaneous with their effects (*ki ha-poel efshar sh'ykadem et paalo*). That is why the terms "create" and "cause" are equivalent (*l'hashvot*) in their generality.

* * *

Having condemned the Kalam blunders in causation, Maimonides explains each of these three causes, *ha-poel*, *ha-tzur*, and *ha-takhlit*, beginning with the analogical sense in which we call God an effective or efficient cause.

**2. EFFICIENT CAUSE (*POEL*)**

The first of the four causes is the *poel*, the "creator, actualizer." It is the one that philosophy termed the *efficient* cause.

All causes are either *proximate* or *remote*. The efficient cause we are most familiar with is the one proximate to its effect. These causes have causes, but this cannot go on indefinitely. The reason they do not go on indefinitely is that *an infinite causal series cannot be traversed*, *v'zei ma sh'lo ya'avor ad l'lo takhlit*. The explanation for this Aristotelian notion is that since the last effect in the chain had a specific cause, there must be a specific cause at the beginning of the chain. A cause must contain everything that comes about in its effect in the same or higher form. But if the chain is infinite, there is no possibility of ever reaching that ultimate cause (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1:2, 994a, 12:3 1070a1-5; *Physics* 8:5, 256a, 11-20; Descartes Third *Meditation*).

If you found this difficult, you are in good company. Herbert Davidson calls it "legerdemain." Crescas argued against it. But we should try to grasp it, because of its centrality to the scientific thought of Maimonides' time. A brilliant modern Thomist, Peter Kreeft, provides a series of persuasive arguments for nontraversibility ("The First Cause Argument," available online). His strongest states:

> "It is often asked why there can't be infinite regress, with no first being. Infinite regress is perfectly acceptable in mathematics: negative numbers go on to infinity just as positive numbers do. So why can't time be like the number series, with no highest number either negatively (no first in the past) or positively (no last in the future)? The answer is that real beings are not like numbers: they need causes, for the chain of real beings moves in one direction only, from past to future, and the future is caused by the past. Positive numbers are not caused by negative numbers. There is, in fact, a parallel in the number series for a first cause: the number one. If there were no first positive integer, no unit one, there could be no subsequent addition of units. Two is two ones, three is three ones, and so on. If there were no first, there could be no second or third."

The variant I admire most is Kreeft's Book of Existence argument, which is also an argument for God:

> "Suppose I tell you there is a book that explains everything you want explained. You want that book very much. You ask me whether I have it. I say no, I have to get it from my wife. Does she have it? No, she has to get it from a neighbor. Does he have it? No, he has to get it from his teacher, who has to get it. . . *et cetera, et cetera, ad infinitum*. No one actually has the book. In that case, you will never get it. However long or short the chain of book borrowers may be, you will get the book only if someone actually has it and does not have to borrow it. Well, existence is like that book. Existence is handed down the chain of causes, from cause to effect. If there is no first cause, no being who is eternal and self-sufficient, no being who has existence by his own nature and does not have to borrow it from someone else, then the gift of existence can never be passed down the chain to others, and no one will ever get it. But we did get it. We exist. We got the gift of existence from our causes, down the chain, and so did

every actual being in the universe, from atoms to archangels. Therefore there must be a first cause of existence, a God."

The untraversability of the infinite was the sole reason that Aristotle needed God, the unmoved mover, at the beginning of all chains of causation. For this reason the major medieval spokesmen repeated the principle, including Saadia, Ibn Pakuda, Ha-Levi, Maimonides and, in Islam, Averroes (Davidson, *Maimonides, The Man and His Works*, p. 358; Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*, p. 492-493)

At the apex of the chain of all causes is God, the ultimate cause. Maimonides now provides the second of his simple examples, in this case to depict the action of remote causes (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 8:5, 258a). If A causes B, and B causes C, this series cannot go on infinitely but must end at some point H. Under that analysis, it is correct to call A the effective cause of *both* B and H. We, therefore, call God the *cause* of all things, despite His being the remote or ultimate cause.

When Friedlander translates this last idea, he placed the word "cause" in quotes, registering the analogical sense that Maimonides meant. To say that A is the remote cause of H is not quite the same as saying that God is the effective cause of each of those effects. He is the effective cause of them in the analogical sense that He is the remote cause of them, as the unmoved mover who *wills* the effects of all causes. We cannot understand exactly how God is the *poel*, the effective cause of all the things in the world, since it is something that we are unable to see. *Poel* is, thus, a homonymous term.

This differs strikingly from the Kalam analysis: for them God was, at each and every moment, the direct cause of every effect. Since they did not believe in remote causes, they, therefore, did not believe that God created natural processes: nature was an illusion (as it is for modern philosophy in its empiricist or its post-modern modes).

**3. FORMAL CAUSE (*TSUR*)**

The problem presented by this section is the great variety of senses in which medieval thinkers understood the term "form." Combing out these tangled strands of meaning is even harder. These include Platonic and Aristotelian form; corporeal and incorporeal form; and what I will call, respectively, "preparatory," "existential," "intellectual" and "emanational" form.

<u>*Preparatory Form*</u>. God is the *formal cause* of the universe. Every being subject to life and death is a combination of matter and form. Each being's matter must be *prepared* to receive its form by a prior form, preceded by yet another form, but not indefinitely, since there could be no infinite regress. I call this sense "preparatory form." At the end of the chain of preparatory forms, God is the ultimate sustaining principle of being.

There is a difference between the tight bonding of cause and effect when we spoke about agent-chains (*poel* chains) above, and, below, when we come to discuss teleological-chains (*takhlit* chains), which also seem tight. In the case of agent-chains, if there is any break in the chain, if there is no "b" between "a" and "c," the last effect will not occur. Similarly, with teleological-chains, we can always proceed up the chain asking the purpose for each effect and the purpose for that purpose.

But with formal-chains (*tzur* chains) there seems to be a looser connection, a greater possibility for the chain to go in a different direction. That is because of this notion of *preparation* (*ha-meutedet*, *takhin*), by which the prior form prepares the matter of the composite object to receive a future form.

In other words, according to this account, the human form prepares the composite matter of Reuven through his life cycle to death and ultimately to dust. This dust is itself a new form, which will become the matter of yet a new composite form for which it has been "prepared." The interplay of elemental forces may result in this dust

preparing one type of body rather than another, a bird rather than a brick. In formal-chains the intermediate causes seem merely successive, not necessary.

*Existential Form*. There is, however, another way to look at form. Form is not just that which combines with matter. In another sense, form is the life giving principle of all things, just like the soul is the life giving principle, and we use the terms soul and form synonymously. Aristotle states that the soul is the first perfection of a material body, through which it lives as it does (*De Anima* 2:1, 412a29). The soul is thus the first form of the living being.

At the peak of the formal-chain, God is the form of all forms, not like the form of a physical body, but in the same analogical relation as a form to a body. Just as the body cannot exist without its form, so the universe cannot continue to exist without God. In this sense, the formal chain is tight, and to the extent that God designed it so, it is determinative and not merely successive. I call this sense of form the "existential form" to distinguish it from the "preparatory" form. The existential form maintains life, while the preparatory form looks beyond death to a new life.

Nothing endures without its form. This is true of any form, corporeal or incorporeal, and it this that I mean by calling it the existential form. The cup would not survive the removal of its cylindrical shape (its "corporeal" form, below). Even with incorporeal forms, if you could extract the universal of cup-ness from the cup, there would be no cup. The analogical sense in which God is the existential form of the world is that without God the world ceases to exist, but God does not cease if the world ceases (Mishneh Torah, *Ysodei Ha-Torah* 1:1-3). That is precisely what Maimonides means when he calls God the *tsurat ha-tsurot*, i.e., the form of all forms, and *khey ha-olamim*, life of the worlds, that God as existential form of the world, is that "form" without which it could not endure. It is in this analogical sense of God as sustainer that we call God the formal cause of the universe.

In all this, Maimonides reminds us that his interest here is only in how God sustains the universe, not how He created it, "You need not trouble yourself now with the question whether the universe has been created by God, or whether, as the philosophers have assumed, it is eternal, co-existing with Him. You will find [in the pages of this treatise] full and instructive information on the subject."

*Corporeal and incorporeal form*. The complication, not very clearly stated (and poorly understood by the commentators), is in the different historically generated senses of the term "form." These senses derive from Aristotle's debate with Plato. Aristotle took the Platonic forms from their noetic perch as the ideal patterns of their particular instances and instantiated them as the normal characteristics of those things, like the cylindrical shape of a cup. He distinguished "form" from his own term, "universal," which is the essential definition of a thing. Thus, my "form" is my shape, while my "universal" is "rational animal," *zoon logikon.*

Nonetheless, the Platonic forms as ideal patterns survived into medieval neo-Platonized Aristotelianism, assuming a new identity as the "incorporeal" forms (sometimes they are called "metaphysical forms"). The Aristotelian version, forms as shapes or characteristics, became the "corporeal" forms.

Maimonides states the difference between the *corporeal* forms, and the idea of God as *existential* form of the universe:

> "...for he (Aristotle) treats of a form which is a physical, and not a purely intellectual one...When we call God the ultimate form of the universe, we do not use this term in the sense of form connected with substance, namely, as the form of that substance, as though God were the form of a material being."

Moreover, God is not even the *incorporeal* form of things in the Platonic sense of their noetic pattern. In his system, Maimonides conferred that role upon the angels, not God. God is the form of the universe in the

existential sense that He sustains all things in existence, not as their corporeal or incorporeal form, as those terms were understood.

The Muslim *falsifa* (philosophers) Avicenna, Algazali, and Averroes, took up the discussion of corporeal form as shapes or particular characteristics. Their debate concerned whether corporeal form refers to the bulk of a thing or to the dimensions of a thing. Avicenna, holding the view that it has to do with bulk or mass, wrote that it was a *predisposition to cohesion* (*hitdevekut*). Algazali called it *cohesion* itself (*devekut*). Averroes propounded the view, that became popular with successors such as Descartes, that incorporeal form was *dimensionality* as such, but not the particular dimensions of the particular object itself (*rakhakim* in Crescas and others, not *memadim*; Efros, *Phil. Terms in the Moreh Nebukim*, 110. On all of this see Wolfson, *Crescas*, 579-590).

Nowadays, perhaps matter as mass fits our Einsteinian equation of mass and energy better than dimensionality, although in "string theory" we see dimensionality reemerging.

<u>*Tselem: the Intellectual Form*</u>. In Guide 1:1, Maimonides called this incorporeal form *tselem*, as in *b'tselem elokim bana oto*, man made in the "image" of God, to distinguish it from *toar*, the shape of a thing.

> "This term (*toar*) is not at all applicable to God. The term *tselem*, on the other hand, signifies the specific form, viz., that which constitutes the essence of a thing, whereby the thing is what it is; the reality of a thing in so far as it is that particular being. In man the 'form' is that constituent which gives him human perception: and on account of this intellectual perception the term *tselem* is employed in the sentences 'In the *tselem* of God He created him' (Gen. 1:27).... On this account, i.e., on account of the Divine intellect with which man has been endowed, he is said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty, but far from it be the notion that the Supreme Being is corporeal, having a material form."

Here, by calling the intellect shared by man and God the true form of man, he said considerably more than that it provides man his existence. This *tselem* is a higher level than mere existential form. I call this "intellectual form."

The intellectual form also seems to me to be different from and higher than the Aristotelian universal definition. While it is true that the term "rational" appears in the universal of man ("rational animal"), it is only what Maimonides elsewhere categorizes as "part of a definition" (Guide 1:52). Now he pushes beyond mere definition, treating man differently than other subjects of definitions, making him the "form and likeness of the Almighty." The form that he called Aristotelian, the *toar* (shape) is not the true form of man, just as in our chapter he says that the divine form of forms, *tsurat ha-tsurot*, is not a figure or shape. Read together with the previous chapter (Guide 1:68), we come to see that while God is the existential form of man, He has a special connection to man through the *tselem*, the incorporeal intellectual form that they share through the unity of mind. This is the intellectual form, also called the active intellect.

God and man are fundamentally different from all other things. Just as we cannot define God, man is ultimately not the subject of any definition or "part of a definition." To put it another way, man can transcend all limits. That is why I think that this strand of meaning should have its own name, the "intellectual form." Beyond being a rational animal, man can realize his intellect and conjoin with the active intellect, the mind he shares with God, *b'tselem elohim bara oto.*

<u>*Emanational Form*</u>. Maimonides' interesting move is his concept that the *formal* sustenance of the universe (as opposed to its *ex nihilo* creation) is emanational. For that reason, I think it is appropriate to call this the "emanational form" so that we can consider it separately from the other meanings of "form." Thus, God is the ultimate form, and all *flows* from Him:

> "It is through the existence of God that all things exist, and it is He who maintains their existence by that process which is called emanation (*v'hu kiumo b'inyan sh'mkhunim oto shefa*)....On that account God is called, in the sacred language, *khei ha-olamim*, 'the life of the Universe.'"

Maimonides' unique position is that God creates the universe from nothing, while its continued existence depends on divine emanation (See below, "The Convergence of Emanation and Creation Theories"). He does not explain exactly what is emanated, but the context seems to demand something like the Platonic instantiation of the noetic forms in their particular corporeal manifestations, which takes us back to where we started, the Platonic form.

> "All things created have an order in themselves, and this begets the form that lets the universe resemble God." (Dante, *Paradiso* 1:103, Robert and Jean Hollander trans.)

**4. TELEOLOGICAL CAUSE OR PURPOSE (*TAKHLIT*)**

Lastly, he regards God as the *final cause* or purpose of creation. All things have their purpose, but in the final analysis, they exist because God wants them to exist. Every purpose ultimately refers back to God's will or intelligence at the apex of all the intermediate stages. This will or intelligence is nothing but God himself.

Teleological Chains. At every stage, we must ask the purpose of each purpose. They do not go on indefinitely. Maimonides gives his famous example of the purpose of a throne (*kisei*, אלכרסי; cf. my treatment of 1:9, the lexical chapter on "throne"). Unsurprisingly, the next chapter, 1:70, is about the *Merkava*, the moving throne that moves all.

His example employs every child's first intellectual game, but he pushes it to the sublime level. At first, we learn that the purpose of a throne is to elevate one above the ground. Why? To instill awe among the groundlings. Why? To obtain their obedience. Why? To keep them from hurting each other. Why? To maintain their best existence. Why? Because that is what God wants.

This is the ultimate answer. It is in this homonymous sense that God is the ultimate cause endowing the whole with purpose (*ha-takhlit ha-sofit shel ha-kol*).

Notice, once again, the difference when it comes to God. The answer to every other "why" in the throne example was specific, e.g., elevation, awe, obedience, and so on. But the ultimate teleological cause was just whatever God wanted, willed or decided. That, however, is an algebraic expression, a variable we will never know how to resolve.

*Imitatio Dei*. Maimonides now strongly contrasts the purpose for things from Aristotle's view in a way he will not do in Guide 3:13, which is devoted to that issue. Aristotle held that each creature's purpose is to achieve whatever perfection is attainable (entelechy), and, specifically for man, to achieve the happiness of the fulfillment of that perfection (eudemonia). In Guide 3:13, Maimonides replies that the purpose of God's creatures is whatever He wants of them, as we said above. However, in a brief aside, he now says, differently, "it is the aim of everything to become, according to its faculties, *similar* to God in perfection" (*v'gam takhlit ha-kol l'hitdamut b'shlemuto k'fi ha-yakholet*).

Straussians should take note that Maimonides provides an explicit view of his political philosophy here, although it is one they might not view with sympathy. In the parable of the throne, we do see that the purpose of a ruler is to establish order so as to prevent the war of all against all. You could see this presaging a Hobbesian social contract to promote self-preservation, but Maimonides is clear that you must continue seeking the purpose at each stage, and that this is just a stage in that teleological chain. In other words, you must ask why self-preservation is important and why we need order. Notice that self-preservation is not his highest level, however important that may be as an intermediate purpose. Above that is the preservation of the existents, *l'hatmid tekinot mtziutam*,

which is more general and exalted than mere self-preservation. Nonetheless, the summit of all purposes is always what God wants.

Now we learn, in addition, that "it is the aim of everything" to imitate the ways of God. The result seems to be that the entire political order serves as a backdrop for man's reach toward God. *Imitatio Dei* is intended not only on the level of the actions of the ruler, but even in the ethical conduct of the ruled; and, indeed, in every dimension of human existence our purpose must be to transcend whatever limits our encounter with God. Tracing back the teleological chain we not only find that God is the ultimate purpose of all the other purposes, but that, in the sense that we must imitate God, we find our own purpose as well.

The purpose of religion, then, is not to support politics; rather, the purpose of politics must be to support religion, since it is only through religion that we discover how to imitate God. Ultimately this imitation reaches its apex in our conjunction with the active intellect, *b'tselem elohim*.

## DID GOD ABANDON THE UNIVERSE?

Maimonides' analysis of causation shows that the philosophers combined the notions of creator, form and end in their account, which was, therefore, more complete than that of the Kalam theologians.

Maimonides provides a historical illustration for this. He points to an unnamed Kalam theologian, who was most radical in advancing God as creator (*poel*) but not cause (*illa/siba*). In his account, God created the universe, but it sustains itself naturally without His help: God is not the sustaining cause of the world. This is like the carpenter who dies but whose cabinet sustains itself without the carpenter's help. God, according to this scholar, created the world but left it to develop on its own. Maimonides says that he:

> "Would be right, if God were only the maker (*poel*) of the Universe, and if its permanent existence were not dependent on Him…(since) God, however, is Himself the form of the Universe (*tsurat ha-olam*), as we have already shown,…it is He who causes its continuance and permanency."

Maimonides bases his argument on the premise that a being cannot exist without its form. This scholar, by contrast, only knows God as effective cause (*poel*), but not God as formal cause (*tsur*). The carpenter is only the effective cause of the cabinet, not its sustaining formal cause, which is either its shape or its cabinet-ness. Remove the form of the cabinet from the material of the cabinet and we have only unformed hylic matter and no cabinet. Since Maimonides' Islamic scholar did not accept formal causes, he was forced to conclude that the existence of God was irrelevant to the continued existence of the world, as though God were like a carpenter. In the same way, for this scholar, after God created the universe it no longer required divine providence. God was not its existential form.

Wolfson identified this theologian as Mu'ammar b. 'Abbad (d. 825. See: *Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy*, Harvard, 1979, pp. 188-189; *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 560-561). We could only call Mu'ammar a "Mutakallimun" in its broadest definition as a religious thinker. Actually, he was one of the early Mutazilites, who contended that reason was supreme over faith. Of them, C. A. Qadir writes:

> "Through their rationalistic attempts, they were successful to some extent in clearing the Augean stable of superstitious and misconceived ideas that were prevalent among the Muslim community of their time. But due to the extreme views of some Mutazilites [like Mu'ammar] and the folly of some Muslim rulers who enforced Mutazilite doctrines by force and punished severely those who deviated from them, the rationalistic tendency advocated and exhibited by the Mutazilites in their thinking did not transform itself into a movement, and soon a powerful reaction set in—in the form of Asharism—which is continued today in the Islamic world." (p. 54, *Philosophy and Science in the Islamic World*, London, 1988)

According to Wolfson, Mu'ammar was an early critic of Kalam occasionalism and its rejection of natural processes. For them "nature" was an illusory string of seemingly similar miraculous divine creations. Their rejection of nature went hand in hand with their rejection of causality for "the denial of causality is tantamount to a denial that things have a nature" (Wolfson, *Kalam*, 559).

Mu'ammar jettisoned Kalam's belief in the continuous re-creation of the world, but failed to embrace the Aristotelian causal structure. He believed in the reality of nature, but not in formal and final causes. He taught that God implanted causality in the world at creation (cf. Maimonides' own similar declaration, *Commentary on Avot* 5:6). Mu'ammar agreed with the Kalam that God is only the effective cause (*poel*), but argued that creation took place just once, in all of its details and implanted processes (cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 29e-30a, 30b, 48a, 41e). The universe proceeds on its natural course, without God ever having to intervene and grossly involve Himself in it.

Pushing the concept of nature to its limit, Mu'ammar concluded that God abandoned His creation. Consequently, God was no longer responsible for evil, but there was also no possibility of miracles. Miracles constitute a change in the divine will to create nature as it is, and he rejected any such change in God. Mu'ammar's Kalam opponents interpreted this lack of divine responsibility as divine impotence and declared him a heretic (Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, Columbia Univ. 1970, p. 65-67).

Maimonides, like Mu'ammar, rejected the Kalam's occasionalist doctrine of continuous Divine creation of all things at every moment. But if it is rejected, and Aristotelian causation is not accepted, then we can no longer explain God's continued relation to the world. Divinity is, indeed, rendered powerless, and, *à la* Mu'ammar, the world is abandoned.

Maimonides takes Mu'ammar's radicalism as the necessary result of the Kalam inability to consider philosophic causation. He says, "Now you understand the greatness of the error into which they have fallen through their assumption that God is only the *Agens* (*poel*), and not the End or the Form,"

## THE CONVERGENCE OF EMANATION AND CREATION THEORIES

We have seen that the real Kalam discomfort with this term, "cause," was that they thought God's "causation" of the universe implied the philosopher's theory of the necessary eternal generation or *emanation* of the universe, and God's concomitant loss of freedom.

At this point in the history of philosophy, however, competing theories of creation began to converge. Plato had been credited, correctly or not, with the theory that God created the universe from existing potential (unformed) matter as a potter molds clay, the potter and the clay existing simultaneously. Aristotle held that the universe and God were both eternal and essentially changeless. There was some confusion of Aristotle's position with Plato's because Plotinus' neo-Platonic doctrine of the eternal emanation of the universe had been circulated pseudonymously as the "*Theology of Aristotle*" (it is a paraphrase of parts of Plotinus' *Enneads*). Thus, Alfarabi (d. 950) was able to hold that in the *Aristotelian* universe God produces the world out of Himself.

Philosophers usually conceived emanation as automatic, unwilled, and eternal, always utilizing the analogy of the emanation of light from the sun (or water from a spring). But at the furthest edges of this theory creationism joined emanationism. Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, Harvard, 1973, v.1, pp. 199-249, shows how this convergence developed in the thinking of Gregory of Nyssa (d. 386), John Scotus Erigena (c. 810-c. 877) and Isaac Israeli (c. 855-c. 955). These scholars combined emanationism with divine will. They invested the language of *ex nihilo* with the notion that there are material ideas (Gr: *hule noete*) in God, an intelligible "matter" from which God willed the emanation of the universe. According to them, God freely chooses to "cause" the universe to *be* from potentiality to actuality.

All of this would have been anathema to the real *ex nihilo* school, men like Augustine, Saadia, and the majority of Kalam theologians. The Kalam pointed to the following problem. In those theories, God was no longer omnipotent. A universe *with* God could mean that there was another power with God. A universe *from* God meant that there was some aspect of God that was potential, or worse, corporeal.

Maimonides was also ambivalent toward emanationism in its usual guises (see Alfred Ivry, "Maimonides and Neoplatonism: Challenge and Response," in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, Lenn Goodman, editor, SUNY, 1992). He resolved the issue by dividing between creation and providence. Creation is from nothing, and although he calls it "from non-existence" (*akhar ha-eder*), he does so only in order to negate any possible emanationist interpretation of *ex nihilo* (Wolfson, *Studies*, p. 215).

Creation *ex nihilo* is important to Maimonides for several reasons, not the least of which is that it provides him a precedent for miracles. Without a miracle, nothing comes from nothing, *ex nihilo nihil fit*.

On the other hand, he reserves for emanation the providential sustenance of the universe. "It is through the existence of God that all things exist, and it is He who maintains their existence by that process which is called emanation (*shefa*)."

Maimonides' division between emanation and creation takes emanation completely out of the discussion of creation, allowing Aristotle to be Aristotle without the complications of neo-Platonized Aristotelianism. To put it differently, emanation is a problem of *Maaseh Merkavah*, not *Maaseh Bereshit*.

## CAUSATION AND US

Does any of this really matter? Of what possible relevance is Maimonides' defense of an antique causal structure against a dreary school of Muslim pedants?

First, since the Asharite Kalam won their battle, Islam as a religious culture came to reject the connection between cause and effect, essentially throwing out any notion of causality. The consequence, that we still live with, was their rejection of science. (Regarding the dearth of printing and patenting in the Muslim world, see Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong*, Oxford, 2002; and Hillel Ofek, "Why the Arabic World Turned Away from Science," *New Atlantis*, Winter 2011.)

Secondly, the modern world has adopted a kind of atheistic Kalam by turning from the general account of causation. Good examples of critical incoherence and crisis in Anglo-American analytic philosophy are the articles on causation by Richard Taylor, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2:55-66, MacMillan, 1967; Penelope Mackie, *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 1995; Jaegwon Kim, *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 1995. Fortunately, there are reasonably responsible accounts of the history of causality (Andrea Falcon, "Aristotle on Causality," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online; Menno Hulswit, "A Short History of Causation," online, both with bibliographies).

Rather than employing a historical-developmental model, I take a different, perhaps idiosyncratic, approach to the ebb and flow of causal investigations.

On the one hand, there are times when men have a positive and hopeful view of their ability to come to know God and the world around them. At other times, they become skeptical that anything can be known. These two moods seem intrinsic to the human condition, reminiscent of the forces of the *yetser ha-tov* and the *yetser ha-ra*, that is, the good and evil inclinations that work in each person.

We are in a skeptical and nihilistic period that has persisted for about 150 years, most eloquently expressed by Nietzsche and most incoherently by our post-modernists. Their atheist account of causation jettisoned all causes

except the efficient cause, and is in the process of denying the efficacy of even the efficient cause (as the encyclopedia articles above show).

Maimonides believed that to come to know God we must know his creation, implying that such knowledge is within our grasp. We have been through many scientific revolutions in the decades since the early twentieth century. Perhaps our mood will again be positive and hopeful, as we explain a world beyond the few things we can actually see. Aristotelian causation recognized that our explanations must include a dimension beyond the tangible, even accepting that there may be purposiveness in evolution. The academics of our day may not see it, but as Hamlet said to an academic of his day, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."